

chiropractor for years, is told: No, we don't care what you want; we want to do it our way.

These policies are very damaging and could put us back in the same position in which the life and well-being of veterans across the country are impacted, are affected, and damaged.

I would again ask, along with my colleagues—which I hope is much broader than just a Republican set of colleagues; I hope my Democratic colleagues and my Republican colleagues—I hope all of us will insist that the Biden administration follow the law.

It used to be that Republicans and Democrats came together when an executive branch decision was made that intruded upon the legislative branches' lawmaking authority.

We need to get back to the days that, whether it is a Republican administration or a Democratic administration, if they are not following the law, they are not following what Congress has told them do, and we ought to all object. And we certainly ought to object to what the Biden administration is doing at the Department of Veterans Affairs to restrict the capabilities of people who are making choices—those who served our country who are making choices that this is in their best interest. And we don't need the Department overruling a choice about that decision.

I hope we will work together. I hope the Department of Veterans Affairs will change its ways. In the meantime, I am worried about veterans across Kansas and across the country whose decisions about their own well-being are undermined by those who decide something better is for them.

Let's let our veterans, who served our country, make a choice in consultation with their healthcare provider about what makes the most sense. Sometimes it is miles. Sometimes it is quality of care. But that choice, regardless, ought to be made by the veteran.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from North Dakota.

BIDEN ADMINISTRATION

Mr. HOEVEN. Madam President, today, I join my colleagues in outlining more than 3½ years of policy failures under President Biden, which are impacting families and businesses across the country every single day. From our economy to our Nation's security, Americans can feel the weight of this administration's decisions, leading to a higher cost of living and less safe communities—things that impact people every single day.

I will begin where individuals most frequently feel those impacts: their pocketbook. Biden's inflation is hurting every American, particularly low-income Americans. For example, Americans are paying more for energy because President Biden has sought to block or restrict access to our Nation's vast energy reserves.

On day one of his administration, President Biden blocked the Keystone

XL Pipeline and placed a moratorium on new oil and gas leases shortly thereafter.

Then, President Biden and congressional Democrats doubled down, passing a partisan tax-and-spend bill that included a new natural gas tax and higher fees and royalty rates on Federal energy production.

Just recently, the Interior Department's Bureau of Land Management finalized a new public lands rule, enabling radical environmental groups to lock away more of our energy reserves under a so-called conservation leasing plan. The BLM also finalized a new on-shore oil and gas rule and a new venting and flaring rule.

In my State of North Dakota, BLM is proposing to close off leasing on 45 percent of Federal oil and gas acreage and 95 percent of Federal coal acreage. BLM's failed stewardship of our energy resources extends to other States as well, including the blocking of new oil and gas production in the National Petroleum Reserve in Alaska.

Each of these actions are specifically designed to drive up the cost of energy production on Federal lands, and these costs are ultimately passed along to consumers. Today, Americans are paying 46 percent more for gasoline at the pump. And, at the same time, utility bills are also rising and outpacing inflation.

The Environmental Protection Agency's latest onslaught of new power sector regulations will require utilities to spend billions of dollars to comply with burdensome regulations or, worse, force the premature retirement of reliable, coal-fired baseload powerplants that our Nation needs.

Independent grid operators from across the country are warning that EPA's regulations will threaten reliability and increase the risk of blackouts and brownouts.

Americans can no longer afford to pay more for less reliable energy following 3½ years of President Biden's failed Green New Deal.

That is why we need to take the handcuffs off our energy producers and empower them to increase supply and bring down prices for hard-working American families.

Now, in addition to discussing President Biden's failures on inflation, the economy, and energy production, I want to, again, bring the crisis taking place at the southern border to everyone's attention.

We are nearly through fiscal year 2024, and the consequences of President Biden's failed border policies are becoming clearer every single day. The American people are seeing beyond the administration's false claims that the border is secure. Every day, there are new reports of horrific crimes being committed by individuals illegally in the United States, and these violent crimes continue to be perpetuated in every State.

Local and Federal law enforcement officials have confirmed that the Tren

de Aragua—I may not have said it just right, but this is a transnational criminal gang that originated in a Venezuelan prison. I am going to repeat that. A transnational criminal gang that originated in a Venezuelan prison is now present and operating in the United States. Think about that. Their activities in the United States include human and drug trafficking as well as assaults and the murder of police officers.

