

that deals with deficit reduction, because we think that should occur without hostage-taking, without any brinkmanship, as it has been done three times in the past few years.

So, Speaker MCCARTHY, respond with a plan, one that can unite the fractured and chaotic factions of the Republican Congress.

NOMINATION OF ARUN SUBRAMANIAN

Mr. President, I will have more to say on this later, but I am just very proud the Senate will vote to confirm a highly qualified judicial nominee whom I recommended, Arun Subramanian.

If confirmed, he will be the first South Asian judge in the Southern District of New York, which has one of the largest—if not the largest—South Asian population in the country. He is a great judge. I am looking forward to him serving well on the bench. I will have more to say about him before his vote this afternoon.

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 President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.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

CRIME

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, 1 month ago, the Biden administration published an official statement opposing Republicans' bill to block a disastrous new soft-on-crime law right here in our Nation's Capital. The administration was on the record against it.

Then the overwhelming majority of House Democrats voted against our commonsense resolution when it passed the House. The proposition behind our bill is simple. It goes like this: The answer to skyrocketing violent crime in the District of Columbia is not—not—to reduce criminal penalties even further. On what planet should this even need to be said in the first place?

The murder rate in Washington is 34 percent higher today than it was at this time last year. Auto thefts are up 110 percent right here in the Nation's Capital. Longtime DC residents are locking their car doors at every red light. Tourists visiting their own capital are worried about walking the streets.

Just yesterday, the chief of the Metropolitan Police lamented that the average homicide suspect that his department encounters has already been arrested—listen to this—11 times before, 11 times.

Here is what the police chief said:

What we've got to do—if we really want to see homicides go down—is keep bad guys with guns in jail. Because when they're in

jail, they can't be in communities shooting people.

That is the police chief here in the Nation's Capital.

But the radical politicians who run the city tried to do exactly the opposite. The liberal city council cooked up a soft-on-crime overhaul of the Criminal Code that would have made it even easier for repeat offenders to get back out on the streets. It would have brought the mandatory minimum sentences for crimes like robbery and carjacking down even lower than they already are. And it would have gummed up an already backlogged and dysfunctional criminal justice system by massively expanding jury trials—listen to this—for misdemeanors. It is like these local Democrats have never met a single criminal they actually want locked up behind bars. It is truly remarkable.

This is exactly why our laws give Congress the final say—the final say—over how our Nation's Capital is governed because we can't have the craziness and dysfunction of a few local politicians jeopardizing the basic public safety in the Federal district that houses our national government. So Republicans wrote a resolution to overturn this nonsense.

But bear in mind, this limited resolution would not even toughen criminal penalties. At this point, we are talking about keeping things where they are and stopping even further—even further—backsliding.

The first step is to use this legal tool to stop the unhinged local politicians from making the totally unacceptable status quo even worse. But even so, this is a bridge too far for the vast majority of Washington Democrats.

Just a month ago, the White House issued an official statement opposing House Republicans' commonsense resolution saying:

Congress should respect the District of Columbia's [authority] to govern its own local affairs.

And listen to this: 82 percent of House Democrats fell in line behind the Biden administration and voted no. But then something amazing happened.

I think somebody at the White House may have shown the President his latest poll numbers on this issue—fewer than one in three Americans approve of the way he is handling crime—because Washington Democrats started panicking and reversed themselves on a dime. The President came here last week, pulled a 180, and told our Democratic colleagues he won't veto the resolution after all.

Now there appears to be a different kind of jailbreak brewing right here in the Senate, and a number of Democrats may jump ship at the eleventh hour, trying to act like they have been tough on crime all along. But our colleagues will not be getting off the hook that easily.

It is not an act of heroic political courage for Democrats to help Congress do our basic minimum job and

stop the DC Council from making an unacceptable status quo even worse, and none of our colleagues get to erase their entire records with this one vote.

Remember, just last summer, every single Senate Democrat went on record against a proposal to redirect a portion of their massive taxing-and-spending spree to fight surging crime.

