

actually more expansive and more worrisome, and they are intended to enable the PRC to dominate its neighbors and counter America's ability to project power in the region.

By word and deed, the PRC is showing the world that it is prepared to redraw maps by force. Sound familiar? That is because the revisionists autocrats we face are operating from the very same playbook.

And Taiwan appreciates the links between the threats we face as well as any of our allies and partners. Its leaders have been outspoken in connecting the dots between an aggressive Russia in Europe and an emboldened China in the Indo-Pacific. And the people of Taiwan increasingly recognize their interests in preparing to deter and defeat aggression. In fact, they are so clear-eyed about challenges posed by revisionist powers today, they are helping a fellow democracy halfway around the world in Ukraine.

But the more pressing questions right now are whether America recognizes our own interests in maintaining a world in which our commitments are trusted, our threats are feared, and what we are prepared to do about it.

Standing by our friends, standing up to adversaries, and investing in the military capacity to do both—as Congress considers annual Defense appropriations and finishes its work on the national security supplemental, these are the fundamental tasks at hand.

#### PRESCRIPTION DRUG COSTS

Mr. President, on a different matter, earlier this week, the Biden administration announced that it had received “counteroffers” in the so-called negotiations between HHS and medicine producers over government price setting.

As I have pointed out recently, the administration spent years trying to corral world-leading producers of medical miracles into a socialist price-fixing scheme. And, for the past several months, they have described their kangaroo court as if it were a garden party.

This week, HHS Secretary Becerra insisted:

We are committed to constructive dialogue. . . . These are good-faith, up front negotiations.

Of course, as any working American knows, in a real negotiation, both parties have the ability to walk away. That is not the case when it comes to prescription drug socialism. The way these negotiations work, if a drug company doesn't agree to the “maximum fair price,” they can either agree to pay an excessive excise tax or they can withdraw entirely from participation in Medicaid and Medicare programs.

Anyone can see that this process is anything but a good-faith negotiation. But that is not even the crux of the issue.

Here is what is: Underneath the administration's rhetoric about lowering prices for American consumers, the hard reality is that prescription drug

socialism means higher costs and fewer treatments.

According to one estimate, this scheme would eliminate nine times as much funding as the 2016 Cancer Moonshot Initiative created. By another analysis, the Biden administration's drug pricing schemes will lead to 139 fewer medicines over the next decade. And that is just on the treatment side.

Over the next decade, prescription drug socialism would reportedly eliminate up to 135,000 jobs directly in the life sciences space in the United States and up to 670,000 jobs in related fields.

Apparently, the Biden administration is really just out to make it harder for the world's foremost engine of medical innovation to do what it is best at—finding cures.

And the worst side effect? The millions of people who will go without groundbreaking, American-made treatments.

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. 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 MAJORITY LEADER

The majority leader is recognized.

#### GOVERNMENT FUNDING

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, with just a few days to go before Friday's funding deadline to keep the government open, both Chambers must continue working quickly, decisively, and with bipartisan cooperation to avoid a shutdown.

The House will vote today on the six appropriations bills we reached bipartisan agreement on, where I expect they will pass with strong bipartisan support. As soon as the House passes these appropriations bills and sends them to the Senate, I will put the bills on the floor so we can pass them and fund these six departments with time to spare before Friday's deadline.

It took a lot of bipartisan cooperation to reach this agreement on these six appropriations bills. Now, it will take more bipartisan cooperation to finish the job.

The appropriations process hasn't been easy in divided government, but after a lot of hard work, late nights, and persistence, we now have six strong appropriations bills that include aggressive investments in American families, moms and kids, veterans, workers, and more. And we prevented any devastating cuts or poison pills pushed by the hard right.

We will fully fund WIC, meaning no mom or kid will be denied vital nutrition assistance. We will protect funding to help Americans, especially rural Americans, afford their rent and keep a roof over their head. We will increase funding for programs and services that support our veterans. And in this

year's appropriations, we prevented the worst of the devastating cuts and poison pills pushed by the hard right.

Passing these bills will give us the much-needed momentum to pass this package of spending bills by the March 22 deadline. But as I have said repeatedly, it will take bipartisan cooperation to finish the job.

