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Senate

Mr. BOOKER. Mr. President, one of those other programs that is now in crisis is what I want to switch to. I think my colleague was joking with me because we have—for anybody who is watching—we have a whole list of things we wanted to get to. My staff, now, seemingly very ambitious—Medicaid, Medicare, healthcare, Social Security is coming up now, tariffs and economic policy, education, national security, public safety, immigration, housing—chapter by chapter, each one about an hour or so. This would be enough to make it until tomorrow evening if I can stand that long and who knows?

But we are behind schedule. So I am going to jump in to talk about Social Security. I want to start because, as I said earlier, I get to stand here. I get to come to this floor, but so many millions of people don't. I want to elevate their voices tonight.

As I go across New Jersey, as I go across my Nation, I see Republicans, Democrats, Independents—there are so many people stopping me in airports, in the community, stopping me in the grocery store, wanting to tell me that they are afraid, that they are angry, that they are worried, that they believe we are in crisis, that our Nation is at a crossroads. Whom are we going to be as a nation?

This topic, I don't know, maybe I will just let you all know that this topic—my mom chewed into me about this topic. She lives in a senior citizen retirement community, mostly Republicans. I visited her many times. It is a great community. I hate how we go to this idea of right or left. These are great seniors that live in a great community, and they are talking about Social Security.

I want to read—start with this section by just reading—these are people sending to me. This is a small postcard, handwritten from somebody from Hamilton Square, NJ:

Dear Senator Booker, I am writing to ask you if my Social Security is now in danger.

Please let me know. It is very important to me. Thank you.

I am going to try to answer that tonight fairly and candidly. Here is another person who writes. My staff is protecting their identity. I just want to say where they are from. South Plains, NJ:

I am one of your constituents and a proud New Jerseyan. I am writing to let you know how upset, distraught, and worried I am about the current state of our country. I hope you will take time and read my letter as this is the first time I felt compelled to write a government official.

I want to tell you, I am reading your letter again, and I am now reading it on national TV, if C-SPAN can be—the Presiding Officer may challenge me with a factual error, but C-SPAN is national TV, I think.

I want to start by telling you a little about myself. I am 64 years old and I am currently working full time. I am a breast cancer survivor. My plan was to retire in the next 3 years, but with the current state of chaos and turmoil, I honestly don't see how I can retire. I am concerned about Medicare, which I will definitely need when I retire. I will also need a supplemental plan for whatever Medicare does not cover. I do not qualify for retirement benefits through my job. With the cuts being made to Federal programs, Medicare will not be enough. I would need a more expensive supplemental plan to cover these cuts.

I am also concerned about Social Security. I have worked since I was 16, except for 9 years when I was home with my three children.

I have worked hard and paid into Social Security and believed that the money was for my retirement. Now I hear that Social Security is a Ponzi scheme, and it may be privatized. This is so unfair for people like me that worked hard all their life and counted on this money to retire. I was planning to work past 65 to get my full Social Security benefits, but now I begin to wonder if it is worth it.

So, at this point, I am in a holding pattern due to the unstable climate in which we are all living. As I said, I have three children who are all adults now. My son has been diagnosed with being bipolar. He has been hospitalized a few times for this. He is currently

on medication that he needs to function and sees a therapist. He is in grad school and is on Medicaid. He works part time since he is a full-time grad student. So he does not qualify for benefits.

I worry about what these cuts will do to my son and others like him. No one seems concerned with the people who rely on these programs to live their best life. Someone needs to look out and take an interest in helping people in these circumstances.

My daughter is a teacher in a district that receives title I funds. She works very hard as a teacher and is devoted to her students. With the dismantling of the Department of Education, I am concerned about what this means to the education field, teachers, administration, and students. My daughter's school is making a difference in the lives of these students, and they need the funding that is received from both the State and Federal Government. Programs like the title I and other federally funded programs need to stay in place.

On another topic—

This constituent is getting a lot into her first letter to a government official, and I appreciate it.

On another topic, inflation: Increasing prices and the overpriced housing market is a huge problem. Placing tariffs on our biggest trade partners is beyond unfair. This drives the cost of goods up, and the consumer is the one who ends up paying the increase. A lot of families are food insecure, wondering where their next meal is coming from. A lot of parents go without so their children can eat. Food pantries and banks are scrambling to meet demand. Something needs to be done so families can survive.

The housing market is also an issue. Owning your own home is now unreachable for most young people starting out. Interest rates are high, and housing prices in New Jersey are unaffordable.

