

ENERGY

Now, Mr. President, on one final matter, since President Biden took office, the cost of energy has risen 41.65 percent. Fuel oil prices are up 56.8 percent. Gasoline is up 55.5 percent, and natural gas is up 22 percent.

This, of course, is not news to working families who have been struggling to keep up for the past 3½ years, but Washington Democrats are just now waking up.

Suddenly, right before an election, Democrats are concerned about the high prices Americans are paying to fill up their gas tanks, but they still can't seem to correctly assign the blame. Just last month, the Democratic leader berated "big oil companies" for "continuing to rake in the cash at the expense of the American people."

But I thought high energy prices were a primary feature of the leftwing climate agenda. As a report from Columbia University's Center on Global Energy Policy put it, "a price on carbon makes those responsible for the damages caused by greenhouse gas emissions pay for those damages. . . . A carbon price makes carbon-intensive goods and services more expensive."

Well, there you have it. High prices for hard-working Americans are a feature, not a bug.

If Washington Democrats are looking for a scapegoat for soaring energy prices, it is about time they looked in the mirror.

And, as our colleague from West Virginia, Senator CAPITO, reminded us recently, the very law Washington Democrats claimed was designed to lower prices is, instead, sending taxpayer dollars to support inflationary climate programs and other radical causes. The EPA sent \$50 million from the so-called Inflation Reduction Act to support the Climate Justice Alliance.

Now, we already know that "climate justice" means higher gas prices for working Americans and electric vehicle subsidies for high-earning elites.

But what about the organization's plan to "break the rules that need to be broken" and "shut down extractive facilities and extractive economic structures" and place "race, gender and class at the center" of the economy?

What about its contention that "the path to climate justice travels through a free Palestine"?

Once again, this is a beneficiary of the so-called Inflation Reduction Act.

Suffice it to say, the so-called Climate Justice Alliance is not comprised of America's allies, and, while they claim to advocate for justice, they are burying working families in higher costs.

I can assure our colleagues that the American people won't take kindly to being treated like suckers.

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.

RIGHT TO CONTRACEPTION ACT

Mr. THUNE. Well, Mr. President, it is about time for Democrats' weekly exercise in election-year politics.

Later today, we will take up another bill intended to provide a talking point for Democrat candidates, and the Democrat leader hopes to put Republicans in a tight spot. But if he thinks to see Republicans quaking in their boots over being asked to take these votes, he should think again, because we welcome the chance to talk about the Democrat agenda.

Take this afternoon's exercise. Under the guise of protecting access to contraception—something that is not under threat—the Democrat leader is bringing up legislation that would not only funnel money to Democrats' allies at Planned Parenthood but would wipe out—wipe out—conscience protections for healthcare providers. The bill specifically targets the Religious Freedom Restoration Act, which was bipartisan legislation passed in 1993—back, I might add, when Democrats actually believed in protecting our First Amendment freedoms.

And this is not the first time Democrats have attempted to carve out sweeping exceptions to this once widely supported legislation. Apparently, Americans are free to live out their deeply held moral and religious beliefs when they don't conflict with Democrats' policy positions.

It is deeply disturbing that the Democrat leader has gone from sponsoring—sponsoring—the Religious Freedom Restoration Act to attempting to decide when and how Americans can exercise one of their fundamental First Amendment rights. If the Democrat leader thinks that Republicans are intimidated to cast a vote against legislation that would seriously imperil Americans' ability to live according to their consciences, well, as I said, he should think again.

I suspect there are few Americans who don't recognize the Democrat leader's politicking for exactly what it is, just as I suspect there are few Americans who bought Democrats' border legislation ploy 2 weeks ago.

The Democrat leader apparently thought that he could erase Americans' memories of 3-plus years of chaos at the southern border under President Biden by bringing up a vote on a border bill that he knew would not be able to pass the Senate, but I think he will find that Americans' memories are more retentive than that.

Three years of national security crisis were not wiped out by a show vote intended to provide electoral cover for Democrats, just as they won't be wiped out by President Biden's latest election-year ploy—an Executive order to implement border restrictions the likes

of which he should have implemented years ago. If anything, any improvements at the border stemming from the President's latest measure will only serve to highlight the President's failure to address this crisis earlier and the needless danger to which he has subjected Americans.

