

an amendment was offered to add everybody in, unfortunately we did not get enough Republicans to vote for it. But this idea deserves new life and bipartisan cooperation in this Congress, and I look forward to hearing more from the President tonight.

Very soon, Americans are going to feel the benefits of our agenda in their daily lives. Implementation is going to be a top priority for Senate Democrats in the months to come. Not everyone has the time to follow what happens in Congress day by day, but when we actually start doing things, implementing the bills, oh, it gets out.

Just look at my home State of New York. After we passed infrastructure, many people didn't hear about it. To others, it was a line in the newspaper—oh, they have a bipartisan infrastructure bill. But last week, when the President came to New York to celebrate Gateway, you could feel the exaltation and excitement in the city. That is going to start happening again and again everywhere, in every State, in every community, as these large bills that helped American families are implemented and people see the actual results in their communities.

So let me say it again. Democrats are proud we stuck together and delivered on an agenda that lowered costs, lifted America out of crisis, and helped lay a foundation for future prosperity. Our MAGA Republicans cannot claim the same. On the very first day in the new majority, House Republicans passed a bill not to help average Americans but, rather, that helps the ultrarich so they can avoid paying their fair share in taxes. The bottom line is, these people who are going to be added to the IRS are going to focus on all of those who are much richer than the average American but pay at a much lower rate. But the Republicans couldn't go for that. Those are the people they want to represent. Then they hardly stopped there. In just 1 month, the MAGA House majority has doubled down on their war on women, tripled down on their asinine national sales tax proposal, and Republicans continue to hold the full faith and credit of the United States hostage to their radical agenda.

In the coming months, nothing will require more cooperation and serious-mindedness than lifting the debt ceiling. I was glad to work with both Presidents Biden and Trump to lift the debt ceiling over the past couple of years. We did it without political blackmail, without brinkmanship. But Speaker MCCARTHY and many of his House MAGA Republicans are taking the debt ceiling hostage and basically saying: Our way or the highway. Agree to cuts or we won't lift the debt ceiling.

That is not going to work, plain and simple. History shows that those who try to threaten their way to an agreement end up losing.

If Speaker MCCARTHY is insistent on spending cuts, which we Democrats will strongly oppose, he has an obliga-

tion to take the next step and actually say what those cuts are for. We will oppose tying the debt ceiling to these types of cuts. The debt ceiling is debts we have already incurred and should be paid without brinkmanship, without adding things to the agenda, which risks a great deal for the American people.

So what are the Republicans asking for? They say they want cuts. What are they? Are Republicans going to ax Social Security or Medicare? We think it is not enough for the Speaker to just say he doesn't want to make those cuts, because Members of his own party, including some of the very MAGA Republicans he followed in the first week of his session, are saying otherwise, and they have shown—some of them—that they can get their way in the new majority. Speaker MCCARTHY needs to prove he won't cut Social Security and Medicare by showing us the plan, his plan.

What about funding for national defense? Our military just shot down the Chinese spy balloon. Are Republicans seriously thinking about cutting defense on some bogus claims of fighting a "woke agenda"? What the heck does that mean?

Republicans, show us the specific cuts. Show us the plan.

What about families and children who rely on nutrition aid? The chairwoman of the House Appropriations Committee recently said they are still looking at cuts to SNAP benefits at a time when children are hungry and groceries are far too expensive. This is from the party that cut taxes for billionaires and mega corporations back in 2017. If making sure hungry children have enough to eat is part of the "woke agenda," then we sure don't have the same definition.

Look, I know it is not easy for this new majority. The 20 or so extremists who dictated the House rules package can now thwart whatever proposal the Speaker wants to come up with if they feel the cuts don't go far enough. So I am gravely concerned that things will be very, very hard for the Speaker to manage, if he can come up with a plan at all.