Thank you for reading my letter. I am asking you, as our Senator, please stand up for what is in the best interest of families, seniors, adults, and children in your district. Tariffs, dismantling Departments like Social Security, Medicare, Medicaid, Education, and other services that are important to the everyday person is not the answer. You are our voice in the Senate. Please do the right thing, and speak up, and continue to fight for everyday Americans.

This is why I am standing up. This is why I will stand here as long as I am

• This “bullet” symbol identifies statements or insertions which are not spoken by a Member of the Senate on the floor.



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physically able. This is why I continue to tell story after story.

But, first, a little important history: 90 years. Our country has made a promise to people that, if you pay into the Social Security Program your whole life, your money will be there for you when you retire. Franklin Roosevelt signed the Social Security Act into law 84 years ago, and this is his quote. He called it “a cornerstone in a structure which is being built, but it is by no means complete.” Social Security is still a cornerstone. It is still the bedrock according to FDR. It is the bedrock of an edifice being built in a nation where we belong to each other. We the people are building this. That is our cornerstone. He called it Social Security. Today, 73 million Americans count on Social Security. Millions more than that are planning on those benefits they earned being there for them.

You heard from the first letters I read that people are really worried. The President of the United States stood up in the State of the Union Address and talked about rampant fraud because payments are going out. All from conservative papers to ones on the other side have shown that what he was saying was not true. But they are sowing chaos. They are attacking, delegitimizing it, and calling it a Ponzi scheme—DOGE leader Musk and the President.

There are 73 million Americans who are counting on Social Security benefits, and 1.6 million are in my State. Forty percent of the people who rely on Social Security—40 percent—have no other source of income. They live paycheck to paycheck—Social Security checks, excuse me. Social Security checks.

Despite mocking Social Security and calling it a Ponzi scheme, people in communities like my parents’—my mom’s—are beginning to worry. They actually took real actions to lay off thousands of Social Security employees, making it harder to process Social Security applications and troubleshoot questions from beneficiaries. They didn’t roll out a plan to say: Hey, this is how we are going to show that we can give the best customer service ever. We are going to bring in some of the best private sector people to advise on how we can use technology and innovation to give the best customer service. Hell, roll in AI, and do all of these things. We are going to make a model of responsiveness to our seniors because we are a society that respects our elders, values them, wants them to retire in dignity and security and peace of mind. That is the big ambition.

No, that is not what was said.

Social Security employees, like many employees, got letters that they didn’t expect, saying they were laid off. It didn’t matter how well they performed, and it didn’t matter what function they performed. It put in jeopardy just trying to contact Social Security, if you are retired or just trying to con-

tact Social Security if you need to apply for benefits. They tried to eliminate service by phone, saying that they wanted to require in-person visits, which is absurd for many seniors who don’t have access to transportation or who live in rural areas because—do you know what they are doing also? They are trying to close down many Social Security offices, and I will get to the specifics of that later.

These actions are harmful enough, but they are just the beginning of what our President and Elon Musk are saying they want to do to a program that, for millions of Americans, is their only check a week. It is essential for them and for others. It is how they make their retirement secure. You don’t protect the future by punishing the people who built this country. You don’t fix America by throwing seniors or veterans or Americans with disabilities under the bus. That is not how we do things. That is not how we should do things. There are so many hard-working families who believe in this idea of, if I work hard all my life in America, I can make ends meet; I can raise my kids; and I can retire with dignity.

Congress does have a responsibility to be good stewards of taxpayer dollars. We should do more of that. I want to do more of that. I want to help lead in that fight. But none of us were invited to the table when it came to this. This congressionally established program—FDR I read—but it was Congress that established it and is now not being included in the planning or in the procedures to try to improve Social Security or to make it more efficient or more effective. We haven’t convened hearings or task forces in a bipartisan way to find out what we can do to better serve our seniors.

Instead, lies are being proffered about Social Security making wrongful payments. Lies are being proffered by the highest office in the land and by the most rich person in the land, who does not need Social Security, who is calling it a Ponzi scheme, who is telling people who are relying on it that they are part of a Ponzi scheme.

But remember this: Social Security is not the government’s money to spend. It is the hard-earned savings of working Americans, and it belongs to Americans. The President and Elon Musk need to keep their hands off of it. It is not theirs to take, and it is not theirs to break.

It is their scheme. They are the ones who have a scheme, and it is not about efficiency. It is not visionary. What we need in America now are visionary leaders who have bold, exciting visions for things like what Social Security can be. What they are doing is not only wrong, but it hurts people; it scares people. And it is not just people but our elders—the people who raised us, the people who built roads and highways, the people who served food, made food, who started small businesses, who raised generations. They are who we are disrespecting.

So what happens in this context? Why am I standing here?

