

eroding Russia's capacity to threaten NATO, is not the time to ease up. Now, with Russia and China's "friendship without limits" and Putin's embrace of Iran and North Korea, is not the time for America to step back.

I will have more to say on the conflict in Ukraine, how the President hasn't been decisive enough, how our assistance is being used to good effect, and how additional appropriations are critical for our defense industrial base and competition with China, but for now, let's just be absolutely clear about a few things.

Helping Ukraine retake its territory means weakening—means weakening—one of America's biggest strategic adversaries without firing a shot and deterring another one in the process. It means investing directly in American strength, both military and economic. Our colleagues will have the opportunity to do all of these when we pass supplemental appropriations before the month is out.

#### NATIONAL LABOR RELATIONS BOARD

Mr. President, on another matter, this week, Senate Democrats are attempting to tip the partisan scales and weaponize a regulatory authority that impacts millions of American workers and businesses.

The Senate's longstanding practice is to fill Democratic and Republican vacancies on important Boards and Commissions in tandem. But instead of pairing Gwynne Wilcox, President Biden's choice for a Democratic seat on the National Labor Relations Board, with a Republican counterpart, our colleagues would like to create an artificial liberal supermajority.

Washington Democrats' runaway inflation continues to send headwinds through the American economy. Credit card debt is at an alltime high.

In historic numbers, workers are concluding that Democrats' Big Labor allies are not in their corner. Fewer and fewer employees want to hand their hard-earned money over to union bosses. Last year, just 6 percent—6 percent—of the private sector workforce belonged to a union.

Just this year, one major union had to fire its president for misusing workers' dues, and officials from at least two other organizations are facing lengthy prison terms for embezzlement. All the while, committed partisans like Ms. Wilcox and liberals at the NLRB have made it their mission to run roughshod over American employers, stack the deck for Democrats' Big Labor allies, and keep corrupt and failing unions on life support with a tangled mess of regulations.

The last thing our country needs is an emboldened partisan majority at the helm of the NLRB; but, unfortunately, that is exactly what we will get if Democrats confirm Ms. Wilcox's nomination all by itself. So I would strongly urge my colleagues to join me in voting no later today.

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. THUNE. 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.

#### INFLATION

Mr. THUNE. Mr. President, we recently passed the first anniversary of the so-called Inflation Reduction Act, and despite the White House's showy anniversary celebration, this legislation is not aging well, and that is not exactly a surprise.

It was clear from the beginning that this bill had problems. It was called the Inflation Reduction Act. Yet before the bill had been signed into law, the non-partisan Penn Wharton Budget Model was noting that the bill's impact on inflation was "statistically indistinguishable from zero." In other words, the Inflation Reduction Act would do nothing to reduce inflation. Even President Biden has essentially admitted that the bill's name was misleading.

It was also clear from the outset that the bill's claims of deficit reduction were extremely shaky, relying on accounting gimmicks and fuzzy math. Then, of course, there were the hundreds of billions of dollars in tax hikes on American businesses—rarely, I might add, a strategy that produces economic growth or benefits for working Americans. There was a massive funding infusion to the IRS focused not on improving taxpayer services, interestingly enough, but on increasing audits to help fund the Democrats' Green New Deal agenda—and more.

The best that could be said for the Inflation Reduction Act when it passed, which isn't much, was that it was less damaging than the staggering multitrillion-dollar spending spree Democrats had originally tried to implement, their so-called Build Back Better Act.

So it is not exactly a surprise that the Inflation Reduction Act isn't aging well, but it has become clear over the past year that the bill is even worse than it appeared originally. It was already an expensive piece of legislation, but the bill's costs have ballooned alarmingly.

The bill's Green New Deal provisions, which were originally projected to cost around \$400 billion, are now expected to cost somewhere in the range of \$660 billion to more than \$1 trillion. Let me repeat that. The bill's Green New Deal provisions, which were originally projected to cost around \$400 billion, are now expected to cost somewhere in the range of \$660 billion to more than \$1 trillion.

