

broken immigration system—and it is broken—but Republicans have repeatedly thwarted his efforts.

Most of us believed that we had an opportunity for a breakthrough, a bipartisan effort, with Senator JAMES LANKFORD on the Republican side leading the way, as well as two Democratic Senators, MURPHY and SINEMA, to make this a bipartisan effort. They had a bipartisan border security bill that was coming before Congress.

At the very last minute, when this measure was about to be considered, Donald Trump stepped in and said: Stop. I don't want any Republicans in the Senate to support a bipartisan effort to solve the border crisis. Stop what you are doing right now. I would rather have the issue to debate in November than to have you try to solve it and give Biden any credit for it.

Former President Trump said at the end of his statement: You can blame me. Well, I am blaming him that he stopped a bipartisan effort to solve the border crisis. When the bill came to the floor, the vast majority of Republicans opposed it at his request. The fact is, he said: "Blame it on me." I do. The former President has made it clear he does not want a solution to our immigration challenges before the November election; he wants a campaign issue.

He has demonized immigrants, saying—and this is one of the most despicable quotes I can think of—that they are "poisoning the blood of our country." He has promised to round up and deport every undocumented immigrant in our country, including Dreamers.

In light of this Republican obstructionism, President Biden has no choice but to use his authority as President to improve our broken immigration system. That is why 3 months ago I led a group of 19 Senate Democrats asking President Biden to protect immigrants with deep roots in our country, including Dreamers and the spouses of U.S. citizens. This week, President Biden responded, taking action to protect immigrants who have been here for decades, paying taxes, and contributing to all of our communities.

The President is helping Americans with noncitizen spouses keep their families together by allowing them to apply for lawful permanent residence—a status they are already eligible for—without leaving the country. He is also allowing Dreamers and other immigrants who have earned a degree from an American college and have received a job offer from a U.S. employer related to their field to more quickly receive work visas.

I commend President Biden for taking these steps, but ultimately only Congress can fix the immigration system in America.

To my Republican colleagues who may criticize the President, instead, I urge them to work with Democrats to pass immigration reform legislation.

I just want to conclude this part of my opening statement by saying that

this issue means so much to me. It was over 20 years ago that I introduced the DREAM Act, as I mentioned earlier. I have come to know these young people, and I have come to try to help them over and over again.

We have had some success on the floor, where we would pass a measure, and the House would not take it up. But despite that frustration, they continue to soldier on every single day, despite fear of deportation, to do their best to be part of America. Given that chance, they have proven themselves over and over again.

I often think, when you consider the hundreds of thousands of individuals who have been helped by the DREAM Act, by DACA, and other provisions, how few cases there have been where they have disappointed us publicly. The law of averages says there is bound to be somebody who is going to break your heart out there, who calls themselves a Dreamer and does something you don't like at all, but by and large, they are an amazing group of people who never ever give up.

Now they have asked, for example, for some help for their parents, and President Biden suggested he is going to give them that help. Some of the parents now are going to have an opportunity to live in America with their families without fear of deportation. That, to me, is what this country should be all about.

#### NOMINATION OF NANCY L. MALDONADO

Madam President, on a separate topic, later today, the Senate will vote on the motion to invoke cloture on the nomination of Judge Nancy Maldonado to be a judge on the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Seventh Circuit. She is an accomplished litigator and a distinguished juror who would be a great asset to the Seventh Circuit.

She graduated from Harvard College and Columbia Law School. She clerked for U.S. District Judge Ruben Castillo, an esteemed jurist on the Northern District of Illinois. Ruben Castillo is a personal friend of mine. He was appointed by my predecessor, Paul Simon. When Nancy Maldonado's name was first mentioned—and she served as district court judge—I called Judge Castillo and said: Do you think she is ready to move to the circuit court? He said: I know she is. That was a great endorsement that I took very seriously.

Following her clerkship, Judge Maldonado spent nearly 20 years at a firm specializing in plaintiff-side employment, civil rights, and fraud matters. Over the course of her career, she tried many cases to verdict, judgment, or final resolution.

In addition, she was appointed by the Cook County State Attorney's Office to serve as a special assistant investigating fraud. From 2019 to 2022, she was appointed by the Illinois attorney general to serve as a consent decree monitor in two matters and as a special assistant attorney general to investigate consumer fraud.

