

and to enable the government to support them—conventional rules of intercourse, the best that present circumstances and mutual opinion will permit, but temporary, and liable to be from time to time abandoned or varied, as experience and circumstances shall dictate; constantly keeping in view, that it is folly in one nation to look for disinterested favors from another—that it must pay with a portion of its independence for whatever it may accept under that character—that by such acceptance it may place itself in the condition of having given equivalents for nominal favors and yet of being reproached with ingratitude for not giving more. There can be no greater error than to expect or calculate upon real favors from nation to nation. It is an illusion which experience must cure, which a just pride ought to discard.

In offering to you, my countrymen, these counsels of an old and affectionate friend, I dare not hope they will make the strong and lasting impression I could wish—that they will control the usual current of the passions or prevent our nation from running the course which has hitherto marked the destiny of nations. But if I may even flatter myself that they may be productive of some partial benefit, some occasional good, that they may now and then recur to moderate the fury of party spirit, to warn against the mischiefs of foreign intrigue, to guard against the impostures of pretended patriotism—this hope will be a full recompense for the solicitude for your welfare by which they have been dictated.

How far in the discharge of my official duties I have been guided by the principles which have been delineated, the public records and other evidences of my conduct must witness to you and to the world. To myself, the assurance of my own conscience is that I have at least believed myself to be guided by them.

In relation to the still subsisting war in Europe, my proclamation of the 22d of April 1793 is the index to my plan. Sanctioned by your approving voice and by that of your representatives in both houses of Congress, the spirit of that measure has continually governed me, uninfluenced by any attempts to deter or divert me from it.

After deliberate examination with the aid of the best lights I could obtain, I was well satisfied that our country, under all the circumstances of the case, had a right to take—and was bound in duty and interest to take—a neutral position. Having taken it, I determined, as far as should depend upon me, to maintain it with moderation, perseverance, and firmness.

The considerations which respect the right to hold this conduct it is not necessary on this occasion to detail. I will only observe that, according to my understanding of the matter, that right, so far from being denied by any of the belligerent powers, has been virtually admitted by all.

The duty of holding a neutral conduct may be inferred, without anything more, from the obligation which justice and humanity impose on every nation, in cases in which it is free to act, to maintain inviolate the relations of peace and amity towards other nations.

The inducements of interest for observing that conduct will best be referred to your own reflections and experience. With me, a predominant motive has been to endeavor to gain time to our country to settle and mature its yet recent institutions and to progress without interruption to that degree of strength and consistency which is necessary to give it, humanly speaking, the command of its own fortunes.

Though in reviewing the incidents of my administration I am unconscious of intentional error, I am nevertheless too sensible of my defects not to think it probable that I may have committed many errors. Whatever they may be, I fervently beseech the Almighty to avert or mitigate the evils to which they may tend. I shall also carry with me the hope that my country will never cease to view them with indulgence and that, after forty-five years of my life dedicated to its service with an upright zeal, the faults of incompetent abilities will be consigned to oblivion, as myself must soon be to the mansions of rest.

Relying on its kindness in this as in other things, and actuated by that fervent love towards it which is so natural to a man who views in it the native soil of himself and his progenitors for several generations, I anticipate with pleasing expectation that retreat, in which I promise myself to realize without alloy the sweet enjoyment of partaking in the midst of my fellow citizens the benign influence of good laws under a free government—the ever favorite object of my heart, and the happy reward, as I trust, of our mutual cares, labors and dangers.

GEO. WASHINGTON.
UNITED STATES, 19th September 1796.

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 legislative clerk read the nomination of Jamar K. Walker, of Virginia, to be United States District Judge for the Eastern District of Virginia.

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Republican leader is recognized.

FOREIGN POLICY

Mr. McCONNELL. Madam President, like a number of Senators on both sides of the aisle, I spent the first part of last week meeting with our NATO allies and our European partners in Munich.

