

Democrats remain committed to finding a realistic, bipartisan agreement on securing the southern border. We will not accept Donald Trump's cruel border policies as envisioned in H.R. 2, which even Speaker JOHNSON has reminded his colleagues didn't get a single Democratic vote in the Senate. But if Republicans show they are serious about meeting us in the middle, we are willing to meet them in the middle.

I hope my Republican colleagues take to heart President Zelenskyy's warnings: The one person happy right now about the gridlock in Congress is Vladimir Putin. He is delighting in the fact that Donald Trump's border policies are sabotaging military aid to Ukraine.

I urge my Republican colleagues to show they are serious about getting a supplemental package done. Democrats are still trying, and we will continue to work with Republicans in good faith in the coming days.

NATIONAL DEFENSE AUTHORIZATION ACT

Mr. President, now, on the NDAA, the Senate will move forward on the annual Defense Authorization Act, moving us closer to passing this bill for the 62nd year in a row.

Both sides have done terrific work these past few months getting the NDAA over the finish line. The Senate passed our version of the NDAA with a strong 86-to-11 vote back in July. That is a good bipartisan vote, majorities of both parties supporting it. And over the past few weeks, conferees have done commendable work reconciling the Senate and House version. And I am pleased that the conference has reported a strong defense bill that contains many of the policies the Senate passed back in July.

We are making major strides to outcompete the Chinese Government by approving President Biden's trilateral U.S., U.K., and Australia nuclear submarine agreement. This historic agreement will create a new fleet of nuclear-powered submarines to counter the Chinese Communist Party's influence in the Pacific. And AUKUS, in general, will be a critical part of ensuring stability in that region. We have worked all year long to get it passed through Congress, and I applaud my colleagues on both sides for their efforts.

As I have said repeatedly, we began the month of December with three major goals here in the Senate before the end of the year: First, we had to end the unprecedented monthslong and destructive blockade of hundreds of military nominees. We have done that. Second, we needed to pass the NDAA as we have for decades on a bipartisan basis. We are on track to do that this week. And, finally, most difficult of all, we must reach an agreement with Republicans on the national security supplemental.

Democrats' attitude on the supplemental can be boiled down two words: We are "still trying." We want to get something done. We hope our Repub-

lican colleagues are serious—serious—about getting something done too.

INFLATION REDUCTION ACT

Mr. President, on the Inflation Reduction Act accomplishments, this morning, the American people received more proof that the Biden and Democratic agenda is working.

The Labor Department reported today that year-over-year inflation in November slowed down to 3.1 percent. At the beginning of this year, it was more than double, at 6.4 percent.

And remember, last summer, before we passed the Inflation Reduction Act and the CHIPS and Science Act, inflation was over 9 percent—from 9 percent all the way down to 3.1 percent. We have made big progress. Meanwhile, the labor market remains strong. Jobs are up, higher than they were before the pandemic. And listen to this: Investment in manufacturing construction—manufacturing construction, plants that will turn out goods that we can consume here and export—is at a 20-year high, more than double its highest under the previous administration.

There is a lot of talk from the previous President about jobs. He did very little. This administration, with what we have done, is really producing jobs, jobs, jobs.

No one should be surprised. Thanks to the Democratic work on the IRA, 2023 has been a banner year for American job creation and for American manufacturing; at the same time, getting inflation and the costs to American families down.

In 2023, dozens of companies have announced new investments in the United States, resulting in hundreds of green new clean energy projects and creating tens of thousands of new, good-paying jobs.

And that is just 2023. The Inflation Reduction Act is projected to create another 1.5 million jobs over the next decade.

According to the White House, private companies have announced more than 600 billion in investments across the country, many spurred by the IRA—the Inflation Reduction Act.

And it is not just through manufacturing that the Democratic agenda is paying dividends. In a few short weeks, seniors, for the first time, will have a cap on how much they pay for prescription drugs, thanks to the Inflation Reduction Act.

This is life-changing news for seniors across the country. Never again will a horrible diagnosis mean \$10,000 or more to get the drug you need to survive. Thanks to the Inflation Reduction Act, insulin is also capped at \$35 a month for seniors on Medicaid, and vaccines are now free.

