

Chair MURRAY and Senator HEINRICH also met with Deputy Secretary Turk and showed how “Default on America” would slash scientific research and cripple American competitiveness, just as both parties passed CHIPS and Science.

Here we have finally passed good, strong bipartisan legislation that will help us compete against the Chinese Government. And what do the House Republicans, led by the MAGA group, do? They cut so much of that out. The American people don’t want that. And they don’t even want the American people to know what they are doing.

Today, the Senate Budget Committee is hearing from experts like Mark Zandi of Moody’s Analytics—hardly a liberal stalwart—to show how “Default on America” would lead to hundreds of thousands of job cuts and diminish economic prosperity. And “Default on America,” as you know, is the Republican plan. That is what we are calling it, and that is what America knows.

And we won’t stop there. Senate committees will continue, next week, showing how the MAGA Republican “Default on America” plan utterly wreaks of MAGA Republican extremism. And it is not a plan at all. It is just a rightwing wish list thrown together in the House. The stench is foul.

Just look at the way the Republican bill treats our seniors. One million seniors will lose access to Meals on Wheels if Republicans’ “Default on America” becomes law. These are seniors who often can’t leave their homes by themselves to get groceries and need a hand from others.

It is incredible—tell seniors who are homebound they can’t get meals so that some rightwing billionaires don’t have to pay taxes?

That is the way these MAGA Republicans think, and that seems to be where House Republicans are following.

Or look at the way “Default on America” turns its back on our Nation’s veterans. If Republicans get their way and “Default on America” becomes law, up to 80,000 jobs at the Veterans Health Administration would be cut.

Our Nation’s veterans have dedicated their lives to keeping our country safe. There is no greater shame than intentionally depriving them of the resources to stay healthy, but that is precisely what the House Republican bill does.

And if anyone wonders whether or not House Republicans truly care about law enforcement and public safety, “Default on America” would cut 30,000 law enforcement jobs—30,000.

Let me emphasize that again because it is a stunning revelation.

If “Default on America” becomes law, 30,000 law enforcement jobs would be cut. Our Border Patrol would be left hanging to dry. Our communities that are fighting the opioid crisis, drugs, and guns would be less safe.

This party, which is railing against “those outside of this room who have

said defund the police,” are defunding the police.

Cuts to seniors, cuts to veterans’ health, cuts to Federal law enforcement—these are just some of the consequences of the “Default on America” wish list that has been proposed by the MAGA Republicans and the Republican leadership in the House.

But the horrors don’t end there. “Default on America” is loaded with poison pills that have nothing to do with averting default and everything to do with the hard-right agenda. “Default on America” would deregulate fossil fuels and empower Big Oil, make life easier for wealthy tax cheats, and impose unpopular work requirements on vulnerable families.

There is no way the American people will accept legislation as flawed, as cruel, as hard right as the Republican “Default on America Act.” “Default on America” cannot credibly be called any sort of plan from Speaker McCARTHY to avoid default. It reads much more like a House Freedom Caucus manifesto.

The solution here is staring Republicans in the face: Do what we have already done under President Trump and President Biden, under both Democratic and Republican majorities. We should pass a clean bill to avoid default—no brinksmanship, no hostage-taking. If we do that, there will be no default on the national debt.

MILITARY NOMINATIONS

Mr. President, I want to salute JACK REED because he put together a very important letter which has been made public this morning. Leader McCANNELL and I received a letter from seven former Secretaries of Defense—Democrat and Republican alike—they served under Democratic and Republican Presidents, including Donald Trump—regarding the blanket holds by the Senator from Alabama on the nominations of senior military leaders.

The letter that is signed by Secretary Gates, Cohen, Panetta, Hagel, Mattis, Esper, and Perry minces no words. The blanket holds are “harming military readiness and risks, damaging U.S. national security”—harming military readiness and risks, damaging U.S. national security.

That is the assessment of former Secretaries of State from both parties. That is the damage caused by the Senator from Alabama. The Secretaries of Defense explained that these holds are preventing key leaders from taking important command positions, including leading the 5th Fleet in Bahrain, critical for keeping Iran in check; and the 7th Fleet in the Pacific, critical for keeping the Chinese government in check.

