

Last week, hundreds of employees at the National Nuclear Security Administration were fired without warning. This week, the administration is scrambling to try to hire most of them back because they didn't realize they oversee our nuclear stockpile.

The Department of Energy fired more than 1,000 employees, including three-quarters of the State and Community Energy Programs Office. Now, I don't know if the people who are making these decisions in the administration even know what that office does, but I can tell you that in New Hampshire, we depend on them because they help keep weatherization programs up and running, and they support emergency operations in the wake of disasters.

With folks in New Hampshire dealing with some of the highest home heating costs and worried about how they are going to keep themselves warm this winter and States around the country still recovering from floods and fires and winter storms, I can't imagine why anybody would think that it is a good idea to get rid of the people who are helping make sure those programs operate.

Then on Monday, we found out that dozens of USDA employees—the Department of Agriculture—who have been working to prevent bird flu were fired, and then the White House realized what they had done. They panicked, and they tried to bring them back. Now, that is on top of all of the people around the globe who have been monitoring the bird flu potential epidemic who have already been fired with the closure of the U.S. Agency for International Development.

Just this afternoon, we heard that nearly 500 employees at the National Institute of Standards and Technology would be fired, including almost 60 percent of the CHIPS Office. So the effort that we stood up—that this Congress stood up—to try to make sure we could compete with China, with Taiwan in the production of semiconductors, which are included in almost everything we use, from our cell phones to our refrigerators, to our cars—60 percent of those people are now gone. So who is going to provide that effort we need in order to compete with China? These are the staff that make sure our high-tech semiconductor manufacturing industry stays competitive.

Example after example shows that the firings that Elon Musk has taken credit for have not been thought through. Either he is doing it deliberately in an effort to undermine the United States or he is doing it because he is so ignorant, he has no idea what any of these people do or what the operations do. Either way, it is inexcusable.

I heard from a constituent this week who worked for the New Hampshire Fish and Game Department for 24 years, and she just took a job as a wildlife biologist with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service last year. Her job focused on implementing the Pittman-

Robertson Wildlife Restoration Act. As my colleagues on both sides of the aisle know, this involves conserving bird and wildlife habitat, hunter education, and shooting ranges. Its funds come not from taxpayer dollars but from excise taxes on firearms, ammunition, and archery equipment. Yet her job was terminated under the guise of government efficiency.

She has a mortgage. She has kids in college who need healthcare coverage. But her main ask to me was to help put a stop to these firings and to simply help her get her job back because, like most of our public servants, she cares about the mission of her work.

Over and over, we are seeing this administration take out irresponsible, reckless initiatives, with devastating consequences for critical positions, without taking a second to think through or learn about what those positions do. When things inevitably break as a result, they don't own up to their mistakes. Instead, they try to convince you that keeping the lights on at control towers or inspecting airplane engines, making plans to manage some of the busiest airspace in the country really isn't critical to your safety. Well, I don't believe that, and I don't think you should either.

For the sake of the American people, we can and we must do better.

I don't think people elected Donald Trump to dismantle this country's air traffic control system. I think they elected him because they wanted to see inflation go down, they wanted to see their grocery prices reduced, they wanted to see help with rental costs, with mortgage rates, with energy costs. What have we seen in the weeks since Donald Trump got inaugurated? No effort to address any of those things. All we have seen is an effort at retribution against his perceived enemies, at firing and undermining services and programs within the government that serve the American people.

For the sake of our citizens, we must do better. I am calling on this administration to right this wrong as quickly as possible before it is too late.

I yield the floor.

THE PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Vermont.

DEPARTMENT OF GOVERNMENT EFFICIENCY

MR. WELCH. Mr. President, I would like to speak about the importance of FEMA, the importance of fixing it but not destroying it. Mother Nature, this week, provided yet another reminder of the devastating impacts of natural disasters.

In Kentucky, we had catastrophic flooding that inundated communities and led to thousands of evacuations. At least 14 are dead, and all of us, our hearts break for the people of eastern Kentucky. To my colleagues from the Commonwealth, I offer all of my support in getting the aid that you need to help recover.

That is the same commitment I have offered to our colleagues in Hawaii, North Carolina, California, and Flor-

ida, and it is also the commitment many of my colleagues made to me and Senator SANDERS after Vermont's devastating floods in July of 2023 and 2024.

What we know in Vermont is the disasters that have afflicted us all over the country, they don't care whom you voted for. They don't respect county or State lines. They are indiscriminate and unpredictable, and the storm metes out its suffering in a bipartisan way. There is no escaping it, but we need FEMA. That is what we learned in Vermont.

When the storm arrived, FEMA was there. In the immediate aftermath when people had seen literally their homes swept down a river, when the crops and farms had been destroyed, when businesses were ruined, FEMA was there to help in the immediate aftermath.

