

summers. But farmers are also battling very little rainfall, and they are praying that their crop loss will not be more than minimal.

The farm bill includes farm safety net programs which are a lifeline for countless producers. They are critical at managing the risks inherent with this critical industry. Everybody knows farming and ranching is risky, for the reasons I mentioned and others.

But this year I hope we can build on the progress we made in the last farm bill to ensure that the agriculture sector is as resilient as possible.

This sector not only feeds, fuels, and clothes America, as I said, it also drives our economy and feeds the world.

In Texas alone in 2021, ag exports totaled more than \$7.2 billion. In 2019, Texas A&M's AgriLife Extension Service estimated the economic impact of the ag sector to be nearly \$160 billion, which is more than 8 percent of my State's GDP.

So a strong, on-time farm bill is essential to the health and well-being of this important sector of the economy, but it is also important beyond that. It is important to the American people, and it is important to our economy.

Our colleague Senator BOOZMAN from Arkansas is a ranking member. And our colleagues on the Agriculture Committee, I know, have been working hard to draft this year's farm bill, and I appreciate the hard work that they put into it. But I am eager to work with our colleagues to get this bill across the finish line on time, again, before it lapses at the end of this fiscal year.

And then, there is another big one, Federal Aviation Administration Reauthorization. As though we needed another big, heavy lift before the end of the fiscal year, it is also the deadline to reauthorize the Federal Aviation Administration. Over the last couple of years, travelers have dealt with widespread flight cancellations, paralyzing staffing shortages, and rising prices. We have also witnessed some jarring safety issues, including near-collisions on airport runways in Minneapolis and New York.

Last month, Senators CANTWELL, CRUZ, DUCKWORTH, and MORAN introduced the FAA Reauthorization Act to address these and other issues. But like the National Defense Authorization Act and the farm bill, the FAA needs to be reauthorized by September 30. Again, all of these deadlines are well-known by the majority leader, but here we are finding ourselves with very little time and a lot to do.

And last but not least is, likely, the biggest lift before us for before September 30, and that is to fund the government. As part of the debt limit agreement, Senator SCHUMER vowed to bring all 12 appropriations bills to the Senate floor by September 30. How he is going to be able to keep his promise is not clear to me, given the traffic jam that we are going to experience, be-

cause this includes funding for our military, veteran services, border security, and so much more.

Senator COLLINS and Senator MURRAY and all of our colleagues on the Appropriations Committee are determined to restore some regular order and common sense to the funding process. I hope the majority leader will stick by his word and put all 12 appropriations bills on the Senate floor before the end of the fiscal year.

We don't need, and the country does not want, another omnibus spending bill like we saw at the end of last year, which, of course, was by design, because it empowers the leadership to the detriment of rank-and-file members of the Congress. When you are presented with a "shut down the government," "take it or leave it" proposition at the end of the year, having bypassed all of this normal process, the question is, Are you going to keep the government open? Are you going to fund the government? Are you going to fund defense, veterans, border security, or not? And that is simply an abomination we do not need to repeat again. And so I do hope the majority leader will keep his word.

None of these bills are an easy lift. They require a lot of hard work, cooperation, and time, and we only have 7 weeks of legislative session to pass them all. So far, the 118th Congress hasn't been a productive one. The Democratic majority has struggled to complete even the most basic tasks, and now we have a lot of work to do, maybe an impossible amount of work to do, by design. The clock is ticking, and we can't let these critical responsibilities slip through the cracks.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Ms. HIRONO). The Senator from Kansas.

#### EDUCATION

Mr. MORAN. Madam President, I was sitting home reading the newspaper, something I still do, and last month I read an article that captured my attention. National test scores of American students showed an alarming decline in the education of our children. Reading scores in America have continued to worsen since the height of COVID-19 pandemic, dropping to the lowest scores in decades.

The troubling deterioration in American education was demonstrated by average scores on the 2023 National Assessment of Educational Progress known as the Nation's Report Card. The report showed that 13-year-olds declined nine points in math compared to 2020. This was the largest drop for 13-year-olds seen in 50 years.

When 13-year-olds are struggling, it portends even worse problems ahead, because mastery in seventh and eighth grade is necessary to progress to more complex knowledge and analytical abilities required in high school and beyond. We know that failures in early childhood education, in early education have a long-lasting consequence.

