

likelihood that a conflict with one would expand to multiple fronts, causing simultaneous demands on U.S. and ally resources.

It is a sobering assessment with some urgent recommendations to go along with it. The question now is what we are willing to do about it.

Congress has a constitutional duty to provide for the common defense. We have a responsibility to align resources with our requirements and our strategy to provide funding adequate to ensure American military superiority.

Unfortunately, this is work Congress must do without help from this administration. And as one Commissioner, Roger Zakheim, has observed, President Biden's 2022 NDS mentioned neither "budget," "funding," nor "dollar."

But after a week back in Washington, Congress is no closer to delivering full-year top-line defense spending than we were back on August 1. The critical increases Vice Chair COLLINS secured over the President's anemic budget request are no closer to becoming law, neither is the National Defense Authorization Act, which the Democratic leader has yet to schedule for floor time.

So it is one thing to request expert analysis; it would be quite another to do the urgent work that analysis rightly prescribes.

PRESCRIPTION DRUG COSTS

Mr. President, on another matter, one of the few details Vice President HARRIS has shared about her governing agenda is a pledge to implement price controls at the grocery store to end so-called price-gouging.

The eerie echoes of Marxist propaganda in that talking point have already attracted attention. But we don't have to dig too far back in the history books to find an example that she may be drawing from.

The Biden-Harris administration itself has used similar language to describe another socialist-inspired price control scheme: the one to combat supposed price-gouging in the market for lifesaving pharmaceutical treatments.

And so far, prescription drug socialism is not working out too well. According to a recent study, nearly 3.5 million beneficiaries are expected to pay higher—higher—out-of-pocket costs as a result of the administration's proposed scheme.

But that hasn't stopped them. Last month, the administration released the maximum fair price for the first 10 medicines selected for its coercive negotiation program. Of course, when you dig into the details, the scheme sounds less like a negotiation than a shake-down.

If the dictated maximum fair price is not feasible, drugmakers have two choices: They can pay an exorbitant excise fee or they can withdraw entirely from participating in Medicaid and Medicare.

Now, remember, the real losers from this misguided policy are the vulner-

able patients who are left with fewer lifesaving cures.

Roche and AstraZeneca have indicated that they will be discontinuing certain drug trials or considering delaying launching cancer medications due to the financial penalties from the Inflation Reduction Act, and yet Biden and HARRIS seem largely unbothered.

Last month, President Biden went on the road to celebrate the results of the Cancer Moonshot Initiative, an accomplishment I was proud to partner with him on. But he hasn't reckoned with estimates that the Inflation Reduction Act could eliminate nine times the amount of funding for cancer research that the Cancer Moonshot created.

Let me say that again.

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Vice President HARRIS, similarly blinded to the consequences of her work, has recently bragged about her role in passing the Inflation Reduction Act.

I can't imagine that Americans facing rare disease diagnoses are as proud of that record as she is.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The majority whip.

SOCIAL SECURITY PROGRAM

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, there was a time not that long ago when families had a similar challenge across America: what to do with mom and dad. At that time, there wasn't much to turn to. If you were fortunate, your parents, during the course of their lifetime, saved up enough money to take care of themselves.

But in my family and many others, it was common to have that spare bedroom for grandma and grandpa because there was no place else to go. It was part of American family life. It caused some hardship. The kids had to double up in the bedrooms, and some of the activities in the family were limited. But you did it because you loved them and they needed help and they couldn't take care of themselves.

In 1939, that started to change. A President named Franklin Delano Roosevelt thought, It is time for us to give some relief to these families, to give dignity to seniors in their retirement years. And he created a program called Social Security—now one of the most popular programs in the United States.

You don't hear many candidates for President standing up and saying, "I am going to cut Social Security benefits," do you? It is worshiped and venerated and respected and followed by families across America. But the critics in the creation of Social Security called it socialism. Socialism: Too much government, leave us alone; let mom and dad live in that spare bedroom; don't give them a separate savings account they can accumulate during their lifetime. If they do it, fine. If they don't, fine too. Socialism.

Fast forward to the 1960s. Now we have a new concern: How are we going

to pay for the healthcare of seniors now that they are living longer because of Social Security? What are we going to do about it?

