

Any shrewd negotiator should recognize that Russia is on the ropes. Now is not the time to appease Putin. This is a time to exert maximum pressure to bring him to the negotiating table hat in hand.

There are three things we must do now.

First, we must continue to pressure Russia economically. This means strengthening existing sanctions, identifying secondary sanctions, and bolstering sanctions enforcement and anti-evasion efforts. At the top of the effort to control the evasion of sanctions, we should be working with allies to combat the illicit oil trade, including efforts to go on the offensive against the so-called ghost fleet of aging tankers Russia employs to facilitate the export of oil and other sanctioned goods.

Second, we must work with our European partners to impound and leverage Russia's frozen assets.

Finally, we must ensure in both word and deed that Ukraine has our support and commitment to working with them to establish a just and lasting peace.

However, instead of taking action to strengthen the negotiating hand on any of these fronts, the administration has shifted focus to the signing of a deal to exploit Ukraine's natural resources. Much remains to be seen about the shape of this agreement, but we do know it will take years, if not decades, to see substantial returns.

A large number of Ukraine's rare earth deposits are actually located in Ukrainian territory that is currently contested or occupied by Russia. I am not sure how one is to square this agreement with Secretary Hegseth's comments about the forfeiture of Ukraine's sovereign territory.

Furthermore, the deal includes no security guarantees from the United States, which the Ukrainians have—rightly, I believe—insisted upon. Security guarantees are essential to assure Ukraine that the United States is not simply interested in an enrichment scheme but is committed to the pursuit of a just and lasting peace.

Indeed, a just and lasting peace must be the final outcome. That is a United States national security imperative, one that has—at least until recently—enjoyed robust and vocal bipartisan support.

We support Ukraine because we know that the war in Ukraine is not just a regional war; it is the most visible demonstration of the larger existential threat Russia poses to our national security.

We support Ukraine to ensure that Vladimir Putin cannot achieve his goals, which are counter to our own national interests. We must be clear-eyed about this. If Putin succeeds in Ukraine, it will be the first piece in his long-stated promise to recreate the Soviet empire. If that happens, if we fail to learn from history and to see brutal and craven authoritarians for what they are and the threat they represent,

we may again find America's sons and daughters sent overseas to fight on foreign shores.

I urge my Republican colleagues and my Democratic colleagues—all my colleagues—to speak up and stand with Ukraine as they have done for so many years. Let us continue.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Minnesota.

DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES

Ms. KLOBUCHAR. Mr. President, I rise today with my colleagues in strong opposition to the firings of scientists, medical researchers, and more at the Department of Health and Human Services.

HHS is in charge of everything from preventing disease outbreaks to making sure that our kids are healthy to ensuring that seniors can live with dignity.

It directly touches more lives than any other Cabinet Agency. That is why the administration's mass firings of thousands of HHS employees are deeply troubling.

When a new CEO comes in and wants to see a new direction for a company, they look at it, they look at all the divisions, they figure out their direction. They maybe cut a division; they maybe make changes to it. They look at the merits of certain employees; they move some employees to different divisions. And they figure out, thoughtfully, what is the right way and what is the best way for their company.

This is the entire government, but that is not what is happening here. They are firing people across the board, without regard to merit, without regard for function. They are firing some of the newest employees who are eager and excited to have their jobs. They are firing some people who are simply up for promotion which puts them in a probationary status.

They are not looking at what these people are doing or the value they bring to the workforce and to the American people. They are just doing it and getting on TV with a chain saw.

These are people who went into public service for a reason. They are people, in the case of Health and Human Services, who keep us healthy and save lives, who work every day to keep America at the forefront of medical breakthroughs and innovation.

It has been our secret sauce. It has given the world the most incredible, credible, lifesaving drugs and medical devices—like the pacemaker in my State.

That didn't just come out of one company. That came out of a lot of ideas, and that came out of a lot of universities, and that came out of people doing clinical trials, and that came out of a devotion by our country to moving forward. That is how we have gotten these lifesaving cures.

That is how we mapped the human genome, so that we are now starting to

offer personalized medicine, drugs that fit people, things that work, things that cure diseases we never thought were possible to cure. That is how our economy has been so strengthened, and we have led across the world.