Let me read just one sentence from the letter:

Leaving these and many other senior positions in doubt at a time of enormous geopolitical uncertainty sends the wrong message to our adversaries and could weaken our deterrence.

Senator TUBERVILLE’s holds are also affecting the next military representa-

tive to NATO, a post essential in allied efforts to support Ukraine.

The future Director of Intelligence at U.S. Cyber Command is also impacted. I hope Senate Republicans read the letter and tell Senator TUBERVILLE to drop these reckless holds. I urge all my Republican colleagues to impress on Senator TUBERVILLE the damage he is causing to our military of people who served for decades and to our own national security at a time when we can’t afford to drag our heels on national defense. All of us in the Senate have strong opinions on various topics, but that cannot justify putting our national preparedness at risk.

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

Mr. President, on AI and the AI meeting today, today the White House will hold a meeting with CEOs of four top AI developers. It is an incredibly important engagement. Over the past several weeks, my staff and I have met with close to 100 CEOs, academics, and more, and I plan to continue to do this. I have also met with Republicans on this important policy topic.

I welcome the White House’s engagement here, and I expect there will be more to come. As I said before, AI is one of the most pressing and serious policy issues we confront today. That is why we are meeting with so many experts to try to get this right; to maximize the benefits of AI but minimize the harm that AI might do.

And before you put forward anything, you have to really know the issue because it is a deep and difficult issue to deal with. That is why we are meeting with so many experts right now. It is critical that as we grapple with artificial intelligence, we should seek to invest in American ingenuity, solidify American innovation and leadership, enhance our national security, and be sure it is done in a responsible and transparent matter.

I want to underscore that anything we do regarding AI must be thoroughly bipartisan. That is why I am talking to a good number of my Republican colleagues here in the Senate. We have to be clear-eyed about the pros and cons of this technology. This is not an ideological issue, but it is a very important issue; and I hope both parties will come together on it.

NOMINATIONS

Mr. President, on nominations, it was another productive week here on the Senate floor when it comes to judges. By the end of today, the Senate will have confirmed another six highly qualified judicial nominees to lifetime appointments on the Federal bench this week—five District judges and one circuit court, all with bipartisan support. I thank my colleagues on both sides for their cooperation.

Confirming highly qualified, diverse judges has been one of the Senate Democrats’ highest priorities the moment we entered the majority. This was a very good week in that regard.

But we are by no means done. You can be sure that confirming judges and

bringing balance to the Judiciary will remain a top priority in the Senate in the days, weeks, and months ahead.

I yield the floor.

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

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

PERMITTING REFORM

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, in the teeth of the Great Depression, America built the tallest structure in the world, the Empire State Building. And we did it in 13½ months. Today, major infrastructure projects wait an average of 4½ years just for an environmental impact statement before they can break ground.

Beginning in the middle of the civil war, the transcontinental railroad took 5 years and 7 months to build from first rail to Golden Spike—in the middle of the civil war. Today, it can take roughly twice that long just to get the permit to open a mine.

The American people have heard a lot of talk from Washington about permitting reform. But our Nation's builders, refiners, miners, and job creators know what they need is a lot less Washington getting in the way. America is facing down strategic competition with major rivals like China that will shape the next centuries of world history. We are in a race for security, prosperity, and influence.

But even as Washington Democrats say they want to help America build things, make things, upgrade our infrastructure, and win that competition, they keep making it harder to do exactly that.

After the bipartisan infrastructure bill became law in 2021, the Biden administration had unelected bureaucrats at the Federal Highway Administration urging States—listen to this—not to spend infrastructure funding on commonsense things like expanding highway capacity and focus on equity and sustainability sideshows instead.

After the CHIPS Act passed in 2022, the administration's Commerce Department tried to rewrite parts of the law, after the fact, to maximize the benefits for Democrats' Big Labor allies. Secretary Raimondo marketed the bill as an urgent national security priority, securing supply chain for microchips. But the left wants to turn it into a Trojan horse for miscellaneous leftwing demands related to workplace H.R.

By one measure last year, the number of natural gas pipeline projects that were canceled dwarfed the number that were completed. On the Biden administration's watch, we are canceling more gas pipelines than we are building—in this administration, canceling more pipelines than we are building.

