

It is great news, not only for this generation but for future generations, whose kids and grandkids will want to live in Upstate New York.

SENATE BUSINESS

Mr. President, on Senate business, we will continue the work of confirming more nominations this week. Last night, I filed cloture on the nominations of Lauren McFerran and Joshua Ditelberg to sit on the NLRB, the National Labor Relations Board.

Ms. McFerran is a current member of the NLRB, but her term will expire soon, unless she is reconfirmed for another 5 years.

The Senate will take the first votes to advance these NLRB nominees on Wednesday. If you truly care about working families, then you should be in favor of advancing the NLRB nominees. The NLRB is essential for protecting workers' rights so employees can speak up for better pay, stronger protections, and the right to organize without retaliation.

If we are worried about income inequality and too much of a gap between working people and those who are very, very wealthy, the NLRB is a great, great way to deal with that problem because, again, it strengthens the worker's hand.

So anyone who says they stand with working Americans should care immensely about getting these NLRB nominees done.

NOMINATIONS

Mr. President, on Senator RUBIO, on the topic of nominees, today, I will later sit down with the President-elect's nominee for Secretary of State, our longtime colleague Senator MARCO RUBIO. I have known Senator RUBIO for many years and have worked with him on many issues. So I expect we will have a good and productive conversation.

I look forward to giving him the same fair chance to make his case that all nominees, regardless of party, deserve.

DISASTER RELIEF

Mr. President, on disaster aid, in 2024, at least 24 major disasters have battered communities across the United States, killing—killing—over 400 Americans, costing over \$60 billion in damages. The true cost is certainly higher. These disasters and disasters of recent years have left the Federal Government's emergency resources all but depleted.

So, for the last month, I have worked with my colleagues to try and get a comprehensive disaster aid package done before the end of the year. I believe we must try as much as possible to get it done, and we on the Democratic side have been persistent in getting as many dollars as possible to help both blue and red States affected by the disasters.

I remain hopeful and determined that we can reach a deal with our Republican counterparts, but the only way we are going to get a disaster package

done is with a serious show of bipartisan cooperation. That is how the CRs work. Disaster aid is not a Democratic or Republican issue whatsoever. Mother Nature comes for us all, as we have seen in every part of the country, time and time again.

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

Mr. President, on artificial intelligence, for more than a year, I have worked relentlessly with Senators on both sides of the aisle to find a way forward on strong bipartisan AI legislation. I created a bipartisan working group with Senators HEINRICH, BROWN, and YOUNG. With the help of many of our chairs and ranking members, we created a never-before-seen, bipartisan AI Insight Forum—many forums, nine of them—to bring top experts from across the country.

Democrats and Republicans also worked together on writing bills, and through hard work, we came to significant compromises that would have led to meaningful AI legislation and kept America No. 1 on AI, both in keeping innovation our North Star, but making sure there were safeguards so that the worst could not happen.

In fact, Speaker JOHNSON and I agreed that all our committees should keep working together to figure out a way to get AI legislation done before the end of the year. We were feeling quite good about that until, unfortunately, the November elections occurred, and following those elections, Senate Republicans chose to walk away from the bipartisan negotiations, abandoning over a year of good-faith hard work.

This is deeply unfortunate because, if we want America to remain the technological leader of the 21st Century, we can't turn a blind eye to the changes AI will bring, nor can we let AI become a partisan issue. That is why I will never walk away from AI talks. I remain committed to working with both sides to make AI a top priority here in the Senate.

As I said, Speaker Johnson and I have had productive talks on AI for months, and I am glad to say we are still having those talks with the hope of finding opportunities for action in the future. It is not going to be easy. It isn't. It is a difficult issue, but we have some opportunities to move the ball forward on AI next year.

I know that many of my Republican colleagues here in this Chamber are just as committed as I am to finish the job. There are two Senators I would like to thank in particular on the Republican side, Senators YOUNG and ROUNDS, who have been excellent bipartisan partners with Senator HEINRICH and myself for over a year. I thank them for their hard work. I thank their staffs for their hard work and tell them we must keep going. We can't let a handful of us on this Senate Republican side stop us from moving forward on AI.