We must turn these test scores around and accelerate the education of America's young as though our future depends on it, because it absolutely does.

America's strength as a global power—let me say that the education of our children is hugely important to our students and their families. But, also, America's strength as a global power doesn't just depend upon a strong military or possessing the latest weapons. Those things are important, but it also depends upon our economy and our ability to maintain a technological edge over our adversaries. And that all begins in the classroom, equipping our students to read, multiply, divide, and succeed.

The mental health, confidence, and contributions of young Americans cannot be thought of as a secondary issue. It is not a secondary issue to other national security imperatives. What that means is that the well-being, health, confidence, contribution, the capabilities, knowledge, intellect, and intelligence of our children have consequences to our security—our national security.

One of those greatest threats in our national security is China. China understands that to force their way into being a global superpower, they must be able to challenge the U.S. militarily and economically. This can be done by dislodging the United States as a leader in key technology areas that will dictate the success of nations in the coming decades.

Those technologies include semiconductor design and manufacture, artificial intelligence, quantum computing, aerospace engineering, advanced manufacturing, and biotechnology. If China were to overtake the United States in any of these areas—in any of these areas—the United States would lose out on trillions of dollars in economic value, our military edge would erode, and the Chinese global influence would increase dramatically.

As we grapple with the implications of a new Cold War with China and as we take stock of many of the associated challenges more complex than the old Cold War, the fact that our youth remain grades behind in math poses a concerning obstacle to future competitiveness. Advances in science and technology will build on basic math. Right now, our children are unprepared; and, therefore, we are unprepared to meet this challenge.

While we work to regain this ground in education, particularly in these STEM fields, we also need to create more opportunities for others that have gained a STEM education here in the United States to practice their profession in this country and contribute to the U.S. economy.

Educating people, only to send them back to strengthen their own home country, at a time in which the U.S. demand for STEM talent is through the roof, defies logic. Only 11 percent of foreign-born recipients of a bachelor's

degree and only 23 percent of those who earn a master's degree manage to find a way to stay and work in the United States.

The U.S. semiconductor industry alone could face a shortage of 70- to 90,000 workers over the next few years, and there is a projected shortfall of 300,000 engineers and 90,000 skilled technicians by 2030. It would be naive to believe that these positions can be solely filled by our American students.

As the Wall Street Journal opinion section recently read, the foreigner working in tech "isn't taking an American job; they are helping keep that job in the U.S."

Foreign-born scientists have been integral to our preeminence as a scientific and military power. Most famously, nuclear physicists from Europe were the intellectual forces that propelled the Manhattan Project; and, today, more than half of the Silicon Valley startups are led by foreign-born entrepreneurs. This is why we have worked to pass the Startup Act in each Congress since I arrived in the Senate.

This bill would ensure that those with advanced STEM degrees would be able to stay in this country while they are engaged in STEM-related professions.

This would fill the immediate and increasing need for STEM-educated professionals, while we work to improve STEM education for America's youth.

There is no "one size fits all" approach to solving the challenges in the classroom. Regaining ground after schools were closed during the pandemic will take hard work and ingenuity. But the success of our Nation depends—again, the success of our children depends, but because that is the case, the success of our Nation, our country, depends on young minds grappling and mastering the basics of math and reading and writing and science.

We must make certain we are taking an "all of the above," long-term approach to national security, and that means making strides in the classroom and investing in our students. Our schools are there to take care of our children and their future, but failure to do so means that we are damaging our Nation's future.

For the sake of our country, its national defense, its economy, and for the sake of all American families, we need to make certain that we reverse course in making certain that our students are learning and are achieving at a rate that allows us to be successful.

I yield the floor.

**THE PRESIDING OFFICER.** The Senator from Tennessee.

Mrs. BLACKBURN. I ask unanimous consent the following Senators be allowed to speak prior to the scheduled rollcall vote: myself for up to 20 minutes, Senator CARPER for up to 5 minutes, Senator BOOZMAN for up to 30 seconds, Leader SCHUMER for as much time as he may consume.

**THE PRESIDING OFFICER.** Without objection, it is so ordered.

#### BIDEN ADMINISTRATION

Mrs. BLACKBURN. Madam President, back in May, I was in Shelby County to visit with 100 members of the Tennessee National Guard. They were heading off on yet another deployment to the southern border.

