

to close regional VA offices and keep our veterans who served us—many of whom risked their lives for us—waiting in line to get the benefits they are entitled to? How would it be good for the country to furlough food inspectors to ensure that the groceries we buy don't make us sick, or delay new applicants for military retirement benefits?

These are just a few of the things that will happen if we shut down next week. When the hard right says they want a shutdown, they are saying they want these things—VA closures, no food inspections, delayed military benefits, and so much more. This shows you that the hard right is not serious about governing. The only tactic in their playbook is to try and bully the rest of Congress and the country to bend to their extremist views.

But here is the incontrovertible truth. The White House is controlled by a Democrat. The Senate has a Democratic majority. And the Republican majority in the House is about as narrow as it can get. So it takes compromise to get anything done in these conditions of divided government. The top-line agreement we reached last week has borne that out. And I am hopeful that reasonable Members, on both sides of the aisle, in both Chambers, are ready to work together to ensure a government shutdown is avoided.

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

Mr. President, now, on artificial intelligence, as we begin the new year, one of the Senate's top priorities will be to legislate on artificial intelligence.

Mr. President, 2023 was a year to remember in the world of AI, with the popularization of technologies like generative AI. It is impossible to predict what 2024 will bring. So we must act and act quickly to ensure that the United States keeps leading the way.

Thankfully, thanks to our bipartisan AI Insight Forums and the leadership of our committees, the Senate has come very far in understanding how AI works and what we should do. We have listened to experts in tech, labor, business, academia, civil rights, and more.

We have discussed everything, from AI's impacts on democracy, on our workforce, on national security, and the thorny but important technical issues like transparency, explainability, bias, and more.

AI, for sure, will be one of the most difficult issues that the Senate has ever faced. But if there has been any consensus so far in these forums, it is that Congress must intervene to promote safe AI innovation.

So AI is going to be a big focus for many Senators this year. My colleagues in the bipartisan AI gang—Senators BROWN and YOUNG and HEINRICH—agree that the Senate will work in tandem with the regular order committee process, using findings and insights that our AI Insight Forums have uncovered. Our committees have already done great work, and I thank all the

chairs and ranking members for their continued leadership.

And I want to emphasize, underline, underscore that our work on AI remains wholly bipartisan. Both sides recognize the need to get something done on AI. So I thank my colleagues on both sides for their work on AI, and I look forward to making more progress on this very difficult issue in the months to come.

NEW YORK

Mr. President, now, on bad weather, across my home State of New York, thousands of our friends and neighbors are just having their power restored after enduring the first major storm of 2024. We have seen heavy rain, coastal flooding, and hurricane force winds across much of Upstate New York.

While communities are just beginning on the road to recovery, we must remain vigilant. Weather reports already show more snow and wind storms are expected this upcoming weekend that could hit communities just as they are starting to recover and rebuild. Senator GILLIBRAND and I have sent a "stand ready" letter to FEMA, urging them to stand ready to provide New York the support it needs if requested.

I will continue to work with the Governor and local officials to ensure New York communities have the tools they need to recover from this storm.

MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR., DAY

Mr. President, finally, on M.L.K. Day, this Monday, America will celebrate a national holiday in honor of the great Martin Luther King, Jr. It is a great holiday, and I was proud as a Congressman to be one of those leaders in helping to pass this legislation. And you would be surprised at some of the bigotry we heard when we tried to do it.

But just one point today, when you think about it, this is the only Federal holiday named for one person. We have Mother's Day for the mothers and Father's Day for the fathers and Veterans Day for the veterans and Independence Day for our Founding Fathers and Mothers, but only one day for one man. And the reason for that is simple: Dr. King was unique.

And, I like to say, he hoisted a giant mirror on his shoulders, and with his eloquence, with his brilliance, and with his faith, he forced America to look into that mirror, and America didn't like what it saw. And that began our slow march to racial equality, on which we are still trodding and still have a long way to go.

But I think every American should be saluting one of the greatest Americans who ever lived, Martin Luther King, Jr., and I look forward to joining with many of my friends in New York to celebrate and commemorate this holiday.

I yield the floor.

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Republican leader is recognized.

