

through Medicaid. And at least one Republican said on raising the debt ceiling: I am a “no” no matter what.

Speaker MCCARTHY knows that it is next to impossible to pass a plan through his own House—that he can’t do that. So Speaker MCCARTHY may claim he wants to negotiate, but that is, ultimately, empty talk if the hard right has the power to reject whatever the Speaker proposes. It is a toxic dynamic that, sadly, isn’t going away any time soon.

When President Trump was in office, I sat down with him to talk about the importance of raising the debt ceiling, and we didn’t engage in threats or brinksmanship or hostage-taking. Instead, we Democrats presented a plan and moved forward from there. It was not easy. It took a lot of preparation and tough decision making, but, each time, we got the job done.

So one more time, House Republicans, show us your plan. You have an obligation to be transparent with the American people. If you don’t have the votes to pass a plan, let’s just get the debt ceiling done. If the plan involves drastic cuts to millions of Americans, then Republicans have an obligation to show the American people what those cuts are because Americans could be faced with the very painful, painful results of those proposed cuts.

Republicans owe it—owe it—to the American people. Speaker MCCARTHY owes it to the American people to stop dodging, to put pen to paper, and to explain clearly how Congress is going to ensure the United States does not default for the first time in history. We Democrats have a plan: Raise the debt ceiling without brinksmanship or hostage-taking, as it has been done before. Speaker MCCARTHY doesn’t have a plan, so he is not really negotiating, and the clock is ticking.

EQUAL RIGHTS AMENDMENT

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, on the ERA, which is a different and extremely important matter, I want to praise and echo the words of my colleagues yesterday who reintroduced a resolution to affirm the ratification of the Equal Rights Amendment.

The resolution is simple. It removes the arbitrary deadline for ERA ratification that was placed by Congress in the 1970s and recognizes the amendment as a valid part of the Constitution. There is no good reason why a constitutional amendment needs a deadline, especially not an amendment that affirms gender equality.

The Equal Rights Amendment has never been as necessary and urgent as it is today. The Supreme Court’s repeal of *Roe v. Wade* reminded all of us that, even today—in 2023, the 21st century—women don’t have the same fundamental rights as men. So this resolution is a terrific and necessary idea.

The ERA has been ratified by three-quarters of the States but not in the requisite time, and that is what this

proposal would fix. It is very popular in the minds of the American people, and I strongly support the resolution. I want my daughters and granddaughter to live in a country where they never have to worry about being discriminated against simply because of their gender. Sadly, today, that is not the case. The ERA would fix that.

So I want to thank Senators CARDIN and DURBIN, Representatives PRESSLEY, DEAN, and BUSH, and everyone who is championing this important resolution.

ELECTIONS

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, finally, on election undermining by the Republican National Committee, one of the biggest lessons of last November was that, for all of the attempts by MAGA Republicans to undermine our elections, the roots of our democracy remain strong and run deep.

For 2 years, we heard the same thing over and over again from the MAGA brigade: that the 2020 elections were stolen, that President Biden was illegitimate, and that we couldn’t trust that our votes were properly counted.

Well, Americans simply didn’t buy it. They saw that the elections were fair. Some have said these were the fairest elections we have ever had. Yet, in every virtual race last fall, MAGA candidates who campaigned explicitly on denying the results of the 2020 election and overturning it were rejected by the voters. It was a good result for the country, for our democracy. Frankly, it was a necessary wake-up call for the GOP, telling them: Get rid of the Big Lie once and for all. The American people aren’t buying it. Maybe a small band of extreme rightwingers is—MAGA people—but not everybody else.

It was so disturbing to read in the *Washington Post* that the RNC is not abandoning the conspiracy of the Big Lie so much as it is doubling down. According to reports, they are working on creating a “permanent infrastructure in every state to ramp up ‘election integrity’ activities” as a way to cater to that portion of their base that still believes in wacky election fraud conspiracies.

As a sign of how unserious this report is, the RNC also makes unfounded claims of a “continuing onslaught of Democrat election manipulation.” I would call it ridiculous—it is ridiculous—but it is a troubling attempt to undermine our democracy. When people don’t believe the elections are on the level, that is the beginning of the end of this grand experiment in democracy that has lasted for centuries. Fortunately, the American people are rejecting it, but the Republicans that lead the MAGA wing are keeping at it.

