

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

to use it to fight wars on its behalf. It was all right with me using it as I wish when I decided to risk every drop of blood in this body to fly a Black Hawk into combat. It was even OK with me losing parts of this body, leaving parts of it strewn across a battlefield in Iraq in defense of this great Nation. In fact, people thanked me for my service, for making that incredibly personal choice about my own being, my own life. I know the same is true for many of the other female servicemembers and veterans who have made the similar decision to serve our Nation.

So my question is, Precisely when do the folks pushing anti-choice policies think that we American women no longer have the basic human right to make our own decisions about our own health?

I ask because over the past year since the Supreme Court announced its Dobbs ruling, we have faced an onslaught of anti-woman, anti-choice bills that would effectively turn women into second-class citizens, rendering them incapable of adjudicating matters related to their own bodies, transforming them from people with autonomy into mere vessels subject to the political whims of lawmakers whose beliefs tend more toward insurrectionist than feminist, lawmakers who think making America great again equates to sapping away women's rights again.

This week is no exception because this week my colleagues across the aisle, led by my fellow veteran, Senator ERNST, are trying to hold our annual Defense bill negotiations hostage in an attempt to force through an extremist amendment that would overturn existing DOD policy—an amendment that would keep troops and their families who are stationed at military bases in anti-choice States from getting the resources they need to travel elsewhere to get basic reproductive healthcare.

You know, our servicemembers often move every 2 or 3 years. They don't get to choose where they are stationed. They receive orders to be somewhere. Then they pack up their rucksacks and go. And I have seen estimates that about 40 percent are assigned to bases in States that now have draconian reproductive rights laws.

If Senator ERNST's amendment to the NDAA becomes law, thousands of military women will be stripped of their right to bodily autonomy just because they have chosen to serve their country. Think about how shameful that is. Think about how disgraceful it is that so many of the same so-called leaders who applaud these women for choosing to put themselves in harm's way overseas are trying to wrest control over their bodies away from them when they are back on U.S. soil.

Think about how astounding it is that the folks backing this kind of policy seem ignorant to the hypocrisy laden in the idea that the greatest democracy in the world—a nation born

out of a fight against governmental overreach and that takes pride in self-determination—would actually strip away the right to personal freedom from the very citizens who have sworn an oath to protect others' rights, to keep others free.

When I fought in Iraq, at the beginning of our rotation, it was so early on in the war that full logistics were not yet set up. We were still living in tents and had no personal hygiene facilities other than the wet wipes we would get in care packages.

So when it came time for me to deploy, Army doctors issued me birth control patches so I could control my menstrual cycle since for the first 2 months I was set to be downrange, there would be no female sanitary support. In other words, because I wouldn't be able to get tampons, pads, or the like for those early days yet still needed to fly my missions, it advantaged the military for me to control my reproductive cycle. I was happy to do it because it was for the good of the Army, the good of the mission, and thus the good of this Nation that I love more than life itself.

But looking back, especially after this week, my takeaway is that our country was just fine with me seeking reproductive care when it suited them but only when it suited them because today we live in an America whose representatives waver even on the basic question of whether women should have access to the kind of care they readily supplied me when it fit their needs.

To me, this Republican amendment effectively punishes women for their willingness to put on the uniform. The policy is both morally corrupt and militarily shortsighted, as how could it not impact the future recruitment and retention of our Armed Forces if women understand that if they wear our Nation's colors, that if they follow orders and are stationed at whatever base they are told to report to, their fundamental rights may remain forever out of reach?

Yes, we are talking about abortions here certainly, but this amendment my colleagues are so focused on passing also impacts a range of other basic life-saving and sometimes even life-creating reproductive care, including fertility treatments, both for those who have worn the uniform and for the partners of those who serve, or the urgent medical services needed in the tragic event they miscarry a child they do want.

So when I hear my colleagues on the other side of the aisle champion this policy, what I hear them say is that they either don't understand or don't care about the very real, severe effects that servicemembers and dependents could face if they can't access reproductive care.

What I hear them say is that they want to force female servicemembers to give birth whether they want to or not, whether they are ready to or not,

regardless of the burden, the cost, the implications for their careers and, more importantly, their lives.

What I hear them say is that they don't believe that the readiness of women servicemembers affects our military's readiness, that they don't think recruiting women is important for the future of our military, that they don't care about the contribution women make to our Armed Forces, that they don't value the service of women, point blank.