NATIONAL SECURITY

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, as I noted earlier this week, the Senate's first major business of the year is addressing a historic array of national security challenges. For the first time since 1945, there is a land war in Europe. A Russian imperialist is deploying North Korean and Iranian weapons in his assault on Ukraine, with additional support from the People's Republic of China.

After the deadliest day for Jews since the Holocaust, there is a land war in the Middle East. Iran, the world's most active state sponsor of terror, is living up to its title, underwriting multiprong aggression against Israel, brazen attacks on U.S. personnel in Iraq and Syria, and a growing war on the global commerce in the Red Sea.

And just today—just today—Iran itself has reportedly hijacked an international oil shipment on the high seas, a further reminder that the Biden administration's failure to impose serious costs and restore credible deterrence is emboldening Tehran.

Our single greatest strategic adversary is supporting this worldwide challenge to the West, interfering more aggressively with peaceful neighbors and investing relentlessly in the capabilities to outcompete us.

Meanwhile, record-setting illegal arrivals have rendered America's own southwest border functionally nonexistent.

This is the most serious crisis of America's credibility in decades, and I don't use the word "crisis" lightly. It implies that a situation requires urgent action.

Of course, that is exactly why the Biden administration spent years twisting itself in knots to avoid acknowledging the record-shattering humanitarian and security crisis that unfolded on their watch and because of their policies at the southern border. Remember how the White House engaged in damage control back in 2021 when the President himself slipped up and called the situation facing CBP and ICE a crisis. It was a big deal because a crisis is something that requires action.

Well, right now, the Senate is very close to an opportunity to finally do something meaningful to address the Biden administration's border crisis. Thanks to our colleague Senator LANKFORD, we are inching closer to a chance to restore sanity, commonsense enforcement mechanisms, and the rule of law. Our colleague's efforts are the foundation of supplemental legislation to address each of the glaring national security challenges that we face: securing America's sovereign borders, investing heavily in American leadership and strength, and equipping America's military with critical capabilities and expanding our defense industrial capacity to deter threats from major adversaries like China. These requirements go hand in hand, and the world is watching to see whether we are willing to meet them.

With an arsenal stocked by North Korea and Iran, Russia, literally, mocks Western hesitation. With brazen terrorist aggression, Iran defies American strength. With intense focus, China bets against America's resolve.

So none of the challenges we face from our southern border to the Red Sea get any easier the longer we wait to address them. Unfortunately, our own allies and adversaries alike have every reason to doubt us. Three years of this administration's hesitation, self-deterrence, and half measures have exacted a steep price. So our work this month is the clearest possible test of America's credibility as a global superpower, as the leader of allies, and as the nation capable of upholding our own sovereignty. The Senate simply must not fail this test.

CRIME

Mr. President, on a different subject, residents of blue cities across America likely began the new year with the simple wish for the Democrats charged with keeping them safe, that this year would be the year they finally get serious about addressing violent crime. Unfortunately, if our Nation's Capital is any indication, 2024 is already off to a bleak—a bleak—start. Just 3 days into the year, the city has recorded 53 car thefts; one week in, there have been at least 125 carjackings and 44 robberies; and one of the year's first homicide cases involved a body found in a trash can within sight of the Capitol Building.

Unsurprisingly, violent crime in the new year is already following familiar patterns. To the surprise of absolutely no one involved, the perpetrator of a drug store robbery last week was the same man who had attempted to rob a single establishment six times—six times—last year. A six-time offender was still on the streets to try again.

Washington's radical local government has lost the plot. The city's leaders aren't just failing to get rampant crime under control, they are actively making matters worse. Less than 4 years ago in a fit of woke righteousness, the city cut police funding by \$15 million. Two years ago, prosecutors decided to prosecute two-thirds of the criminals officers brought in.

And if catch-and-release wasn't enough, MPD officers are still subject to bizarre do-not-pursue orders that prevent them from doing their jobs. No wonder the department is suffering a recruiting crisis—and at the exact time that law enforcement is needed the most.

So I am sorry to say that the list of local disgraces doesn't end there. Late last year, the city's Mayor announced a program to fight the epidemic of carjackings in Washington by distributing free tracking devices for residents' valuables. Apparently, even if you can't expect the police to hunt them down, at least residents of our Nation's Capital can watch them—watch them—as they escape.

