

And both sides want to outcompete the Chinese Government, secure our border from threats like fentanyl, and provide humanitarian aid to minimize civilian casualties in both Israel and Gaza.

All of these priorities are bipartisan. All of these provisions are included in the President's request. So let's get to work in the coming weeks to pass this supplemental package quickly and with strong bipartisan support.

With the House of Representatives in paralysis, the Senate will not wait to act. We will step into the breach and make sure the business of legislating continues. And if we act with enough bipartisan conviction, I believe it would go a long way to pushing the House to getting its act together and following suit.

The world will watch very closely what actions we take in Congress over the next couple weeks. We must send an unmistakable message to the country, to our allies, and to our adversaries that America will always spring to the defense of our allies in their hour of need. That is why we must pass this supplemental as soon as we can.

GOVERNMENT FUNDING

Mr. President, now, on appropriations, Democrat and Republican appropriators continue making progress on an agreement to move forward on three bipartisan funding bills here on the floor. We worked all last week to clear the objections from some of our Republican colleagues, and we kept talking over the weekend in good faith.

We are not there yet, but it is my hope we can reach an agreement to begin voting on amendments very soon, in all likelihood by tomorrow morning. But, again, we need a little more time to keep working.

Here in the Senate, unlike the chaos of the House, most Members on both sides want to see bipartisanship because we know that is the only way things move forward in divided government. A clean Senate appropriations process, without poison pills or dilatory tactics, is one of the best ways we can show our desire for bipartisanship is serious, and I am optimistic we are nearly, nearly there.

I thank the Senate appropriators, Chairman MURRAY, Vice Chair COLLINS, and all the other Members, on both sides, for bringing us close to an agreement. I hope to see one very soon.

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

Mr. President, now, on our second AI Insight Forum, later this afternoon the Senate will hold our second bipartisan AI Insight Forum, focusing on our North Star for AI: innovation. Our forum begins at 3 today in the Kennedy Caucus Room, and I encourage my colleagues from both sides of the aisle to attend.

We had a strong bipartisan turnout for our inaugural AI Insight Forum, and I hope we will see the same today. It is important to show how bipartisan and how seriously we are taking AI here in the Senate.

Today's AI Insight Forum includes some of the Nation's leading voices in labor, academia, business, tech, civil rights, and others, coming together to hold an unvarnished, candid, and urgent debate on AI. The topic today will be how Congress and the private sector can foster innovation. We will talk about the need for transformative innovation—the types of AI systems that will create new vistas, unlock new cures, improve education, protect national security, preserve the global food supply, and more. But we will also talk about the need for sustainable innovation—innovations that can solve the deep challenges of AI, like increasing transparency and security, and reducing bias and risk. And this means supporting effective guardrails, because everyone agreed at our last forum, from one end of the spectrum to the other, that if the Federal Government doesn't impose some guardrails, there will be none, and the whole invention of AI could come tumbling down.

We need to prioritize both transformative and sustainable innovation. We must find a balance between innovation and guardrails, without going too far in one direction and hurting the other.

And I want to thank my colleagues in our bipartisan AI little gang—Senators ROUND, HEINRICH, and YOUNG—for helping to organize and run today's AI Insight Forum.

Again, for the information of Senators, our forum begins at 3 p.m. today in the Kennedy Caucus Room. I hope to see you all there.

TECH HUBS

Mr. President, now, on tech hubs, yesterday was a really exciting day, thanks to two words: "tech hubs." I spent the day traveling across Upstate New York, sharing the great news that the Buffalo-Rochester-Syracuse and the Binghamton region just won prestigious tech hub designation that I created in our CHIPS and Science Act. This announcement means one thing: More good-paying, long-lasting jobs are coming to Upstate New York, an area that has seen so many companies leave over the last three or four decades.

Yesterday's tech hubs celebration was something I have been working hard toward for a very long time. When I was writing the tech hubs program with Senator YOUNG into our bipartisan Endless Frontiers Act, and then into the CHIPS and Science Act, I had Upstate New York in mind, and, now, thanks to this new designation, communities and cities across Upstate New York are facing an awakening. The region is now primed to become a global hub for workforce training, innovation, and semiconductor manufacturing.

