

how it will continue to change our world.

I encourage all Members to attend this important briefing. I am also pleased to announce that our presenters for that day will be Rick Stevens, from the Department of Energy's Argonne National Laboratory, and Dr. Sethuraman Panchanathan—he is the head of the NSA; he is known as Panch; it is easier to say—and Dr. Kathleen Fisher, from the Information Innovation Office at DARPA, the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency. Our moderator will be Dr. Jos-Marie Griffiths, a member of the National Security Commission on Artificial Intelligence and president of Dakota State University.

So it is a broad range of presenters from academic, defense, energy, and scientific backgrounds. It will be a great discussion and a truly important one because Senators have no time to waste learning as much about AI as possible.

AI is going to be a regular part of our lives from here on out. Rapid change may, at times, seem frightening, but if applied correctly, AI promises to transform life on Earth for the better.

But there are real risks too. We must now work to anticipate the risks, mitigate them, and ensure that AI innovation is safe in the decades to come. So I encourage all Senators to attend the briefing on the 26th. I thank our presenters who will join us that day, and I thank my colleagues—particularly Senators Rounds, Heinrich, and Young—for working together as a team in putting this briefing together.

ECONOMIC GROWTH

Mr. President, now, on inflation, yesterday, we learned that inflation slowed down for the 12th month in a row, down to 3 percent—3 percent—the lowest that it has been in 2 years.

This morning, as American families stop for gas on their way to work, or check their pocketbooks, or go to the supermarket, they can continue to see throughout the country that we are turning the corner. They are seeing more money in their pockets; they are seeing inflation cool down; and they are seeing wages continue—continue—to go up.

Listen to this. This is important. Wage growth is now significantly above inflation for the first time since March of 2021. This is the work of a Democratic agenda in action, of President Biden's good work: lower costs for families, higher wages for workers, and millions and millions of new jobs created.

Republicans had claimed that if we passed the Inflation Reduction Act, inflation would only get worse. The Republican chairman of the Ways and Means Committee claimed the Inflation Reduction Act “will prolong and make worse the current inflation crisis.” It is becoming clearer and clearer that they were dead wrong. In fact, since we passed the IRA, inflation has been cut by more than half on an annual basis.

Let me say this again: Since we passed the Inflation Reduction Act, inflation has been cut by more than half on an annualized basis.

And if that is not enough proof that the Democrats and President Biden's agenda is working, the other major pieces of legislation we passed in Congress—like the infrastructure law and the CHIPS Act—are creating millions of good-paying jobs throughout the country and in my home State of New York.

Since President Biden took office, private companies have announced over \$500 billion—\$500 billion—in investments across industries like semiconductors, clean energy, EVs and battery manufacturing, and heavy industry. What does this mean? Jobs, jobs, jobs, and more jobs—so many jobs, in fact, that some of my Republican colleagues who voted against all these bills are claiming credit for the projects and the growth that they are generating in their own States and districts.

So we have a lot of work ahead of us, but yesterday's report makes clear the Democratic agenda is working.

DIVERSITY

Mr. President, now, on Democratic office diversity, this morning, the Senate Democratic Diversity Initiative released the results of its annual survey of Democratic staffers, the seventh year they have done so in a row.

When I became majority leader, I promised to work to increase the diversity of Senate offices so that they can reflect the diversity of the States and the communities in which we serve.

This year's survey shows that we continue to make important progress, and I want to highlight a few of the results.

For the fourth year in a row, the number of diverse staffers has increased, reaching the highest level since we launched our survey and almost certainly the highest level ever, certainly the highest level in our conference's history.

Our survey also shows that more African Americans work for Senate Democratic offices than ever, and, in fact, that is also true for Latinos, Middle Eastern and North Africans, and Asian American Pacific Islanders. Additionally, more staffers identify as part of the LGBTQ community since we first asked that question starting in 2019.

These milestones matter. Diversity matters. Our democracy can only thrive when all voices are heard and represented. I have seen that in my own office. I learn more and more from people of diverse backgrounds. It is a great thing, and it helps me be a better Senator for all the people of New York State.