There was a concern in Washington that the cost of medical care—surgeries and treatment—was just too expensive for the average person. And so President Lyndon Baines Johnson created Medicare. Medicare was a health insurance program for senior citizens across America.

When it started, it ushered in a dramatic change in healthcare in America. The construction of hospitals started expanding their pace across this country. Medicare made a big difference.

What did they say about it in criticizing it? Socialism: Too much government trying to provide healthcare for senior citizens. Of course, Medicaid came on its heels, as well, to take care of low-income individuals facing the same challenge.

"Socialism"—we hear that time and again. This morning, the Republican Senate leader criticized efforts to lower pharmacy drug costs across America. He called it prescription drug socialism. Here we go again. Any effort to help the average family who is trying to get by and trying to make ends meet that involves the government is criticized as socialism. The argument was made by the Republican leader that this socialism, this lowering of prescription drug prices, is ultimately going to stifle research and competition. He failed to mention one or two things.

First, he failed to mention that virtually every single prescription drug that is now making a difference across America started with government research. The National Institutes of Health—the premier medical research Agency in the world—did the basic research for virtually every single one of these drugs. As much as I admire the private sector—and I do—and as much as I wish the pharmaceutical industry well, the fact is, if they are honest about it, they are simply bargaining with the government that helped them get started to find profitable products.

The second thing I want to note that the Republican leader did not mention this morning is that, for decades now, we have allowed the Veterans Health Administration to negotiate drug prices. In other words, what we are now doing in Medicare, we have been doing for veterans. Our theory was our veterans deserve the best, and we have got to be able to afford it as a government, and they have to be able to afford it as individuals. So we negotiated these drug prices. I didn't hear any screaming and hollering about helping our veterans, because it was the right thing to do.

Doing that for veterans is virtually the same thing that is happening in other countries. Why are exactly the same drugs that are made in the United States sold in Canada for a fraction of the cost? Because the Canadian

Government negotiated—just like the Veterans Health Administration in the United States—for reasonable prices for Canadian citizens. Now we are doing the same thing. Finally, after decades of promise, it is happening. This notion that the top 10 drugs under Medicare are now going to be negotiated so that we can bring prices within reach of the government and individuals is simply an extension of what we have been doing at the VA for years. I have to tell you it makes a difference, a serious difference.

Imagine that the Biden-Harris proposal not only allows for negotiating prices down to a reasonable level for Medicare, but it also says that you in Medicare are limited to a \$2,000 annual expenditure for prescription drugs. And \$2,000 is a lot of money. Don't get me wrong. For a lot of people, it is a hardship to come up with that kind of money, but it is within the reach for most Americans to pay that amount of money. We know that drugs, otherwise, are too darned expensive for them.

Now, the critics of that, like the Senator from Kentucky, this morning, call it socialism. I call it the American approach to helping families—a realistic approach that says that pharmaceutical drugs should be affordable. If I understood the position of the Kentucky Senator this morning, he thinks it is a big mistake. I think it is a breakthrough. Finally, we are going to reach the day when we can negotiate prices for those not in Medicare who will be helped as well. So I wanted to start my remarks with that.

VENEZUELA

Mr. President, in 2018, 6 years ago, I visited Venezuela—a once prosperous, albeit imperfect, democracy suffering terrible economic and political decline.

As we drove around the streets of Caracas, the person from the Embassy in the car said: Take a look at something you might not notice. Notice the belts that the people of Caracas are wearing, particularly the men, and notice how long the end of the belt is and how many notches they have put in the belt. The people are starving in this country because of the government of Nicolas Maduro.

I told President Maduro at a meeting during that visit that the upcoming election, which was just months away, would only be credible if it was monitored and honest. He went ahead with the discredited election anyway. The result was as predicted: an exodus of millions of desperate people fleeing repression and economic collapse.

A few weeks ago, Venezuela held another Presidential election in which the regime had arbitrarily blocked key opposition candidates from the ballot and had tried to undermine the preelectoral process. This is an indication of what activities are going on. Venezuelan opposition candidate Edmundo Gonzalez eventually left the country, even though it was pretty clear from the results that we were able to glean from the Venezuelan elec-

tion that he was the winner. Ten million Venezuelans peacefully had voted. Results that were meticulously documented by credible monitors showed an overall win for this opposition candidate. Despite this, the Maduro regime refused to release the results and announced that they had won instead. It arbitrarily arrested thousands of opposition supporters and issued an outrageous warrant for the arrest of Gonzalez, forcing him to leave the country.

