

House Republicans have boxed themselves in and now have to choose between serving the American people or pleasing the extremists within their ranks. We are already seeing this play out when it comes to the debt ceiling. I yield the floor.

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

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

WELCOMING JOHN PETER RICKETTS

Mr. MCCONNELL. Moments ago, the Senate returned to our full 100-person strength as Nebraska's new junior Senator took the oath of office.

The Cornhusker State expects a lot from its leaders. For the last 8 years, Nebraskans could rest easy knowing they had DEB FISCHER and Ben Sasse on the job here in Washington. And during that same time, of course, they also had an outstanding leader even closer to home. As Governor, PETE RICKETTS applied private-sector savvy to the work of public administration with great effect. He secured for Nebraska families and small businesses the biggest tax relief in that State's history. He championed parents' rights and defended civics education.

In the face of a global pandemic, he built the State's response on common sense—saving lives but also safeguarding livelihoods; preserving liberties and protecting kids' educations, all at the same time. The people of Nebraska chose wisely in electing and reelecting Governor RICKETTS by huge margins. And their new Governor chose wisely in sending his predecessor here to this Chamber.

I know I speak for the entire Senate in extending a warm welcome to Senator RICKETTS and his wife Susanne.

PETE, we are glad to have you here on the team.

118TH CONGRESS

Madam President, on another matter, the American people want and need this 118th Congress to work differently than the past 2 years that were just finished. We just had 2 years of one-party Democratic control, 2 years of spending us into record inflation on party-line votes, 2 years of ignoring top priorities of the American people like violent crime and open borders, two years of Senate Democrats procrastinating on basic government duties in order to push radical proposals like an unprecedented elections takeover and unlimited abortion on demand for all 9 months.

The American people put an end to that one-party government because they wanted change.

This year, the Senate leadership must not put off our most basic jobs, like intelligently funding our Federal Government and providing for our Armed Forces, before the very last minute. Basic duties like the appropriations process and the National Defense Authorization Act need more thoughtfulness, more bipartisanship, and more regular order. And they must

not be shoved into late December after the Senate Democrats waste literally months looking for ways to placate the radical left.

The American people elected a bipartisan, divided government. The country voted to change Washington. So this Chamber's Democratic leadership needs to change accordingly.

TRIBUTE TO DONNA BUTT-MOORE

Madam President, on one final matter, over the recent State work period, my team unexpectedly lost a dear friend and longtime colleague, our Eastern Kentucky field assistant Donna Butt-Moore.

Donna worked in my London, KY, field office for 14 years. She and her co-worker, Donna McClure, ran their team as a dynamic duo. They were born only a month apart. They even shared the same initials. Back in Kentucky, they were known as just "the Donnas."

And while Donna M. would travel around Eastern Kentucky, Donna B. was the rock that held down the fort at our office. She fielded calls. She greeted visitors. She solved Kentuckians' problems. Donna was endlessly patient, endlessly kind, and endlessly focused on helping constituents.

She was sweet and sometimes quiet, more of a listener than a talker, and deeply empathetic. She was the kind of person who would come to the verge of tears almost daily after reading a news article or Facebook post about somebody in need. But woe to anybody who mistook Donna's big heart for any lack of determination. If Donna wanted something—if Eastern Kentucky needed something done—she made it happen. That is why condolence notes have poured into our office and to Donna's family from all over Eastern Kentucky—all from people she helped through her public service.

Donna's work brought her into contact with important leaders, but I understand she was most excited when she had the opportunity once to snap a picture with Lee Greenwood. I understand another longtime dream was fulfilled just this last August, when her duties led Donna to ride on a Black Hawk helicopter with the Kentucky National Guard.

After each year's busy August State work period, Donna would always take a vacation on the first day of September, not to kick up her heels and take a rest but to head out into the woods and hunt with her husband. This past year, she bagged a deer all by herself.

Donna was the definition of Eastern Kentucky resourcefulness. If she heard you had some extra flowers lying around your house, she would swing by to gather them for a beautiful arrangement. If you had leftover meat in your freezer, she would want to cook it up and feed the whole neighborhood. In fact, she spent much of her time outside of the office catering parties for her friends and her neighbors.

Donna and her beloved husband Doug met later in life—fewer than 10 years

ago. It was true love from the start, and Donna quickly became a doting grandma to Doug's grandkids. She loved her brothers, Bruce and Bub. She loved her nieces and nephews. She cherished having such a dynamic family so close to home and treasured any time they could spend together.