In 2022, the Senate confirmed Judge Maldonado on a bipartisan vote to the U.S. District Court for the Northern District of Illinois. Since her confirmation, despite some of the things that have been said incorrectly on the floor, Nancy Maldonado has presided over 1,000 cases—1,000 cases—ruled on thousands of motions, and issued approximately 300 substantive decisions as a district court judge.

Notably, Judge Maldonado has never, never been reversed by a reviewing court. This shows that she is carefully resolving cases in a way that ensures that litigants feel they were treated fairly in the courtroom.

If confirmed, she will be the first Hispanic judge to serve ever on the Seventh Circuit Court.

She has my strong support as well as the support of my colleague Senator DUCKWORTH.

She received a unanimous rating of "well qualified" from the American Bar Association.

The suggestion that she does not carry her load or work hard in court is just not fair. She has shown over and over again that she has a reputation for integrity, professional competence, and judicial temperament.

Judge Maldonado also has broad support from across the legal community, from law enforcement, labor unions, as well as the National Education Association.

I urge my colleagues to support her nomination.

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

The Republican whip.

#### INFLATION

Mr. THUNE. Mr. President, summer is an exciting time of year for many Americans. It is a time for adventure, for relaxation, for quality time spent with friends and family. But, like seemingly everything else, summer activities are more expensive in the Biden economy.

The cost of gas for a family trip is up 45 percent since President Biden took office. Food for a summer cookout costs 10 percent more than it did last year. And fees for summer camp are giving parents sticker shock. Even just keeping the house cool has climbed 8 percent since last summer to over \$700.

And, of course, this is a small sampling of what Americans have been going through for the past 3-plus years. Last week's inflation report confirmed again what Americans know all too well, inflation is still a problem. Overall, prices are up more than 20 percent since President Biden took office. The

cost of groceries is up 21 percent. Energy costs are up 41 percent. Car repairs and maintenance are up 30 percent. And the list goes on.

All told, it costs a typical family \$13,000 more per year to maintain the standard of living that family enjoyed when President Biden took office—\$13,000 more, just to buy the exact same things you were buying 3 years ago.

As one mother of three told the *New York Times*:

We're spending way more to get the same amount of food that we were getting before.

The inflation rate has been elevated for 38 months. Understandably, many people are at the end of their ropes. Americans have dipped into their savings. They have taken out record levels of credit card debt, and a shocking report came out recently that said that more than a quarter of Americans have skipped meals because of inflation—skipped meals because of inflation.

The cost of dealing with inflation is adding to Americans' financial pain. To fight inflation, the Federal Reserve has been forced to keep interest rates high, which affects Americans' finances in a variety of ways. Many Americans turned to credit cards—racking up record levels of debt—to cope with inflation.

And higher interest rates, in part the result of the Fed's actions, are making credit card bills harder to pay down. The same is true for car payments. And Americans looking to own their own home are facing what one housing expert calls "the most challenging home buying market we've ever seen."

The average monthly mortgage payment is a staggering \$2,800. The result of a combination of higher mortgage rates and higher home prices. And if you do own a home, a recent report found that the cost of keeping and maintaining it has gone up 26 percent since 2020 to more than \$1,500 per month.

It is worth remembering that it didn't have to be this way. Three years ago, President Biden and Democrats forced through a reckless and partisan spending spree under the guise of pandemic relief.

They had been warned that spending so much risked setting off an inflation crisis unlike anything that we had seen in decades. Yet they chose to ignore those warnings and push through \$1.9 trillion in new government spending. Inflation almost immediately began surging as a result.

It is the textbook definition of inflation: Too many dollars chasing too few goods. And then instead of learning a lesson, they moved forward with even more reckless spending plans.

Fortunately, the Democrats' \$3.5 trillion Build Back Better spending spree failed to get off the ground, but they have steadily run up the debt with their so-called Inflation Reduction Act, whose true cost continues to grow.

And the student loan forgiveness schemes the President has put in place

come with a price tag in the hundreds of billions of dollars. And it is clear that if President Biden gets a second term, there will be a lot more lavish spending on the docket. Plus, you have the President's proposed tax hikes, and then there are the expiring tax cuts.