I mentioned that the Democrat leader knew his border show vote would fail, just as he knows his Planned Parenthood subsidy, anti-religious freedom legislation will fail this afternoon. That, of course, points to the fundamental unseriousness of what the Democrat leader is doing.

If the Democrat leader had any real interest in legislating on these issues, he would be working with Republicans to bring up legislation that actually has a chance of receiving the support from both Democrats and Republicans.

Senator JONI ERNST, for example, has legislation to promote access to contraception, but that is not the legislation Senator SCHUMER is bringing up because these votes have nothing to do with legislating and everything to do with boosting Democrats' electoral chances—he hopes—in this fall's elections.

I suspect the exercises in election politics will continue. Look for this to be the summer of show votes here in the U.S. Senate.

As I said, Republicans are ready for it. We are happy to talk about the Democrat agenda, whether that is the President's disastrous border policies—or lack thereof—or Democrats' never-ending inflation crisis, or another attempt by the Democrat leader to force through legislation to legalize abortion up until the moment of birth.

All the show votes in the world won't erase Democrats' record, as Democrats may discover, to their cost.

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

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

IMMIGRATION

Mr. LANKFORD. Mr. President, the President of the United States is, today, using clips of my speech on the floor of the Senate in his campaign ads talking about border security and immigration. Well, I would encourage him to use clips of this speech today instead, because President Biden created the problem at the border right now.

That is not some theory. That is not some political statement. That is fact. And I can compare that to the two previous Presidents, who operated under the exact same law as President Biden is operating under now. We have 2½ million people—plus—illegally crossing our southern border this year. Under

President Obama, we had half a million.

There is no difference in the law between President Obama, President Trump, and President Biden. The only difference is the Executive who is actually overseeing that law's prosecution. That is the only difference.

So why would we have half a million people illegally crossing the border under President Obama and 2½ million people under President Biden? It is the Executive and how they are carrying out the law.

Now, I have been very clear: That last half a million is Congress's responsibility. We have a responsibility to change the definition of "asylum," to change how the enforcement is done, increase the number of agents that are there, take away a lot of the appeals that are frivolous—and we all know it—to be able to allow people who qualify for asylum to get into the country and people who do not get turned around so they can go through a legal pathway, not through an illegal pathway.

That is Congress's responsibility, that last half a million. Those are changes in the law we have to get done, and I have been very outspoken on that and will continue to be outspoken on that because we have not done our job here.

But the other 2 million people who are illegally crossing this year, last year, the year before that, that is not on Congress; that is on the President of the United States because he created this.

Why would I say that? Day one of his Presidency, he walked in with an Executive order day one and announced to the world: We are no longer going to do a border wall construction. We are going to stop border wall construction. Day one, this President announced that he is no longer going to do the Executive order that had been put in place under President Trump to ensure that there was a meaningful application of Border Patrol laws and immigration regulations. Literally, he took those regs and set them aside and said: We are not going to do that.

Day one, he announced a 100-day moratorium on deportations and on enforcement and then continued to be able to extend it out from there.

This wasn't day one, but it was a week and a half later: DHS implemented a new policy saying that we are going to change the way we do removals of people who are illegally present in the country. The next day after that, he changed the way asylum processing is done at the border and removed what was called the "Remain in Mexico" program.

That is something the Supreme Court actually came back and said: You can't just remove that; you have to re-implement that. So the Supreme Court actually required that to be implemented. This President put in the mechanics to do it but is not actually doing it.

So, as Americans, we are paying hundreds of millions of dollars to have the facility and the personnel actually there to fulfill what the Court has required them to do, but they are not actually doing what is called the "MPP," the "Remain in Mexico" program. That is a decision that they made.

A week after that, in February of 2021, Antony Blinken announced that he was terminating the agreements with Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador so that they would then enforce their borders more readily. That agreement that we had made with them with the State Department, the State Department terminated that to be able to open up the pathways for more folks to go.

I could keep going on and on and on. You see, what is happening now is not happenstance; it was a deliberate decision made in 2021 to open our borders to "not look so mean." But what has actually occurred is more than 10 million people have crossed our border illegally, and the administration has announced just in the last couple of weeks that 55,000 people have crossed just this year that they designated as a special-interest migrant—their definition—55,000 people. Those individuals are coming from areas that they define as a terror risk. Those 55,000 individuals have all been labeled by this administration as a potential risk to national security—55,000 in just the last year. You know what has happened to those? The vast majority of them are in the United States right now because they were released by this administration.

