

We will strengthen our ties to Taiwan, increase our influence in the Indo-Pacific, make progress on the vital AUKUS partnership, and increase the administration's power to sanction and punish international fentanyl traffickers.

I mentioned this before, but I cannot emphasize it enough. This fentanyl bill is a major, major help in stopping the scourge of fentanyl from coming into this country. Members on both sides of the aisle should celebrate that in a bipartisan way. Under the leadership of Senator BROWN and Senator TIM SCOTT, we were able to get this done.

All of these agreements are the result of both sides working together, each one a good reason to keep going until the job was done. Both sides will continue working today and into next week until we pass the NDAA. We are making good progress, but, of course, we still have more to do.

APPROPRIATIONS

Mr. President, now on appropriations, as the Senate works to finish the NDAA, we will also vote this morning on an important executive nominee, David Uhlmann to be Assistant Administrator at the EPA. Mr. Uhlmann is one of the Nation's top prosecutors of criminal polluters. He has broad support from leading officials from both former Democratic and Republican administrations.

Off the floor, we will also make great progress on the appropriations bill.

This morning, the Appropriations Committee is marking up three more bills, continuing the great work of our appropriators over the past few months. This is never an easy process, but hats off to Chair MURRAY and Vice Chair COLLINS. They are working really well together, and we are on track to pass all of our appropriations bills through committee, through regular order, with strong bipartisan support. It is hard to do, but they are doing a great job.

It is precisely how the appropriations process should work—both sides coming together, finding common ground, and advancing bills that invest in American families, keep our communities safe, and keep our government open.

It is this kind of bipartisan cooperation that prevented any government shutdown in the last Congress when Democrats had majorities in the House and in the Senate. Not one shutdown. Not even for a day. We didn't shut the government down. Americans don't want to see one this year.

There is a lot of work to do, but today's markup is another example that our appropriators are moving forward on a good path, and I thank them again for their efforts.

U.S. SUPREME COURT

Mr. President, and now finally on the SCOTUS ethics markup, the Supreme Court ethics markup, this morning, as I speak, the Judiciary Committee is holding votes to advance Supreme Court ethics reform legislation. I sup-

port Chairman DURBIN, Senator WHITEHOUSE, and the Judiciary Committee's work on SCOTUS ethics reform, and I look forward to working with them to make progress on this legislation.

Holding Supreme Court Justices to high ethical standards should not be a partisan issue. On the contrary, both sides should leap at the opportunity to do whatever we can to protect the public's trust in our system of justice. It is an essential part of protecting our democracy.

Right now, sadly, Americans' trust in the Supreme Court is understandably shaken. They see Supreme Court Justices accepting lavish gifts and vacations from billionaires and MAGA extremists—not your ordinary, run-of-the-mill billionaires but true ideologues who then support organizations and court suits to move America to the far right, and the Court seems to do it. Then they turn around, gut—these ideologues turn around, gut affirmative action, block student debt relief for millions of Americans, and green-light discrimination against the LGBTQ community. The hypocrisy, the appearance of a conflict of interest is sickening, and Americans clearly see right through it.

The American people agree that Justices who sit on the highest Court in the land should be held to equally high ethical standards.

So, again, to repeat, I support the efforts of Chairman DURBIN and the Judiciary Committee, and I will work with them to make progress on this issue.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

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

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

The Republican leader is recognized.

KENTUCKY FLOODING

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, yesterday, communities across my home State endured another spate of heavy rains. Flash flooding was especially severe in Western Kentucky, where residents are still rebuilding after tornadoes pummeled the region just 19 months ago.

First responders have been moving quickly to rescue and evacuate those impacted, and I understand that so far, there are no reported injuries or deaths. I am thankful for the heroic work to keep Kentuckians safe.

My team is in touch with State and local officials to help however we can, and later today, I will speak with the mayor of Mayfield to get an update on the situation in her community.

Elaine and I continue to pray for the safety of West Kentuckians as they recover and rebuild in this time of need.

BORDER SECURITY

Mr. President, on an entirely different matter, "The administration's plan is working as intended." That is the Department of Homeland Security's assessment of the situation at our southern border since President Biden ended title 42 authorities back in May.