#### FEDERAL TRADE COMMISSION

Mr. President, last November, I wrote to the Federal Trade Commission, the FTC, urging them to investigate Exxon's \$60 billion blockbuster merger with Pioneer, one of the largest mergers in energy industry in two decades. I warned that Exxon's deals—and Chevron's announced merger with Hess—had the red flags of anticompetitive behavior. I warned that these deals could open the floodgates to more consolidation, less competition, and higher prices, just to pad the profits of the largest oil companies.

It turns out I was right. Since last November, there have been at least four multibillion-dollar mergers announced among America's large oil companies; and in all of 2023, there was an astounding 250 billion dollars' worth of oil and gas deals.

So today, I authored a letter joined by 50 of my Senate and House Democratic colleagues in urging the FTC to increase its scrutiny over this wave of oil mergers to see if the mergers violate antitrust laws.

Big Oil is alarmingly getting even bigger, and the FTC must investigate for the sake of consumers, workers, small businesses, because when oligopolistic behavior reigns, costs go up, and the public pays the price.

History has shown that when America's largest oil companies go through consolidation, it eventually leads to higher gas prices. According to the Government Accountability Office, the GAO, the five biggest mergers of the 1990s and 2000s led to tangible spikes in prices, particularly the merger between Exxon and Mobil, which I fiercely opposed as a Congressman at that time.

I have always said that one of the greatest mistakes of the Democratic administration in the 1990s was to allow this merger between Exxon and Mobil, as well as the merger between Chevron and Texaco, because, as we saw, competition greatly suffered and costs went up for consumers.

That is why I strongly opposed those deals back then. When you look back, you say: How the heck did even a Democratic administration allow Exxon and Mobil to merge, Chevron and Texaco to merge? But, sadly, history is repeating itself when it comes to oil mergers; although, the Biden administration has not been supportive.

And let's not kid ourselves, these mergers aren't just about efficiency or lowering costs. These mergers are about buying out the competition so the newly consolidated industry can boost profits at the expense of consumers. And these profits have become

the jet fuel, so to speak, for a record wave of stock buybacks and grotesque levels of executive pay. In January, Chevron announced \$75 billion in stock buybacks, which will cut the number of shares by as much as 20 percent. Exxon, likewise, announced another \$35 billion in buybacks for this year and next. These are just two examples of many.

Americans, meanwhile, will continue to feel the sting of Big Oil's greed every time they go to the pump. That is why we are calling on the FTC to look into this pattern of consolidation announced in recent months and step in, if necessary.

#### NOMINATION OF RONALD T. KEOHANE

Mr. President, now on nominations, today the Senate will continue our work to confirm President Biden's nominees. We will begin by confirming Ronald Keohane, a proud Buffalo, NY, native, as Assistant Secretary of Defense for Manpower and Reserve Affairs, and I am proud to support this great New Yorker.

Mr. Keohane is exceptionally qualified for this position, having served in various support roles for our servicemembers and their families during his 30-year career. He served in the Obama administration in a similar role as Deputy Assistant Secretary for Military Community and Family Policy.

So Mr. Keohane is the right man for the job because he understands the value of caring for our servicemembers and their families.

#### NOMINATION OF SANKET J. BULSARA

Mr. President, off the floor, the Senate is also moving forward with more of President Biden's judicial nominees.

I just returned from the Judiciary Committee, where I had the honor of introducing Judge Sanket Bulsara, whom I recommended to President Biden to serve as a district judge for the Eastern District of New York.

Judge Bulsara made history in 2017 as the first South Asian-American judge to serve in any court within the Second Circuit when appointed as a magistrate judge for the Eastern District of New York.

New York's South Asian population, I am proud to say, is one of the very fastest growing in New York. We have the largest South Asian community in a metropolitan area in the country, and these folks are hard-working. They raise good families. They make sure they do everything they can to see their children have better lives than they do, often through education and study and hard work.

They are law-abiding, and they are just great Americans, part of the American dream. And so I feel proud when they are elevated to an exalted position like Federal judge.