It is because the people of New Jersey are saying: Why aren’t you doing more? This is unacceptable, Senator BOOKER. It is unacceptable. Hear our voices.

My phones have exploded with people whom the President and Elon Musk have made terrified about what is happening to the Social Security service and what is happening to their checks. My staff said that we were overwhelmed with phone calls and emails from people who were worried about the direction that the President is taking Social Security. The people who called were angry or terrified, and I want to share some of these calls from my constituents.

Here is someone from the great Cherry Hill, NJ:

I am very concerned that the President, along with his cruel and inept administration and DOGE, are working to privatize and ruin the Social Security Program.

I am a constituent, Senator Booker. I live in Cherry Hill, NJ, and I am a senior who relies on Social Security income for my basic needs, food, and housing. The mere idea of not having those funds has caused me sleepless nights and wondering if I will become homeless.

I am going to stop there for a second.

I remember President FDR and growing up hearing that what he did was get on the radio not to stir up fear, not to stir up chaos, but to comfort people, to remind them that we are Americans, and you have no need to fear. But this President, just with his rhetoric alone about Social Security, is driving my constituents to write me notes like this.

I continue with the letter from my constituent from Cherry Hill:

I hope you will convince both Democrat and Republican colleagues to prevent this from happening. Trump lied when he promised during his campaign he would not touch the Social Security Administration, but now we see threats and already some actions toward making severe cuts and making the program less accessible. I urge you to continue to fight for us.

(Mr. CRAMER assumed the Chair.)

Pennington, NJ:

My sister and I are older Americans who are each disabled—one from a severe accident because of a drunk driver and the other from a life-changing illness. We are alone and take care of each other. For me, SSDI is my one and only income. I have a few years before I am at full retirement age. Even with my check and splitting rent costs between us, it is taking right under 50 percent of my monthly check for rent alone.

Fifty percent.

This does not leave much to cover even the bare necessities of health, vehicle insurance, utilities, food, medicine—even a tight budget, especially with costs on everything continuing to rise.

Senator, as seniors, we are petrified about what is happening to SSA. I must ask you, Senator: What do we do if our monthly SSA benefits are interrupted? How do we keep a roof over our heads as disabled seniors? With very limited savings, it would only take a few months before the roof over our heads would be in jeopardy. We just spent a small

fortune for us to move into a smaller, lower cost apartment because we could not afford significant ongoing rent increases. I realize we are far from alone in our fears, but that is of very little comfort as we spend our nights unable to sleep, fearful we do not lose our only income along with a roof over our heads.

These are our elders.

Here is a constituent from Egg Harbor Township:

My husband and I live Social Security check to Social Security check. Without those checks we earned—without those checks we earned—we are dead. Please don't let this outrageous administration take our benefits away.

This is a constituent from Runnemede, NJ:

I am a 75-year-old New Jersey resident. I received my working papers in 1964, at the age of 14. I worked continuously until I reached the age of 70, in 2020. I enlisted in the U.S. Navy in 1967 and retired in 1999. I was on Active Duty from 1970 to 1977. I finished my career in the Naval Reserve. For 56 years, I paid my taxes and contributed to Social Security.

I have collected my Social Security for 4 years, and as you are no doubt aware, the amount of money paid me monthly by the Social Security Act was calculated by them based on my contribution.

I am currently a full-time, 24/7 caretaker for my invalid wife and do not have the luxury of earning a supplemental income. My sole income is from Social Security and a small Naval Reserve pension. My total healthcare comes from Medicare and TRICARE for Life.

The contract I made with the United States Government was that they could use my money during my working life with the understanding that they would take care of me when I could no longer earn for myself. I have kept my part of this bargain for 56 years. Now, after only 4 years, the government is threatening to renege on our agreement.

Please, sir, do not let this happen, Senator Booker. That is my money. I earned it. I earned my Social Security by my contributions, and I earned my pension by my service.

Another constituent named Sara:

I have been a teacher in Atlantic County for 26 years. My husband is a 100-percent disabled veteran who receives VA disability payments as well as SSDI. We depend on the VA and SSDI for approximately half of our income for our family of five.

We are currently preparing our oldest for his first year at college and are awaiting financial aid packages from several schools. We are petrified that Trump and Musk's agenda is dangerous and will have life-altering consequences for families like ours.

We are counting on you, Senator Booker, to do the hard work to protect the essential benefits.

The destruction of the Department of Education is another completely horrifying situation. We need to protect our special needs students and Federal financial aid for college-bound students. We need to protect the idea that education is for all—

Education is for all. Education is for all—instead of a few elites who could just afford it.