I will make this easy for the folks over at the RNC: Undermining our elections is a losing strategy. It is a loser politically. It didn’t work last year, and it is not going to work next year. For the sake of our country and

the sake of the GOP, the RNC and the MAGA wing of the Republican Party need to break the election fraud echo chamber that has paralyzed their party and has, frankly, caused them to lose election after election.

GATEWAY PROJECT

Mr. SCHUMER. Finally, yesterday, Mr. President, was a very special day for the people of New York. After a lot of hard work, we finally welcomed President Biden to celebrate progress on Gateway, the most important infrastructure project in America.

Anyone who knows me knows Gateway has been one of my greatest passions for more than a decade. Call it a labor of love—and it is—because I love New York. Without our tunnels, the region’s economy would come to a screeching halt, and not just New York’s, not just New Jersey’s but the whole Northeast and eventually the whole country’s.

So after many false starts and a lot of opposition, Gateway is finally full speed ahead, thanks to both the bipartisan infrastructure law and the great help and enthusiasm from President Biden.

We had a good time yesterday—the President, I, and the other Senators—because we knew we were getting something so important done. And that is why we are here. The implementation of the bills we passed last year is really vital to this country and to keeping our prosperity going and increasing.

There were a lot of smiles at yesterday’s celebration. Many of us waited for years for this moment, and after a lot of persistence, we can finally say Gateway is going to be built.

Gateway is just one of the major infrastructure initiatives supported by the bipartisan infrastructure law. Just like the CHIPS and Science Act and the Inflation Reduction Act, it is beginning to pay real dividends in the form of new jobs, new investments, and prosperity. We are going to see much more of it this year and the years to come.

That is precisely what Democrats promised to do, and that is what we are delivering on.

I thank the President for helping us and celebrating with us yesterday in New York.

I yield the floor.

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

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

DEBT LIMIT

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, later today, the Speaker of the House and the President will begin bipartisan discussions about the future and trajectory of our government’s borrowing and spending.

It is right, appropriate, and entirely normal that our need to raise the debt limit would be paired with negotiations regarding Democrats' runaway printing and spending.

The American people changed control of the House because the voters wanted to constrain Democrats' runaway, reckless, party-line spending. The voters of this country looked at the trillions of dollars of party-line spending, the runaway inflation, and the mountain of debt, and last November they hit the brakes.

We just experienced 2 years when Washington Democrats got to set policy without negotiating, and the American people put an end to it.

Some Democrats are trying to rewrite history and pretend that Republican demands for negotiations are unusual, but that, of course, is just false.

Back in 2017, the Senate Democratic leader said the debt ceiling gave Democrats "leverage" in broader talks. As the New York Times explained back in 2017, then-Speaker PELOSI and the Democratic leader "began formulating a plan to apply pressure, jettisoning the idea of backing a straightforward or 'clean' debt limit measure . . . as a way to gain muscle in coming negotiations." That was the Pelosi-Schumer playbook for the debt limit: Demand negotiations.

Here is how the Democratic leader put it himself at the time. He said the debt ceiling "gives another ample opportunity for bipartisanship, not for one party jamming its choices down the throats of the other."

So I trust Democrats will be consistent with their past positions and the White House will waste no time beginning the customary bipartisan negotiations with the new Republican majority over in the House. The President of the United States does not get to walk away from the table.

The same President who happily signed off on trillions of dollars of needless party-line spending needs to begin good-faith negotiations on spending reform with Speaker MCCARTHY and do it today.

STUDENT LOANS

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, now on a related matter, there are lots of egregious ways that President Biden has wasted taxpayer money trying to buy up his low approval ratings, but the Democrats' proposal for student loan socialism is really one of the worst.

It is like the Democrats paid scientists in a lab to invent the most unfair government handout that could possibly, possibly exist. Democrats want to take the graduate school loans of doctors and lawyers and white-collar professionals making six figures and put their debt on the shoulders of Americans who didn't take out loans at all.

To the middle-class families who saved, sacrificed, and skipped vaca-

tions to pay for more of their kids' college, the Democrats want to turn you into suckers.