On the Biden administration's watch, Customs and Border Protection reported record-shattering numbers of illegal border crossings. Yet Washington Democrats would like us to believe that with the flip of a switch, they have brought the crisis they helped create under control. Believe me, I wish that were true. But the American communities dealing with the effects of President Biden's open borders, like the record flows of deadly drugs, know different.

And so do the thousands of migrants caught up in this administration's humanitarian catastrophe along the border. Here, unfortunately, are the facts. While the Biden administration crows about migrant encounters declining, the month of May 2023 saw nearly 35,000 inadmissible persons arriving at southern border points of entry. That is double the May total from just a year before. And last month, in June, the number jumped to over 45,000.

Meanwhile, the number of FBI Terror Watch List suspects arrested at the border thus far this fiscal year has already set a new annual record. President Biden's HHS Department still can't seem to account for over 85,000 children who arrived at the border unaccompanied and were released into the United States.

I know several of our colleagues on this side of the aisle will have more to say on the subject later today, but if this is what the Biden administration calls a plan that is working as intended, I hate to see what they think failure looks like.

NOMINATIONS

Mr. President, on another matter, for more than 2 years now, the Biden administration has sent the Senate a steady stream of radical and unqualified nominees. That much is hardly news. But today, the President's pick to serve as Secretary of Labor made an especially ignominious bit of history. Julie Su has now waited longer for confirmation by the Senate of the same party as the President than any previous Cabinet nominee on record.

Her nomination has spent 4½ months in limbo while Senate Democrats decide whether they can even muster a party line confirmation vote.

"We're still taking input." That has become sort of our colleagues' go-to line as they decide whether to hold their noses and vote this scandal-plagued, leftwing activist into the job. Well, I would suggest to our colleagues that there is not much that Ms. Su's radical record has left to the imagination.

This is a nominee who managed to botch her previous job so royally that

the biggest newspaper in her home State, The Los Angeles Times, called one department's performance on her watch an "epic failure." That was the L.A. Times describing the performance of this California department head.

As head of California's labor authority, Ms. Su was responsible for tens of billions of dollars in fraudulent unemployment insurance payments—tens of billions of dollars in fraud. Why on Earth would the Biden administration think that sort of performance deserves an encore?

Well, maybe because Ms. Su has a penchant for doing the bidding of favorite liberal activists and Big Labor allies. On the job in California, Ms. Su reportedly instructed employees on how to hide illegal immigrants from Customs authorities working to enforce the law. Here in Washington, she has worked overtime to give unions access to more of the workers' paychecks and veto power over vast-evolving industries where independent contractors and gig workers thrive.

So American taxpayers have seen enough—enough—of Julie Su. When will Senate Democrats finally decide they have as well?

CHINA

Mr. President, on one final matter, this week, the Biden administration's climate envoy, John Kerry, was in Beijing on a mission to get Beijing to cut its carbon emissions.

As China continues to oppress its own people and threaten peaceful neighbors in the Indo-Pacific, our former colleague apparently thought he could get Chinese officials to treat leftwing climate policy as a "free-standing" issue. Well, by all accounts, the administration's envoy was unsuccessful on that front. It appears he did not meet with the Chinese foreign minister or President Xi.

Meanwhile, China's leader used his latest public remarks to reiterate that he didn't plan to curb increasing emissions—let alone start lowering them—for another 7 years.

So let me put it another way. Over the last 7 years, the U.S. economy cut its emissions by 5 percent while China increased its own by 12 percent. While the Biden administration waged war on affordable energy and decimated coal country, China made plans for hundreds—hundreds—of new coal plants. While President Biden has tried to cut defense spending after inflation, the PRC has plowed ahead with investments in domestic industry and military modernization.

Perhaps the administration's climate envoy would be interested in the carbon emissions of China's fast-growing navy or the fuel efficiency of its hypersonic missiles. The PRC appears to be all too happy to trade nonbinding international commitments for more of America's jobs, prosperity, and national security.

America's top adversary clearly recognizes what the Biden administration does not: You can't win a strategic

competition by hamstringing your own economy, and you can't expect to convince your rival to follow suit voluntarily.