Rosie is another constituent. She starts off proudly:

I am a senior, 84 years old.

God bless you, Rosie. My mom is 85.

My only income is Social Security—

She generously gives me confidential information.

My only income is Social Security, \$1,179 per month, and I am terrified that the current gang of thieves in the White House will tamper with it under the guise of "saving money." If Social Security is cut off, I am on the streets.

I can't keep harping enough on the traditions of our country, where Presidents, whether you agree with them or not, whether they are from your party or not—Ronald Reagan didn't whip up fear in bedrock commitments like Social Security or health. Barack Obama didn't shake people so that Republicans and Democrats in my State would write me letters using words like "fear" and "terror," would worry about losing sleep when they have enough things to stress over.

Here is Debra:

I am a retired widow. I depend on Social Security to pay bills each month. I am concerned about the reports that Elon Musk is to revamp and, in my opinion, ruin the Social Security Administration. I am worried that payments will be disrupted. There are many other things going on in the government today that I am also concerned about. I hope that the Senators and Congress people, along with the judicial system, can stand up to him and take back control of government.

She says this is going to revamp and ruin Social Security. This is just somebody simply saying—it is like, be plain. Don't make up lies about false payments. Don't call it a Ponzi scheme. Give us a bold vision of how it is going to help more seniors, how you are going to serve more seniors, how you are going to improve the system, how you are going to make it better, how you are going to serve the dignity of our seniors.

This is Holly. Holly is a constituent too.

I am one of your constituents who is retired and relies 100 percent in order to live on my earned Social Security benefit in which I paid throughout my entire working career. I call on you to maintain the Social Security Program as it stood before the ascension of Trump and Musk. You must ensure that there are no missed earned benefit payments or late payments made to recipients; especially, accessible Social Security offices must remain open and fully staffed with trained, experienced Social Security employees in order to provide the kind of regular, necessary customer service by phone, online, and in person.

And the Trump-Musk administration's endless terrorist threats of dismantling the Social Security Administration, insidiously calling it a Ponzi scheme, working in order to privatize it—it must cease and desist immediately.

Moreover you, Cory Booker, must reverse and/or stop whatever draconian changes are being made to destroy the Social Security Administration with thousands of cuts to needed employees with almost no notice and no public input.

Social Security is being dismantled by an unelected billionaire. At least for now, Musk and his band of DOGE boys—not a real government department—who have illegally and callously rifled through our most private, personal information and done God knows

what with it, with their ultimate goal to risk and/or steal the retirement funds of older Americans by placing the Social Security Trust Fund in the hands of private corporate equity firms—seniors do not agree to this. Seniors do not agree to this. Such action is illegal and completely unacceptable!

This constituent continues:

Furthermore, I am deeply concerned that the ceaseless chaos will invite criminals to exploit confusion around identity verification. Ironically, while the administration claims these changes are meant to combat fraud, they may very well do the opposite. Hastily introducing new, unfamiliar technology and verification steps without any real public education campaign will create the perfect environment for criminals to deceive and defraud.

This late and ill-conceived change also comes at a time when the Social Security Administration is already struggling with a customer service crisis, long hold times, low staffing, delayed callback systems, confusing announcements about possible office closures. This chaos has to be stopped now, Senator Booker.

I urgently ask you to please use your congressional power to reverse these changes which are creating more confusion for older Americans. Senior Americans earned Social Security through a lifetime of hard, honest work. I know I did. The money is ours, and we deserve a properly run Social Security Administration which continues to be administered honestly through the Federal Government, as established in 1935.

In fact, the narrative of the Social Security Act running out of money could be easily fixed if Congress wrote laws that slightly increased the amount that high-net-worth individuals—the wealthiest of the wealthy—paid into the program.

Holly, God bless you.

My mother, in her senior community, is seeing this rise in scammers trying to steal people's money, and she is amazed at the technology they are using. The scams involve the voices of their relatives asking them for help during a crisis. All that technology and the wisdom of my mom—she is like, why aren't we using the technology and innovations to make Social Security easier to use and easier to engage with? Commonsense questions.

Carli, a constituent from New Jersey:

Please include disabled people when you talk about Social Security and Medicare, Senator Booker. You don't mention us every time. I paid into Social Security for 16 years. I worked full time. I was sick almost every day. I finally had to leave my job in 2015. I was granted SSDI, and I am on Medicare. And until I was injured last year, I had a part-time job, where I continued paying into the system.

I fear that the first people they will go after are the disabled. We are not as capable of fighting. People see us as lazy or fakers, and we are almost never included in the conversations about marginalized communities. Please don't let me be erased.