You know, I have worked for years to cut redtape, and I know there is more to do. I know there is more we can do to make our government effective. But we can do that together and take the ideas from the administration. We can work on it in the next budget. We can make some changes. I support permitting reform—all kinds of things that we could do.

But these mass firings in the area of medical research? This makes no sense.

The Department of Health and Human Services is also tasked with implementing Medicare drug price negotiation, which I fought for years to pass into law, along with my colleague Senator WELCH from Vermont, when he was in the House, and Senator SANDERS here in the Senate.

This is expected—we finally passed it. It was part of the Inflation Reduction Act, and it actually says: Hey, this sweetheart deal that pharma had with Medicare, in which they can't negotiate at all and that the prices are locked in and so our country—people are paying twice as much as they do in places like Canada, for the drug. Yet it is our taxpayers that put in the money for the research or the VA, which works so well for our veterans. They are able to negotiate and get better prices, but not 50 million seniors?

So what did we do? We finally ended the sweetheart deal, and we passed a law. I would have been more aggressive about how many drugs we could negotiate because I understand they start with a group of drugs, and pretty soon that is going to help people who aren't seniors, as we did with the insulin cap. That insulin cap, at 35 bucks a month, was only for seniors, but Merck and other companies offered it to nonseniors, as well, because we got it going with the biggest prescription drug buying group in the country, and that would be our seniors.

So this Medicare negotiation has ramifications for everyone in this country. However, even though we only did 10 drugs at first, the Biden administration picked blockbuster drugs—big drugs that so many people take, like Januvia and Jardiance and Xarelto and Eliquis. Combined, in 1 year—just 1 year, when this starts next year; no one has refuted these statistics—9 million seniors will save \$1.5 billion in out-of-pocket costs in the first year alone and save taxpayers over \$100 billion in the next decade. That is just 10 drugs.

They have now come up with 15 more drugs, including Ozempic and those weight-loss drugs, and they have passed that torch now—or the voters have—onto the next administration. So now, it is on them to negotiate these 15 and then pick 15 more and 15 more. Imagine how much money we can save, not just for the seniors—that is obvious—but also for the taxpayers because

we are footing part of this bill. And then, ultimately, it will bring down drug prices, like they have in other countries.

But firing the men and women who carry out these price negotiations put those savings totally at risk. You cannot take on some of the world's biggest companies—the pharmaceutical companies—with bandaids and a skeleton crew. That is not going to work. I think we all know that. We all know this is really hard work.

On top of this, the firings threaten healthcare for the 170 million Americans who get coverage through Medicare, Medicaid—which is so many of our seniors when they are in assisted living with their long-term care, and people's parents and grandparents—as well as coverage under the Affordable Care Act, including over 2 million Minnesotans. In fact, Medicaid actually provides healthcare for 20 percent of my rural residents in my State. You will see similar numbers all across the country. And more than half of all nursing home residents in our State are on Medicaid.

I remember when my dad was in assisted living. He got late-onset Alzheimer's. I found a place for him and found the next place when he needed a little more help, and I knew, as his savings were running out, what that day was. I knew the exact month that he was going to run out of his savings, and then he would go onto Medicaid. And that was a safety net. I actually knew I couldn't keep him at the same place, but I knew a place I could have him go to.

He ended up dying a year before that date happened. But there are so many people in our country that know the exact date when their parent or their grandparent is going to be able to have that safety net of Medicaid because they have actually run through all their savings.

Nationwide, Medicaid provides coverage for two-thirds of all nursing home care. And these cuts—what we are seeing out of the House budget, where they have put targets on the exact program that includes Medicaid—these cuts will be particularly disastrous for people with chronic conditions, including millions of veterans who become sick or disabled as a result of their service.

What is this all about? It is about funding giant tax breaks for billionaires. Yes, over 2 trillion of that money goes to people who are wealthy, people making over \$400,000 a year.

I am all for keeping in these tax cuts for people making under \$400,000 a year, but I do not know why, when you are facing the debt that our country has and when you are dealing with people's needs with Medicaid and the like, you would decide to add tax cuts and make permanent tax cuts for people who are making over \$400,000 a year.