All this brings us back to what Democrats have been insisting on from the very beginning: No brinkmanship. No hostage-taking. Let's lift the debt ceiling together. Let's pay the debts that Democrats and Republicans, including Donald Trump, already incurred without ultimatums.

Tonight, I expect the President will make this very clear to the American people, and it will be the responsibility of House Republicans to show that they take the debt ceiling seriously before they create an unprecedented crisis that will wreak havoc on every single American.

CHINA

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, now on the Chinese surveillance balloon, I

strongly—very strongly—condemn President Xi's brazen incursion into American airspace with the Chinese surveillance balloon, and I commend President Biden for being calm, calculated, and effective in taking down the balloon over water to ensure the safety of Americans on the ground and to ensure we maximize our intelligence gains as we examine this balloon, which is far less likely to burn and crash into a million pieces in water than over land.

Instead of criticizing China, I was shocked to hear MAGA Republicans—before they even knew what was happening, before they even knew the whole story—direct their criticism toward the President, saying that we should have shot down the balloon the moment we saw it. So it is clear that the MAGA Republican criticism was at best premature and at worst political.

This is one area where we don't need politics. We need Democrats and Republicans to come together to condemn China and be a unified front against the CCP.

President Biden and his team did the right thing. They waited and took down the balloon carefully, precisely, and with what both the military and intelligence experts urged them to do. Had the President not gone along with what the military said, I can imagine that some of these same Republicans, so highly political in their criticism, would have then criticized the President for not listening to the military leaders. But now we can recover most of the equipment and begin to analyze the technology in the way it was done.

Again, I applaud President Biden for his leadership. And on Thursday, all Senators—all Senators—we have upgraded this. Because so many Senators wanted a briefing, I asked the administration to do it as an all-Senators briefing instead of the Gang of 8, and that is what is going to happen. So all Senators will receive a classified briefing from administration officials on the surveillance balloon.

NOMINATION OF DEANDREA GIST BENJAMIN

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, now, finally, on the Fourth Circuit, before Senators join with our House colleagues for the State of the Union, the Senate will take its first judicial nomination vote of the Congress by advancing DeAndrea Benjamin to serve as a circuit court judge—a circuit court judge—for the Fourth Circuit. If confirmed, Judge Benjamin would make history as only the second woman of color to sit on that court, a long overdue step in making sure the bench reflects the vibrancy of the Fourth Circuit. Judge Benjamin's credentials are unassailable, and I thank my Republican colleagues in the Judiciary Committee who supported her.

The Senate is going to continue prioritizing judicial confirmations on the floor of this Congress. We have a

lot of outstanding men and women coming out of the Judiciary very soon, and we will work quickly to move them out of this Chamber and onto the bench.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The clerk will call the roll.

The 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 ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Without objection, it is so ordered.

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

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

STATE OF THE UNION ADDRESS

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, this evening, President Biden will begin the back half of his term with his State of the Union address to Congress and to the American people. But the White House's attempts to script the message for this week have been upset by recent events. Over the last several days, the country learned that on President Biden's watch, the state of our Union is apparently under Chinese surveillance from our own skies.

It is ludicrous to suggest that Canada and the United States had no choice but to let this thing traipse across the continent from coast to coast. President Obama's own Defense Secretary, Leon Panetta, says, "We should have acted earlier."

The administration's handwringing and indecision, finally downing the balloon only after it had toured the length of our country, was typical of how President Biden and his team have conducted our foreign affairs.

Our top military commanders and civilian experts all say that our broader strategic competition with China is our most serious challenge. But this President's last budget request tried to cut funding for our military after inflation, while Beijing keeps investing in their own capabilities.

The commander of our U.S. Strategic Command just told Congress that China now has more land-based intercontinental ballistic missile launchers than we do. The administration's reckless retreat from Afghanistan blew past the expert warnings, cost the lives of 13 American servicemembers, let thousands of terrorists waltz out of prison, and incentivize others to challenge an America that looked cowardly.