Donna was also a woman of deep faith who looked to the Bible in every single aspect of her life. Her home and desk had signs containing just one word, "Blessed." She savored every gift she received from the Lord, and her funeral service in London last week showed how Donna Butt-Moore was herself a blessing to everyone around her.

Elaine and I and my entire staff were stunned and heartbroken to hear about Donna's passing. Friends, colleagues, and neighbors across Kentucky are grieving her loss. I am so grateful for her service to the people of our Commonwealth.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The senior Senator from Illinois.

WELCOMING JOHN PETER RICKETTS

Mr. DURBIN. Madam President, I want to begin by welcoming our newest Senator from the State of Nebraska, PETE RICKETTS.

I don't know him well, but I am sure I will come to know him. I certainly know his family. They have made their impression on the city of Chicago by purchasing the historic franchise the Chicago Cubs. They have made major investments in the city of Chicago and the State of Illinois in that pursuit. Best of all, they have virtually guaranteed that Wrigley Field is going to stay in Wrigley Field—exactly where it should be. It is one of the cathedrals of baseball in America, and the Ricketts family has made a commitment to it, which is certainly satisfying to devout baseball fans like myself.

I hope the time of the new Senator will be productive and gratifying. Work in this body can sometimes be slow and frustrating, but with patience, good things can happen.

SENATE ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Madam President, 4 years ago today, as another new Congress was starting its work, America was nearing the end of the longest Federal Government shutdown in history. It was day 33 of a 35-day shutdown, a shutdown that was precipitated by President Donald Trump when he refused to sign any budget that did not include billions of dollars for what he wanted to build and call his "big, beautiful" wall on the southern border. That dysfunction and that government shutdown cost our economy billions of dollars, and it shook the confidence of many—in this country and its future—in America's ability to do the basics.

Fast-forward to the start of the last Congress 2 years ago when three of the newest Members of the Senate had just been sworn in, giving America only the second 50-50 Senate split in its history. It was a time of crises and division: the deadliest public health emergency in a

century; the greatest financial crisis since the Great Depression; and then—and then—a violent attack on the Capitol by an insurrectionist mob, one of the darkest days in the history of this building and our Nation. The doubters said a 50-50 Senate coming into being with that circumstance was destined to be gridlocked. We proved them wrong.

Today, we begin the legislative work of a new Congress, the 118th Congress. Will these 2 years—the next 2 years—be remembered for dysfunction or democracy? chaos or consensus? That really is the challenge we face. The choice is not entirely in our hands here in the Senate with a 51-to-49 slim majority.

The new MAGA majority in the House of Representatives has promised endless investigations, confrontations, impeachments, and chaos, but it doesn't have to be that way. The Senate can be a steady force. We can pass a budget. We can give a helping hand to families and businesses. We can invest in a better future. We can defend democracy against the rise of autocracy. We can pay our Nation's bills if we are willing to work together for the common good.

If you want to see our choices, look at what we faced on January 4, just a few weeks ago. On that day, the House of Representatives was in chaos. A small band of MAGA hard-liners held the House hostage to their extreme demands. In the end, it took 15 rollcall votes, over 4 days, to elect a new Speaker, who will be, after all of his concessions to the extreme wing of his party, on paper, perhaps, the weakest Speaker in recent memory.

However, on that same day, January 4, President Biden and the Republican leader, Senator MCCONNELL, were together at a major bridge that connects Covington, KY, with Cincinnati, OH. It is a bridge that has needed repair for years, and now those repairs will happen because of the historic infrastructure bill passed by the last Congress—the largest infrastructure plan since the Eisenhower administration in the 1950s and the creation of the Interstate Highway System.

That bipartisan infrastructure plan will rebuild bridges and roads all across America and our State of Illinois. We have already seen evidence of that. It will expand affordable high-speed broadband services, and it will build the 21st century infrastructure America needs to remain the strongest in the world. It is already creating good jobs in Illinois and around the Nation, and it will continue to do so. That is just one of the achievements of this Congress that had a 50-50 Senate.

We also passed the CHIPS and Science Act to supercharge America's microchip industry and bring high-tech manufacturing back to America. We passed the boldest economic recovery and investment plan since President Franklin Roosevelt, the most sweeping legislation enacted by any government on Earth to confront the climate crisis, and the bipartisan PACT Act to help

millions of veterans who were exposed to burn pits and other toxic chemicals during their military service. We kept the price of insulin for seniors at \$35 a month. Now, for the first time ever, Medicare can negotiate on prescription drug prices, and Medicare recipients' out-of-pocket expenses for drugs will be capped at \$2,000 a year.