Carli, you are not. I see you, and I am standing here for as long as I physically can so that I can elevate your voice and others'.

Patricia, a constituent from New Jersey:

I am 65 years old, a senior. I have worked my whole life and paid into Social Security. Will you please work hard and push back to preserve these benefits? Without Social Security money and Medicare as well, I will not survive. I am outraged—

Patricia writes—

to see what is happening recently. Help. If there is anything you request of me—

My constituent says: If there is anything you need of me, please let me know.

That is one of the most beautiful sentiments in America, is that people in crisis who are racked with fear and worry still are standing up to volunteer, retired seniors.

I am always moved when a constituent not only tells me what is on their mind, how they are angry, how they are worried, what their concerns are, but they also say: Let me help you. Let me help you.

Patricia, it is late at night, and you are probably sleeping, but you helped me tonight at 12:41 a.m.

The goodness and the decency of our seniors, the kindness and generosity of our communities, and what does our President do to these people? He spends time in the State of the Union Address not calling us together, not calling us to a common cause, not reminding us that we share common values and common virtues; he spreads lies about Social Security and unleashes the wealthiest man in the world to cut before he even understands the Agencies he is cutting—a guy who, with the same kind of cynical nature—I can't even fathom being as wealthy as he is; it is not what I have sought in my life—he calls it a Ponzi scheme when constituent after constituent tells me that is their only source of income, that they paid into it all of their lives, and now the most powerful person on the planet and the richest person on the planet are striking fear and worry into seniors.

Yet, with all of that power, all of that money, a constituent from New Jersey tells me about what she is concerned with and then says:

If there is anything you request of me, please let me know. I am here to help.

“I am here to help.”

That is the country I know and love, not the fearmongers and the demagogues and the spreaders of lies but the good decency of Americans who, even in their time of crisis, ask the question: How can I help? How can I help.

Helen from New Jersey:

Senator Booker, please stand up to Musk and Trump to save, protect Social Security and Medicare. My life and my husband's life depend on it. We are senior citizens who worked and paid our share of taxes for over 50 years. We now need those benefits to survive.

Here is Janet, one of the hundreds—I am sorry to my staff—thousands of people who have written, emailed, and called. One more. Janet:

I oppose the closing of Social Security field offices. If anything, more field services should be opened if phone support is cut back.

In 2022, while living in Wyoming, I started on Social Security. There were issues, and thank God for the local field office in Cheyenne because they were the only people who could physically look at my documentation, realize what was happening to me, submit

corrections, and enter notes in the system that the Social Security phone support could see. It took four or five trips to my local field office to resolve it.

I had previously gotten nowhere with Social Security phone support. Today, I read the list of field offices that are slated to be closed, and they appear to be in rural areas.

The people who live there might have to drive a full day's drive several times to apply for and follow up on their benefits. It is not fair. It is not fair. It is not fair. It is not fair.

Across the country—my office hears from—it is not just New Jersey. Across the country, people are frustrated and feel like nobody listens. We get calls from across the country. My staff doesn't say: You are not from New Jersey, so we are not going to talk to you. My staff is just incredible people I have surrounding me in the office who remind me of the values I treasure.

So they wanted me to include tonight people not from New Jersey because, again, we hear from thousands of people in my State and so many around the country.

Here is Maria Caranci from Springfield, Delaware County, PA:

My name is Maria Caranci.

Forgive me, Maria, if I am pronouncing your name wrong.

I am 78 years old and live in Springfield, Delaware County, PA.

When I was 16, I received my first paycheck and saw money was taken from my earnings. I learned that about FICA, the special government savings account that I would put part of my earnings into until I retired. This was how I could pay bills in my old age. It was something I could always count on. My earnings history shows the good and bad times, including the gaps when I received unemployment.

My chosen career was in mortgage banking. Banking mergers, dramatic changes to interest rates, and even bank lending regulations meant times of unemployment with few options or jobs or accepting temp employment. I had to make the choice.

Every paycheck withheld FICA. I was almost 65 when I began my career at the bank offering decent pay with overtime. It was 2010. I had two goals to meet for my retirement: a mortgage-free home and working until I was 70, earning the maximum benefit.

Underwriters that I worked with had shown me what they felt added security to my personal finances. So I was diligent with setting up my emergency savings account. It would be there for anytime my Social Security check didn't cover my expenses on my home or me getting older. So I often worked until 10 p.m. at night, delayed taking days off, making goals possible.

The Social Security Administration sent information about my future benefit payments, so I made a budget and determined my escrow for taxes, insurance, and home maintenance to be taken from my benefit.

