President of Ukraine, will address a joint session of Congress using the remote technology. We are all in awe of his courage and leadership, and we are anxious to hear his message, to think of what that man has achieved by staying on the scene, regularly broadcasting videos to show that he was still there. He inspires his people to get up and fight for Ukraine.

Our message to him on that day is ''Slava Ukraini!''—that is, ''Glory to Ukraine.'' And it is a phrase that was actually banished during Soviet times because it was so nationalistic that the Soviets didn't want the people of that country using it. They use it proudly today because they are an independent, free, and democratic nation.

America stands with Ukraine in its fight for democracy and civilization. I just hope that we will learn many lessons from this. Don't many of the things which we were arguing about in America seem so trivial in comparison to what we are talking about in Ukraine: truckers coming to protest social distancing and masks and vaccine mandates? I am sure those are important issues, but they pale in comparison to the life-and-death struggle which is going on in Ukraine.

These people understand that they must be ready to stand and die for their freedom. How many of us could rise to that level if challenged? It is something I think about a lot.

AMERICAN RESCUE PLAN

Madam President, on another topic, 2 years ago—March 13, 2020—President Trump officially declared COVID a national emergency in America. We all remember the dark and uncertain days in the early spring of 2020. Overnight, schools, offices, and businesses closed their doors and opened their Zooms.

Today is also an important anniversary in America's recovery. One year ago today—1 year ago—Democrats in Congress passed the American Rescue Plan, our comprehensive plan to help American families, hospitals, and small businesses weather the economic hardship of the pandemic and to distribute vaccines and medical equipment so that we could get the pandemic behind us and return to normal life in America.

The pandemic has affected everybody: Republicans, Democrats, and people who don't care at all about politics. Sadly, however, the American Rescue Plan only passed with Democratic votes. Not a single Republican would vote for it, in the House or in the Senate.

And it worked. We were right. It was needed. The U.S. economy has recovered faster and stronger from this pandemic than any other G–7 nation in the world. America's economy added more than 6 million new jobs in the year since we passed the American Rescue Plan. That is a record.

Part of the reason our economy is strong today is because that plan made wise decisions that helped families, helped businesses, and helped communities through the worst time when the pandemic forced businesses and schools to close. The American Rescue Plan provided a critical lifeline to low-income families, stabilized middle-class families by providing enhanced child tax credits, and expanded unemployment insurance and housing relief. That plan also closed the holes to provide help for families with children, expanding the earned income tax credit and child tax credit.

In particular, the enhanced child tax credit gave working families a chance to breathe. They used it to buy the basics—groceries, diapers—pay the utility bills, pay the rent, pay the mortgage. Some of us just take that all for granted. For many people, it is a paycheck-to-paycheck challenge. Some families actually finally paid down their debts. Others put a few dollars away for the next emergency.

Now, they are feeling squeezed again, those same families. That doesn't mean we were mistaken when we passed the American Rescue Plan. It means we have more to do to lower the cost of living for families across the United States. This should be done on a bipartisan basis.

Inflation is a global problem, not simply an American problem. It is a reflection of the world labor market and a global supply chain basically disrupted by a pandemic and still in the process of recovery.

Now, we have made a decision as a nation to ban imports of Russian oil. Seventy-nine percent of the American people support that decision, even though they understand that it will drive up the price of gasoline. They don't want their hard-earned American dollars paying for Vladimir Putin's war, killing the innocent people of Ukraine. I salute them for their courage in joining our Nation together in that effort to stop it.

Yes, it will add more to the price of oil. It already has over the last week or two because of Putin's invasion, but we have got to face a reality. To stop the killing and death in Ukraine, we have to be prepared to make some sacrifice.

Inflation is a real problem. We need real solutions, not just complaints.

TRIBUTE TO DR. NGOZI EZIKE

Madam President, my remaining statement is a tribute to an extraordinary individual, a lady who is a doctor and was the head of the Illinois Department of Public Health during the worst part of the pandemic.

Her name is Dr. Ngozi Ezike. I saw her on TV every day when I was back home during the pandemic, and she was such an inspiring person, so talented. She was calm. She was wise. She was compassionate. And she was professional. She really made life bearable during an unbearable time. She saved lives.

A Harvard-trained, board-certified internist and pediatrician, she worked at all levels of public health. For the last 3 years, she has been our State's top doctor. She had been in that post for a little over a year when COVID hit. We were lucky she was there.

Directors of State health departments usually work outside the public spotlight. She was in the spotlight every day. Appearing with Governor JB Pritzker in his daily briefings, she was the public face of Illinois' effort to contain the virus and save lives. What a reassuring presence. She dispensed daily doses of compassion and empathy along with the facts and statistics, the realities, pleas for mask wearing and handwashing. She delivered her message calmly, clearly, and then, without missing a beat, delivered it again in Spanish.

Her sincerity was obvious and never more so than at a news conference about 7 months into the pandemic when she broke down as she was delivering the day's grim statistics. She paused to regain her composure and then urged Illinois residents to fight the fatigue and keep doing what is needed to protect themselves and each other from the virus. After seeing that on television, I wrote her a fan letter, and many others did too. She really cared.

Two weeks ago, she was at another news conference with the Governor. With the number of Illinois residents hospitalized with COVID below 1,000 for 3 days for the first time since last August, the Governor said it was time to lift our mask mandate, time to move toward normal life in Illinois.

Dr. Ezike surprised everybody by announcing that she was going to return to normal life herself; she was leaving her position. In announcing her decision, she thanked her husband and four kids ''for tolerating the absences, the last-minute changes in plans, the endless multitasking and the ever-present cellphones.'' And she added:

Now it's time—

She said to her family—

to make you my priority and give back a portion of the encouragement and support that you have lavished on me.

She thanked the people of Illinois ''for their sacrifices'' and asked we continue to show each other compassion and tolerance. She remembered the nearly 33,000 people in our State who have died of COVID since the beginning, and she said:

All of the people and all of their stories, I will carry always in my heart.

And she said:

I'm so blessed to have been able to bring some measure of comfort to Illinoisans, to quiet some of the chaos and to infuse some calm.

Dr. Ezike, I would say that the blessing was ours.

As the first Black woman ever to head the Illinois Department of Public Health in its 143-year history, Dr. Ezike added that she was also ''glad that I served as a role model to young girls, girls of color, little Black girls, that they can be leaders in any field.''

In addition to shepherding our State through the worst COVID crisis, I am