These are some of the bravest and most capable people that you will ever meet. Tennesseans depend on them to keep us safe during natural disasters, to rescue lost hikers in the Great Smoky Mountain National Park, and to defend the country from our adversaries overseas. Yet there they were on their way to what many would call a war zone in their own country to do the job that Joe Biden refuses to do.

They shouldn't have had to go, but they went because they knew that no matter who was to blame for all this chaos, our Border Patrol agents and local law enforcement needed help controlling it.

When I think back on my conversations with those servicemembers, I can't help but notice the stark contrast between their focus on service and sacrifice and the Biden administration's lack of regard for the welfare of this country.

Over the past several years, the relationship between the American people and their government has changed, but not for the better. At the beginning of Biden's term, they were just baffled by what they were seeing. All they could do was shake their heads in disbelief. But as the months wore on, that disbelief gave way to genuine fear that this President was digging a hole that they wouldn't be able to claw their way out of no matter how hard they worked.

As it turns out, those fears were well-founded, and now, 3 years into this administration, that fear has given way to outrage because this President has made it abundantly clear that when it comes to pursuing his radical agenda, he simply doesn't care whom it hurts.

The President may be happy to ignore the mess he has made, but Tennesseans don't have that luxury. If they ignore the problems they see, they suffer real consequences. If local law enforcement officers just ignored the drugs flooding into their communities, even more people would die from fentanyl overdoses and drug-related crime.

Every year, I meet with local leaders in each of our State's 95 counties, and the conversation turns to the border crisis every single time. It is an unmitigated disaster, and they just don't understand why the President refuses to do something about it.

If you talk to law enforcement in East Tennessee, they will tell you that they are recording record levels of drug seizures. What they once would apprehend in ounces they now measure in pounds.

Chief Jason Owens at the Border Patrol gave a "week in review" from June 22 to 29. Here is some of what they apprehended. They know they had 28,339

apprehensions. They also had an additional 6,100 "get-aways." They apprehended 116 pounds of marijuana, 50 pounds of fentanyl, and 2,056 pounds of cocaine. Where does much of the drugs that are coming across with those "got-aways" end up? It ends up in our communities.

A judge in Rhea County told me that 80 percent of the crime he sees is drug-related. If they could get a handle on the drugs, they could take care of much of the court cases and the prison population, but they can't get a handle on it because the local dealers are not the root of the problem. For every drug smuggler the Border Patrol manages to catch and every pound of drugs they apprehend, you have that handful of "got-aways" who escape into the country with drugs and contraband.

In Overton County, they said they haven't busted a local meth lab in 5 years. Here is why. The drug dealers have outsourced their entire supply to the cartels because it is easier and cheaper to smuggle it in than it is to make it themselves. The police can trace that supply chain down I-75 to Atlanta and then right across the border into Mexico.

Now when they respond to an overdose death, local officials have to implement fentanyl protocols because they know it is the likely culprit. The cartels add this to the drugs to make them that much more addictive. Everything is laced with fentanyl. It is also very lethal in small amounts. In Marion County, they are spending an astronomical amount of money on autopsies because of this. As of May, they have spent \$80,000, and almost all of those deaths are fentanyl-related.

These local officials are desperate for help. They know this is this administration's fault because the situation escalated when the Biden administration moved into the White House.

Here is what the President did: He terminated "Remain in Mexico." He terminated title 42. He terminated DNA testing at the border. And his rhetoric made it clear that he would rather pander to the left than admit that Trump-era border policies were working. Then he left local law enforcement to fend for themselves.

They need our support. When title 42 ended, I introduced the Make the Migrant Protection Protocols Mandatory Act. That would reinstate the successful "Remain in Mexico" policy. I also introduced the End Child Trafficking Now Act, which would reinstate DNA testing at the border and thwart the child trafficking rings that President Biden has allowed to flourish. If we passed these two bills, we could give Border Patrol and local law enforcement a fighting chance against the cartels.

But the problem goes much deeper than just preventing illegal entry into the country. When Joe Biden took office, he threw the rule of law out the window. Since then, we have watched Biden and his supporters ignore the