Let me repeat that. Vaccines are free, improving healthcare across America and helping people be healthy without having to pay for it, in terms of things they can't afford.

Drugmakers are penalized if they raise prices faster than inflation. The

administration is negotiating right now for better prices for 10 of the highest cost, most commonly used drugs in Medicare.

And because ACA premiums are becoming more affordable, this year we are seeing a record number of Americans sign up for healthcare on the individual marketplaces.

It takes a lot of work, but the Democrats' agenda is paying off. Costs are coming down. Jobs and opportunities are going up. And while there is a lot of work to do, the American economy is on the right track.

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 PRESIDING OFFICER. (Mr. PADILLA). Without objection, it is so ordered.

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

The Republican leader is recognized.

UKRAINE

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, this morning, the Senate welcomed Ukraine's inspirational and determined President Zelenskyy to the Capitol.

For nearly 2 years, the people of Ukraine have defied the world's expectations. They have ground down the world's second most powerful military, and they have confounded Putin's aggressive, imperialist aspirations. At every step of the way, America's commitment and support has provided critical fuel for Ukraine's resistance and helped European allies wake up from a holiday from history.

Now, our allies are awake. They are investing in collective defense, and clear majorities of Americans understand the importance of America's continuing to lead as the arsenal of democracy.

I have been a staunch supporter of Ukraine's fight to take back its land, liberate its people, and restore its sovereignty since the beginning of Russia's invasion way back in 2014. Our Ukrainian friends' cause is just, and if the West continues to stand with them, they can win.

But let's be absolutely clear: Ukraine's cause hasn't always been popular here in Washington.

In 2021, Republicans recommended that the Biden administration step up assistance to help Ukraine deter renewed Russian threats, and the administration seemed to think Ukraine was a frozen conflict and a distraction from other priorities. In early 2022, as the gravity of Putin's plans came into focus, Republicans urged the President to expedite shipments of critical weapons systems to stop Russia's advance, but his administration's unfounded fear of escalating the conflict repeatedly kept decisive capabilities out of Ukrainian hands at critical moments.

When Russian troops crossed the border and the administration first came

to Congress for assistance, it was Republicans who demanded we use emergency funds to pay for the cost of deploying U.S. forces to Europe rather than forcing our military to take those costs out of hide.

And it was Republicans who demanded that our supplemental appropriations bills include funding to replenish and modernize the stockpiles we were drawing down to support Ukraine.

Perhaps, they expected the war to be over quickly, but the Biden administration requested neither of these things. In fact, when the Senate received the President's first supplemental request, I called the Democratic leader and said: "Double it." He agreed with my suggestion, and that is precisely what we did.

Republicans on the Armed Services, Foreign Relations, and Appropriations Committees have worked overtime to help equip Ukraine for victory. We have pushed relentlessly for investments that strengthen our Armed Forces, degrade our adversaries, and stand firmly with a sovereign democracy against authoritarian aggression—all while expanding our defense industrial capacity and creating American jobs at the very same time.

We have done it because we know that American leadership has ripple effects. Just look at how our European allies are now contributing more to Ukraine than we are, how allies across the world are investing in hard power and in our collective defense.

We know that the threats we face are intertwined; that Russia, Iran, China, and North Korea work together to undermine America and the West. We know that our border—just like Ukraine's borders and Israel's and Taiwan's—must be inviolable.

That is why, for months now, we have supported supplemental action on all four of the most pressing national security challenges we face. My support for Ukraine and Israel is rock solid. I am committed to preparing the U.S. military to deter and defend Chinese aggression. I am determined to get the national security crisis at the southern border under control. And I am going to work to get it done as long as it takes.

PRESCRIPTION DRUG COSTS

Mr. President, now, on another matter, last week the Biden administration announced the latest front in its push for prescription drug socialism: march-in rights.

Here is what it means. Washington bureaucrats are claiming the authority to determine price ranges for drugs funded through public-private partnerships. And if these unelected regulators decide that a company has set its price too high, they will steal the company's intellectual property rights. In President Biden's own words, "the government reserves the right to 'march in' and license that drug to another manufacturer who can sell it for less."