And I believe our survey matters, too, because the only way we can make progress is by holding ourselves accountable through transparency. To say we are doing it is not enough. To actually do it and have the statistics

and numbers that show we are doing it shows the real progress we are making.

Now, we have a lot of work left to do. We are not there yet. No, that is for sure. But I am encouraged that our caucus continues to grow more diverse with each passing year.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

The Republican leader is recognized.

CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, across the country, surges in violent crime and deadly drugs have forced businesses to board up and working Americans to think twice about the cities where they have chosen to raise their families.

While repeat offenders are increasingly turned loose to run up longer rap sheets, victims of senseless violence are usually guilty of nothing more than being in the wrong place at the wrong time. For example, just days ago, I was reminded of this when a 6-year-old girl in my hometown of Louisville was shot by a group of motorcycle thugs while riding in the back seat of her car. While she remains in critical but stable condition, I join the entire Louisville community in wishing her a full recovery.

Tragedies like this are unfortunately not unique to Kentucky. In our Nation's Capital, crime has surged to startling levels. Compared to last year, car thefts have shot up 117 percent, robberies are up 53 percent, and homicides are up 17 percent.

Just last week, a social studies teacher from Kentucky who was visiting Washington for a conference was fatally shot on a university campus. The assailant had a previous firearm charge and repeatedly violated the terms of his release. This young man from my home State was one of 10 people who were shot and killed in Washington during the first 5 days of this month, including a college student and an Afghan immigrant who had risked his life as an interpreter for the U.S. military.

Too many Americans are mourning loved ones, and in cities across their country, when they look for answers to this senseless violence, they find radical prosecutors refusing to do their jobs. Liberal district attorneys are watering down criminal codes and outright refusing to prosecute repeat offenders who ought to be behind bars.

Earlier this year, the liberal DC Council tried to pass a new criminal code that would make it easier for repeat offenders to get back on the street. Thankfully, Republicans used

Congress's jurisdiction over our Nation's Capital and blocked this nonsense. But at every level of government, Democrats continue to turn a blind eye.

Keeping our communities safe is a fundamental governing responsibility. The American people deserve to feel safe in their own streets.

CHINA

Mr. President, on another matter, during this week's summit in Vilnius, NATO allies issued a wide-ranging joint statement on the challenges facing the alliance. Among other things, I was encouraged to see our allies united in a particularly frank new assessment of the Chinese threat. Quote:

The People's Republic of China's stated ambition and coercive policies challenge our interests, security, and values. . . . The PRC's malicious hybrid and cyber operations and its confrontational rhetoric and disinformation target Allies and harm Alliance security.

Some of us have even more stark concerns about the PRC. But even this consensus statement indicates a promising shift toward the realism the current moment simply demands.

Of course, NATO allies have never just been concerned with the North Atlantic. Individual NATO allies fought alongside U.S. soldiers in Korea and deployed to other far-flung regions to help contest Soviet aggression. After 9/11, NATO invoked article V for the first time and came to America's defense. A number of NATO allies deployed to Afghanistan, and some stayed until the bitter end, long after certain American politicians had simply given up.

NATO created a training mission in Iraq, and NATO allies remain focused on the threat radical terrorists still pose to our collective security.

Russia's invasions of Georgia in 2008 and Ukraine in 2014 woke some allies and some Americans to the threat posed by great-power adversaries, but the dramatic escalation in Ukraine last year sounded an even larger alarm.

NATO, as an alliance, stayed focused on the threat posed by great-power adversaries—and not just on the European continent. As the UK Parliament's Intelligence and Security Committee put it in a new report, "China almost certainly maintains the largest state intelligence apparatus in the world—dwarfing the UK's Intelligence Community and presenting a challenge for our Agencies to cover."

Europe's largest and most integrated economies are recognizing the dangers of getting in bed with authoritarian regimes. As Germany's Foreign Minister has observed candidly, "We paid for every cubic metre of Russian gas two-fold and threefold with our national security."