Last April, the Council on Environmental Quality issued a rule that would open new infrastructure projects—listen to this—to even more frivolous litigation from radical activists by redefining whole categories of potential and environmental effects.

Mr. President, this week, the Democratic leader announced he wants the Senate to pass even more legislation related to competition with China. But our Democratic colleagues gave the game away when they continually obstruct real honest-to-goodness commonsense reforms to our permitting process. We cannot and we will not outcompete China by rewarding radical activists' bad behavior. We will outcompete China if and when we decide we are going to help builders actually build.

Our colleagues Ranking Member CAPITI of the EPW Committee and Ranking Member BARRASSO of the Energy Committee are the experts in this space. Consider the case our friend from West Virginia recalled just yesterday on the floor. The Mountain Valley Pipeline was designed to help heat 10 million homes across Appalachia, and it was supposed to be completed—listen to this—5 years ago. Construction is more than 90 percent complete. But thanks to predatory legal challenges, the builders have now literally spent more time in court than on the job site, and a project that was supposed to cost \$3.5 million now has a pricetag almost twice that size thanks to legal delays and legal fees.

It is actually mind-boggling to think that in the world's most advanced economy, we simply let our critical infrastructure crumble, our skilled workers stay home, and our brightest ideas languish until radical environmentalists run out of legal challenges and unelected Washington bureaucrats decide they are finally satisfied.

Thankfully—thankfully—our colleagues from West Virginia and Wyoming are teaming up to introduce two bills that deliver real—real—permitting reform. The Capito and Barrasso bills are designed to create a streamlined fast track for energy and infrastructure projects, set enforceable limits on bureaucratic reviews and legal challenges, and give builders certainty that changing political winds won't hamstring their projects.

Unleashing American energy, harnessing American resources, and investing in the American workforce—these are the crucial priorities; and, led by Senators CAPITO and BARRASSO, Senate Republicans are on the case.

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

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. LUJÁN). Without objection, it is so ordered.

The majority whip.

THE ECONOMY

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, for the past 2 years, we have made historic, steady progress to strengthen the American economy. Under President Biden's leadership, we have success-

fully navigated one challenge after another, from the COVID pandemic to Putin's invasion of Ukraine, to supply chain snarls and persistent inflation.

While America's economy has remained resilient in the face of these challenges, it is not invincible. We received a reminder of that just a few days ago when financial regulators took swift action to prevent a catastrophe.

Over the weekend, Federal regulators seized a major bank that was teetering on the brink of collapse, First Republic, and sold it to JPMorgan Chase. These actions not only protected First Republic's depositors, they could have saved our economy from potential recession. Why do I say that? Well, First Republic was the third major bank to fail in 2 months. In fact, it was the second largest bank failure since 2008. So think about what could have happened had regulators failed to contain the damage from First Republic's collapse. Today, we would be reading headlines about panicking investors, panicking depositors, and turmoil throughout the financial system. Thankfully, we avoided that outcome. It is because the Government had the good sense to step in and maintain confidence in the banking system.

Now, Federal regulators stepped in to protect our economy when the crisis at hand was a bank with \$229 billion in assets, but that \$229 billion bank asset pales in comparison to a much larger undertaking we are facing in Washington today—the future of America's \$23 trillion economy.

Right now, in the U.S. House of Representatives, Speaker MCCARTHY is threatening our economy with the first-ever Federal debt default, the first time ever in our history. Let's put Speaker MCCARTHY's dangerous gamble in context.

Just days ago, some of the smartest financial minds in the world were convinced that a \$229 billion bank could be the difference between financial stability and financial calamity. Well, that \$229 billion is a tiny fraction of the \$23 trillion economy that Speaker MCCARTHY is gambling with.

We are only weeks away from the deadline of June 1. That is when Secretary Yellen says America could default on our Federal debt. So every day the House Republicans refuse to perform the most basic responsibility of government—paying our bills—they are spreading uncertainty throughout the global economy. That uncertainty is dangerous and costly.

Over the past few years, our Nation has emerged from the depths of a once-in-a-century pandemic; we have navigated one market disruption after another; and, today, we are finally moving in the right direction. But now, Speaker MCCARTHY, in the House, wants to throw all of that historic progress away. Why? To please the most radical members of his party. The debt ceiling proposal House Republicans passed last week is not a budget;