I knew how much I would have per week for my living expenses once my mortgage was paid. I used the overtime income from my emergency savings account. Everything relies on my receipt of my monthly check from Social Security.

The recent assault on Social Security has me terrified. People who were not elected, vetted, or made to swear an oath to protect our U.S. Constitution have taken our personal data, saying that they are searching for fraud. Errors are being made with this new regime and no clear resolution in sight.

Why do they need my personal information that includes my Social Security number,

work history, and bank information? In February, my identity was stolen. When thieves moved my mail using a postcard sent to USPS, my bank statement and a copy of my paycheck were forwarded to the thieves before I got the USPS notice of the change.

I froze my credit then and have done so later since TransUnion has the Bose address listed as a fraudulent one on part of their report but also has another address for mail that have to be returned to the sender.

I have quit fighting the data entry mistake, but I remain diligent and alert if mail is due and doesn't arrive. What can I do about this new group of identity thieves known as DOGE?

Until recently, I had confidence in my ability to provide for myself because I lived in the United States of America, a republic governed by the people, for the people.

My parents were children of the Great Depression. So they instilled in me how to be financially solid and survive. Now, at 78, I am learning everything that I hold dear is to be attacked by the 47th President using a contributor to his reelection as his adviser and the leader of a group named DOGE.

I do not feel safe, due to cuts in so many that have kept us safe—cuts in the CDC; cuts in the FBI; cuts in the EPA; cuts in the FAA and Social Security.

I worry about losing our foreign allies and the release of convicted domestic terrorists pardoned by the President while suspected immigrants might be whisked away before anyone even knows they are.

Everyone I know receiving Social Security benefits relies on those payments for their daily life. As prices increase under President Trump's leadership, many are not as fortunate as me who had a solid plan for increased expenses. We worked, putting into FICA with every paycheck that we received.

The thought of delaying payments or making errors so that anyone must prove their right to receive their benefit is stealing from people. Are we still the land of the free and the home of the brave? I am counting on our elected officials like you and the courts to preserve it.

Lisa Bogacki, Fleetwood, PA:

Hello. My name is Lisa. I live in Fleetwood, PA. 15 years ago, my healthy 42-year-old husband was found deceased on our couch by our then-13-year-old son. Our 10-year-old and 3-year-old stood quietly crying on the stairs.

Sudden cardiac death was the cause. The same day, my daughter asked if we would need to move to another house. I promised her—promised her—that I would do everything I could to keep them in the only home they had ever known. Those early days remain blurred in my mind.

I remember my father taking me to the Social Security office, and shortly thereafter, survivor's benefits for my children began showing up in the bank account to assist with their care. If not for these benefits, I would not have been able to keep my promise to my children.

It is not much money, amounting to roughly the salary of a minimum-wage job. Yet it was a lifeline to some piece of normalcy for my family, not a Ponzi scheme.

My kids have now aged out of the system. I am about to begin widow's benefits as my body cannot continue multiple jobs as a physical therapist, which I needed to do to make ends meet for myself and family.

Social Security benefits were essential to the care and being of raising my children. It was a promise from their father who had paid into the system his entire working life. We must work on continuing to expand these essential benefits and never consider dismantling or privatizing them.

Thank you, Senator Booker.

Here is Kayanna Spooner from Chippewa Falls, WI, who writes me:

My name is Kayanna Spooner, and I live in Chippewa Falls, WI. I am 63 years old. My husband Joe and I have five children and three grandchildren and live a wonderful life as our family is growing.

God bless you and your family.

We own businesses and work to contribute Social Security for ourselves and our employees. We did all the things we could do to secure our future and contribute to the larger community of those in need.

We felt that we were living the American dream until one day in 2012—

I know this personally—my dad. I feel for you, Ms. Spooner—

until one day in 2012, I was diagnosed with Parkinson's disease. Parkinson's disease is a degenerative brain disease that progresses over time.

Sorry. I am thinking about my dad.

It is unrelenting and affects motor and nerve processes.

Loss of benefits will have a direct and daily effect on me and my family as we navigate the medical needs we will be facing. I will need comprehensive care as I age. I will need medication every single day of my life, and I will need the security of a generous society to care for me.

Millions of others join me there. Please, Senator Booker, please protect my Social Security.

I just thank God that my mom had the resources to take care of my dad, and I watched that degenerative disease take from his life 20 years and how much it cost—the thousands of dollars it cost my mom to take care of him.