Ultimately, sadly, that means they don't care about solving our military's recruiting challenges as much as they do about getting on the good side of anti-choice billionaires who bankroll campaigns. That is offensive and hypocritical.

These proposals are misogynistic and sadistic. These proposals are craven and cowardly. In other words, it is a perfect snapshot of today's self-interested, self-defeating GOP.

Look, we Democrats on the Senate Armed Services Committee have used every negotiation tactic under the Sun to try to stop our Republican colleagues from crashing down the entire Defense bill negotiations with this one poison pill. But let me be clear. We cannot pass a Defense funding bill if this amendment is hidden deep in its fine print. We have even offered to hold a separate vote on this same exact policy as a stand-alone bill—a solution that would both protect this week's larger NDAA process while also letting the rest of the Senate have a say on this single piece of legislation. But Republicans have decried this offer, calling it a ploy. It is not a ploy. We are giving them the vote they say they want.

They don't want a solution. They don't want fairness. They just want to scream and shout. They want to show off to the most fringe parts of their base, knowing that in a few days they will somehow contort reality and blame Democrats even when they are well aware that their own political agenda is at fault for Congress failing to pass this critical national defense legislation.

Just as I made my own decision about my body when I signed up to fly Black Hawks in Iraq, I am making my choice today to use my voice to say "enough."

We must not allow Republicans to score political points by restricting the personal freedom of the very people who have dedicated their lives to defending that most fundamental, most American ideal.

Our female servicemembers, veterans, and military families, deserve access to healthcare, regardless of what part of the country they happen to be stationed in. They deserve to have full control over their bodies here at home, just as they did when they were carrying rucksacks and M4s on those bodies overseas.

To my colleagues on the other side of the aisle, if you care about the

strength of our military, if you care about defending our freedoms that have defined America since the first drop of ink was written on our Constitution, then you will vote against this amendment. Please do not abandon the women who have done so much to keep our Union safe. Please do not repay our heroes for their sacrifices by telling them what they can and cannot do with their bodies they put at risk time and again to protect our country.

Please, as you sit at your fancy desks under this hallowed, historic dome, ask yourself if you are so desperate for a pat on the back from FOX News that you would be willing to vote to strip away the rights these women have spent their lives protecting. I certainly could not live with that decision—with that vote. I hope the same is true for each of my colleagues.

I yield the floor.

#### NOMINATION OF JULIE RIKELMAN

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, today, the Senate will vote to confirm Julie Rikelman to the U.S. Court of Appeals for the First Circuit. She is a highly skilled litigator with almost 25 years of experience in private practice, as in-house counsel, and in public interest law.

After graduating from Harvard College and Harvard Law School, Ms. Rikelman clerked for Justice Dana Fabe on the Alaska Supreme Court and Judge Morton Greenberg on the Third Circuit. Ms. Rikelman then began her legal career as a Blackmun Fellow at the Center for Reproductive Rights—CRR—litigating reproductive rights cases around the country. In private practice, Ms. Rikelman has handled a wide range of civil and criminal cases, at both the trial and appellate level, including securities fraud, commercial breach of contract, State antitrust law, and election law. As an in-house attorney at NBC Universal, Ms. Rikelman litigated a variety of matters in Federal and State courts—including defamation, intellectual property, and employment discrimination. In 2011, Ms. Rikelman returned to CRR to take on a more senior role litigating cases, as well as spearheading case strategy.

Over the course of her career, Ms. Rikelman has proven to be a skilled trial attorney and an accomplished appellate practitioner, arguing multiple appeals, including two before the U.S. Supreme Court. The American Bar Association unanimously rated Ms. Rikelman “well qualified,” and she has the strong support of her home State Senators: Ms. WARREN and Mr. MARKEY. I urge my colleagues to join me in supporting Ms. Rikelman’s nomination.

#### VOTE ON RIKELMAN NOMINATION

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the question is, Will the Senate advise and consent to the Rikelman nomination?

Ms. DUCKWORTH. I ask for the yeas and nays.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there a sufficient second?

There appears to be a sufficient second.

The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk called the roll.

Mr. DURBIN. I announce that the Senator from Pennsylvania (Mr. FETTERMAN) and the Senator from Connecticut (Mr. MURPHY) are necessarily absent.

