

Take Nancy Maldonado, unfortunately now a Federal judge on the Seventh Circuit. This is the judge infamous for letting her work pile up and blaming her clerks for lack of time management. It is particularly ironic that Senate Democrats chose to procrastinate on their most urgent responsibilities by confirming a nominee with a nearly unparalleled record of judicial procrastination.

Congress has real work in front of us, some of which really should be behind us by now—from the National Defense Authorization Act, to the farm bill, to annual appropriations.

Our colleagues on the Armed Services Committee reported the NDAA by an overwhelming bipartisan vote over a month ago, but so far, the Democratic leader hasn't come close to putting this must-pass authorizing legislation out here on the floor. Of course, urgent national security priorities won't fund themselves, either. The Senate hasn't cleared a Defense appropriations bill or any other government funding, for that matter. Well, at least the fiscal 2025 appropriations have been written. The farm bill that is supposed to help America's growers and producers succeed doesn't even exist yet. Apparently, it is just a twinkle in Chair STABENOW's eye.

The American people sent us here to do a job, and a show-vote summer can't hide the fact that Senate Democrats' majority isn't earning its keep.

VENEZUELA

Mr. President, on a different matter, as the Maduro regime continues its attempt to steal an election, the people of Venezuela are standing up forcefully against the predations of a hellish socialist dictatorship.

Across the country, working Venezuelans are protesting in the streets. They have torn down a statue of Maduro's socialist predecessor, Hugo Chavez. In at least one instance, security forces have removed their uniforms and refused to use force against the demonstrators.

The people of Venezuela are putting up an inspired resistance. Unfortunately, they are up against an authoritarian who will stop at nothing to retain his grip on power. After all, Maduro has learned from the worst—Moscow, Beijing, Tehran, Damascus, and Havana—and he has no shortage of useful idiots and fifth columns at his disposal.

Some of the same corners of social media that defended Bashar Assad, spun conspiracies about Ukraine, and demonized Israel are now laughably accusing the CIA—believe it or not—of masterminding Venezuela's unrest.

Meanwhile, supposedly mainstream media here in America are already hard at work whitewashing history. According to the New York Times, Venezuela's problem isn't the abject failure of socialism but the incursion of a supposed "brutal capitalism."

George Orwell would like a word.

Mr. President, the free world ought to have the courage to look evil in the face and call it what it actually is.

NATIONAL SECURITY

Mr. President, on another matter, I have said frequently that the single most important, immediate objective of the free world right now is Russian defeat in Ukraine—I mean that—but not just for its implications on transatlantic security or our own economy; not just because helping degrade a major adversary's military strength is in America's interests; not just because the defense of Ukraine has ignited significant new investments in hard power here at home and among our European allies; certainly not just because of what the outcome will say about how the free world values sovereignty—no. The world we live in doesn't reward thinking compartmentally. Security threats don't exist in vacuums. Our credibility is not divisible. Our adversaries are working more closely together to undermine the American-led order, and allowing one threat to fester makes every other one a taller order.

This week, the final report of the independent, bipartisan Commission on the National Defense Strategy underscored this reality.

[The] new alignment of nations opposed to U.S. interests creates a real risk, if not likelihood, that conflict anywhere could become a multi-theater or global war.

A multitheater war—the sort of conflict America is simply not prepared to fight.

Too many in Washington seem to think America can just opt out of facing such a challenge, but our enemies get a vote too. We owe it to our servicemembers and the American people to plan accordingly.

As the NDS Commission report lays out, we have a lot of work to do and not much time to do it.

The PRC's military is already leaving little room for doubt about Beijing's willingness to use hard power to coerce its neighbors and to test American power and Western resolve.

Last month, the PRC's naval forces launched a violent confrontation in disputed waters that Beijing clearly hopes to turn into a Chinese lake.

The Philippines—America's longtime treaty ally—has maintained a lawful presence in an area just 100 miles off their coast known as the Second Thomas Shoal for decades. Its sailors peacefully man a grounded ship on the shoal, and they count on regular shipments of supplies. But in recent months, these shipments have come under brazen attack. Chinese forces have rammed Philippine resupply vessels, harassed them with water cannons, injured Philippine sailors, destroyed their navigation equipment, towed them out to sea, and left them for dead.