I know my friend ANDY KIM, who is in the Senate right now, is facing health challenges with his father. I know so many people personally whose parents have Alzheimer's. I know so many Americans who are not powerful. They are not rich. I know so many Americans who live in fear every day that one little thing will happen to them that will destabilize their financial well-being. And now those millions of Americans, because a President and a man named Musk are striking fear into them, are whacking away the people that answer phones, are firing the people in an Agency that already was struggling with wait times, already was struggling with slow response times—these people who are hanging on by a thread in their lives or are facing the people they love the most who are struggling with the diseases that so many of us in this body have been affected by, they are now worried. They are writing me letters with words like “fear” and “terror.” They are talking about staying up at night and not being able to sleep because they don't have a President who comforts them. They have a President who talks down to them, who lies about the services that they rely on.

What is this? It is not normal. It is not normal. This is America. How can the most powerful people in our land not comfort others, not tell them they have nothing to fear, but fear itself? Not tell them to have malice toward none but have charity toward all?

What kind of man is in our White House that makes fun of the disabled, who lies so much that the fact-checkers lose count, who minimizes the pain and the suffering? We have Cabinet Secretaries who say—the billionaires themselves who say: If my mom misses a Social Security check, ah. But if somebody else complains about it, they are probably a fraudster.

These people are not fraudsters. They are hurting. They are afraid. They are worried. For God's sake, this is America.

Every one of our Founders' documents is riddled with words that speak to our commitment to each other. Yeah, they were imperfect geniuses, but they were people that aspired to virtue. They read the greatest philosophers of their times. They said: What does it mean to be good to one another? What does it mean to create a society that is not run by despots and dictators who are so disconnected, who talk down, “let them eat cake”?

They dreamed of a different country than this, folks. They dreamed of a different country than this. They dreamed of a country that stood for not just “get all I can for me,” the biggest tax cuts possible to the wealthiest people. They dreamed of a nation where any child born in any circumstance from any place could grow up and have their American dream.

And God, it gut-wrenches me when I hear people not as privileged as me—and I am not Musk and DOGE—but my mom had the resources and the family to support her as she watched my dad die of Parkinson's disease. But this person who is writing in, she herself has Parkinson's. She underlines and bolds the part of her letter. She says—and I will read it again because, Ms. Spooner, I want you—from Chippewa Falls, WI—to know you are seen, to know you are heard, to know that maybe the President will talk down and cut and malign your only paycheck, your only hope, but I won't. I won't.

I see you. I feel you. You can't lead the people if you can't love the people. And I am sorry our President is not showing that. He may be saying those words.

She writes, with Parkinson's—I still remember my dad telling me he had it. She writes about Parkinson's:

It is unrelenting. It affects my motor and nerve processes. Loss of benefits will have a direct and daily effect on me and my family as we navigate the medical needs we are going to be facing. I will need progressive and comprehensive care as I age. I will need medication every single day of my life.

I know this. I know you will.

I will need the security of a generous society to care for me.

A generous society to do the basic for families in this kind of struggle.

Millions of others join me there. Protect my Social Security, Senator Booker.

I tell you, I am going to fight for your Social Security. I am going to fight to protect the Agency. I am going

to fight against unnecessary cuts that hurt the service it gives. And today into tomorrow, I am going to stand as long as I can. As long as I can, I am going to stand and read stories like this because you are seen; you are heard. Your voices are more important than any of the 100 of us.

More of your stories should be told on this floor. People that are scared right now, terrified right now, people living in rural areas that see their local Social Security Agency on a list that Elon Musk made of places he is going to sell away to the private sector, and you are going to lose your Agencies. Well, I will fight.

I am sorry.

Margaret Hebring from Chippewa Falls, WI. Chippewa Falls, two letters, my staff is keeping me on my toes. This is another person from Chippewa Falls, WI.

My name is Margaret Hebring, and I live in Chippewa Falls, Wisconsin. I am 77 years old, and I am a member of the Lac Courte Oreilles band of the Lake Superior Ojibwe. My husband is a veteran and who is currently—

I am sorry, so sorry.

My husband is a veteran who currently has cancer, and he is receiving chemotherapy at the VA hospital, which we have to travel to, which is over 100 miles away. And without our Social Security, I am not sure what would happen to us.

We would, for sure, have to sell our home. I have savings that will last me one month. I have savings that will last me one month right now. We live paycheck to paycheck. So please, please protect our Social Security.

This is Judith Brown. We are moving away from the great State of Wisconsin. We are going to the great State of North Carolina, where my dad is from, up in Hendersonville—no, Asheville. But this person, Judith Brown, is from Charlotte, NC, one of my top five favorite non-New Jersey States.

I don't know if my friend ANDY KIM has his top five favorite non-New Jersey States. New Jersey is obviously the best. Don't look at the Senator from Connecticut, and I hate to tell him that Connecticut is not on my top five non-New Jersey States, even though I got educated—

Mr. MURPHY. You lived in Connecticut.