In the last Congress, we confirmed 97 outstanding new Article III judges, including the first Black woman ever to serve on the Supreme Court, Justice Ketanji Brown Jackson. These new judges will bring unprecedented diversity to our Federal courts both in terms of demographics as well as in their backgrounds and professional experience.

In the last Congress, with President Biden's leadership and the support of Congress, the United States rallied the free world to confront Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

Yesterday, I was at a meeting in an area known as the Ukrainian Village in the city of Chicago. It was a gathering not only of proud Lithuanians, who were determined to do everything they could to help their friends and relatives back in Ukraine fight off Putin's invasion, but also a lot of others. There were many Polish people there, Lithuanians as well, and many other consulate generals were present to express their support for the common cause.

I am proud that the United States is leading this effort, and we must continue to. When I hear suspicions and rumors and suggestions that maybe the MAGA Republicans in the House have grown weary of this war and impatient for it to end, I have to remind them that freedom is worth fighting for. The Ukrainians are dying for it. We need to stand by them with the NATO alliance and see this through and put an end to Putin's terrible war crimes.

We ensure, as well, that the United States will not be a safe haven for the perpetrators of heinous war crimes in Ukraine. We will continue to stand with the Ukrainians until Putin's illegal war is over and Ukraine is once again free and at peace.

We authorized and strengthened the Violence Against Women Act; passed new laws to strengthen protections for survivors of domestic violence, sexual assault, child sexual abuse, and sexual harassment.

Over the last 2 years, the Federal Government delivered 700 million COVID shots for free—in 2 years, 700 million vaccinations—and according to the White House, COVID deaths in America are down by 80 percent.

America's economy created 11 million jobs—the strongest job creation in the history of our Nation. The Nation's unemployment rate is near a 50-year low. Gas prices are headed down, and inflation is finally easing a little bit.

All of that happened with a 50-50 Senate. That is not gridlock. That is government working for the common good.

The priorities for this Congress are pretty obvious. We need to continue

our efforts to protect the basic rights of Americans. As well as voting rights, we need to include on that list reproductive health rights for the women of America.

We are determined to end the crisis on our southern border by securing the border, finally fixing our broken immigration system, and passing the DREAM Act—my ambition for almost two decades. Well, it has been longer than that to be honest with you.

Over the last week, I visited with some of the migrants who were bused to Chicago, and I talked to them about their families and what they face. If there is anyone who thinks that they are trying to game the system in America, they ought to talk to them. They are ready to go to work, and we need to make sure that that is done in a proper fashion.

Last year, we passed the most significant gun safety law in nearly 30 years, but the horrific shooting that killed 11—now the latest number is 11—and wounded 9 more this past weekend at the Lunar New Year celebration in Monterey Park, CA, is another terrible reminder that more work needs to be done for gun safety. The Lunar New Year shooting was the 33rd mass shooting in America so far this month—33 so far this month.

Last year, there were 600 mass shootings. I remember one of them well, and I am sure the Acting President pro tempore does too. The gunman opened fire on the Fourth of July parade in Highland Park, IL. He discharged 83 rounds in less than a minute, and he killed 7 people and injured dozens more. There were 19 little children and 2 of their teachers who were murdered in their classroom in Uvalde, TX, just days before. There were 10 people who were killed in a grocery store in Buffalo, NY, in a racist attack. The list goes on and on and on.

It is madness. It is sickening. It is a uniquely American problem. Try to explain it away. You can't. There are just too darned many guns in the hands of the wrong people, and they continue to produce them and sell them with abandon and without any sense of responsibility for the results.

DEBT CEILING

Madam President, we must pay our Nation's bills. We all agree with that. Using the debt ceiling as a bargaining chip to force deep cuts in Social Security and Medicare is unacceptable. Pushing through other extreme changes that can't pass on their own merits ought to be unthinkable; yet this is what the MAGA extremists in the House appear hell-bent on doing.

I would remind those who want to pose for holy pictures as budget balancers that one-fourth—almost one-fourth—of our entire national debt that has been accumulated in the United States over the last 230 years was racked up during the 4 years that Donald Trump was in the White House—almost one-fourth of our national debt. What we are doing with