But it is not just Upstate New York that is affected. It is a metaphor for the whole country. There are 2 tech hubs in New York and 30 others around the country, from coast to coast, in red States and blue States. And when I talked about tech hubs for cities like

Rochester and Buffalo and Syracuse and Binghamton, my colleague and friend on the Republican side, TODD YOUNG, was talking about tech hubs in his State of Indiana, in places like Indianapolis, South Bend, and Fort Wayne.

The whole idea is this. The tech industry has gravitated to a few large cities—my own city of New York, which has greatly benefitted, San Francisco, Boston, Austin, and Los Angeles—but there is a load of talent in the rest of the country. It is just that no one paid attention to these places. That is the idea of tech hubs.

There were 400 applications for tech hubs across the country in the Department of Commerce, and I salute Secretary Raimondo, who was very careful in picking the places where it could actually work, and that is why there are 30.

So this is a great thing, and it will spread. It will take advantage of the talent that already exists in the companies and universities and individuals and schools—in the heartland of the country, not just on the coasts—and give them a real chance to take part and create tens of thousands—millions—of good-paying jobs in every part of the country.

So I was really proud of the tech hubs proposal, and it is going to continue. We are going to put more funding into it. We are going to do everything we can to help tech hubs grow and help America grow and stay No. 1 in the world, because when we invest in science and high-end manufacturing and research, everybody—everybody—benefits.

So this is good news in red States and in blue States. Secretary Raimondo didn't look around and just say, "Oh, we can only do blue States," like Donald Trump might have done. She has put them in all the places that there can be new help.

So let's look at the contrast here, folks. While the House Republicans struggle to even select a Speaker, these tech hub announcements show that President Biden and Democrats are delivering, putting tens of thousands of people to work in good-paying jobs, opening new plants and factories, and securing American leadership in the technologies of tomorrow.

Not in a very long time has the contrast between the parties been as glaring as today. When Democrats lead the way, Americans see more jobs, more manufacturing, lower costs. When Republicans are in charge—rightwing Republicans, not all of them, but the rightwing seem to be running the show of these MAGA Republicans—it leads to paralysis, chaos, and extremism.

No matter how the GOP impasse in the House is resolved, we will not change our focus as Democrats. We will create more jobs, work to lower costs, and do it on a bipartisan basis wherever we can.

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.

BORDER SECURITY

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, over the weekend, the southern border crisis set a sobering new record. In the past year, CBP conducted more border apprehensions than in any year on record. Officials reported more than 2.4 million apprehensions since last October, and this number doesn't even count the illegal entries that actually evaded authorities.

Most alarmingly, this news isn't actually new. Last year was the third straight year we set an all-time record for border apprehensions. In other words, every year that President Biden has been in charge of border security, his administration hasn't simply failed; it has failed to a historic and catastrophic degree.

America has had functionally open borders for years. Along with millions of illegal aliens, we have allowed Chinese fentanyl and other lethal drugs to literally pour into our country and kill thousands of Americans every year.

So the Democrats' border crisis isn't new. What is new is their supposed desire to finally do something about it. Now that blue State mayors and Governors are starting to feel the consequences of this catastrophic policy failure, the Biden administration says it now wants to take action. Of course, the administration mostly just wants to throw money at the problem and at its friends in local government. Apparently, the preferred response to a border crisis is a blue State bailout.

Meanwhile, a particularly dangerous consequence of the President's border crisis is making history of its own. In the past year, southern border apprehensions of individuals on the terror watchlist broke an alltime record, the record that was just set the year before.

Even President Biden's Department of Homeland Security has admitted in its 2024 "Homeland Threat Assessment" that "record encounters of migrants arriving from a growing number of countries have complicated border and immigration security."

The American people have watched the Biden administration spend their way into plenty of problems, but they haven't managed to spend their way out of a single one yet.

Our country deserves real law enforcement and real borders. Border security is national security. And on that front, the Senate has a lot of work to do.