This is a border crisis of this administration's creation. They created this crisis. While Congress has the responsibility to do the things that we need to do, this administration created this crisis with the decisions that they made in Homeland Security, that they made in the State Department, and they made at the Department of Justice.

Individuals who cross the border multiple times, that is a felony in American law. Ask the Department of Justice how many of those folks have been prosecuted as a felony in the last 3 years—I dare you; ask them—and you will find out it is zero. They have just stopped prosecutions.

They have announced to the world: We are no longer enforcing American law. The world has taken the message, and they are coming because we are the United States of America. We are the greatest country in the world. But we are also the top terrorism threat in the world because people come here to do us harm because they hate our freedom and who we are.

We are not doing the most basic security that every nation does, and that is protect our border. So the President announced an Executive action this week, an Executive action that he literally pulled from a section of the bipartisan bill that we worked on, but it was literally the bolt-on section on the end of it.

The heart of the bill was not what you do after thousands of people are crossing the border; the heart of the bill is what do you do for the first person that illegally crosses. The bill was set up to say that the very first person that illegally crosses—they are picked up at the border, they are screened quickly, and then they are deported quickly. We changed the screening process, we changed the appeals process, and we changed all the standards. We rapidly affected the first person.

This administration has announced a new initiative that they are going to do not for the first person that illegally crosses but for somewhere around the 4,000th.

Why do I say 4,000 when they have announced 2,500? Well, you have to read the fine print. They said: After 2,500 people come, then we are going to add some new authorities. But the fine print is pretty important.

They exclude the about 1,600 people a day that they are currently letting in at ports of entry using what they call the CBP One app. They are giving those folks parole. They have not gone through any legal process. They are declaring them as legal when they come through. So they are not including those folks that are illegally coming across the border under a parole program they have created. That program could end tomorrow. Illegal immigration would drop by 1,600 people tomorrow if they turned off the program they turned on.

They are also not including what is called the Cuba, Haiti, Venezuela, Nicaragua program. There are 1,000 people a day coming in under that program. They have just excluded them as well from their 2,500 number.

They are excluding anyone who is an unaccompanied minor. They are excluding them.

They have also listed a whole bunch of others—if they have a health issue, others.

So this 2,500 number—I have had several folks say: Well, that is half of what you all had proposed in your bill. It is not. You have to read the fine print of what is actually in the Executive order.

What could this administration do? It is pretty straightforward. Here a few things they could do right now.

Right now, they could actually start putting pressure on recalcitrant countries, through the State Department, to take individuals back into their own country. The State Department has stopped putting pressure on recalcitrant countries. They could do that today.

The law today allows the administration to start doing direct hire for Border Patrol and for ICE. They are not using that authority. They are just saying: We can't hire enough agents. They have direct hire authority they are choosing not to use.

Right now, this administration could speed up the way they handle the appeals process through all these frivolous regulations and some of the Executive orders. They had to literally take

away those things and make it more difficult to actually fight through the appeals. They could put those back in today.

Today, they could end the Cuba, Haiti, Nicaragua, Venezuela program that they created to allow folks to be able to come in in greater numbers from those four countries. They started that program. They could end that today.

They could end the catch-and-release that they have created at the southern border. They could end that today. They started it. They could turn that off.

They could restart the cooperative agreements with Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador to stop the flow of migrants coming from Central America up as they are coming through those areas. They could do that today.

They could reinstate the "Remain in Mexico" program. All the structure is there. The court required them to have it. They could actually use it, and that would make a huge difference today.

They could actually start prosecuting border crossing cases from start to finish. What do I mean by that? This administration is starting the process of prosecuting individuals, but halfway through, they are just dropping the case. Well, it doesn't take long for the word to get out to people who illegally cross that even if you start the prosecution, this administration will drop it and will not finish it. They text family members back home and say "come," and the next group actually comes from there.

This administration is currently finding new ways to allow people to come in. In States like Oklahoma—my State is currently being prosecuted by the Department of Justice because we passed laws in our State to put greater requirements on people that are illegally present in the State and have committed criminal acts. It used to be, under the previous administration, if someone was illegally present and they committed a criminal act, they were more active to remove those. Right now, the Department of Justice is actually putting pressure on my State of Oklahoma for pressuring people that are illegally present and also have committed a criminal act.

The Department of Justice could actually enforce our southern border rather than actually go after States that are trying to actually enforce the law in our own States.

