

day, we get a little closer, but there are still issues to be resolved. But one thing is certain: We are going to keep going to get this done.

I have remained in touch with my Senate colleagues, with Leader McCONNELL, and the White House every step of the way. The goal, of course, is to come up with a proposal that can get at least 60 votes in the Senate. That means both sides must accept they won't get everything they want. It means that maximalist demands, stonewall tactics, and attempts to sabotage negotiations before they even finish must be shunned by the membership of this body. There is too much at stake to play those games.

There are some on the fringes who are, unfortunately, though, trying to do precisely that: to sink this supplemental package from afar. But in the Senate, both sides have an obligation to ensure those voices stay in the minority. Many of the voices who are making suggestions that they don't like are not voting for this anyway—anyway.

It is not going to be easy to get over the finish line. But Senate Democrats are going to stay the course—stay the course—until the job is done.

President Biden, on numerous occasions, has stated he is willing to work with Republicans in a big way on immigration. And for over 2 months, Democrats have shown we are serious about reaching an agreement by remaining at the negotiating table. So we will keep going because Senators don't need to be reminded of the consequences should we fail.

Like I said, the last round of Ukrainian aid happened on December 27. If we don't act, Ukraine will fall and make the world a much more dangerous place for America. And every day, Americans will feel the impact—not years but months away.

Since the start of the war, Putin has bet that sooner or later, the United States would throw in the towel. They doubt Western resolve. They doubt American strength. Just last month, Putin speculated on Russian television that “the free stuff is going to run out some day, and it seems it already is.” That is what Putin is saying. He is gloating that we are not giving Ukraine the aid it needs. His allies are certainly helping him.

The Senate has an obligation to make sure Putin regrets the day he questioned America's resolve, and that is putting the focus on what we are doing in this Chamber.

We have an obligation to answer the call to defend democracy in its hour of need. We have an obligation to help our friends fighting for their survival.

We must—must—finish the work on the supplemental. We are not there yet, but we will continue working.

#### ECONOMY

Mr. President, on the economy, we are not even a month into 2024, and a new pattern is emerging. Americans are feeling more and more optimistic

about the economy. Last week, a report by the University of Michigan showed that consumer sentiment—how consumers feel about the economy—surged by 29 percent over the last 2 months—the biggest 2-month increase in over 3 decades—in over 30 years. Higher consumer sentiment means Americans have more money in their pockets and are feeling better about their financial future.

That is precisely what the Democratic agenda is all about: lowering costs, increasing wages, fueling economic growth. That is why Democrats passed historic legislation like the Inflation Reduction Act, the CHIPS and Science Act, the infrastructure law, and more.

When you pass an ambitious agenda like the ones the Democrats have passed under President Biden, it can take some time for the effects to take hold. But by now, the signs are getting clearer and clearer: Under President Biden, under Democratic leadership, the country is on the right track. Real wages are rising. In fact, paychecks have outpaced inflation over the past year, meaning people's paychecks are going further. Inflation is cooling down, now to 3.4 percent. When we passed the Inflation Reduction Act, it was over 8 percent.

Unemployment is falling. The economy created 2.7 million new jobs last year, more jobs than any year of the Trump administration.

And manufacturing investment levels are at an all-time high—again, more than double the peak of the Trump administration.

That is the difference between Democratic and Republican leadership. When Democrats were elected into office, we passed legislation to lower costs, to bring American manufacturing back, to lower prescription drug costs—which is already happening—and invest in science and innovation.

But what about the hard right? What about what is going with our Republican colleagues? Well, look at what they spend time talking about: shutting down the government.

That is what the hard right does. We are getting things done for the American people; they are talking about shutting down the government, pushing America toward default. Amazingly, the hard right, which has a lot of sway in the House and too much in the Senate, said default would be a good thing. Attacking a woman's right to choose, wasting time on sham impeachments, and drastic cuts to veterans' aid, nutrition programs, education, Federal law enforcement, no wonder some Republicans are so concerned they have no real accomplishments to show the American people.