If Democrats' deficit reduction plans for this bill were shaky before, they are really, really shaky now. It is not hard to imagine that the steep increase in the bill's costs could mean that it ends up adding to the deficit instead of reducing it, and now it has emerged that

some of the biggest beneficiaries of the bill's green energy subsidies are not American companies but foreign companies. Not only that, but billion-dollar companies are expected to receive the lion's share of the bill's green energy tax subsidies—ironic for a President who claims he wants to make big companies "pay their fair share." It also turns out that the bill's provisions are actually driving up the cost of green energy projects and inflating the cost of project materials and labor. It is no wonder that President Biden recently said of the Inflation Reduction Act:

I wish I hadn't called it that.

And I haven't even mentioned other aspects of this legislation like the bill's price controls for prescription drugs, which will curtail medical innovation and the development of new medications. When the Biden administration originally proposed this policy, research from the University of Chicago projected that price controls on prescription drugs in Medicare would result in 135 fewer new drugs available to patients. Now, we are seeing those projections come to fruition as multiple drug companies have indicated that they are halting research into new treatments for cancer and other diseases as a result of the Inflation Reduction Act.

President Biden has been spending a lot of time recently talking about his economic philosophy, or lack thereof, which he has taken to calling Bidenomics. According to the White House, it is a philosophy based on "growing the economy from the middle out and the bottom up," while also spending responsibly. It is a nice-sounding vision, but it has little to do with the economic reality in the Biden administration.

The so-called American Rescue Plan Act—the massive Democrat spending spree that helped plunge our economy into a 2-year-plus inflation crisis—is proof enough that "spending responsibly" is not exactly the *modus operandi* for Democrats and President Biden. And as for "growing the economy from the middle out and the bottom up," well, if the President really thinks he is doing that, I have a nice piece of oceanfront property in South Dakota to sell him.

In fact, it is lower and middle-income Americans who have suffered the most in the Biden economy. Prices have increased by more than 16 percent since the President took office, by more than 20 percent for groceries, and inflation is costing the average household more than \$900 per month—\$900 per month. Show me a working family who finds that affordable.

Bidenomics, according to the President, is supposed to be about lifting up working families, but, in reality, working families in the Biden economy are struggling just to get by.

A grim line in a news story the other day noted:

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turning to credit cards and retirement savings as lifelines.

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That is the reality of life under Bidenomics. But you only need to listen to one of the President's speeches to know that the President isn't overly troubled by economic reality. Lately, the President has been taking credit for the recent moderation in the inflation rate. Well, that takes a lot of gall. It is a little bit like punching a hole in a boat and then taking credit for rescuing the occupants from drowning—except, in this case, the President isn't even doing the rescuing.

The rate of inflation has slowed in spite of the White House, not because of it. In fact, if the President had his way, Congress would have passed a lot more reckless spending, and inflation would likely have gotten even worse.

As it is, Americans are having to deal not only with the ongoing effects of Democrats' self-inflicted inflation crisis but with the steep rate hikes the Federal Reserve has imposed to dig us out of the Democrats' inflation mess. These rate hikes have made borrowing more expensive, putting the dream of homeownership or necessities like replacing an aging car out of reach for many Americans.

And there may be more economic pain on the way if Democrats have their way. The Democratic leader recently promised—or perhaps I should say threatened—to pass an even bigger Green New Deal bill than the Inflation Reduction Act if Democrats regain full control of Washington in the next election. I don't even want to think about how much that kind of legislation could cost taxpayers or what damage that kind of legislation could do to our economy.

The President can talk all he wants about Bidenomics as building the economy from the bottom up and the middle out. To Americans who have lived under the Biden economy, Bidenomics means something very different. Perhaps the President should check in with the 58 percent of workers who say the economy has gotten worse over the past 2 years before he gives his next celebratory speech.

Mr. President, 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. REED. 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.

#### MILITARY PROMOTIONS

Mr. REED. Mr. President, I rise this morning to discuss the promotions of our military leaders.

During the past month, I had the opportunity, as many of my colleagues

did, to visit our troops overseas and around the country. As always, I was moved by their selflessness and courage, and I was impressed by the knowledge and skill of our military leaders.

We ask much of our servicemembers and their families, and they deserve our gratitude and support. So although I was proud to spend time with our troops and their families this past month, I was appalled by the hardship and disrespect many of them are experiencing.