ISRAEL

Mr. President, on a related matter, in the coming days and weeks, the Senate

will work urgently to address several major, related threats to the American people, to our allies, and our interests at home and abroad.

After Russia's escalation against Ukraine last year, the savage Iran-backed terrorist attacks on Israel, once again, reminded the civilized world of the persistent evil that demands our attention and our action.

The United States must stand with our ally Israel for as long as it takes to restore its security, and we have a responsibility not to look away from the brutality and inhumanity the terrorists inflicted on innocent Israeli men, women, and children.

Unfortunately, our own Western media haven't made that task any easier. Some of the most disturbing firsthand accounts reported the savages responsible for the October 7 attacks had beheaded Israeli infants and committed other unspeakable atrocities. Some in the press leapt to express skepticism and even discredit the reports of eyewitnesses. But these sickening accounts were proven to be true.

In an especially reckless example, America's "paper of record" took the word of Gaza's terrorist overlords and actually announced to the world that an apparent explosion at a hospital had been an Israeli strike that killed hundreds of people.

We know now it was the terrorists themselves whose rockets struck the Palestinian civilian target. But as the saying goes, this dangerous lie had traveled around the world before truth had literally laced up its shoes.

Perhaps the corporate media organizations that have spent years warning about disinformation should exercise a bit more caution with the claims of a terrorist organization that uses civilians as human shields.

So let us get a few things straight. There is a humanitarian crisis in Gaza. People are suffering. But the blame for their suffering belongs solely to the terrorists who divert humanitarian and economic assistance and build terror tunnels and rocket launchers instead. And the solution is not to use the same corrupted mechanisms to allow Hamas to further exploit this crisis of its own making.

The Israeli Government's stated intention is to destroy Hamas's capacity to wage war and end the stranglehold of Gaza.

And the West has every reason to expect that Israel will hold itself—as it always does—to the highest standards of humane conduct. But make no mistake, war is hell. This will be a difficult, bloody, and costly fight. And we know Hamas's propaganda machine will do everything possible to exploit every inadvertent civilian casualty.

There can be no moral equivalence between terrorism and self-defense. The President must give Israel the time and space it needs to achieve its military objectives in Gaza. America should assist Israel with any intelligence, planning, and resources their

military requires. This includes coordinating closely with Israel to ensure new channels for international humanitarian assistance and prevent Hamas from again expropriating it.

Hamas is Israel's primary focus, but it is clear that Iran's Hezbollah proxies in Syria and Lebanon are toeing up to the line.

Israel has responded quickly and decisively to repeated attacks from Lebanon in recent weeks, and the United States and other Israeli partners should make clear that Hezbollah and Iran will face devastating consequences if they escalate the situation.

Unfortunately, terrorists have also escalated their attacks on American forces in the region. Reports indicate multiple attacks in recent days in Iraq and in Syria. As one U.S. official put it, there are "red lights flashing everywhere."

Deterrence has failed, and the United States must restore it before Iran-backed terrorists kill Americans. We must strike back hard at anyone who targets U.S. personnel.

More broadly, it is time for President Biden to close the book on his failed Iran policy. It is past time to work with Republicans to craft a bipartisan Iran strategy that will actually outlive this administration, unite America's allies, and counter the full range of threats Iran poses to the region and to the world. This has to include confronting Iran's role as the world's most active state sponsor of terror. We ignore this growing threat at our own peril.

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. SCHATZ. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Ms. BUTLER). Without objection, it is so ordered.

NOMINATION OF MICHAEL G. WHITAKER

Mr. SCHATZ. Madam President, a quick note about the business pending before the Senate: leadership at the FAA, the Federal Aviation Administration.

It has been more than 18 months since the FAA last had a Senate-confirmed leader, and in that time, we have seen an alarming number of close calls on runways and operational challenges, including the outage of the critical Notice to Air Missions system. Compounding these issues is a shortage of air traffic controllers that has led to flight delays and cancellations.

The FAA urgently needs a permanent leader to address these concurrent challenges and guarantee the safety of travelers. Michael Whitaker is that leader, and I am glad that the Senate is going to confirm him over the next day or so.

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

Madam President, next, I would like to turn to a different topic.