To make matters worse, the Biden administration claims that the author-

ity for this power grab comes from a 1980 law designed to promote the exact opposite outcome. The purpose of the Bayh-Dole Act was to encourage private-public cooperation to drive new innovations in medicine, not the other way around.

The truth is, incentives matter. If Washington bureaucrats get the final say on how American producers market lifesaving cures, then America will cease to be the world's leading hub of medical innovation.

Why would any entrepreneur invest the time and resources to create a new treatment if the government can simply steal their intellectual property and redistribute it?

Unsurprisingly, the Biden administration is still working out the kinks of prescription drug socialism. But the medical innovation sector can't afford to wait before considering its investments. Neither, for that matter, can a whole host of other industries that rely on public-private partnerships. Just think about what it could mean in fast-evolving areas of technology.

Under the model of prescription drug socialism, the Biden administration is laying the groundwork for government patent seizure on other cutting-edge technologies, from semiconductors to nuclear energy.

America's pipeline of lifesaving cures is the envy of the world. American entrepreneurs and researchers save millions of lives. If President Biden wants to march in on this innovation sector, the bright minds behind it just might decide to take their intellectual property and march out of the American market.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The 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 PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

The Republican whip.

NATIONAL DEFENSE AUTHORIZATION ACT

Mr. THUNE. Mr. President, this week, the Senate will vote on the final version of the National Defense Authorization Act, or NDAA, which is one of the most important bills we consider each year.

We had a robust floor debate on the Senate version of this bill in July featuring the kind of open amendment process we should be using on a regular basis to debate important legislation. All told, more than 900 amendments were considered, and 121 amendments were adopted during floor consideration, making this the most open NDAA floor debate in years. I wish we had been able to take up a final version of this legislation earlier, but I am glad we are on track to finally pass it this week.

I have said it before, and I will say it again. If we don't get national security right, the rest is conversation. The se-

curity of our Nation is the precondition for everything else—for the continued enjoyment of our freedoms, for a flourishing society, for a healthy economy, for government's ability literally to do anything. So there is no time when we can afford to let our readiness slide or to take the security of our Nation for granted.

But the unfortunate truth is that we have some catching up to do when it comes to military preparedness. We have military services that are well below their recruitment targets. We are behind on shipbuilding and ship maintenance. There is a persistent pilot shortage, and in a number of cases, we have too few mission-capable aircraft. We are not doing an adequate job of maintaining the kind of supply we need of certain munitions. And the list goes on.

This is not an acceptable situation, and it could have very serious consequences. To give just one example, recent war games envisioning a U.S.-China conflict following an attack on Taiwan have had grim results, showing enormous military and economic costs to both sides. One story on these war games noted:

And while the ultimate outcome in these exercises is not always clear—the U.S. does better in some than others—the cost is [clear]. In every exercise the U.S. uses up all its long-range air-to-surface missiles in a few days, with a substantial portion of its planes destroyed on the ground.

In every exercise the U.S. uses up all its long-range air-to-surface missiles in a few days, with a substantial portion of its planes destroyed on the ground.

Well, needless to say, we have some serious work to do, and I am pleased to report that this year's NDAA does make some genuine progress on the readiness front. The bill expands the Pacific Deterrence Initiative and deepens our ties with our ally Taiwan to help detour Chinese aggression. It rejects the President's dangerous plan to shrink the U.S. Navy and authorizes investment in new ships. It contains multiple measures to increase our supply of munitions, including the addition of six critical munitions to the Pentagon's multiyear procurement program. Two of these munitions—Tomahawk missiles and Mark 48 torpedoes—play an important role in our ability to deter China.

I am also pleased that the committee responded to my request and included significant funding for joint air-to-surface standoff missile procurement, the long-range anti-ship missile, and development of the nuclear long-range standoff weapon, or LRSO. These are essential arrows to have in the quiver for our bombers, and the future LRSO will help modernize the air leg of our nuclear triad.

This year's NDAA also critically invests in recruitment. As I mentioned earlier, we have multiple military services that are well below their recruitment targets. These represent serious future personnel deficiencies. All the ships, planes, and munitions in the