

who you are. And the truth is, of course, the current situation does not have to be that way.

In Belgium, another industrialized country, the gender wage gap is just 1.2 percent. Women make virtually the same amount as men do. In Spain, Norway, and Denmark, the gender wage gap is 5 percent or less—women make 95 percent of what men make. Across the European Union, the gap is just 10.6 percent, and in the United States, it is 16 percent.

The Paycheck Fairness Act would close this gap by guaranteeing equal pay for equal work and making it easier for women to come together to file and win lawsuits against unscrupulous employers who commit wage discrimination.

These bills are not only good policies, they are precisely what the American people want. According to the last polls I have seen, 87 percent of the American people support guaranteeing paid sick leave to every worker in our country; 84 percent of the American people support equal pay for equal work; and 59 percent of the American people support the PRO Act.

The bottom line is that most Americans understand we live in a rigged economy. People on top are doing phenomenally well—have never done better. Ordinary workers are struggling to put food on the table, to purchase the healthcare they need, to take care of their families, to send their kids to college, to take some time off for a vacation. That is not what America is supposed to be about.

Tomorrow, the HELP Committee begins the difficult and long journey of beginning to bring justice to the working class of this country and tell the CEOs and the corporate executives and the 1 percent that they cannot have it all, that this economy has got to work for working people and not just for the people on top.

With that, I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Massachusetts.

NOMINATION OF JULIE RIKELMAN

Ms. WARREN. Mr. President, I rise today in support of the nomination of Julie Rikelman to serve as a judge on the United States Court of Appeals for the First Circuit.

Based on a recommendation of a bipartisan advisory committee on Massachusetts judicial nominations in Massachusetts, Senator MARKEY and I were pleased to recommend Julie Rikelman to the President for this important role on the Federal bench. She received bipartisan support from the Senate during her cloture vote last week, and I expect the same will be true shortly, when we vote on her confirmation to the First Circuit.

Julie Rikelman is an accomplished lawyer who has significant experience in both private practice and public interest and whose career demonstrates an unwavering commitment to the rule of law.

Ms. Rikelman's commitment to the rule of law and the Constitution is in-

formed by her personal experience fleeing religious persecution. In the late 1970s, she and her family came to the United States from Ukraine as Jewish refugees seeking equal opportunity denied to them in the former Soviet Union.

Ms. Rikelman went on to graduate from Harvard College and Harvard Law School. After law school, she clerked for Justice Dana Fabe on the Alaska Supreme Court and then Judge Morton Ira Greenberg on the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Third Circuit.

Following a 2-year stint as a Blackmun fellow at the Center for Reproductive Rights, Ms. Rikelman entered private practice—first, as an associate at Feldman & Orlansky and then as senior associate at Simpson Thacher & Bartlett LLP. In 2006, she joined NBC Universal as litigation counsel before being promoted to senior litigation counsel in 2008 and vice president of litigation in 2011. She has worked on issues related to securities, breach of contract, employment discrimination, intellectual property, and constitutional law matters.

In 2011, Ms. Rikelman returned to the Center for Reproductive Rights as a senior staff attorney. One year later, she was appointed U.S. litigation director, and, in that role, she argued two cases before the U.S. Supreme Court.

Ms. Rikelman's exceptional qualifications are bolstered by the support she has received from lawyers in public and private practice, from prosecutors, from defenders, from academics, and from former judges representing a range of political perspectives.

Whether appointed by Republicans or Democrats, her supporters “share a strong belief that Ms. Rikelman is a lawyer of uncommon talent and ability, broad experience, sound and fair-minded judgment, and unquestioned integrity.” Her former NBC Universal and Simpson Thacher Bartlett colleagues describe her as “thoughtful” and “open-minded” and observed that she “carefully considered every argument without prejudgetment and without regard to her personal views.”

There it is—fairminded, experienced, thoughtful, and exceptionally talented. These are the qualities a Federal judge should possess, and these are the qualities that Julie Rikelman has exhibited throughout her career.

In addition, her personal and professional experiences will bring important diversity to our Federal bench and underlie her respect for the rule of law.

Finally, it is important to note, now more than ever, that we have judges on the Federal bench who deeply understand reproductive rights law, and Ms. Rikelman's experience in this area makes her an exceptionally qualified nominee.

I have every confidence that Julie Rikelman will continue to uphold the rule of law and our Constitution as a First Circuit judge.