Thankfully, the most acute aggression appears to have subsided for the moment, but a fundamental reality still remains: Just as Russia is using force to redraw European borders and reassert imperial ambitions, just as

Iran is using force to sow chaos and threaten international shipping, the People's Republic of China is engaged in a concerted effort to expand its control over maritime commerce well beyond its borders and build a pretext for wider war, and the first target of that conflict may well be America's longest standing treaty ally in the Indo-Pacific.

Our adversaries have struck up a "no-limits" partnership, and the challenges they present us are as complex as they are urgent. We don't get to make neat, tidy, either-or choices about which threats deserve our attention—not anymore.

The Senate was right to pass a national security supplemental to equip vulnerable partners with American weapons and invest in expanding our defense production capacity earlier this year. The Biden administration was right to start directing more rhetorical attention to the challenge facing our Philippine ally. But to the extent that the administration is serious about backing up its frequent assurances to the Philippines with actual support, it is high time to do more to help our allies and partners in the Indo-Pacific to reconfigure and strengthen their defenses against the PRC's maritime threat and to clear bureaucratic barriers so security assistance programs can move at the speed of relevance. More importantly, it is time for Congress and the administration to take our shared responsibility to provide for the common defense seriously.

So I will close today with another quote from the Coauthors of the bipartisan National Defense Strategy Commission. Here is what they said:

The Commission finds that the United States faces the most significant national security threats since the height of the Cold War, if not World War II. We are not prepared to meet those threats. The United States confronts the prospect of war against peer and near-peer adversaries simultaneously across multiple theaters—a war we could quite possibly lose.

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.

U.S. SUPREME COURT

Mr. THUNE. Mr. President, yesterday evening, in the tradition of another Democrat President and his infamous Court-packing scheme way back in 1937, President Biden announced a proposal to interfere with the Constitution's separation of powers and permanently politicize the Supreme Court. He dressed it up with appeals to permanent American values, but what it all boiled down to was this: Democrats don't like some of the Supreme Court's

recent decisions, and so they have decided to change the rules of the game. That is it.

I have disagreed with more than one Supreme Court decision in my time—I have disagreed with Supreme Court Justices nominated by Presidents of my own party—but I have never thought that my not agreeing with a Supreme Court decision meant that the Court itself was illegitimate or that my party should attempt to change the law to make over the Supreme Court in our image.

Well, not so for Democrats. The Supreme Court releases a handful of decisions the Democrats don't like, and they decide that the Court is illegitimate and that it is time to remake the Court to their liking. More than one Democrat has already introduced legislation in Congress to do just that.

And now, with the President's announcement yesterday, it has become clear that those plans have accelerated and that if Democrats take the White House and Congress in November, we can expect them to lose no time in destroying the Court as we know it.

While the President's proposals are troubling enough, with a measure to circumvent the Constitution's lifetime appointments for Justices and replace the Supreme Court's own code of conduct with a code of conduct mandated by Democrat Members of Congress, who knows—who knows if Democrats will stop there? After all, while their proposal would conveniently start by retiring Republican appointees, Democrats would only be able to retire one Justice every 2 years. What is to say that would be fast enough for Democrats?

We all know that Court-packing, which is expanding the Supreme Court until you get a sufficient number of Justices to endorse your policies, has gained significant traction in Democrat circles. Indeed, President Biden's term limits proposal is a version of Court-packing by another name, and it would not surprise me at all if Democrats didn't stop there, because—make no mistake—this is a slippery slope. Once you start interfering, there is no going back.

If the Democrats implement this plan, it is easy to see a future where each subsequent administration acts to “return balance” to the Supreme Court, with the result that the Supreme Court changes wildly from administration to administration, losing all independence and credibility and any resemblance to the Supreme Court as established by the Constitution.