Again, no matter how difficult it may be, my commitment to Members

in both Chambers remains steadfast. I will work with anyone, regardless of party, to get meaningful, sustainable, and transformational AI done—transformational because of what AI could do to cure heart disease, to educate young people around the globe, to deal with our climate crisis; and sustainable so that we have guardrails that prevent AI if some bad force, whether it is a country or a rogue group, get hold of it. We would prevent them from doing bad things and keep AI sustainable.

We must get both done. Our outline and our work are a good step in that direction. We must continue to move forward.

TRIBUTE TO BENJAMIN L. CARDIN

Mr. President, finally, saying goodbye to Senator BEN CARDIN. Today, one of the most beloved Members of our caucus and this Chamber, and a very near and dear friend of mine, will deliver his farewell address on the floor: Senator CARDIN. Everyone knows BEN. He is humble and modest, and I expect his speech will reflect that. But make no mistake about it. BEN's legacy is giant, and he has left an indelible mark on this institution, on his home State of Maryland, and on America.

Now, it is no surprise that BEN and I became so close—and, frankly, our wives, Iris and Myrna, have become very close friends—because we are cut from the same cloth. We both began our careers in the State assembly before coming to Congress.

BEN, I believe, stayed—he was elected when he was 23 years old, as I was, to the assembly. And we both have strong Jewish values. We are both known for showing up to any event, big or small. We both married up. And another thing, we took great inspiration from our fathers.

When BEN was just 23 years old and a newly elected member of the Maryland House of Delegates, his father told him something that BEN still draws upon to this day:

He had something people worked for a lifetime for . . . the opportunity to make a difference.

BEN has made an immense difference in Maryland, whether you are enjoying the beautiful views of the Chesapeake Bay, which BEN has fought so ardently to restore, protect, and conserve; or riding the many roads and bridges and trails and rails across Maryland that BEN helped secure billions in Federal funding for; or talking to the millions of Marylanders who today have access to better health and dental care and the promise of a secure retirement because of BEN's efforts. BEN has been a difference maker.

As chair of the Foreign Relations Committee, he has made a huge difference on human rights and foreign policy. When I asked BEN last year to serve as chair, I knew he would be up to the task, and he sure was. Despite the many challenges facing America at home and abroad, BEN is one of the reasons that America has the power today to hold accountable the gross violators

of human rights, even when their home countries fail to act.

He worked closely with Senator John McCain on this and the Magnitsky Act, and so many ramifications of what was done to Magnitsky inspired BEN, and he moved forward on legislation in that regard.

As chair of Small Business, he made a difference for Main Street businesses, especially in the pandemic. I worked closely with BEN to make sure small businesses would get the money that they needed. Because of his leadership, the small business economy—and we worked together to get nonprofits, when I said our churches and our synagogues and our mosques and our theaters and our museums needed help as well, BEN joined me, and they were saved.

And he made a difference on many other issues, coleading legislation to affirm the ratification of the ERA, the Equal Rights Amendment; serving as cochair of the Helsinki Commission; and more.

The reason BEN was able to accomplish so much was because he took the road less traveled here in Congress, oftentimes. He put substance over flash. He delved deeply into issues, got to their roots, and then worked across the aisle.

He was all about details: What was the problem? Who was it affecting? Who can I find common ground with? Those are questions he asked.

That has been him from his first day in office, and it will be him until his last—smart, decent, humble, loyal, hard-working; a great man, a great Senator, and a great friend.

We will miss him deeply. But Iris and I continue every year—Myrna and BEN would come up to New York, and we would go to see Shakespeare in the Park. We did it for the last 10 years or so. BEN and Myrna, that tradition will continue, as will our friendship, but we will miss you.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The clerk will call the roll.

The assistant bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. MCCONNELL. 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.

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

The Republican leader is recognized.

NLRB

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, on January 20, 2021, President Biden broke with longstanding precedent and fired the general counsel of the National Labor Relations Board. I guess if you campaign on establishing “the most pro-union administration in American history,” then replacing duly appointed officials with Big Labor acolytes is certainly a day one priority. As we know, this was an area where the President really did do his level best to make good on his campaign promises.

