

LEGISLATIVE SESSION

Mr. SCHUMER. Madam President, I move to proceed to legislative session.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The question is on agreeing to the motion.

The motion was agreed to.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

EXECUTIVE CALENDAR

Mr. SCHUMER. I move to proceed to executive session to consider Calendar No. 469.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The question is on agreeing to the motion.

The motion was agreed to.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The clerk will report the nomination.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read the nomination of Melissa Damian, of Florida, to be United States District Judge for the Southern District of Florida.

CLOTURE MOTION

Mr. SCHUMER. I send a cloture motion to the desk.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The cloture motion having been presented under rule XXII, the Chair directs the clerk to read the motion.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

CLOTURE MOTION

We, the undersigned Senators, in accordance with the provisions of rule XXII of the Standing Rules of the Senate, do hereby move to bring to a close debate on the nomination of Executive Calendar No. 469, Melissa Damian, of Florida, to be United States District Judge for the Southern District of Florida.

Charles E. Schumer, Richard J. Durbin, Brian Schatz, Mazie Hirono, Tina Smith, Gary C. Peters, Amy Klobuchar, Raphael G. Warnock, Catherine Cortez Masto, Alex Padilla, Mark R. Warner, Tim Kaine, Sheldon Whitehouse, Martin Heinrich, Christopher A. Coons, Margaret Wood Hassan, Peter Welch.

LEGISLATIVE SESSION

Mr. SCHUMER. Madam President, I move to proceed to legislative session.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The question is on agreeing to the motion.

The motion was agreed to.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

EXECUTIVE CALENDAR

Mr. SCHUMER. I move to proceed to executive session to consider Calendar No. 514.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The question is on agreeing to the motion.

The motion was agreed to.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The clerk will report the nomination.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read the nomination of Marjorie A. Rollinson, of Virginia, to be Chief Counsel for the Internal Revenue Service and an Assistant General Counsel in the Department of the Treasury.

CLOTURE MOTION

Mr. SCHUMER. I send a cloture motion to the desk.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The cloture motion having been presented under rule XXII, the Chair directs the clerk to read the motion.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

CLOTURE MOTION

We, the undersigned Senators, in accordance with the provisions of rule XXII of the Standing Rules of the Senate, do hereby move to bring to a close debate on the nomination of Executive Calendar No. 514, Marjorie A. Rollinson, of Virginia, to be Chief Counsel for the Internal Revenue Service and an Assistant General Counsel in the Department of the Treasury.

Charles E. Schumer, Ron Wyden, Alex Padilla, John W. Hickenlooper, Christopher A. Coons, Tim Kaine, Catherine Cortez Masto, Christopher Murphy, Jack Reed, Margaret Wood Hassan, Thomas R. Carper, Michael F. Bennet, Maria Cantwell, Richard Blumenthal, Peter Welch, Sheldon Whitehouse, Chris Van Hollen.

Mr. SCHUMER. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the mandatory quorum calls for the cloture motions filed today, February 26, be waived.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. SCHUMER. I yield the floor.

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

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

GOVERNMENT FUNDING

Mr. MCCONNELL. Madam President, as Congress returns to Washington this week, the deadline to avoid a partial lapse in government funding is fast approaching.

Without action by Friday, the country would face needless disruptions to agriculture, transportation, military construction, and essential services at the VA.

So I will say at the outset what I have said every time Congress has faced this threat: Shutting down the government is harmful to the country. And it never produces positive outcomes—on policy or politics.

What is more, a shutdown this week is entirely avoidable. The Senate passed full-year appropriations for each of these important areas 4 months ago, and our House colleagues have produced full-year legislation of their own. We have the means and just enough time this week to avoid a shutdown and to make serious headway on annual appropriations. But as always, the task at hand will require that everyone rows in the same direction: toward clean appropriations and away from poison pills.

Needless to say, millions of Americans will be watching carefully to see

whether and how Congress fulfills its responsibilities this week.

American farmers and ranchers, like the Kentuckians visiting Washington this week, expect us to take the challenges they face in feeding our Nation seriously. Veterans who swore to protect and defend expect us to keep our promises to care for them when they return home. In the coming days, we will need to do just that.