I would like to remind my Democrat colleagues of what happened with the filibuster for judicial nominees here in the Senate. Back in 2013, Democrats, frustrated that they could not rubberstamp all of President Obama's appointees, abolished the filibuster for lower court nominees. It turned out to be a quick step from that to abolishing the filibuster for Supreme Court nominees a few years later, and I am pretty

sure that I have heard more than one of my Democrat colleagues express regret over that 2013 decision. But it seems that Democrats are resolved not to learn from history and are perfectly willing to sacrifice the long-term stability of the Supreme Court for their own short-term political gain.

Even worse than any specific element of President Biden's proposals yesterday is the incredibly dangerous precedent they would set for meddling in what is supposed to be a separate, independent branch of our government. If Democrats were really, really concerned about impartiality and the rule of law and promoting faith in the Supreme Court, the last thing they would be doing is interfering with the Court's makeup.

If there are any Democrats left in Congress who are willing to put the long-term health of our institutions over some temporary political gain, I urge them—I urge them—to join Republicans in opposing this power grab. 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. BLUMENTHAL. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

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

KIDS ONLINE SAFETY ACT

Mr. BLUMENTHAL. Mr. President, I come here today to talk briefly on the Kids Online Safety Act before the milestone, historic vote that we will take at about noon today.

For years—in fact, for decades—Congress has discussed and debated the need for reform and safeguards on the internet. We have held dozens of hearings, brought Mark Zuckerberg and every other Big Tech CEO to our committees, and there has been broad agreement: Something needs to be done. We need rules, safeguards. Despite countless polls showing public bipartisan demand for legislation, nothing has happened, nothing.

Senator BLACKBURN and I began working on our subcommittee when we held legislative investigations on kids' online safety. Throughout that process, we began to meet with parents who have lost their children because of social media's harms from bullying, fentanyl, sex exploitation, and other horrific harms.

As a parent of four children and Senator BLACKBURN also as a parent, we felt deeply the grief, but we admired the grit and the grace of those parents who came to us and demanded action.

I am haunted by one of the moms who said to us early on, I think speaking on behalf of so many of them and us:

When will you stop them from killing people? When will you stop them from killing our children?

Voting today, the U.S. Senate is finally taking action on Big Tech.

At its core, the Kids Online Safety Act is a simple, straightforward measure. It gives young people and parents the tools and safeguards to take back control over their online lives. It gives them that measure of power. It empowers them. It enables them to make choices about what they want to see and hear on the internet rather than the algorithms that drive content—often repetitive, addictive content—about bullying and eating disorders that contributes to the destruction of their lives.

There are three key principles in this legislation: accountability, safeguards, and transparency.

First, social media platforms will be bound by a duty of care, legally required to exercise reasonable care to prevent their products from causing self-harm, suicide, eating disorders, substance abuse, and other harmful impacts.

The duty of care is flexible because we wanted to keep up with the changes in technology and to be able to be fairly applied to companies with widely different sizes, business models, and products.

We recognize the obligations on Instagram or YouTube should be different from those for a startup and that social media platforms are different from video games.

Second, social media platforms will have to provide young people safeguards and set them to the strongest settings by default.

Finally, social media companies will no longer be able to hide harm. This legislation will require yearly independent audits and access to data. Researchers, Congress, and parents all will be able to hold those companies truly accountable.

Importantly, this bill stops Big Tech from avoiding their legal obligations to protect children. We do that through the knowledge standard in the bill.

The bill ensures that if Meta or Google know or should know that a user is a teen or a child, they need to provide them the safeguards under this legislation. Where the platforms have information indicating that they are kids, they need to act and protect them—no more sticking their heads in the sand, no more excuses, no more platitudes that disguise inaction and irresponsibility.

In short, we want kids to have more of the good that comes from the internet without the bad. There are a lot of positives. Kids experience it, but there is some really scary, toxic stuff that kids also experience. And they have told us again and again and again they want to make choices. They don't want the algorithms to do it for them. That is why we have empowered them to make those choices. We are not blocking or censoring content for them. We are simply creating an environment that is safe by design.

At its core, this bill is a product design bill. All my career, I have tried to protect consumers against defective