Mr. THUNE. The following Senators are necessarily absent: the Senator from Wyoming (Mr. BARRASSO), the Senator from Idaho (Mr. RISCH), the Senator from Florida (Mr. RUBIO), and the Senator from South Carolina (Mr. SCOTT).

The result was announced—yeas 51, nays 43, as follows:

#### [Rollcall Vote No. 166 Ex.]

##### YEAS—51

Baldwin	Heinrich	Reed
Bennet	Hickenlooper	Rosen
Blumenthal	Hirono	Sanders
Booker	Kaine	Schatz
Brown	Kelly	Schumer
Cantwell	King	Shaheen
Cardin	Klobuchar	Sinema
Carper	Lujan	Smith
Casey	Manchin	Stabenow
Collins	Markey	Tester
Coons	Menendez	Van Hollen
Cortez Masto	Merkley	Warner
Duckworth	Murkowski	Warnock
Durbin	Murray	Warren
Feinstein	Ossoff	Welch
Gillibrand	Padilla	Whitehouse
Hassan	Peters	Wyden

##### NAYS—43

Blackburn	Graham	Paul
Boozman	Grassley	Ricketts
Braun	Hagerty	Romney
Britt	Hawley	Rounds
Budd	Hoeven	Schmitt
Capito	Hyde-Smith	Scott (FL)
Cassidy	Johnson	Sullivan
Cornyn	Kennedy	Thune
Cotton	Lankford	Tillis
Cramer	Lee	Tuberville
Crapo	Lummis	Vance
Cruz	Marshall	Wicker
Daines	McConnell	Young
Ernst	Moran	
Fischer	Mullin	

##### NOT VOTING—6

Barrasso	Murphy	Rubio
Fetterman	Risch	Scott (SC)

The nomination was confirmed.

(Mr. MARKEY assumed the Chair.)

(Mr. WARNOCK assumed the Chair.)

The PRESIDING OFFICER. (Mr. KELLY.) The Senator from Colorado.

Mr. BENNET. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the motion to reconsider with respect to the Rikelman nomination be considered made and laid upon the table and the President be immediately notified of the Senate’s action.

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

#### UNANIMOUS CONSENT REQUEST—EXECUTIVE CALENDAR

Mr. BENNET. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate proceed to the consideration of the following nominations en bloc: Calendar No. 46 through No. 52, No. 82 through No. 107, No. 110 through No. 113, No. 130 through No. 139, No. 180 through No. 205, No. 224 through No. 234, No. 236 through No. 246; that the nominations be confirmed en bloc; that the motions to reconsider to be considered made

and laid upon the table with no intervening action or debate; that no further motions be in order to any of the nominations; that the President be immediately notified of the Senate’s action.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there an objection?

The Senator from Alabama.

Mr. TUBERVILLE. Mr. President, reserving the right to object, I object.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Objection is heard.

The Senator from Colorado.

Mr. BENNET. Mr. President, this is now the sixth time that I have been on this floor asking for unanimous consent so that the U.S. Senate can do its job to ratify, to approve the nominations of flag officers’ promotions at the Department of Defense.

That is something that we have done as a matter of course in the U.S. Senate for the last 230 years. No Senator in the history of the United States has ever prevented the Senate from proceeding with these nominations of flag officers.

I certainly don’t have to tell the Presiding Officer how important these promotions are, how critical they are. And observer after observer after observer has said that it is in the national security interest of the United States, not surprisingly, for this Senate to confirm these promotions, to ratify these promotions.

We are compromising our national security when one Senator out of the whole 100 people decides that they are going to do something that no Senator has ever done in the history of the United States. No Senator has ever put a blanket hold on the promotions of flag officers, and there is a good reason for that, because if people are willing to play politics with that, they are playing politics with our national security. If they are willing to play politics with that, they are playing politics with the expectations of people who have spent an entire career defending the national security of this country, serving the public, serving in the Department of Defense, and who now have been promoted to a position of trust and responsibility.

By the way, this doesn’t just affect those people who are getting that promotion. It also affects the people who are below them who can’t get the promotion that now is no longer vacant because they are stuck in the job that they are in.

And I am shocked that somebody here would do this and pretend that this is just common: You know, this is the Senate. This is the way the Senate functions. This the way the Senate, as my colleague from Alabama has said, just does its business.

This is not how the Senate ever does its business. It is not how the Department of Defense does its business. And it, particularly, I think, should be particularly grieving to the American people because of the reasons the Senator from Alabama is doing what he is doing.