The American people deserve to walk the streets of their Capital City without fear. They deserve leaders who care

more about safety than about keeping up with the far left's new soft-on-crime orthodoxies.

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.

CONGRATULATING THE SOUTH DAKOTA STATE UNIVERSITY JACKRABBITS ON WINNING THE 2024 NATIONAL COLLEGIATE ATHLETIC ASSOCIATION DIVISION I FOOTBALL CHAMPIONSHIP SUBDIVISION TITLE

Mr. THUNE. Mr. President, winter in South Dakota can be tough going, but no matter how low the temperatures go or how high the snowbanks rise, you can count on South Dakota sports fans coming out to support local athletes. After all, there are games, tournaments, and trophies on the line this time of the year. For sports fans like me, there is no better place to be than on the sidelines cheering for South Dakota's athletes.

This year, we have not been disappointed. On Sunday, the South Dakota State University football team won its second consecutive national title. That is right—the Jackrabbits are back-to-back FCS champions.

This Jacks team has a lot of talent and an awful lot to be proud of. Sunday's win closed out SDSU's first undefeated season as a Division I program. They now boast a 29-game winning streak—the third longest in FCS history.

Their defense was impenetrable this season, allowing an average of just 9.27 points per game and allowing just 15 points to be scored against them in four postseason games. I want you to think about that. When you get into the postseason, these are the playoffs. These are the best teams. In the four postseason games that they played, including the national title game, they gave up a total—total—of just 15 points.

I think that record of accomplishment this year was perhaps best personified in the title game, when Montana was driving the ball in the first quarter down in SDSU territory, and they had a fourth and goal at the 1-yard line, and the SDSU defense made a stand. In an iconic play, linebacker Adam Bock stopped the Montana ball carrier at the 1-yard line, stood him up, and took him down before the ball could cross the end zone and give them a touchdown. The Jacks got the ball back, and from then, it was on to a 23-to-3 victory.

Jacks quarterback Mark Gronowski won the Walter Payton Award for outstanding offensive player—the first SDSU player to win this award—and I don't believe there was a close second. He was richly deserving of it. Gus Mil-

ler, center, from Brookings, SD, won the Rimington Award for best FCS center—also incredibly well-deserved.

As one reporter put it, "This team is just dynamite." I couldn't agree more. Their hard work and commitment to each other and to the team has brought them success this year, and Jacks nation is incredibly proud of them.

I want to congratulate the Jackrabbits players, coaches, and staff on this incredible championship season. There is much to celebrate now, but I am sure Coach Rogers will soon have the team working hard again to keep that winning streak going.

Mr. President, at this point, I want to recognize the South Dakota State University Jackrabbits football team by entering a resolution into the CONGRESSIONAL RECORD.

I would ask, as in legislative session, unanimous consent the Senate proceed to the consideration of S. Res. 519, which is at the desk.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The clerk will report.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

A resolution (S. Res. 519) congratulating the South Dakota State University Jackrabbits on winning the 2024 National Collegiate Athletic Association Division I Football Championship Subdivision title.

There being no objection, the Senate proceeded to consider the resolution.

Mr. THUNE. I ask unanimous consent that the resolution be agreed to, the preamble be agreed to, and the motions to reconsider be considered made and laid upon the table with no intervening action or debate.

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

The resolution (S. Res. 519) was agreed to.

The preamble was agreed to.

(The resolution, with its preamble, is printed in today's RECORD under "Submitted Resolutions.")

EXECUTIVE CALENDAR—Continued

SOUTH DAKOTA

Mr. THUNE. Mr. President, as I said, it is not just football championships keeping South Dakota sports fans busy this time of the year. There is just as much excitement—sometimes even more—at a Friday night basketball game in towns across our State.

Over the holidays, I was able to get around South Dakota for some of those games. I caught up with Coach Phillips and the Northern State University basketball team last week. I brought my grandkids to see the Sioux Falls Jefferson girls take on the O'Gorman Knights girls for some Friday night hoops. I went to a girls hoops matchup between the Faulkton Trojans and Highmore-Harrold Pirates. I got to see some of the Hoop City Classic at the Corn Palace in Mitchell, SD, and Saturday was able to see a cross-State matchup between the boys teams from