In Munich, we met an array of world leaders, including a bipartisan meeting with German Chancellor Scholz. It is clear from our meetings in Munich that Europe is moving in the right direction, but more must be done across the alliance to rebuild our defense capacity and to give Ukraine the weapons they need to defeat Russia's aggression.

After the Munich Security Conference, Senators TILLIS, ERNST, BUDD, BRITT, RICKETTS, and I continued on to meet with more American partners in both Europe and the Middle East, where we met up with Senator MULLIN as well. We met with both President Herzog and Prime Minister Netanyahu in Israel, with the Crown Prince of Saudi Arabia, with the President of the UAE, as well as the President of Finland.

We had the pleasure of meeting some of our own American diplomats and civilian personnel who were on the ground advancing our Nation's interests in each of these places. I was especially happy to meet some of the men and women serving in our Armed Forces who are onsite at installations in these countries or stationed protecting our Embassies. It was a great honor to run into some fellow Kentuckians serving in the 380th Air Expeditionary Wing at Al Dhafra Air Base in the UAE.

Here in Washington, you hear American leadership in the world discussed and debated like it is some fuzzy concept or abstract principle, but let me tell you, when you travel to Europe, when you travel to the Middle East, when you meet with the civilian and military leadership in those nations that are America's friends and wish us well—well, there is nothing unclear about the importance of America's leading role in the world. Our friends in Europe know beyond any doubt that peace and prosperity depend on a strong and involved America. Our partners in the Middle East know without a doubt that security and stability rely on a strong and involved America.

We are the indispensable Nation. Our superpower status is paramount—not just for these other countries but even more importantly, for our own interests here at home. Putting up our drawbridge and pretending we can go it alone as “Fortress America” will not cut it—will not cut it—in the 21st century. It would put the future of our economic security, energy security, and national security at enormous risk.

The need for American leadership is palpable. My colleagues and I will have much more to say on this subject in the coming days.

EAST PALESTINE TRAIN DERAILMENT

Madam President, on another matter, the attention and prayers of the entire Nation have been fixed for the past several weeks on the town of East Palestine and the surrounding area in Northeast Ohio. The derailment of the Norfolk Southern train led to a disastrous chemical release, forcing many from their homes and leaving a community vulnerable. The people of East Palestine are understandably anxious and upset, and of course they deserve answers.

Our colleague the junior Senator from Ohio has been all over this issue. We will continue to work with him to ensure the people of Ohio are appropriately informed and supported in the months to come. We also thank Ohio Governor Mike DeWine for his leadership on the ground.

Unfortunately, this leadership has cut a sharp contrast with the Biden administration's Secretary of Transportation. Even amidst a catalog of crises on his watch, from this and other recent train derailments to the meltdown in air travel back during the holiday season, Secretary Buttigieg has seemed more interested in pursuing press coverage for woke initiatives and climate nonsense than in attending to the basic elements of his day job.

Understandably, there were some initial concerns in my home State of Kentucky about possible impacts since we are downriver, but the good news is that even after careful monitoring by local experts, there is no reason to believe that Kentuckians have anything to worry about. Local water authorities are monitoring the Ohio River's downstream water quality very closely, and thus far they have seen no cause for alarm whatsoever. Every indication is that the situation for Kentuckians is 100 percent normal. Even so, my staff and I remain in close communication with all the relevant utilities and local authorities.

INFLATION

Madam President, now on one final matter, January was the 21st month in a row with year-on-year inflation of at least 5 percent. The U.S. economy has seen prices rising at an annual rate of 5 percent or more every single month following President Biden's first 100 days. Democrats' reckless spending has made soaring costs a fixture of everyday life for families all across our country. Real-wage declines have become a tragic reality for workers in every single State.

Last week, new data proved yet again that persistent inflation has become actually embedded in our economy. One key measure of consumer behavior, the personal consumption expenditure index, grew at triple the monthly rate from December and at its fastest pace since June of last year. Inflation in the services sector in particular is 5.7 percent higher than it was a year ago.