In addition, there is now an increased threat from dangerous elements illegally entering the United States who have direct ties to international terrorist organizations like ISIS. Just last month, ICE arrested eight Tajikistan nationals with potential ties to ISIS, who illegally crossed the southern border and have been living in the United States. Now, let that sink in for a minute.

At our port of entry and all along the border, we continue to see high numbers of individuals on the Terror Watchlist who are attempting to enter the United States. So far, in fiscal year 2024, we have seen 316 individuals attempt to enter the country.

FBI Director Wray said it himself:

We are seeing a wide array of very dangerous threats that emanate from the border.

The cause of these threats to our homeland is clear: President Biden's failure to secure the southern border. President Biden's failure to secure the southern border.

The American people suffer the consequences because the Biden administration refuses to enforce policies that protect our southern border. These policies were put in place by the Trump administration. They are the Migrant Protection Protocols, or "Remain in Mexico" policy; enforcing third safe country agreements; and resuming construction of the border wall.

The Biden administration must address this border crisis, enforce the laws that kept monthly encounters to the lower numbers that we saw under the Trump administration, and take border security very seriously, deadly seriously, because border security is national security.

Altogether, all these issues—whether it is safety, whether it is inflation—all of these things affect Americans across this entire country every single day. After nearly 4 years of policy failures, our country needs to get back on the right track: bring down inflation, strengthen our economy, and address the border and national security and safety in our communities. That is exactly what my colleagues and I are working every day to accomplish.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Texas.

Mr. CORNYN. Madam President, over the last 3½ years, President Biden's policies have unleashed a series of crises, one after another, and have thus made the lives of average Americans harder, not easier.

There is a security crisis at the border that my colleague from North Dakota talked about a moment ago—rising crime rates across our communities, some of which come from gang members who transit our southern border and then go on to commit crimes of violence against innocent Americans all across the country; the drugs that took the lives of 108,000 Americans last year alone; and then America's weakening role on the global stage.

I believe there is a reason why the threats that confront our country and world peace are at the greatest level they have been since World War II. It is because the tyrants, the autocrats, the dictators—the people like Vladimir Putin, President Xi in China, Kim Jong Un in North Korea, and the Supreme Leader in Iran—perceive weakness, and weakness for them is a provocation; it is an invitation for them to take action and threaten stability and peace.

President Biden's policies have made Americans' lives harder, not easier. Nowhere is that more evident than in the high prices that are clobbering family budgets. I know the occupant of 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue is doing just fine. He is not feeling the impact of higher prices at the gas pump, at the grocery store, in rent, and all across our economy. It doesn't affect him, and it doesn't affect many of us, but for people on a fixed income and people who are of lower income—seniors, retired individuals—it is degrading and undermining their standard of living and their quality of life.

Since President Biden took office 3½ years ago, consumer prices have risen on average 20 percent. That means a dollar that you spent on consumer products—whatever they may be—3½ years ago now only buys 80 cents' worth of value. That is a hard leap for many families to absorb, and for those living on fixed incomes or tight budgets, it is virtually impossible. Families are paying 21 percent more for groceries, 41 percent more for energy, and 54 percent more for gasoline. When you add in price hikes on clothing, car insurance, and even a visit to the dentist, you are looking at a mountain of expenses that cost more today than they did when President Biden took office.

America has experienced a 40-year high in inflation as a result of the reckless spending policies of the Biden administration's by throwing \$2.7 trillion of reckless partisan spending on the fire of inflation, making it much, much, much worse. Of course, then the Federal Reserve has to try to raise interest rates, which they have done, in order to dampen that fire, in order to put out the fire. But that doesn't erase the fact that American consumers—our constituents—have experienced a 20-percent increase in their cost of living across the board.

An average household in the State of Texas is spending more than \$1,000 a month more today than they did 3½ years ago. That is more than \$12,500 a year. Texans don't need that sort of

data, though, to know that their lives have been impacted negatively, because they have felt the impact themselves for 3½ long years. They have seen the effect of Biden's policies reflected in their bank accounts and on their credit card statements.

Credit card debt is at one of the highest levels it has been in all time. People who can't meet their monthly bills, if they have access to a credit card, may likely charge it and say, "Well, I am trying to get by today by borrowing on my credit card," but of course they end up having to pay that back as well at some point. Meanwhile, they are charged a lot of interest costs, which, again, increase their cost of living.