But we also experienced something that I have heard from my colleagues in FEMA-related situations, and that is that in the longer term recovery, you run into the frustration of a distant bureaucracy that can't make quick turnaround decisions and such things as granular as whether you can install a 24-inch culvert instead of a 16-inch culvert.

That is why the reform we need is focused on empowering local communities to have much more decision-making and implementation authority in executing the recovery that takes, oftentimes, well over a year or 2 years.

You simply can't have that done by folks not in the community. Those folks in the community are totally invested in getting their community back on its feet, helping its businesses, helping the folks who lost their homes, and helping the farmers who lost their crops.

So the reform that we need in FEMA is definitely there, and we can do that and must do it together because any of these natural disasters are going to come our way at some point, regardless of which side of the aisle you represent.

It is one of the reasons I am absolutely so concerned about what is happening at FEMA now. There has been a DOGE invasion. I use that explicitly. What does Elon Musk know about the suffering in these communities? Where does he get the authority—where does he get the callousness to say FEMA should be destroyed? Something, by the way, the President himself has said.

When I think about all the folks in Vermont, all the folks now in Kentucky, all the folks in California from the fires, Hawaii and the fires, to be told that the response of the Federal Government, when a catastrophic event happened in their community, without any responsibility on their part—they were on the receiving end of Mother Nature making its decision to hit that community at that time. Why do Trump and Musk say we ought to get rid of the Agency that is on the scene as the storm arises and stays there, hopefully, until people get back on their feet?

The other thing that is happening with DOGE going into FEMA is that they are getting access and accumulating very personal information. If you are in the path of the storm and you seek FEMA aid, you have to give a significant amount of your own personal information, but that is solely for the purpose of evaluating your claim.

We now have the DOGE folks. These are very young people. We don't know what their credentials are. We don't know what the use is that they are going to put this information to—getting the personal information of people in all of these communities around the country. They have no right to do that. They have no need to do that. It doesn't facilitate the reform or the destruction of FEMA. It is just an invasion of privacy.

We need FEMA. We can fix it. We can reform it, but I have talked to many of my colleagues on both sides of the aisle, and they know that most of our States, really all of our States, are simply not set up and equipped to deal with a catastrophic event. Oftentimes, as in the case of Vermont, a once-in-a-100-year-storm that came 2 years in a row, but we don't have the infrastructure of an emergency response to deal with that.

We need the help of the Federal Government. That is exactly the role the Federal Government should play. It has a fiscal capacity that none of our States have, and the definition of an emergency is something that couldn't have been prevented by the actions of the State.

So we need to recommit ourselves to assuring the American people in each of our communities that if and when there is a disaster, FEMA will be there. But we also have an obligation to make it work better so in that long-term recovery that is so essential, both emotionally and physically, that we will give the local communities much more authority to make their decisions and empower them with much more control of the funds needed to meet that recovery as quickly as possible.

We not only can work together to improve FEMA, the only way we will is if we do work together. How in the world is it a partisan issue when you are talking about the folks you represent or I represent who find themselves in the path of a fire, in the path of a flood, in the path of a hurricane or a tornado? We come together to help each other when that happens.

That is the responsibility we have, but more than that, it is really a wonderful opportunity to serve, where we are in a position to help Americans, regardless of where they live, regardless of what their political persuasion is, but because we respect them, the lives they have built, and we want to help them after a destruction of things that are really important to them and their community. We want to help them get back on their feet.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. SCHMITT). The Senator from Tennessee.

Mrs. BLACKBURN. Mr. President, today, after 4 years of reckless spending and decades of high inflation under the Biden-Harris administration, our national debt now sits at \$36.4 trillion. In many ways, this number represents one of the biggest threats to our Nation, as interest payments on the debt now eclipse our country's total defense spending.

Think about that. The debt—interest on the debt—is costing the hard-working taxpayer more of their money. It is taking a greater share of their tax dollars than we are spending to provide for the common defense.

It is astounding that that is where we are, but this problem has gotten worse through the years. During the last few months of the Biden administration, October to December of last year, our country ran a deficit of more than \$710 billion, up 39 percent from the same period in 2023.

The American people know this is unsustainable. Among many other reasons, that is why the American people showed up in record numbers and gave a mandate to Donald J. Trump as the President of the United States, winning the electoral college and the popular vote.

The American people know full well they are overtaxed. Government is overspent. And they are tired of it.

And since Inauguration Day, the President has been hard at work on this issue, getting the economy under control. And one of the first things he did, back in office, was to establish the Department of Government Efficiency. It is being led by Elon Musk, and the agency is working to uncover and eliminate waste, fraud, and abuse from the Federal Government. And to no one's surprise, DOGE has found a lot of waste, especially with programs that should never have been put on the books in the first place.