The Democrats' inflation is not just driving up the prices for groceries and

essentials that families pay themselves at the checkout counter; it is also baked into the costs families pay indirectly through service providers, from plumbers to contractors to medical providers and beyond. In every corner of the economy, workers and businesses are still having to hunker down against the ongoing consequences of Democrats' reckless mistakes.

What an odd time, then, for the Biden administration to declare victory over a problem it helped actually create. The White House Press Secretary declared earlier this month that "the President's economic plan is indeed working." Well, today, 57 percent of Americans say they have less money in their pocket than they did a year ago. Nearly two-thirds say they are living paycheck to paycheck. The White House calls this mission accomplished. The American people call it a nightmare for 2 years and counting.

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. SCHUMER. Madam 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 MAJORITY LEADER

The majority leader is recognized.

EAST PALESTINE TRAIN DERAILMENT

Mr. SCHUMER. Madam President, first responders at the State, local, and Federal level continue working around-the-clock helping the people of East Palestine recover from one of the worst train derailments in decades.

The scene in East Palestine over the last month has been the stuff of nightmares: a 38-car derailment; an entire town forced to evacuate; the stench of industrial chemicals and soot hovering in the air; parents scared of their kids' drinking water; and kids anxious about life returning to normal. No community deserves this.

While a full investigation of the derailment has yet to be completed, the Chair of the National Transportation Safety Board said this accident was "100 percent preventable." Again, the NTSB Safety Board Chair said the accident was "100 percent preventable."

The fault of this disaster lies first and foremost with Norfolk Southern. Norfolk Southern's CEO, Alan Shaw, needs to come before the Senate, answer questions under oath, and explain to the American people exactly what went wrong and how they will prevent accidents like this from happening. He should not duck. He should be there. He should come before the Senate, and we are asking Mr. Shaw to do just that.

The American people should hear from Norfolk Southern's CEO precisely why they thought it was a good idea to spend years—years—lobbying to loosen regulations designed to prevent accidents like this. And I especially want to hear why Norfolk Southern, after

seeing a record \$3.3 billion in profits last year, prioritized billions—billions—in stock buybacks instead of putting that money toward safety and toward their workers.

Over the past few weeks, there has been no shortage of opportunists racing to blame the administration for the train derailment. Former President Trump himself showed up in East Palestine and blamed everyone but himself for the tragic accident. But President Trump, as usual, omits a crucial truth: The Trump administration spent years working to loosen safety regulations intended to make these types of accidents less likely.

They are in the best of the big rail companies. When President Trump entered office, rail companies spent millions to push for repeals on all sorts of safety regulations, from inspection requirements, mandates for newer brakes, and rules governing the number of employees required to operate a train. In one instance, the Trump administration repealed requirements for an electronic braking system because, according to them, the safety benefits were simply not worth the costs.

Let me say that again.

In 2017, the Trump administration decided to repeal the requirements for brake upgrades because they didn't think the safety benefits were worth the cost. I think the people of East Palestine now know that that analysis was wrong and that they are suffering the consequences of rail companies putting profits over people.

Now, I want to be clear: A full investigation is still needed to determine which, if any, safety regulations might have prevented the accident in East Palestine, but you don't need to be an expert to see that, when companies prioritize profits over safety—when they loosen safety rules, lay off thousands of workers, and spend more money on stock buybacks than on preventing accidents—you are flirting with disaster.

It is so typical of Donald Trump. He does the bidding of corporate special interests and it leads to serious harm to the American people. And when he gets caught, he turns around and blames someone else. It just doesn't wash, and the American people see through it. Disasters like the one in East Palestine are precisely what can happen when safety takes a backseat to maximizing profits and when self-aggrandizing politicians like Donald Trump allow and encourage it to happen.

I particularly want to thank my colleagues from Ohio and Pennsylvania for being vigilant in responding to this disaster and working in a bipartisan way to solve it.

I also, of course, want to thank all of the first responders at every level of government for working without rest to keep people safe.

The Senate is going to look into precisely what went wrong in East Palestine. A good first step will be in hearing directly from Norfolk Southern's