Setting aside his Acting Secretary of Labor’s record presiding over perhaps the biggest state UI fraud in American history, President Biden’s NLRB has worked overtime to pollute employer-employee relations across the country with vague new standards, distort longstanding free speech principles, and wage all-out war on small business franchisers.

The NLRB member who has held primary responsibility for executing on the Biden Big Labor agenda is its Chair, Lauren McFerran, and she is up for confirmation to another term.

If the Board’s public actions over the last 4 years are not telling enough, I would urge our colleagues to consider the gross mismanagement on Ms. McFerran’s watch that took an independent inspector general report to uncover—serious violations of electoral procedures and coverup attempts, to boot. This is to say nothing of the fact that her confirmation would give a lameduck President control of an independent Board well into his successor’s term.

In this case, there are any number of reasons not to reward bad behavior, and whichever our colleagues choose, I hope they will join me in opposing the McFerran nomination tomorrow.

FEDERAL JUDICIARY

Mr. President, on another matter, regarding the Federal judiciary, its membership, its independence, and its ethics, I have often found myself at increasingly stark odds with many of my Democratic colleagues. It is unfortunate, but I don’t intend to stop policing the separation of powers any sooner than the left stops trying to undermine it.

But over the last year, one corner of the judiciary’s operation where the Senate rightly holds sway has become the site of rare bipartisan agreement, and that is Federal courts’ capacity to hear and decide cases in a timely manner.

Across the country, Federal district courts’ case backlogs are preventing them from rendering swift justice. This past spring, the judiciary’s own data recorded a 1-year uptick in civil filings before district courts of 22 percent.

The solution to this clear challenge—more district judgeships—has earned wide support. In April, the senior Senator from Indiana introduced legislation that would steadily apportion larger benches to districts across the country over the next decade.

In August, the JUDGES Act passed the Senate by unanimous consent, proving that the right to a speedy trial still enjoys overwhelming popularity. I was particularly encouraged by the vocal endorsement of my friend the Democratic leader, who recognized the measure as a “very responsible, bipartisan, and prudent bill” that would lead to “a better functioning judiciary.” Soon, we expect to House to take up and pass the JUDGES Act with similar overwhelming support.

Normally, we could rest assured that such popular action would be signed

into law without further ado, but maybe not this time. Last week, the White House seemed to suggest, through anonymous comment, that President Biden had concerns with the bill. I, for one, would be curious to hear the President’s rationale. It is hard to imagine a justification for blocking the JUDGES Act that doesn’t smack of naked partisanship. It is almost inconceivable that a lameduck President would consider vetoing such an obviously prudential step for any reason other than selfish spite.

Litigants across America deserve their day in court, and they deserve to know the Federal judiciary has the bandwidth to carefully and thoroughly consider their cases. The President—a former chairman of the Senate Judiciary Committee—is well-equipped to appreciate this fact, and I hope he acts accordingly.

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.

BORDER SECURITY

Mr. THUNE. Mr. President, 10 million. Between official U.S. Customs and Border Protection encounters and known “got-aways,” there have been roughly 10 million migrant encounters at our southern border during the Biden-Harris administration.

To put that number in perspective, that is roughly 10 times the population of my home State of South Dakota. Ten million is larger than the population of Colorado. It is larger than the population of Tennessee. It is larger than the population of Maryland, of Massachusetts, of Indiana. I could keep going. Ten million is larger than the population of the vast majority of U.S. States.

Needless to say, a crisis of this size has had consequences. Shelters have been overwhelmed. Border cities have been overwhelmed. Blue cities far from the border have been overwhelmed. Border Patrol agents are exhausted, as their Chief noted in an interview last week.

I haven’t even mentioned the national security implications. There is no question that the chaos at our southern border represents a serious security risk for our country. And you don’t have to take my word for it. The Department of Homeland Security’s 2025 threat assessment notes:

Over the next year, we expect some individuals with terrorism ties and some criminal actors will continue their efforts to exploit migration flows and the complex border security environment to enter the United States.

That is from the Biden Department of Homeland Security’s 2025 threat assessment.