I want to thank our bipartisan advisory committee in Massachusetts for

all of the work they did to identify and recommend candidates like Julie Rikelman, and I want to thank President Biden for nominating her to this position.

I urge my colleagues to support the confirmation of Julie Rikelman, a supremely qualified candidate who will bring her commitment to delivering equal justice under the law to the First Circuit Court of Appeals.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Hawaii.

NATIONAL DEFENSE AUTHORIZATION ACT

Ms. HIRONO. Mr. President, this week marks the 1-year anniversary of the Supreme Court's Dobbs decision overturning *Roe v. Wade*. This disastrous decision has sown chaos and confusion across the country and led to dozens of States restricting or banning abortion care.

Republicans are obsessed with banning abortion nationwide, and they are using every vehicle possible to advance their radical anti-abortion agenda.

Tomorrow, my colleagues and I on the Armed Services Committee will begin our markup of the fiscal year 2024 National Defense Authorization Act. The NDAA is an annual bill that sets our Nation's defense policy. Despite our differences, Congress has come together to pass an NDAA on a bipartisan basis every year for the last 62 years.

While Republicans and Democrats may disagree about military policy, we have always kept the readiness of our forces above politics. From combating threats abroad to rebuilding DOD infrastructure at home, we have no shortage of important issues to work through in this year's bill, but right now my Republican colleagues are threatening to derail the bill by injecting anti-abortion provisions into a bill that has nothing to do with abortion.

After the Supreme Court's disastrous Dobbs decision, the Department of Defense clarified their travel policy to enable servicemembers stationed in States with abortion restrictions to travel in order to receive reproductive care. This updated travel policy in no way, shape, or form authorizes the DOD to pay for abortion care. There is no language in these provisions that pays for abortion. They simply allow servicemembers to access care they would otherwise be able to access but for being stationed in States that do not allow such care.

My Republican colleagues are hell-bent on outlawing abortion nationwide and exerting control over servicemembers' freedom by preventing their travel to receive healthcare. Amending the NDAA is just one way to impose their will on the Department of Defense.

In another example, one of my Republican colleagues on the committee currently has a hold on more than 250 general and flag officer promotions within the Department of Defense because he objects to the DOD's travel policy and wants to make a point

about his displeasure. The Secretary of Defense as well as Secretaries of the Army, Navy, and Air Force have all testified that these holds impact our national security.

Radical Republicans are pandering to their MAGA base, and the American people will pay the price. While the Republicans continue their anti-abortion crusade, we should be working to craft an NDAA that addresses the real challenges our servicemembers face and gives them the resources they need to continue protecting our Nation, including access to healthcare.

That is what I will be focused on when we begin our markup tomorrow, and I urge my Republican colleagues to join us in this important task in the NDAA markup that will begin tomorrow. Our servicemembers and the American people are counting on us to get this job done.

I yield the floor.

THE PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. MARKEY). The Senator from Tennessee.

INFLATION

Mrs. BLACKBURN. Mr. President, for almost 3 years now, the American people have watched the Biden administration and their Democratic allies in Congress burn through trillions of dollars of their hard-earned money.

Early on in the administration, when one of their radical proposals made its way to the Senate floor, I would hear from Tennesseans wanting to know whom the Democrats expected to actually pay the bill for these programs. But as time has gone by, the Democrats confirmed, as they have every time they have been in power, that their plan was to keep squeezing taxpayers for as much money as possible, for as long as possible. Indeed, the Federal Government has a ceaseless, non-ending appetite for taxpayers' money.

I don't think I have to tell you how discouraging this is for Tennesseans. It is confirmation that their President knows what is happening to them but he just does not care. They are in pursuit of a goal. They see this as a means to an end.

Now, when I am at home in Tennessee, as I was this weekend, people don't ask me where all the money went because they know the Democrats have wasted it on handouts and Green New Deal schemes—trillions of dollars down the drain. All they want to know is when is this going to stop.

They can't plan ahead. They can't save for special occasions. Even something as simple as a holiday cookout has slipped out of reach for so many families. Independence Day is coming up, but what should be an exciting time for everyone has turned into a source of stress because, in 1 year—1 year—the price of a bag of chips, up 7.9 percent; ice cream and popsicles, 8 percent more; potato salad will cost 7.1 percent more this year, and that is only accounting for the cost of the potatoes. Hot dogs and hamburgers have gone up, but when you account for the almost 16-percent hike on ketchup and

mustard, a 9.4-percent hike on lettuce, the 13-percent hike on pickles, and a ridiculous 12.5-percent hike on the bun to put it all on, you can cross your main course off the menu also.