Let the record reflect what actually gets Washington Democrats' attention and what does not. It did not get their attention when rates of violent crime in America's major cities were accelerating this time last year. It did not get their attention that compared to prepandemic levels, homicide nationwide are up 34 percent. It hadn't gotten Democrats' attention when the streets of our own Federal district are where repeated offenders are driving spikes in carjackings and murder.

But now that even the mainstream media are beginning to hold them to account for their negligence, now Washington Democrats are finally trying to change their tune. Innocent citizens getting shot in our streets didn't do it, but when Democrats take political shots in the press, that finally gets their attention.

So, look, we will welcome any of our Democratic colleagues who can recognize basic sanity and want to be on the winning side for our Republican resolution later this week, but local, State, and national Democratic Party officials will not be getting off the hot seat as quickly or as easily as they have got convicted felons getting back on the streets.

Washington, DC is only 0.2 percent of our Nation's population. What about New York, Chicago, San Francisco, Portland, Philadelphia, even Louisville? Don't these citizens deserve some sanity as well? Don't the families and children and elderly people and young women of these communities deserve to walk their streets with safety and security too?

We cannot only have public safety in this country in exceptional cases when a Republican House and a narrowly divided Senate can force Democrats to do the right thing against their will.

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. DURBIN. 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.

MAGNITSKY SANCTIONS

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, last week, the Biden administration announced it was imposing Magnitsky law-related sanctions on several Putin thugs involved in the jailing of Vladimir Kara-Murza. This is the move that I, along with Senators SHAHEEN, RUBIO, TILLIS, MENENDEZ, and RISCH, had urged.

Kara-Murza is an incredible Russian patriot who, despite being poisoned

twice by the Kremlin, returned to Russia last year to continue the peaceful struggle for a more democratic nation and an end to the disastrous war in Ukraine. I will never forget that he came to talk to me just before he returned to Russia and reflected on his determination and optimism for a better future for Russia. Tragically, he was arrested shortly after arriving in Moscow on the laughable charge of criticizing Mr. Putin's war.

Kara-Murza, Alexei Navalny, and so many other Russians who are courageously pursuing a better future for their country deserve our support, and they deserve to be released from Putin's disgraceful gulags.

I would also like to take a moment to mention another brave person. This gentleman, Oswaldo Paya, a brave Cuban, died under suspicious circumstances 11 years ago. Oswaldo Paya had spent years advocating for peaceful, democratic change in Cuba, including submitting thousands of signatures calling for greater political freedoms using a process allowed by the Cuban Constitution itself. Not only did the Castro regime cowardly ignore these modest requests, but it then changed the constitutional provision that allowed for this kind of political input.

After years of harassment and threats, in July 2012, Oswaldo Paya's car was run off the road by a government vehicle, leading to his death. The Cuban Government has never provided a credible accounting of the incident or charged anyone with his death. So, this week, Senators RUBIO, KAINE, CASSIDY, MENENDEZ, CRUZ, CARDIN, WARNER, and I are again calling on the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights to complete this investigation. I hope the Commission finally acts to bring light to Paya's case and to help deter acts of aggression like this in the future.

RAIL SAFETY

Mr. President, the residents of East Palestine, OH, were still desperate for answers about the toxic derailment of the Norfolk Southern train in their town a month ago when a second Norfolk Southern train derailed in Springfield, OH, this past weekend. This morning, we learned of even another accident involving Norfolk Southern. A railroad employee was killed early this morning when a Norfolk Southern train collided with a dump truck in Cleveland, OH.

These three rail accidents in just 1 month—one of them a catastrophic derailment—have sent a grave and blaring signal that we need to do more to protect American communities from hazardous freight rail shipments. The need for greater rail safety is urgent, especially in my State of Illinois. Chicago, IL, is the busiest rail hub in the United States. About a quarter of all freight rail traffic in our Nation passes through the Chicago area every year.

If we ignore the warnings from East Palestine and Springfield, OH, it is only a matter of time until the next deadly derailment. In East Palestine,

the government has responded quickly. Federal Agencies were on the ground within hours and are still there today. President Biden has instructed workers from Federal Agencies to even go door to door, checking on the residents in the area to see who may need medical attention as a result of exposure to toxic chemicals.