According to the PRC's summary of this week's meetings, the U.S. needs to "properly handle the Taiwan issue" in exchange for any of the hollow, unenforceable promises the Biden administration hoped China would make on its carbon emissions.

Sell out a peaceful democracy in exchange for leftwing climate priorities? No one should be surprised that Beijing responded to the administration's naive demands on climate with a priority of its own. On that count, the Biden administration's envoy deserves some credit for walking away. But this is hardly the only time Democrats have gone looking in the wrong places for an edge in our competition with China.

Here is the truth: The way to keep America safe and prosperous is to invest in hard power and deter those who wish us harm. And this week, as the Senate continues our work on the NDAA, our colleagues have an opportunity to demonstrate that they understand this basic essential reality.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Republican whip.

NATIONAL DEFENSE AUTHORIZATION ACT FOR FISCAL YEAR 2024

Mr. THUNE. Mr. President, currently, the Senate is considering one of the most important pieces of legislation that we consider each year, and that is the National Defense Authorization Act.

It is a bill that authorizes funding for our men and women in uniform and our defense needs—from planes, ships, and submarines to weapons, logistics, and communications technology.

The United States has long had a reputation for military strength, and part of that reputation has rested on the strength of our equipment, but in recent years, our technological advantage has eroded to the point where there is reason to be concerned whether we would win a war against a major power like China. While we have made some progress to reverse this trend, we have a lot more work to do to ensure our military retains our technological edge, and I am glad that this year's NDAA makes progress toward this goal.

Today, I want to talk about one critical aspect of America's defense capabilities in particular, and that is long-range strike, specifically our bombers.

Long-range strategic bombers have played a critical role for the United States in a number of conflicts, but today's bomber force is desperately in need of an update. Our bomber inventory is roughly one-third the size that it was in 1989, and it is the oldest in Air Force history. Experts warn that, in a conflict, the current U.S. bomber force would be insufficient against an adversary like China. Fortunately, this is one problem that we have made a concerted effort to address.

Congress, the Pentagon, and successive administrations have been at work developing a next-generation strategic bomber for a number of years, and we finally have it. That is the B-21 Raider. It is a sixth-generation, long-range strategic bomber, and it will take its first flight later this year.

This is something that, as I said earlier, our Nation has a vital interest in making sure it is completed and that we get that important military asset as part of our defense arsenal as we look at the threats that we face around the globe today.

The Air Force calls the Raider the future backbone of its bomber force, and Secretary of Defense Austin says it is "deterrence the American way."

The B-21 is an example of what American ingenuity can achieve. It will be able to penetrate hostile air defenses and reach targets anywhere in the world, which 90 percent of our current bomber force can't do, all while launching from the United States and deploying stealth technologies that you have to see—or should I say—not see to believe. This is a remarkable capability. Its systems will be able to evolve with a changing threat environment and incorporate new technologies within the airframe, and it will be able to work alongside the technologies of tomorrow, such as unmanned aircraft and artificial intelligence.

The specter of the B-21 has already caused a stir in China, and I am certain that it will cause our adversaries to think twice about aggression.

I am proud that when the B-21 enters service in the next few years, South Dakota's Ellsworth Air Force Base will be Main Operating Base 1—home to both the formal training unit and the first operational squadron. The men and women of Ellsworth are working hard to prepare for this important new mission, and I am working to ensure they have everything they need to successfully carry it out.

Last year, I worked to ensure that Congress provided not only for the development and initial production of the B-21 but for support facilities at Ellsworth that will be needed for the aircraft, including a radio frequency facility and a weapons generation facility.

I was also able to secure language in last year's NDAA to create a pilot program to evaluate dynamic airspace concepts. Dynamic airspace will allow airspace boundaries to evolve as military exercises progress, enabling larger volumes of airspace for realistic training for aircraft like the B-21.

I am pleased to report that this year's NDAA authorizes full funding for the next steps of the B-21 mission, including continued bomber development and procurement as well as continued investment in the required support facilities at Ellsworth.

In looking at Ellsworth today, it is hard to imagine that its future was in jeopardy not that long ago. Shortly after I came to the Senate, the Department of Defense's Base Realignment