Its hesitating, indecisive, self-deterred approach to helping Ukraine before Putin invaded and in the earliest days right afterwards left freedom's friends flat-footed and are making the substantive fight more difficult than it ever had to be.

And now the Biden administration apparently has pivoted from chasing another bad nuclear deal with Iran to trying to let terrorists out of Guantanamo Bay.

These are just some of the reasons why 41 percent of Americans say the state of our union is weak—weak—and only 13 percent say it is strong.

Of course, this administration has also created problems for American families closer to home. A nationwide poll published last week revealed that just 16 percent of Americans say they are in a better financial situation today than they were 2 years ago when the President and his party assumed total control of government.

For 84 percent of Americans, one-party Democratic control of Washington either failed to live up to its promises or actively made life worse. Two years ago, over the objections of their own party's top economists, Washington Democrats misinterpreted a narrow election victory as a mandate for an unprecedented spending spree.

When President Biden took office, inflation was at 1.4 percent. From Inauguration Day to today, inflation is over 13 percent.

Working families have seen grocery prices jump 18.6 percent, used car prices rise 26.2 percent, and energy prices soar by 33.9 percent. Millions—millions—of Americans have earned pay raises at work, but runaway inflation has left them with less purchasing power than before.

Our southern border is in crisis, shattering all-time records for illegal immigrant apprehensions. Streets and neighborhoods are being swallowed up by violent crime—after local Democrats have cut police budgets, liberal prosecutors have turned jails into revolving doors, and national Democrats spent years amplifying the kinds of anti-police rhetoric that result in more crime.

And President Biden is helping the radical left go on offense and bring a culture war to the doorsteps of normal American families—trying to squeeze Catholic hospitals and faith-based daycares out of business; trying to take school choice and curriculum transparency away from parents—and on and on and on.

President Biden campaigned on being the adult in the room. But he is not even calling the shots in his own party. Over and over on issue after issue, this President hands the car keys to the radical left and turned himself into a passenger. That is why working families across the country have voted for change.

They elected a Republican majority in the House of Representatives to put the emergency brakes on runaway liberal spending. They reelected all-star Republican governors in places like Texas, Georgia, and Florida. And they elevated a talented new generation of leaders, including the youngest serving governor in America—Governor Sanders of Arkansas—whom the American people will hear from tonight.

Our country may still be struggling to understand what on earth Washington Democrats think they have actually accomplished in the past 2 years. But they can be absolutely sure where Republicans stand.

CONCLUSION OF MORNING BUSINESS

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Morning business is closed.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

EXECUTIVE CALENDAR

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, the Senate will proceed to executive session to resume consideration of the following nomination, which the clerk will report.

The bill clerk read the nomination of DeAndrea Gist Benjamin, of South Carolina, to be United States Circuit Judge for the Fourth Circuit.

Mr. McCONNELL. I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Without objection, it is so ordered.

COVID

Mr. CRUZ. Mr. President, when the COVID pandemic hit, small businesses were shut down; millions of Americans lost their jobs; schools were shut down; flights were canceled; and traveling ground to a halt. The sick and the elderly were forced to die in hospitals and nursing homes, tragically alone, without the comforting embrace of loved ones.

The corporate media told us there was no way that this virus could have escaped from a Chinese Government lab, and Big Tech companies banned and censored posts laying out the evidence that it had escaped from a Chinese lab, labeling that evidence a "conspiracy theory." Masks were mandated everywhere.

And when the COVID vaccines came out, those were mandated too. Doctors, nurses, and our brave service men and women who chose not to get the vaccine were fired, discharged, sent home.

The corrupt corporate media's reaction to COVID devastated our economy and led directly to massive inflation, to weakening and even destroying faith in public health institutions, and resulted in learning loss that millions of American children may never recover from.

The pandemic is over. President Biden has even admitted that. The vast majority of America has moved on with their lives. But, sadly, the Biden