The difference, frankly, is night and day: Democrats are focused on lowering costs, more jobs, and more money in people's pockets, but the hard right is consumed by chaos, bullying, cutting vital investments, making things worse. They want to make things worse. Somehow that is their credo.

The Republican frontrunner for President has made it abundantly clear that he is not running on making people's lives better but rather on airing his personal political grievances, as we saw in last night's so-called victory speech.

So we still have a long way to go to make our economy better—working better for families—but the evidence is growing that under President Biden, we are headed in the right direction, and Americans are seeing it for themselves.

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.

#### NATIONAL SECURITY

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, Vladimir Putin's reelection campaign is employing a slogan that the Russian people—and the rest of the world—have actually heard before. Here is what it is: “Russia's borders do not end anywhere.”

“Russia's borders do not end anywhere.” That is Vladimir Putin.

The map of Europe illustrates what he means in the starkest possible terms. A brazen war of conquest is headed toward its 11th year. Two years of Russia's brutal escalation in Ukraine has subjected a sovereign nation to horrific losses and heinous war crimes.

Since well before Russian troops made their first run toward Kyiv in February of 2022, I have been pushing for the decisive capabilities Ukraine needed to defend itself. And I have held President Biden to account for not doing more sooner to give our friends a decisive edge against Putin's aggression and for not investing more seriously in rebuilding America's military strength.

But I have never been under any delusion about why America was backing Ukraine's fight. This has never been about charity. It is not about charity. It is not about virtue signaling or abstract principles of international relations.

This is about cold, hard American interests. It is in the United States' direct interest for authoritarians not to feel free to redraw maps by force. It is in our interest to help degrade the military of a major adversary without committing American lives to the effort. It is in our interest to help blunt aggressive behavior before it triggers wider conflict and directly threatens our closest allies and trading partners.

We cannot pretend that America is inoculated against the consequences of a war in Europe. We can't afford to

harbor the notion that leaving Russian aggression unchecked would somehow enhance America's posture and strategic competition with China. Accelerating Russian defeat in Europe is precisely what will help ensure we don't wind up dealing with simultaneous aggression from adversaries in Europe and the Indo-Pacific.

Even as a global superpower, this is not a burden America should resign to bear alone, and, fortunately, we don't have to. Over the past 2 years, our European allies have taken a more serious and sober accounting of the requirements of a collective defense. They are now fast overtaking America's share of overall security assistance to Ukraine, and we already trail the contributions of 13 allies measured as a share of GDP.

This is certainly good news for collective defense and for the urgent demands that press upon American strength.

The United Kingdom, for example, just pledged to invest more than \$3 billion in Ukraine's fight over the next 2 years. This is on top of the tremendous leadership Great Britain has displayed since the earliest days of Putin's escalation.

Germany created a €100 billion special defense fund, enacted major military reforms, and continues to make progress toward NATO's 2 percent defense spending target.

Denmark is expanding its domestic industrial base and participating alongside U.S. forces in coalition operations in the Red Sea.

Smaller frontline allies like Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania are continuing to make massive relative commitments to the cause. Estonia has pledged \$1.3 billion to Ukraine over the next 4 years. Just today, even the new, right-leaning Government of Slovakia expressed clear support for the Ukrainian cause in a visit to Ukraine.

More good news came yesterday. NATO is one step closer to admitting another strong and capable member to the transatlantic alliance.

I am glad that Turkey's Parliament voted to ratify Sweden's accession. Unfortunately, this step took far too long and created unnecessary friction within the alliance.

Sweden will bring major defense and technological capabilities into NATO on day one. The Swedes are increasing their defense budget and expanding their defense industrial capacity. This is not just good for NATO; Sweden's entry into NATO, just like Finland's before hers, is in our national interest.

I know colleagues on both sides of the aisle share my expectation that Hungary—the final remaining ally to approve Sweden's accession—will act soon to finish the job. Washington is watching.