Judge Bulsara is the epitome of the American dream, just like so many in the South Asian community. He is the proud son of hard-working immigrant parents from Kenya and India, and a graduate of Harvard University and Harvard Law School. He has considerable experience in both the public and

private sectors. If confirmed, Judge Bulsara would make an exceptional addition to the Eastern District, and I am very proud to champion his nomination.

#### CLEAN ENERGY

Finally, Mr. President, on clean energy investment, when President Biden comes before the Congress to deliver his State of the Union this week, Americans will hear a clear theme: America's economy is accelerating, inflation is decelerating, and the investments Democrats made in the past few years—I was proud to be majority leader during probably the most successful, productive Congress in 30 years, and these investments are really paying off.

Today, for example, many Americans are paying less for insulin than they did a few years ago, thanks to reforms we made on the IRA. Seniors on Medicare have a cap on prescription drug spending. No longer does a serious illness mean seniors on Medicare spend \$10,000 or more on prescription drug expenses. Consumer sentiment is way up, compared to 2 years ago. And despite so many naysayers who were sure there would be a recession, inflation has slowed to more normal levels without—without—causing a recession.

In fact, manufacturing construction is at an alltime high, triple its highest point during the last administration, the Trump administration. And these are just the accomplishments of the past year. The IRA, the Inflation Reduction Act, is projected to create another 1.5 million jobs over the next decade.

But today, I want to point out another part of our agenda delivering beyond anyone's wildest expectations: the surge in America's clean energy and the jobs it creates. The New York Times put it best in a recent article when they noted that "clean energy manufacturing is booming."

Thanks to investments Democrats made in the Inflation Reduction Act, in the Chips and Science Act and other bills, clean investments, just last year, reached over \$230 billion. For context, that is triple the investment levels of 2019, just 5 years ago.

Many companies who invested towards clean energy have said legislation like IRA and Chips and Science made their decisions easier. And while \$230 billion can seem hard to visualize, the practical impacts of these investments are plain as day.

Americans see these investments at work through new EV battery plants, new construction sites, new good-paying jobs that will stick around for years. Our economy has added nearly 30,000 jobs in power generation and supply, a stark turnaround from years of decline during the previous administration.

New Yorkers see these investments through the surge of onshore wind and solar energy production and through all of the factory openings we have seen across the State, particularly in

Upstate New York, in an area that in the past had lost jobs—manufacturing jobs—is now growing again. That is great news. It makes us all very happy.

Consumers will see these investments at work through cheaper EVs; and in time, Americans everywhere will see these investments pay off through less pollution, cleaner air, and fewer kids getting sick from asthma and other illnesses. That is something we are very proud of.

Sometimes it can take a while for the effects of an ambitious agenda to take root. We saw this happen with ACA. But today, the evidence is pouring in that the work that President Biden and Democrats put in over the past few years, the investments, are paying off in a big way for our country, and Americans are beginning to take notice.

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. THUNE. 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.

The Republican whip.

#### BORDER SECURITY

Mr. THUNE. Mr. President, last week, President Biden visited the southern border—just his second such trip in his entire half-a-century-long political career. While I suspect his visit was motivated more by the thought of an election year photo op than by a desire to see the border crisis firsthand, the President should—should—be visiting the southern border. But more than that, the President should be taking action on the border, real action—the kind of action that will actually do something to help stem the crisis we are facing, because we are facing a crisis.

The number of migrant encounters at our southern border in January was the highest January number in more than 20 years. That, of course, followed a recordbreaking and staggering, I would add, 301,983 encounters in the month of December—not only the highest December on record but the highest total for any month ever. And there is no end in sight. The first 4 days of March saw 7,000-plus migrant encounters each day, putting us on track for yet another month of 200,000-plus migrant encounters at the southern border.

Of course, none of these numbers include "got-aways," and those are individuals whom the Border Patrol saw but was unable to apprehend. There have been approximately 1.8 million known "got-aways" since President Biden took office and an untold number of unknown "got-aways" over the same period.

Now, this is a crisis on many levels. It is a logistical and enforcement crisis, it is a humanitarian crisis, and it is