We actually had a vote on this, late at night about a week ago, where we asked our Republican colleagues: OK.

Well, how about for people making over \$10 million a year? That was Senator WARREN's amendment. She said: OK. How about if they are making over 10 million? Could we at least agree we shouldn't cut their taxes?

And, unfortunately, our Republican colleagues, for that amendment, yelled out: No.

Then we said—Senator KELLY got up there and said: OK. How about if they are making over \$100 million? Then we should add more tax cuts?

Our colleagues voted against that amendment, which said we should not add more tax cuts for people making over \$100 million when our country is facing the debt it has, when you have got the needs for people in nursing homes and the needs for people with childcare and the like.

So then they tried one more time. Senator ANGUS KING, Independent of Maine, said: OK. How about for people making over \$500 million? Then, at least, you can agree with us—right?—that we shouldn't add more tax cuts for those people making over \$500 million a year. And, sadly, our colleagues voted no.

Instead of cutting costs for regular people and their prices and groceries, they are cutting Medicaid, which provides healthcare for 7.2 million seniors, almost 40 million children, nearly two-thirds of nursing home residents, and millions of people with rare diseases.

But this isn't just the numbers. There are moms and dads, brothers and sisters, friends and neighbors. I heard from one Minnesotan who, at 4 years old, was diagnosed with Duchenne muscular dystrophy, which causes rapid muscle weakness, making it harder to complete most physical tasks. But this Minnesotan, who is now 26, has been able to thrive because he has Medicaid coverage. He got an education. He got a job. He graduated with a master's degree in public policy. He is paying taxes. In his words, Medicaid gave him the affordable health coverage he needed to manage his rare condition.

For him and millions more, the cuts at the Department of Health and Human Services put their lives and livelihood at risk.

This week is rare disease week. I have met with many rare disease patients. I am the cochair of that caucus. And they are in town right now to convene and collaborate with Federal medical researchers, Ph.D. students, other families affected, drug and device reviewers and advocates.

Many of these rare disease patients were looking forward to attending the rare disease event that was supposed to be today. And this year it was going to be a collaboration between NIH and the FDA because of all that integral work that goes on with drugs being approved for people with rare diseases, but that annual event was canceled because the people carrying that out—these people here with very difficult, rare diseases—that was canceled because the people doing the event were fired.

The mission of the Department of Health and Human Services, which the thousands of Americans who were fired work every day to uphold, is enhancing the health and well-being of all Americans. These mass firings are a direct affront to that mission.

The building that houses the Department of Health and Human Services is named for Minnesota's "Happy Warrior," Vice President Hubert Humphrey. It has been that way through Democrat and Republican Presidents. He was a champion for expanding access to healthcare. Inscribed in the entrance hall of that building are words from Humphrey's final speech in 1977. By the way, he was someone who was loved right here in this Chamber by Democrats and Republicans. Some of the most conservative Republicans mourned his loss, and they loved the guy. And this is what he said in his final speech here:

The moral test of government is how that government treats those who are in the dawn of life, the children; those who are in the twilight of life, the elderly; and those who are in shadows of life, the sick.

And he added, given he had a child in his own family with Down syndrome, and those with disabilities.

The firing of those who care for kids and seniors and those who work on rare diseases and those who are bringing together our people who work on drugs that are supposed to solve and are solving the problems for these rare disease families and those that are doing the approvals and those that are doing the research and the families that want to talk to them about it—they were all here, and they canceled it because, just like that, Elon Musk came in with his chain saw.

Those families are not going to tolerate this much longer.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Vermont.

DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES

Mr. WELCH. Mr. President, I want to speak about the extreme cuts that have affected the Department of Health and Human Services, the Federal Drug Administration, the National Institutes of Health, and the Centers for Disease Control.

First of all, the DOGE operation starts out with a premise that it is attacking waste, fraud, and abuse. And I am for that. Anyplace that we can save taxpayers money by responsible assessment of what programs are working or aren't, anytime we can uncover waste or certainly fraud and abuse, I want to do that, and I want that to be done across the board. Whether you are talking about health programs where they could be better organized or they could be more efficiently run to achieve the goal of better services for the people you represent and I represent for all Americans, I want to do that.