These are promising developments. Allies are taking important steps toward greater burden-sharing, but we cannot mistakenly conclude from this progress that there is also declining demand for American leadership—quite

the opposite. The West's efforts to deter and defend against our adversaries in Europe, in the Middle East, and in the Indo-Pacific still require an engaged America. They require that we continue to invest heavily in new capabilities for our Armed Forces and in greater defense industrial capacity to meet soaring demand and sustain long-term competition.

This is what national security supplemental legislation would do: invest tens of billions of dollars right here at home and continue to bring new, cutting-edge capabilities—made in America by American workers—into our arsenal.

The Senate will very soon have a chance to restore our sovereignty at the southern border, to invest in our strategic competition with China, and to rebuild our credibility in the eyes of allies and adversaries alike.

#### ENERGY

Now, Mr. President, on another matter, when President Biden took office, the average approval time for liquefied natural gas—LNG—permits was about 7 weeks. Right now, it is about 11 months. But soon, wait times could actually become irrelevant.

At the behest of climate activists, the administration is now considering adding a climate test to the national interest analysis regulators conduct before approving new LNG projects—never mind that climate interests all too often run in the exact opposite direction of America's national interests. This move would amount to a functional ban on new LNG export permits.

The administration's war on affordable domestic energy has been bad news for American workers and consumers alike. Radical policies from the EPA are killing jobs in coal and auto manufacturing. Regulatory nudging is forcing automakers to produce a supply of electric vehicles for which there is insufficient demand. Now further limits to LNG exports will only send energy costs higher at a time that the West is trying to reduce its reliance on Russian energy.

This agenda is not just bad for Americans at home either; it is directly at odds with American interests on the world stage. From Russia to Iran to China, it is abundantly clear that our adversaries are not waiting for us to wake up from this experiment in green self-harm. Russia is building a new export facility for liquefied natural gas that is scheduled to be up and operating as soon as next year. Iran is also in the process of completing an LNG export facility to be ready next year as well.

It should go without saying that increasing global reliance on Russian and Iranian energy is not sound strategy. The Secretary of Energy herself has described Russian gas as the “dirtiest form of natural gas on Earth.” China, for its part, increased its emissions last year by double the amount U.S. emissions actually declined.

Our allies in Europe are increasingly relying on us to keep their lights and

their heat running. It was LNG exports from the United States that allowed Europe to reduce its reliance on Russian energy in the wake of their attack on Ukraine.

So if the Biden administration is foolish enough to shut down our LNG exports or saddle their national interest analysis with Green New Deal schemes, I hope they understand which nations' interests they are advancing.

Choose our Nation's interests or blindly follow some green, radical scheme to empower our political rivals in China, Iran, and Russia. It is hard to fathom that this is even a question the Biden administration is contemplating.

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. TUBERVILLE. 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.

#### NATIONAL SCHOOL CHOICE WEEK

Mr. TUBERVILLE. Mr. President, I come to the floor today to express my very strong support for school choice.

Sunday was the start of School Choice Week. Tens of thousands of parents, students, and educators are going to celebrate the accomplishments of the school choice movement.

I spent 40 years in education.

I was a government school teacher—better known as public school—including in higher education. I was a coach. I was a mentor. For 40 years, I watched the school choice movement grow and change many, many lives. I have seen the changes that school choice has brought for students across our great country.

When I first started in education 40 years ago, there was no opportunity for school choice. Homeschooling was very, very rare. But our government schools were in better shape back then. Homeschooling today is practically like attending a small school. Today, there are about 2 million kids being homeschooled across our country. Homeschooling is the fastest growing form of education in America. It is growing because parents recognize that our schools are failing—I am going to repeat that: failing—our kids. It is time for lawmakers across this country at every level, including us, to recognize that our schools are failing.

Over the past 40 years, I have watched our education system decline with my own eyes. I have visited schools, parents, and principals in 49 States and American Samoa. What I saw sometimes was absolutely shocking. And, for today, it is the main reason that I ran for this seat here in the U.S. Senate. Education wasn't just a local problem; it was a national problem.

By now, it is undeniable that our K through 12 education system is in a crisis because of job protections and