Now, in recent weeks, the agency, working overtime to find ways to save money for the taxpayer, they found \$33 million in Education Department grants to groups that push far-left ideas like critical race theory and \$44.6 million in canceled leases for unused office space and \$45 million in scholarships for students in Burma and \$182 million in Department of Health and Human Services contracts that had nothing to do with health—nothing. They even found \$168,000 for a museum exhibit for Anthony Fauci, and a billion dollars in DEI programs.

Now, when you scoop all of that together, you have a pretty good savings for the U.S. taxpayer, who has been funding all of this. Removing these programs and recouping those dollars, that is the right thing to do.

In addition, DOGE has worked to reform the mismanaged U.S. Agency for International Development. We call this USAID. Under the last administration, the Agency used its \$40 billion budget to support leftwing and anti-

American causes around the world, including terror-tied extremist groups in the Middle East.

As DOGE uncovers the left's abuse of taxpayer dollars, Washington Democrats have tried desperately to paint the agency as unaccountable to the American people. But the exact opposite is true. DOGE, which reports directly to President Trump, is restoring government accountability by reining in the Federal Government and reining in the bureaucracy. By the way, they are unelected.

That is why, last week, President Trump issued an Executive order to support DOGE, directing Federal Departments to work with the agency to reduce the size of the Federal workforce. A downsize is desperately needed. The government employs more than 2.4 million civilian employees at a cost of hundreds of billions of dollars each year.

To support these efforts, I recently introduced a package of bills called the DOGE Acts, which would hold the Federal Government accountable for managing taxpayer dollars. Now, all of these bills would help to drain the swamp. And these are bills that I have proposed over the last several years, but we brought them together under the heading of the DOGE Acts. It would implement a hiring and salary freeze, direct Agencies to reduce the size of their workforce by 5 percent within 3 years, and establish a commission to report to Congress on moving non-national-security Agencies outside of Washington, DC.

In addition, the legislation would create a pilot program to determine Federal employees' compensation based on merit, not seniority, something that is so important to do because, right now, the longer someone holds a job, the more they are going to make. Let's move that to how well they do their job and how well they perform in fulfilling the responsibilities that are given to them.

And it would require Agencies to reinstate their pre-COVID telework policies, a measure that is especially crucial after just 6 percent of Federal employees worked in an office full time during the Biden administration.

Tennesseans go to work every day. They are working full time in order to get a full-time paycheck, and they are astounded when they hear that under the last administration—the Biden administration—6 percent of Federal employees worked full time. But do you know what? They all got a full-time paycheck courtesy of the hard-working U.S. taxpayer.

Perhaps most importantly, the DOGE Acts would cut nonsecurity discretionary spending by 5 percent by fiscal year 2028 and every following year, saving taxpayers billions of dollars. When it comes to government spending, Tennesseans—and certainly Americans—demand accountability. With DOGE, Republicans are delivering it.

BIRTH TOURISM

Mr. President, in one of his first acts back in office, President Trump defended our country's cherished principle of equal citizenship by ending birth tourism. For years, foreign tourists have abused our Nation's birth-right citizenship by visiting America with the sole purpose of having their children here.

These tourists have no intention of staying here or of even raising their children in America. Instead, they return to their home country to rear their children, who now have the benefit of American citizenship but no ties or loyalty to our Nation. This abuse of our citizenship is wrong. Yet Democrat-aligned groups are trying to stop President Trump's order in the courts.

When you look at the numbers, you realize how much is at stake with this Executive order. According to one estimate, birth tourism results in 33,000 births to women on tourist visas each year. Think about that—33,000. That is tens of thousands of people each year who claim American citizenship and all its benefits, while having nothing at stake in the future of our country. To no one's surprise, birth tourism has spawned a multimillion-dollar industry, and it is rife with fraud and criminal activities.

In China, traffickers charge clients tens of thousands of dollars to coach them on lying to Customs and Border Protection, obtaining a visa, and reaching our country.

In fact, the problem has gotten so bad that airlines in Asia are turning away pregnant passengers to America over birth tourism concerns.

This cannot go on, which is why I fully support President Trump's efforts to bring this terrible practice to an end.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Connecticut.

TRUMP ADMINISTRATION

Mr. MURPHY. Mr. President, the idea that men and women citizens are bound by a common set of laws that are applied consistently and universally, regardless of one's income or political power or political affiliation, is a fairly modern invention because, for thousands of years, laws were simply what rulers used to impose and maintain power, to control people. Laws were applied or crimes were invented for the ruler's critics, and laws were ignored or waived away for those in favor with the regime.