While Congress had a month of recess, hundreds of military officers were denied their promotions, hundreds of military families were played as political pawns, and our national security was undermined—all because one Senator disagrees with a legal healthcare policy.

For more than 6 months, the senior Senator from Alabama has blocked every senior military promotion—now totaling nearly 300 officers—in his bid to extort the Pentagon to overturn its reproductive healthcare policy.

The Senator claims that he is not harming military readiness, but he is dangerously wrong. The Secretary of Defense and every member of the Joint Chiefs of Staff have condemned his hold and described the damage he is inflicting on U.S. military leadership. Seven retired Secretaries of Defense—both Republican and Democratic—have condemned the Senator's actions and urged him to drop his hold.

Just yesterday, the Secretaries of the Army, Navy, and Air Force rebuked the Alabama Senator and the damage he is causing to our military readiness. As they wrote, the Senator “has prevented the Defense Department from placing almost 300 of our most experienced and battle-tested leaders into critical posts around the world.”

Many of our most important officers are being blocked. Indeed, if you look at the photo behind me, you will see what visitors to the Pentagon encounter. Instead of a consistent group of leaders, there are notable absences. And eventually, if the Senator persists, this whole board will be full of blank spaces. We will have no effective military leadership. Three of these faces, as you noticed, are blank because of the Senator's hold. For the first time in history, the Army, Navy, and Marine Corps are without top leaders.

He is blocking the confirmation of Gen. Eric Smith, the next Commandant of the Marine Corps, and GEN Randy George, the next Chief of Staff of the U.S. Army. Next week we will hold confirmation hearings for ADM Lisa Franchetti—the first female officer to be the Chief of Naval Operations—and Gen. David Allvin, the next Chief of Staff of the Air Force. The Senator has indicated he will block both of these nominations.

At the end of September, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Milley, is legally required to retire. The Joint Chiefs consists of eight officers: the Chairman, the Vice Chair-

man, and the Service Chiefs of the Army, Navy, Air Force, Marine Corps, Space Force, and the Chief of the National Guard Bureau. If the Senator does not come to his senses before General Milley retires, fully half of the Joint Chiefs of Staff—our Nation's most vital military leaders—will be empty.

I am concerned that the Senator does not appreciate the gravity of this situation. These positions cannot simply be filled by other officers. They can only be temporarily covered by their Vice Chiefs, who must also continue to cover their own jobs, and at this level, those jobs are 24/7. Having two 24/7 jobs is quite demanding.

These are extraordinary, challenging times, and the jobs of our Vice Chiefs are just as important and challenging as those of Chief of Staff or the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. The Senator is flirting with disaster to force these officers to fill two enormous jobs simultaneously.

Dozens of key commanders are also being held. The Senator is blocking the nomination of the commander of Cyber Command, who also serves as the Director of the National Security Agency. We all know how much cyber has become an integral and perhaps decisive part of our military strategy. And to leave that position blank is to leave ourselves vulnerable to the cyber operations of multiple adversaries and criminal gangs and to leave us in a void when it comes to improving and looking forward for years ahead with vision to what we must do to be not only competitive but to be dominant in the cyber space.

He is blocking the nomination of the next commander of the Navy's 7th Fleet, the largest of the Navy's forward-deployed fleets, which has responsibility for the Indo-Pacific. And, again, I hear so many times my colleagues from both sides of the aisle, but particularly from the other side, arguing about how we have to do more to protect Taiwan; we have to do more to resist Chinese incursions. One thing you don't want to do is have an ad hoc arrangement in command of this fleet, and that is exactly what we have.

He is blocking the nomination of the next commander of the Navy's 5th Fleet, responsible for our naval forces in the Indian Ocean, Persian Gulf, and Arabian Sea—critical, critical points.

And particularly, again, with my colleagues railing with good cause against the Iranians, if we do not have competent, consistent, confirmed leadership in that area of the world, then we are running the risk of giving an advantage to the Iranians and a disadvantage to the United States and its allies.

He is blocking the nomination of the next U.S. Military Representative to NATO, who is the senior uniformed representative to NATO, during a time when NATO continues to provide critical support to Ukraine in its war against Russia and as NATO itself is expanding to counter the threats posed by Russia.