There is no reason why a meal like this should suddenly be out of reach of many families, but it is, and it is not just due to the price of the hamburger bun. That is just something that really is adding insult to injury.

Since Joe Biden became President, grocery prices have increased 20 percent, which is something every single person serving in Congress has seen in action. You cannot deny this. Any trip to the grocery store tells the story.

Energy bills have gone up 36 percent since Joe Biden and the Democrats took power. Rent is up 15 percent; clothes, 12 percent more. A tank of gas is up 51 percent, and a used car to put that gas in is going to cost you 33 percent more today than it did last June.

To counteract all of this, the Fed has raised interest rates at the fastest pace since the 1980s, which has in turn destroyed access to consumer credit and made it harder for small businesses to take out the loans they need to grow.

The problem isn't limited to a holiday celebration; our President and the Democrats have made life too expensive to afford every single day of the year.

Needless to say, spending has been out of control for over a decade. Regardless of what this administration believes, we cannot spend our way to prosperity. It does not happen. But we can directly trace this crippling inflation back to the reckless spending policies of this administration. So let's take a look at some of the things they have chosen to prioritize over the good of the country and the good of the people.

They used the 6,825-page Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2023 to set a new precedent for wasteful spending that, frankly, continues to baffle most Tennesseans. This bill, which no one had the opportunity to read, included billions in pure waste and authorized over \$1.82 trillion in total discretionary spending authority.

To make matters worse, the Inflation Reduction Act, which passed last August, gave the Internal Revenue Service \$80 billion for—guess what—more IRS agents. They estimate that the resulting increase in harassment will take \$204 billion from hard-working taxpayers who are already struggling to make ends meet.

The IRA also included \$386 billion for Joe Biden's radical climate agenda, including \$27 billion for the Greenhouse Gas Reduction Fund, the sole purpose of which is to increase the power of the EPA; \$3 billion in environmental and climate justice block grants; and an extension of the Affordable Care Act's premium tax credits.

This is hundreds of billions of dollars going to pet projects of the left, while Americans are struggling to put food on the table.

But the spending won't stop there. Earlier this year, President Biden released a pledge to make things worse. It is in the form of his 2024 budget request. This exorbitant wish list proved that he has no desire to get our national debt under control. It included annual budget deficits ranging between 4.6 and 6.8 percent above the baseline. He also included trillions in tax increases and added even more funding to the IRS. He doubled the tax on capital gains; increased the corporate income tax rate to 28 percent, which is the second highest rate in the developed world; and then made sure the IRS could find ways to take even more money—not exactly a taxpayer-friendly approach.

This path is not sustainable and will only lead to our children and grandchildren bearing the full brunt of our massive national debt burden. In my opinion, this is immoral.

This is why every Congress I introduce legislation to cut spending by 1, 2, and 5 percent all across the board. These small changes would make a big difference and help us return to a path of fiscal stability and fiscal sanity.

The Consumer Price Index rose 4 percent in May. Incredibly enough, the Biden administration celebrated this as a win, which leads me to believe they are still counting on the American people somehow ignoring what a mess they made in continuing to fork over the money.

Let's be clear. Four percent inflation is still double the target rate. This is not a win. It is not normal. The day Joe Biden came into office, inflation was at 1.4 percent.

Now, what this does do, it does guarantee that Tennesseans will face yet another month of groceries that are too expensive to afford and unsustainable spending on programs they did not vote for and do not want.

If we were to pass a 1-percent across-the-board cut to Federal spending, then there is a chance we can reverse this trend and ease the impossible burden that the Biden administration has placed on the American people. But if we continue to ignore the problem and spend even more money, that will lead us even further down the path to economic collapse.

I yield the floor.

THE PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Illinois.

Ms. DUCKWORTH. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that I be permitted to speak for up to 7 minutes and that Senator GRASSLEY be permitted to speak for 5 minutes prior to the scheduled vote.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

ABORTION

Ms. DUCKWORTH. Mr. President, I have come to the floor today with a simple question: When exactly was the moment when military women like me no longer had the right to bodily autonomy?

Our Nation was just fine with me using my body as I saw fit when I chose