To the plumbers, firefighters, check-out clerks, and auto mechanics who made career choices to avoid taking on debt, the Democrats think dentists and the lawyers deserve extra handouts at your expense.

To the patriots who volunteered to serve our Nation in uniform as part of a plan to attend college debt-free, the Democrats want to change the rules behind your back.

President Biden and his party wake up every day looking for ways to transfer money and power away from the working class toward elites. But even for today's Democratic Party, this one is especially galling.

This is "reverse Robin Hood" policy: Democrats stealing from the working class to reward people who are comparatively better off. It just isn't fair on a personal level. It is also staggeringly reckless fiscal policy.

Remember, this whole undertaking was first set up as a short-term emergency measure at the very start of COVID—those earliest weeks when the entire economy seemed to be in a free fall. That was almost 3 years ago.

Shortly afterward, thanks to the bipartisan CARES Act that came out of the Republican-led Senate, the economy rebounded. Household savings actually went up. Many white-collar professionals spent months, if not years, working remotely from the comfort of their living rooms. Any legitimate reason for pausing loan payments evaporated just a few months after it began, but the Democrats have kept it going, year after year. Now they want to magically wave away people's debts altogether. Needless to say, this would be enormously expensive for the country.

If you add up the cost of three things: the nearly 3-year-long "pause" thus far, the mass jubilee the Biden administration is trying to defend in court, and the Democrats' proposal to turn the income-driven payment program into permanent socialism, the total cost of these three measures is projected to hit \$1 trillion—\$1 trillion.

This estimate is from our colleague Senator CASSIDY, who is shining a bright spotlight on these terrible policies as the incoming ranking member of the HELP Committee.

On top of all the reckless inflationary spending the Democrats have pushed through, they want to redistribute up to another trillion dollars away from working-class Americans toward college-educated people who already earn higher salaries on average.

The Democrats want to squeeze even more money out of cashiers, welders, first responders, janitors, and cosmetologists and send it to a group of people who already outearn those people on an average basis—more reckless spending, more debt inflation, and no fairness for American families.

BURMA

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, finally, today marks a solemn anniversary for the people of Burma and for all of us around the world who spent years—literally years—rooting for them to make progress toward greater freedom and democracy. Two years ago, their hopes of a stable democracy were wrenched away by a brutal military coup.

To date, this takeover by the Tatmadaw, which is their army, has displaced 1.2 million people, including many thousands who have been forced to flee the country altogether.

Inside Burma, more than 16,000 people have been taken as political prisoners. At one point, the military was detaining American journalist Danny Fenster and Nathan Maung; the Australian economist, Sean Turnell; dozens of innocent children; and, of course, my friend Aung San Suu Kyi, whose latest conviction and a sham trial leaves her facing the possibility of life in prison.

Expert observers count the coup's death toll at 19,000. That includes people this illegitimate government simply executed outright, like the activists Ko Jimmy and Phyo Zeya Thaw.

Now the leaders of the Tatmadaw coup are laying out plans in broad daylight to stamp out Burma's pro-democracy movement once and for all. The military is shedding any last ounce of legitimacy it pretended to have and is now conducting airstrikes against innocent civilians.

The junta's new regulations for this year's election are designed to make viable opposition virtually impossible. No wonder the illegitimate Tatmadaw rulers rolled out the red carpet for Putin's Foreign Minister to visit Burma. Thugs recognize other thugs.

On the second anniversary of the coup, with a potentially devastating sham election on the horizon, it is absolutely vital that the United States continue our assistance to the National Unity Government and other key groups working inside Burma to protect the innocent and advance the cause of democracy and increase cross-border humanitarian aid. By our example, America should rally our partners to raise the international stakes for the Tatmadaw's continued brutality.

In December, the National Defense Authorization Act instructed the Biden administration to take several more concrete steps to bulk up American support for the people of Burma. It made sanctions on senior junta officials mandatory. It required more targeted and precisely timed sanctions against state-owned enterprises like MOGE, M-O-G-E. Finally, the NDAA also notably authorized funding for programs to strengthen federalism in and among ethnic states in Burma and for technical support and nonlethal assistance to Burma's ethnic armed organizations and People's Defence Forces to strengthen communication, command and control, and coordination of