In 2017, Republicans delivered tax reform that lowered rates across the board and allowed families to keep more of their hard-earned dollars, but those tax cuts are set to expire next year. And President Biden seems willing to let that happen.

That would mean a \$1,600 tax hike for a typical family in 2026 on top—on top—of years of economic pain from Bidenomics and inflation. Let's hope the American people don't have to find out what that will feel like.

It is going to be another expensive summer in the Biden economy, and if President Biden and the Democrats have their way, there could be many more to come.

I yield the floor.

**THE PRESIDING OFFICER.** The Senator from Mississippi.

#### NATIONAL SECURITY

**Mr. WICKER.** Mr. President, for the first time in 24 years, this week, Russian Dictator Vladimir Putin visited the North Korea dictator Kim Jong Un. This rare trip was a sign of a new reality, and it amounts to bad news for the United States and for our alliance and for the forces of freedom around the world.

An axis of aggressors continues to emerge, and this visit by Putin to Kim Jong Un is just the latest sign. Our adversaries: Russia, North Korea, China, the Ayatollah's Iran have been banding together to create a world that is less free, less peaceful, and less prosperous for the American people. Every Member of the Senate knows this. And we have an opportunity to respond, and there is a glimmer of good news.

Last week, the Senate Armed Services Committee, of which I am a member, overwhelmingly voted to move the National Defense Authorization bill forward. We wrote the bill specifically to address this rising danger.

Our near unanimous support for passage of the NDAA is a sign that we agree on at least one thing: The United States is not ready to stand up to this axis of aggressors, this new group who are banding together and assisting each other as they never have before. And we don't have time to waste.

The Armed Services Committee has put that conviction into practice. Senators from both sides of the aisle added an additional \$25 billion to the legislation, to the top line of this legislation—\$25 billion dollars which would invest in the munitions and systems we need to confront this axis and to prevent war, to preserve the peace and prevent war.

Vladimir Putin's visit to Kim Jong Un was more than just a ceremony. The two autocrats signed a defense pact between North Korea and Russia, agreeing to help each other militarily.

This new pact is troubling, but it should come as no surprise. It is only the latest step in their growing partnership.

For 2 years, North Korea has been supplying Russia with millions of artillery shells and hundreds of ballistic missiles for Putin's illegal war against Ukraine. In exchange, Moscow has helped Pyongyang evade the sanctions that previously held back the North Korean economy.

The Russian-North Korea partnership is just one aspect of the growing axis of aggressors. China has supported Russia's unprovoked and illegal invasion of Ukraine. China has sent weapons components and geospatial intelligence to Vladimir Putin. In return, Moscow has sold all to China.

Iran has supplied—Iran, in another section of the world, has supplied hundreds of ballistic missiles and thousands of deadly drones for Putin's terror campaign against Ukrainian citizens.

Russia has returned the favor by sending Tehran advanced air defense missiles and jets. All four of these countries—Russia, Iran, North Korea, and communist China—have supported Hamas's hateful and illegal attack on Israel, and they have supported the Houthis' reckless campaign against international commerce.

Time and again, my colleagues and I have been calling attention to this evil alliance. We in the United States should expect more meetings like the one that took place in Pyongyang this week.

A year ago, China hosted the first State visit of Iranian officials—first time ever that communist China has hosted a State visit of Iranian officials. Just last month, Vladimir Putin met with Chinese President Xi Jinping. This is not an accident. These instances are not unrelated.

At these meetings, handshakes will turn into hardware. You can be sure of that. Our adversaries will continue sending the tools of war to each other, further destabilizing the free world.

And as the world is changing, so must the United States. We must return to what we know works best, what has been proven to work best. We must increase our military capability, and we must do it now, which is why I am so thankful to my colleagues on a bipartisan basis for what they have done in the National Defense Authorization Act in committee.

In May of this year, I released a detailed plan to make sure that we return to a necessary level of support for our military. We entitled it the "21st Century Peace Through Strength" document, and it contains proposals for every theater and every domain of warfare.

A number of elements in the report are particularly relevant to the budding North Korea-Russia relationship and to China's nuclear breakout. In my plan, I recommend serious conversations with our allies and partners—conversations about how to meet the