Quite frankly, one of the things this administration could do today is to vet people coming across our border better, because they are currently not coordinating all of the data points we have for foreign individuals. They are not checking against all of those systems when people are crossing our border illegally.

This administration and this President need to stop saying there is nothing he can do until Congress acts. Congress does need to act, but there is a lot he could do that would make a huge

difference. And it is not just my opinion; I can prove it with fact. Just compare this Democrat President and his number of illegal crossings against the last Democrat President and his number of illegal crossings: Biden, 2.5 million a year; Obama, half a million a year.

I understand this President doesn't want to enforce what President Trump did, although that was more effective than what President Obama did, but he should do at least what President Obama did.

Stop playing politics with this on all sides. Stop running a speech that I have given on this floor for his campaign purposes unless he wants to run this speech and to say this President needs to step up and do his job.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Mississippi.

NATIONAL SECURITY

Mr. WICKER. Mr. President and my colleagues, for too long, political leaders have shied away from being honest and having a difficult conversation with the American people about our national security. Elected officials have kicked the can down the road, failing to tell the country just how dangerous the world has become. It is past time to confront this issue.

Many Americans do not know that the safety we enjoy has been secured by a global network of U.S. military bases, diplomatic efforts, and international coalitions, as well as massive amounts of equipment and ammunition. We have taken our security for granted, not knowing that much of it has been enabled by a previous once-in-a-generation investment made decades ago.

President Ronald Reagan led Congress to rebuild the U.S. military in the 1980s. I will hasten to add that it was a bipartisan Congress who joined President Reagan in this effort. Americans have been living off that investment ever since.

Because of those efforts, we have rested easy under the umbrella of overwhelming military superiority. Today, though, our military streak is diminishing to dangerous lows—dangerous lows. That umbrella of security has become a false sense of security. The U.S. Navy is the smallest and oldest it has been in over eight decades—80 years. Our Air Force is shrinking. Much of our military infrastructure is out of date.

This is a fact, and it is no secret. Time and again, U.S. military leadership comes before Congress and tells us we are facing the most dangerous security environment since at least the Cold War, if not since World War II.

Most Americans don't know that we are long overdue for a generational replenishment of our weaponry. We have delayed updating our military even as China has gotten closer and closer to matching our military might. The news gets even worse: China is actually multiplying its strength by spear-

heading a new axis of aggression, joined by Russia, Iran, and North Korea. So far, China has not moved against us because its dictator, Xi Jinping, knew he would lose, but just over the horizon, he might have reason to feel differently.

We in Congress must tell the American people what is at stake. Failing to deter China would immediately trigger a global economic depression. Losing to Beijing would extend the hardship, darkening the course of the entire 21st century. I am not trying to be alarmist, but we need to be honest.

This bleak future is possible but not inevitable. I recently introduced a detailed plan to rebuild American military might and restore our ability to deter threats. It would be a downpayment for our future. It would be expensive—many worthwhile things are expensive—but it would be far less costly than war.

Political neglect has put us in this vulnerable position. It does not have to be this way. My goal is to launch a much needed conversation about how we can turn the page on that complacency and to get started right away with corrective action. I have been inviting my colleagues on both sides of the aisle to join in this discussion. I will continue to extend that invitation. But there is really no time to waste. We need to get started this year. We can do so next week when the Armed Services Committee in the Senate begins the NDAA markup, the National Defense Authorization Act. During our meetings, I will introduce an amendment to raise the level of this year's defense investment significantly. My amendment will be an opportunity for the kind of debate for which this Chamber is renowned.

In considering national spending priorities, we have thought of ourselves as hamstrung by spending caps, but we simply have to dream bigger when it comes to our vital national security. I hope this debate will lead to a defense topline number that meets the moment.

President Reagan's buildup kept the peace and won the Cold War, and it did so without firing a shot. The future can be just as peaceful and secure for our children and our grandchildren, but it is time we made that investment in the future.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Texas.

Mr. CORNYN. Mr. President, before he leaves the floor, I want to say to the Senator from Mississippi how proud I am to stand here beside him as he delivers an inconvenient truth, which is, our national security is not something we can take for granted. You pay for it with your treasure or your blood. That is an inconvenient truth.

In the course of our Nation's history, we remain the beacon of freedom, opportunity, liberty, and prosperity for the world, but we cannot take that for granted because we see everywhere we look rising threats and challenges to