Many Americans have scrapped family vacations and have settled for more affordable, local activities. Sometimes it is a matter of convenience. Sometimes it is a matter of life or death, such as deciding whether to fill a prescription or pay your air-conditioning bill.

I can tell you, right now, in the wake of Hurricane Beryl, many Texans are without electricity and are experiencing 100-degree heat and 99-percent humidity.

Many Americans who can't afford to pay their utility bills are having to cut back on things like air-conditioning. Many people, during the heat of the summer, particularly vulnerable Americans and the elderly, are suffering as a result.

What is President Biden's response when you raise these criticisms? It is to say: Well, it is somebody else's fault. He tries to blame his predecessor for the sticker shock that Americans are experiencing on a daily basis.

A couple of months ago, President Biden claimed that inflation was at 9 percent when he took office. Now, that is not the only time that President Biden has misstated the facts. It might be a compelling point if it were actually true. When President Biden took office, inflation was only at 1.4 percent, and under his leadership, inflation has soared to a 40-year high of more than 9 percent.

Fortunately, thanks to the policies of the Federal Reserve, which are painful enough because they raise interest rates, which costs consumers more on the debt they owe on their vehicles or when they buy a house, inflation has slowed, but high prices remain.

President Biden's policies have sent prices through the roof, and that is where they have stayed. No matter what the level of inflation is currently, those high prices are cumulative, and with election day less than 5 months away, voters are asking themselves a very important question: Has my life gotten better or worse since President Biden took office?

Thanks to President Biden's policies, families are struggling to cover the costs of gasoline, groceries, rent, insurance, and just about everything else, and high interest rates, which are a result of the Federal Reserve's tight-

ening of access to credit, continue to make dreams like owning a home or opening a small business out of reach for many Americans.

As I said, Texans are now paying more than \$1,000 per month more thanks to President Biden's policies. If President Biden manages to win another term in the White House, I worry about how much higher my constituents' monthly bills will continue to climb.

I yield the floor.

VOTE ON WAGNER NOMINATION

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the question is, Will the Senate advise and consent to the Wagner nomination?

Mr. WHITEHOUSE. Madam President, I ask for the yeas and nays.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there a sufficient second?

There appears to be a sufficient second.

The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk called the roll.

Mr. DURBIN. I announce that the Senator from Massachusetts (Mr. MARKEY), the Senator from New Jersey (Mr. MENENDEZ), the Senator from Vermont (Mr. SANDERS), and the Senator from Arizona (Ms. SINEMA) are necessarily absent.

Mr. THUNE. The following Senators are necessarily absent: the Senator from Texas (Mr. CRUZ), the Senator from Oklahoma (Mr. MULLIN), the Senator from Utah (Mr. ROMNEY), and the Senator from Florida (Mr. SCOTT).

Further, if present and voting: the Senator from Florida (Mr. SCOTT) would have voted "nay."

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Ms. BALDWIN). Are there any other Senators in the Chamber desiring to vote?

The result was announced—yeas 55, nays 37, as follows:

[Rollcall Vote No. 210 Ex.]

YEAS—55

Baldwin	Hassan	Peters
Bennet	Hawley	Reed
Blumenthal	Heinrich	Rosen
Booker	Hickenlooper	Schatz
Brown	Hirono	Schumer
Butler	Kaine	Shaheen
Cantwell	Kelly	Smith
Capito	Kennedy	Stabenow
Cardin	King	Sullivan
Carper	Klobuchar	Tester
Casey	Lankford	Van Hollen
Collins	Lujan	Warner
Coons	Manchin	Warnock
Cortez Masto	Merkley	Warren
Cramer	Murkowski	Welch
Duckworth	Murphy	Whitehouse
Durbin	Murray	Wyden
Fetterman	Ossoff	
Gillibrand	Padilla	

NAYS—37

Barrasso	Graham	Risch
Blackburn	Grassley	Rounds
Boozman	Hagerty	Rubio
Braun	Hoeven	Schmitt
Britt	Hyde-Smith	Scott (SC)
Budd	Johnson	Thune
Cassidy	Lee	Tillis
Cornyn	Lummis	Tuberville
Cotton	Marshall	Vance
Crapo	McConnell	Wicker
Daines	Moran	Young
Ernst	Paul	
Fischer	Ricketts	