Now, early Americans had watched the British Kings apply laws selectively, both in Britain and in the Colonies, and our Founders sought to create a nation where all men were equal in the face of the law and that the law was applied uniformly and justly.

That idea, equal justice—the law applies to everybody regardless of whom you support politically or whom you are aligned with politically—was in many ways the Founders' most vital check against tyranny. That is the dif-

ference between a democracy made of equal citizens and an autocracy, where the law is simply whatever the ruler decides. It is a foundational principle of American constitutional democracy. It is not something we can take for granted.

Now, I will admit that likely every President has made a decision or decisions that compromised that belief in the rule of law. Often, those decisions were related to one of the maximalist powers that the President possesses; that is, the power of the pardon. I, for instance, did not agree with President Biden's decision to issue pardons to his family members. I thought that was excessive. I thought that compromised the rule of law. But this President's contempt for the rule of law—Donald Trump's contempt for the rule of law—is unprecedented.

What we are all watching right now is Donald Trump throw away the idea that laws apply to everyone equally, and it is astonishing to watch so many of my Republican colleagues fall in line. Some of them may be on board for the destruction of the rule of law because they want the Trump family to rule forever, but many of them know that this is wrong, what is happening, and their silence is heartbreaking.

Donald Trump issued a statement over the weekend:

He who saves [the] Country does not violate any Law.

That is a quote attributed to one of the most notorious dictators of the last half-millennium, Napoleon Bonaparte. It is a stunning claim that Trump—not the law or Congress—decides what is legal and illegal.

If he had said that in 2017, maybe we could just write it off as Trump being Trump, as just bluster, trolling, but this time, he has actually implemented a methodical campaign to seize control of the law and apply it differently depending on whether you support him or oppose him.

Take for example what happened on Friday night. Trump ordered the Department of Justice to cut a deal with the indicted mayor of New York City, Eric Adams. The deal was simple: If Adams pledged loyalty to Trump and agreed specifically to cooperate with Trump's immigration raids in the city, Trump would look the other way regarding Adam's corruption. The charges would be dropped, and Adams could keep stealing money as long as he was politically loyal to Trump.

They didn't hide this deal. Adams and a high-ranking Trump official literally went on TV to announce that they had formed an alliance based upon the release of charges in exchange for political loyalty.

But when Trump told the highest ranking Justice Department employees in New York City to execute the corrupt deal, they wouldn't. The top official resigned rather than take part in the corruption and so did the next in the chain of command. By the time Trump found someone who would im-

plement the deal, seven DOJ lawyers and four of Adams' deputy mayors had resigned because what was happening in plain view was a fundamental challenge, a fundamental corruption to the rule of law—a rule of law that up until today, Republicans and Democrats had both revered.

Meanwhile, other parts of Trump's team are engaging on the other side of the ledger, targeting and harassing—using the law—the President's critics, because that is what happens in a nation without the rule of law. Law enforcement lets loyalists like Adams off the hook and is overzealous in targeting critics.

Let me give you just one example of what is happening right now as we speak. Last month, Trump's new FCC Chairman opened an investigation into a single radio station that had the audacity to simply file a news report about an ICE raid that was happening locally. Multiple other sources filed similar reports with similar footage, but only one investigation was opened, and—you guessed it—it was against the radio station that was owned by a high-profile critic of Donald Trump, George Soros.

So the game is clear. Like, we can see it. They are not even hiding it. There is not a rule of law anymore; there is one set of law for people or entities who are loyal to Donald Trump, and there is one set of law for people who dare criticize him. That is not democracy.

If we don't find a way—Republicans and Democrats—to come together to defend the rule of law, if we don't say that what is happening today—deals being cut with corrupt politicians in exchange for their pledges of loyalty to Donald Trump—if we can't speak with one voice about that kind of corruption, well, then our democracy is cooked.

NOMINATION OF KASHYAP PATEL

Mr. President, that brings us to the pending nominee to lead the FBI, Kash Patel. If your plan is to destroy the rule of law and turn the Department of Justice into a political weapon that rewards loyalty and punishes dissent, then Kash Patel is the perfect person to lead the FBI, and that is likely exactly why he was chosen.

Listen. Kash Patel is a joke. Many of my Republican colleagues know this. He has spent the last 4 years taking the most extreme positions inside the world of MAGA in order to make money for himself.

For instance, he says that he can provide proof beyond a reasonable doubt that the FBI was behind the January 6 invasion of this building. Let me say that again. The man that my Republican colleagues are about to vote to lead the FBI believes that there is irrefutable proof that the Agency he is about to lead secretly organized the violent assault on the Capitol. That is bananas. My Republican colleagues know that. That is a lie. And we are about to put this guy in charge of the