Enough of this madness. Enough of this outright theft of the Venezuelan voters' overwhelming choice for a better future. This week, I have introduced a simple 2-page bill terminating all U.S. petroleum cooperation and related trade with Venezuela until the legitimate results of the election are respected. I also filed it as an amendment to the annual Defense authorization bill.

The entrenched regime clings to power using oil revenues dependent on U.S. involvement. Under my bill, that is going to end and so will Maduro's financial strength. It is simply that simple. Are we going to do business as usual with a dictator who ignores the results of a freely held election?

I also appealed to our democratic allies in the region, including the democracies of the Caribbean, to stand resolute in the defense of a sweeping and clear vote by the Venezuelan people. They cannot sit idly by for another 6 years amidst regime-inflicted suffering and economic collapse in Venezuela. Our neighbors in Venezuela deserve better.

JUDICIAL CONFIRMATIONS

Mr. President, on a separate topic, over the past 3 years, something profound has happened on the floor of the Senate. We have been building on the most important accomplishments of the Biden-Harris administration: the confirmations of highly qualified, independent, even-handed judges to the Federal bench.

To date, we have confirmed 208 judges to lifetime positions on the Federal judiciary during my time as chairman of the Senate Judiciary Committee over the last 3½ years. This is progress. We have stayed on pace with the number of judges confirmed during the Trump administration, even though we have had the longest evenly divided Senate in history. We now only have a narrow majority of 51 to 49.

These confirmations highlight the Senate Judiciary Committee's and Biden-Harris administration's commitment to filling vacancies with highly qualified, diverse candidates who will ensure the fair administration of justice. This is a historic slate of judges we have approved who will rule with reason and restraint. They respect the rule of law, adhere to precedent, and answer only to the Constitution.

I have served on the Senate Judiciary Committee for more than two decades, including as chair for the past 3½ years. During that time, I have evaluated and voted on more than 1,000 judi-

cial nominees. The record is clear: President Biden's nominees to the Federal bench represent the best. Every single one—every single one—of the President's 208 judges so far has received at least a “qualified” rating from the American Bar Association, an indication that their peers found them to be high in integrity, professional competence, and judicial temperament.

Something that also stands out about President Biden's nominees, aside from their exceptional qualifications, is the professional and demographic diversity they bring. We have made history on the Senate Judiciary Committee and in the Senate in confirming more Black women to the Federal circuit courts than all of the previous Presidents of the United States combined. Of course, we have confirmed the first-ever Black woman to serve on the Supreme Court, Justice Ketanji Brown Jackson.

With Hispanic Heritage Month beginning this weekend, I would like to celebrate the historic nature of the Hispanic and Latino judges whom President Biden has nominated and we have approved. Just this week, we confirmed Jeannette Vargas to the Southern District of New York. During the Biden administration, the Senate has confirmed 37 Hispanic judges, more than any other President in history. President Biden also has appointed historic firsts to the bench, including the first-ever Hispanic judge to sit on the DC Circuit and the first Latina to sit on the Fifth. In my home State, Judge Nancy Maldonado became Illinois' first Latina Federal judge and, more recently, the first-ever Hispanic judge to serve on the Seventh Circuit.

Beyond this demographic diversity, there is recordbreaking professional diversity. In the past 3 years, we have confirmed more public defenders and circuit judges than all prior Presidents combined. There is nothing wrong with a former prosecutor being a Federal judge. I have voted for dozens of them, and I am sure they are competent in doing a good job. But if we want balance on the bench, we should make sure that we have diversity in professional background.

Another notable aspect of this record is that the vast majority—nearly 90 percent—of the Federal judges approved during the Biden administration have been bipartisan. This includes three-quarters of the appellate nominees. I want to thank my several Republican colleagues who have joined us in good faith to make this happen.

This focus on qualified, consensus nominees will go a long way to restoring trust in the judiciary. The American people want judges who look like America and understand the American experience in all of its forms. We will continue elevating judges who are qualified, principled, and committed—above all—to faithfully following the Constitution. The American people deserve nothing less.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.