BIDENOMICS

Now, Madam President, on another matter, since President Biden took office, consumer prices have risen 17.9 percent. On his watch, our economy has seen inflation grow at its fastest rate in four decades. As prices soared, wages failed to keep up. Paychecks have risen just 14.5 percent. In other words, the Biden economy has effectively imposed a pay cut across the board.

The effects of Washington Democrats' reckless spending have forced working families to do more with less. As the American people struggle to make ends meet, they are carrying record-high credit card debt—34 percent more than they were just 3 years ago.

Polls continue to report that the country isn't very bullish on the prospects of undoing the Biden administration's damage anytime soon. By one recent survey, fewer than 3 in 10 Americans rate today's economic conditions positively, and barely 1 in 4 expects things to improve over the coming year. So this President's economy is leaving workers feeling suffocated.

The effects of historic inflation are inescapable. Even after paying the rent or the mortgage and footing steep utility bills, families still have to put food on the table in the face of a food price surge that is making the wrong sort of history. Since January 2021, nationwide grocery costs have increased 21 percent. The cost of dining out has increased nearly the same. By the USDA's own figures, grocery budgets are now taking up a larger share of disposable incomes than at any point since 1991.

As one woman in suburban Chicago recently told reporters, her family's food costs alone were rising faster than their incomes. Surveys indicate that fully 94 percent of Americans share her concerns about the prices of food and other consumer goods.

This is the Biden economy. This is Bidenomics in action. Bizarrely, this is what the Biden administration has decided to spin as a roaring success. Both the White House and the President's reelection campaign continue to insist he is proud of his economic record. Imagine telling anyone who will listen that today's economy has you and your family in a bind, only for the President of the United States to declare a job well done.

Don't get me wrong—the Biden administration is quite keen to assign blame for our economic hardships. They are just looking everywhere but

in the mirror. On Super Bowl Sunday and in the middle of the worst food budget crisis in a generation, the President himself cut an ad, warning that the real problem in American families' pantries was bags of potato chips with fewer chips inside. President Biden calls shrinkflation a rip-off, but the American people know the real rip-off is the historic inflation that has shrunk their paychecks and forced them to make tough choices about tomorrow and get through today. In fact, they say so repeatedly. The only question at this point is when Washington Democrats will start listening.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The senior Senator from Illinois.

SOUTH AFRICA

Mr. DURBIN. Madam President, over the recess that just concluded, I had a chance to visit South Africa for an Aspen Institute conference to discuss the future of that continent. With so much of the world's attention on Ukraine, as it should be, and the Middle East, as it should be, we often forget the importance of this dynamic and challenging African continent, with nearly one out of five of the world's population—a percentage that will increase greatly this century.

There were so many different aspects we discussed and so many different opportunities. The thing that I came away with was the clear understanding—the Chinese understand this, as they see a future in Africa that we don't see, and they are investing dramatically in Africa's future—that if the United States and other Western nations ignore this reality, the Africa of tomorrow will be a lot different than the one today and may not be our friend as we want them to be.

During my time in Congress, I have tried to advance several efforts to foster more engagement in Africa, including support for funding to address AIDS, tuberculosis, and malaria through the Global Fund and PEPFAR, as well as mobility programs and clean water and sanitation. In fact, Chicago-based World Bicycle Relief is helping lead some of the most innovative mobility programs that help get kids to school and healthcare workers to visit rural, remote areas.

I didn't agree with President George W. Bush on many things, but I want to give him credit for making the United States a leader in stemming the HIV/AIDS pandemic in some of the poorest parts of the world, including Africa.

It was just over 20 years ago that nearly 30 million Africans were infected with HIV/AIDS—30 million. They had almost no access to treatment. President George W. Bush's response was known as PEPFAR, the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief. It worked. PEPFAR and its companion effort, the Global Fund, dramatically curtailed the AIDS epidemic ravaging many parts of the world, including much of Africa, saving more than 25 million lives. These programs provide retroviral drugs for

those with AIDS, allowing them to live productive lives and to prevent the spread of disease through childbirth.

