One day, I hope the barrier-breakers of today will be closer to the norm of tomorrow. We want more women to sit on our courts, especially the Supreme Court. We need more people of color, more public defenders, more civil rights lawyers, more children of immigrants to sit on our courts to reflect the broad diversity that America is and will continue to be. In fact, it will continue to grow.

The more Americans look at our courts and see people who look like them and come from the same backgrounds and share similar experiences, the better off our justice system and our democracy shall be. And nowhere else is this more important than the Supreme Court.

So I applaud the President's commitment to choosing a qualified and historic nominee, and the Senate stands ready to work quickly to confirm President Biden's pick when we get it.

ECONOMIC GROWTH

Mr. President, on economics and economic wins, at the beginning of last year, the CBO projected that the U.S. economy would reach a growth rate of about 3.5 percent by the end of 2021. The International Monetary Fund had a rosier outlook. They said economic growth could be closer to 4 percent. The Federal Open Market Committee was perhaps the most optimistic, forecasting a growth rate of about 4.3 percent.

They were all wrong. The U.S. economy shattered most expectations and grew at the amazing rate of 5.7 percent, the strongest rate since the time of Ronald Reagan. This was no accident, far from it. Last year's historic turnaround is a reminder that the right leadership in government matters. Democrats promised in 2020 to fix Donald Trump's utter mismanagement of the COVID crisis and get our country back on track. And, a year later, after securing the strongest growth rate in decades, Democrats are delivering on that promise.

After Congress passed the American Rescue Plan, I said: ''Help is on the way.'' And that help is getting America back on a path to normal. Though we are still learning to live with the virus, our economy, our communities, and our schools are better off because of vaccines, because of testing, and because of targeted legislation we passed last year, like the RESTAURANTS Act and Save Our Stages.

I want to stress an important point that is forgotten too often. We are finally seeing wages go up at a significant rate. That is dollars in the working people's pockets.

For decades, economists have decried the lack of wage growth in America. It has been reported that from 2000 to 2020, if you were in the bottom 75 percent of Americans—the majority—your wage growth was not real at all. In other words, costs ate up all of the wage growth, and the wage growth was paltry, in many years: 0 percent, 1 percent, declining in some. Lack of wage growth has been the scourge of our economy for so long, as it affects average working folks, closing off opportunities for millions of hard-working people who have worked harder and harder only to see their lives deteriorate.

Now we are finally seeing signs that wages are going up, and that is going to stay for years to come. This is real progress for working families. As we keep fighting to lower costs, we Democrats are going to do everything we can to see that this large wage growth remains and continues, and that will mean better lives for the American people.

We know the work is not done. We know we must keep working to help Americans lower costs so they can better afford the basics, from healthcare and prescription drugs to daily essentials like groceries, to the costs of higher education. Addressing these issues remains our focus.

We also must address strained and broken supply chains. Later this week, the House will take up the long-awaited USICA bill by passing a companion, the America COMPETES Act. I have been working very hard to make sure that this happens. Once conferenced, this legislation would bring manufacturing back to America instead of sending jobs overseas. This bill will say: ''Buy America''; keep the jobs here.

We saw what just happened in Ohio in the advent: thousands and thousands of new jobs in manufacturing. So this legislation is going to bring manufacturing back to America, bring jobs over here, good-paying jobs back here.

It would strengthen domestic supply chains and, thus, reduce our costs and, in particular, help our country address its semiconductor shortage, a driver of rising costs in so many different things, from cars to cell phones to everything.

Finally, all this is a reminder of what Democrats at our core stand for: building ladders of opportunity for working Americans to get to the middle class and provide stability to those already in the middle class so they can stay there and thrive. And wages going up is a large part of that. And this administration's record on wage increases, we haven't seen in decades.

We still have more work to do to bring our country out of the rubble of COVID so that we can look confidently into the future. But the growth of last year showed we are well on our way, and Democrats will keep working to help working people—working families, middle-class families, poorer families trying to get to the middle class—have the kind of prosperity and help they need and deserve.

BUSINESS BEFORE THE SENATE

Mr. President, Senate business: approps and on nominations. On a separate matter, we Senate Democrats will continue to work with our Republican and House counterparts on the vital task of passing an omnibus package to fund the Federal Government, avoid a shutdown, and ensure government effectively serves the American people.

This morning, I will meet with Democratic appropriators to discuss the state of negotiations as we work toward the omnibus. I will be meeting with Speaker PELOSI in that meeting, as well. Later today, the four-corners appropriators—Chairman LEAHY, Ranking Member SHELBY, Chairwoman DELAURO, and Ranking Member GRANGER—will also meet to continue their talks. We need to have an omnibus to fund the government. That is the goal we are working toward, and I want to thank my colleagues for their diligence and their leadership.

Separately, of course, today the Senate will continue confirming the President's highly qualified nominees. Because of a growing backlog of noncontroversial nominees, which a small handful of Republicans continue to obstruct, I filed cloture 2 weeks ago to move forward on 20 individuals. Today, we will have votes on three of these nominees. We are prepared to work late into the evenings this week to get these nominees confirmed without further delay.

Confirming these nominees is a top priority for the Senate this week. They will serve on our Federal judiciary, advance America's diplomatic and economic interests, and work to strengthen our national security. The vast majority of these men and women were reported out of committee with strong bipartisan support and normally would pass through this Chamber with consent, without a lengthy process. Instead, because of a handle of obstructionist Republicans, the Senate will take the necessary votes to confirm these nominees.

Every President deserves to staff their team with the individuals that the President sees fit, and we in the Senate will keep working to make sure President Biden has his nominees confirmed so they can carry out their mission serving the American people.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

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

The 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.

THE ECONOMY

Mr. MCCONNELL. Working Americans and their families are being hammered by the worst inflation in 40 years, and Washington Democrats own it. Sometimes it can be difficult to directly connect Washington policies to the downstream effects on our families. Sometimes it can be tricky to identify cause and effect. But not this time—not in this case.

The pain that families are feeling today was not just foreseeable, it was