So I am hopeful our allies are resolved to avoid making similar mistakes in the future. They seem to increasingly understand the deep strategic links between our own continent and the Indo-Pacific. That is why the alliance invited key partners—Japan,

South Korea, Australia, and New Zealand—to participate in the Vilnius summit. Now, effective deterrence, resilience, and defense means much more than strong words and diplomatic displays of unity; it means concrete plans backed by robust investments.

Today, Germany's Government is releasing a followup to its new security strategy dedicated to what it calls "systemic rivalry" with China. The Foreign Minister describes the long-awaited plan as an effort to "protect our own resilience, our own security, and reduce dependencies that threaten us."

It is encouraging to hear the Foreign Minister acknowledging that the PRC has become "more repressive at home and more offensive abroad." However, the document clearly reflects an ongoing debate within the German Government about how to engage both economically and strategically with China. The United States and other allies will be watching how this debate unfolds and what practical steps Germany takes to limit the growing threats from Beijing.

As Germany's major pledges to make significant new investments in defense suggest, Berlin really is at a turning point. I am hopeful that Germany's defense commitments will be realized, that promised funds will go under contract to repair its badly atrophied military, and that German businesses will diversify their investments away from increasingly risky bets in the PRC.

The United States, for our part, needs no convincing that China poses a singular strategic threat. In fact, clear majorities of Americans support expanding our deterrence in the Indo-Pacific. But if we want to succeed at the big things like outcompeting China, we need to get our ducks in a row on our most basic governing responsibility: providing for the common defense.

Hard power is essential—more so than any number of pet rocks politicians hold up as helpful to compete with China. Hard power is the currency of geopolitics.

The National Defense Authorization Act—our annual must-pass opportunity to assert national security priorities—is finally before us. When it comes to actually delivering the robust funding our Armed Forces need, the Biden administration has left our work cut out for us. His defense budget was plainly insufficient to meet the growing security challenges we face.

We need to invest in the cutting-edge capabilities that will make our adversaries think twice, and we need to rebuild the industrial base that keeps America's arsenal—and the arsenal of democracy, our allies' arsenals—stocked. There is no time to rest on our laurels.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

The Republican whip.

FARM BILL

Mr. THUNE. Mr. President, the farm bills that we take up every few years are essential pieces of legislation. They help provide the tools and resources that farmers and ranchers need to carry out their task of feeding our Nation. And with parts of the 2018 farm bill expiring in the next few months, passing our next farm bill needs to be one of Congress's top priorities during the remainder of the year.

The Senate Agriculture Committee has been working on this year's legislation, but there is more work to be done. And we need to make sure that we don't delay in getting this bill over the finish line. Farmers and ranchers already face a lot of uncertainty in their profession—few jobs are as subject to market fluctuations or the whims of the weather—and the least that we can do here in Congress is make sure they know that the critical programs won't be expiring and they will continue to have access to essential resources that help make farming and ranching possible.

As a member of the Senate Agriculture Committee and a Senator from a State where agriculture is not just "a" way of life but "the" way of life, the farm bill is always one of my top priorities.

I have had the privilege of helping to craft four farm bills during my time in Congress; and, for me, the process always begins and ends with farmers and ranchers.

I have been gearing up for the 2023 farm bill pretty much since work finished on the last one. And, last year, I kicked off a series of roundtables with agriculture producers to hear firsthand from farmers and ranchers what they need from this year's farm bill.

These formal discussions, along with the many informal conversations I regularly have with farmers and ranchers, have provided me with invaluable feedback, and I am working on a number of measures for this year's farm bill that reflect the input I have received from South Dakota producers.

One thing that farmers have made clear is the critical role of the farm safety net. Crop insurance is the cornerstone of the farm safety net, and it needs to be maintained and, to the extent possible, strengthened in the next farm bill.

Currently, the Agriculture Risk Coverage and Price Loss Coverage programs, which help offset losses when prices for agricultural commodities drop, are not always proving sufficient. And one of my top priorities for this year's bill is improving commodity and livestock programs to ensure that farmers and ranchers have sufficient backup.

I am also working to make the Conservation Reserve Program a more effective option for producers and landowners. Currently, the program doesn't