These are the right steps to take, but we also need to do more to prevent train derailments and accidents in the first place so that more communities don't find themselves facing the same dangers and uncertainty as East Palestine.

Freight rail traffic has increased in recent decades, and it continues to grow. At the same time, freight companies have moved to larger and longer trains to increase profits. But Federal regulations have not kept pace with the changing rail industry. That is the problem.

Listen to these figures, which tell the story. In 2001, the profit margin of the leading freight carriers was 15 percent. Today, the profit margin of those same rail carriers is 41 percent—from 15 to 41 percent. While derailments are down overall since the 1970s, the number of train accidents per mile has actually increased. In addition, over the last 7 years, the damage from derailments has grown, particularly from trains carrying hazardous chemicals.

Instead of investing adequately in safety and their workers, freight rail companies have cut staff dramatically and fought to dismantle safety regulations. Those efforts paid off under the previous President, when rail industry regulators dramatically loosened a number of safety rules. The result is greater danger, more congestion, and blocked rail crossings in communities across America.

The disaster in East Palestine appears finally to have produced a bipartisan consensus that change is needed—and it is. My colleagues from Ohio, Senators BROWN and VANCE, have introduced a bipartisan bill that will make several important, commonsense changes and force freight railroads to improve the safety of their operations. I support these efforts and hope the Senate will pass the bill soon.

While the exact causes of the recent Ohio derailments have not yet been determined, inspectors for the national Surface Transportation Board found that a wheel bearing on the derailed Norfolk Southern train in East Palestine heated to more than 250 degrees above average—250 degrees—causing the plastic pellets it was carrying to catch fire.

The bipartisan bill from Senators BROWN and VANCE will increase how frequently the temperature of wheel bearings must be checked. It also would require additional safety procedures for trains carrying these deadly and dangerous materials. This includes rules for the length of trains and their weight, increased inspections, and a requirement that trains hauling haz-

ardous materials have two trained crew members on board instead of just one. Finally, the Brown-Vance bill would provide funding for hazmat training for first responders, and it would invest in both rail research and the development of new tank car safety features. These are important safety steps that will protect rail workers and the communities through which these trains pass.

This past December, Congress approved a labor agreement that gives rail workers the largest wage increase in 50 years, but most of the railroads balked at providing their workers with even 1 day of paid sick leave per year so that they can take care of themselves and their families.

For too long, railroads have short-changed their workers and possibly endangered American communities, maximizing their corporate profits. It is time for change.

Working for railroads is a tradition in my family. I grew up in East St. Louis, IL. Both of my parents worked for the New York Central Railroad. My two brothers and I also worked for the same railroad. I know from personal experience that many railroad jobs are physically demanding and can be dangerous. Lucky for me, the only scar I have from working on the railroad is a minor one, but others have been injured in more grievous ways.

We can't take all the risks out of rail transport, but we must reduce unnecessary risk. The bipartisan Brown-Vance bill strikes the right balance. We should pass it without delay.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. PADILLA). The Republican whip.

IMMIGRATION

Mr. THUNE. Mr. President, at the end of last week, I joined several of my Republican colleagues to travel down to our southern border. It was my second visit to the border during the Biden administration—my third overall. My first during the Biden administration was almost exactly 2 years ago, after border numbers started to soar in the wake of the President taking office.

I would have to say unfortunately little has changed since my last visit. Thanks to the fact that President Biden spent the first 2 years of his Presidency refusing to even acknowledge this crisis, much less actually address it, we are still facing a disastrous situation at our southern border.

I talked to Border Patrol agents who have spent 2 years dealing with record-breaking numbers of illegal immigrants and are still looking for support from the Biden administration that never seems to come. Again and again, Border Patrol agents told me that not only do they not feel supported by the Biden administration, but they feel like the Biden administration has actually impeded their ability to do their jobs. "Just let us enforce the law," one agent told me. It is something that was echoed by other law enforcement officers that we spoke to. To give you just