Some might have forgotten just how devastating AIDS hit many parts of the world, killing more than 2 million people globally each year and leaving 14 million orphans in Sub-Saharan Africa. I was reminded on my trip just how devastating AIDS was to southern Africa. Take Malawi, where the PEPFAR and Global Fund programs have increased the number of Malawians living with AIDS, on treatment, from 5 percent to 95 percent—survivors.

So it is bewildering to me—I can't understand this—how we are presently engaged in a political debate on Capitol Hill as to whether PEPFAR is a good program. Extremists are arguing that we shouldn't reauthorize this historic, lifesaving program when people are still dependent on these drugs to survive from day to day and week to week.

Last year, President Bush—junior in this situation—wrote an op-ed, urging PEPFAR reauthorization, in the Washington Post in which he quoted his late speechwriter and PEPFAR champion, Michael Gerson, as follows:

What definition of pro-life does not include saving millions of lives from preventable disease and death?

Bush went on to note:

We are on the verge of ending the HIV/AIDS epidemic. To abandon our commitment now would forfeit two decades of unimaginable progress and raise further questions about the worth of America's word.

I agree.

I call on my Republican friends to help authorize this historic, bipartisan, lifesaving effort without further delay.

SUPPLEMENTAL FUNDING

Madam President, on a different topic, just before our recent recess, the Senate overwhelmingly passed a bipartisan aid package, notably to help Ukraine defend itself against Russia.

Ukraine has fought a heroic, historic, significant battle to defend its independence and democracy, thwarting a full-scale Russian invasion 2 years ago and showing the world how you stand up to a bully like Vladimir Putin. In fact, its resistance to Russia has major security impacts and benefits for our larger Western security.

But as everyone in Congress knows, Ukraine urgently needs more weapons and assistance, and needs it now. Our European allies approved their aid earlier this month, but despite European and U.S. Senate support, many almost unbelievable events have occurred over the past few weeks that endanger Ukrainians' chance of success and global security.

Closest to home, the House of Representatives has remained passive, detached, and silent for the past 2 weeks on the Senate-passed national security supplemental bill, with its leadership subservient to Donald Trump, who in turn is just enamored—a real bromance—with Vladimir Putin.

Last week, true to form, former President Trump went so far as to even say he would encourage Russia to attack fellow NATO members. Can you imagine anyone responsibly making that suggestion? I can't.

Furthermore, on the global stage, public reports have suggested that Putin is thinking of putting some kind of nuclear weapon in space. For all those who want to embrace Putin as part of our future, look at the reality of the situation in Ukraine and in outer space.

Amidst all of this, Russian opposition leader Alexey Navalny died in a Russian gulag prison just before a sham election in which Putin is afraid of any real competition. In response to this tragedy, Trump sank to a new low, shamefully comparing Navalny's death to his own self-inflicted legal problems.

Is there anyone who doesn't see that Putin is gloating at this perceived impunity and relishing in his congressional apologists?

Why in the world would we play into Donald Trump's delusions? Why would Trump-beholden Republicans fawn over Putin, a wanted war criminal responsible for kidnapping—kidnapping—20,000 Ukrainian children and taking them into Russia—a stunning number that is likely to go higher?

Or imagine the scene shared by my colleague from Hawaii, that of Ukrainian soldiers on the frontlines checking their phones to see whether House Republicans passed our Ukraine aid package. They were watching our votes on the floor of the U.S. Senate while they were risking their lives in the battle against Putin. These soldiers are fighting with their lives for democracy and security in Europe, while House Republicans do nothing.

It is time for the House Republicans to pass this urgently needed aid package without further delay.

(The remarks of Mr. DURBIN pertaining to the introduction of S. 3804 are printed in today's RECORD under "Statements on Introduced Bills and Joint Resolutions.")

Mr. DURBIN. 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. CASEY. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Ms. BUTLER). Without objection, it is so ordered.

BLACK HISTORY MONTH

Mr. CASEY. Madam President, I am honored to rise today on the last couple of days of Black History Month to talk about a program we have had since 2007 in our office. This is a time for us to reflect, in our State, upon the Black Pennsylvanians who have led our communities in years past and who continue to honor us with the trailblazing work that they do throughout their communities.