Mr. BOOKER. I am sorry about that. I am sorry about that. The Presiding Officer is such a good man. His State is not on my top five non-New Jersey States, but North Carolina is. And I am going to read a letter from Judith Brown.

My name is Judith Brown. I live in Charlotte, North Carolina. I was 17 when I started working and worked for another 20 years as an administrator until I had to be declared disabled. Without disability, I would not have been able to see my specialist, get eye care, or any of the other needs that I had. I was also the mother of two young sons who are on the autism spectrum. Without disability, I wouldn't have been able to take care of them and get the care they needed to be independent young men.

God bless them.

I hear that they want to close the field offices and change the customer service line.

As a person with mobility and vision impairments, this is outrageous. I need to be able to access it the best way I can on the times that I can access it. Please, Senator, fight to protect Social Security for a senior like me and for young people with disabilities like my son. Thank you.

No, thank you, Judith Brown. Thank you for writing a letter. Thank you for speaking up. Thank you for not being silent. Thank you for advocating, not just for your family but for the millions and millions of other Americans who lean heavily not just on their Social Security checks but on the incredible public servants that keep that Agency working and who wish to have a President that said: I am going to bring the best of business experience to my customer service. I am going to bring the best of caring and technology and innovation. I am going to call the best computer technologist scientists in the country. We are going to make this the best Social Security in the history of our country.

And you know what, my friends, the billionaires I had on stage with me when I was inaugurated, I am just going to ask them to pay a little bit more, .00001 percent more of their net worth to make sure Social Security is safe forever.

I am sorry. It is crazy. I am going back to Pennsylvania. I mean, it is almost like you can't make this up, honestly. I just know my country. I know our character. I know how good of a people we are. I know how much we love one another. I know our faith in red States and blue States and right and left.

I have sat next to people on planes who introduced themselves to me as Republicans from a red State, and by the end, we are laughing and talking and sharing stories. We are a good nation. Together, we can be so great and show them that.

But how can we have a President that in 71 days drives this much fear into our country? It is absurd, everybody. It is absurd. This is why I can't let this be normal anymore.

Michelle from Lancaster, PA:

My name is Michelle Gruver—

I love your last name, Michelle—

from Lancaster, PA, and I would definitely be impacted if something would happen to my Social Security—

Michelle also has Parkinson's—

and I am on disability, and the money that I have goes pretty much to most of my medications and foods that I need to eat to keep myself going and strong. That is how it would impact my family. I wouldn't be able to afford also my insulin for my diabetes.

Parkinson's and diabetes.

So it is a challenge every month as it is even with the amount that we have because of the cost of pharmaceuticals and things to keep us going.

Yes.

So that is why Social Security is really important to us as a family. It helps us get by every day. Thank you.

This is Patricia Heaney Porter from Johnstown, PA:

My name is Patricia Heaney Porter. I reside in Johnstown, Pennsylvania. My work is varied. I have been employed as a secretary in the private sector, as a statistician for a government agency, as a real estate agent, and most recently as a legal secretary. This is my story of how Social Security has affected my life. My mother passed away in 1956. My sisters and I—

God bless you—

were 8, 10, and 11.

My maternal grandparents stepped in, and they raised us with the help of Social Security survivor benefits, resulting in good education and other needs to be met. We had almost normal lives due to these benefits.

While raising two children, I worked as a real estate agent. My income was based on commissions rather than salary, so I made entire Social Security payments based on my income. We had a roof over our heads, healthy food on the table. One of my children had serious medical issues. And I paid for her bills out of pocket, never asking for a penny from any government agency. These expenses were paid for from my income, and I paid taxes every year.

I waited until I was 70 to collect my Social Security benefits as I realized the later you collect, the better the benefits. I have no pension, and I live almost entirely on Social Security benefits. I am always looking for part-time work, but few people want to hire me as I will be 80 in June.

God bless you, God bless you.

Based on the benefits I receive, I am able to pay my mortgage and all monthly expenses. I receive Medicare which helps pay the medical bills.

Should Social Security and Medicare be taken from me, I will likely lose my home. I could no longer afford medical costs, groceries. I have a medical condition which requires regular visits with a specialist who is 70 miles away. Without Social Security and Medicare, I would no longer be able to see him, and my condition would result in death sooner rather than later.

Thank you for all you are doing to see that the benefits received from Social Security, Medicare and Medicaid will continue.

Senator MURPHY and I were talking. It is all interrelated, right? This is somebody on Social Security, but they have to drive for medical attention. We are in a hospital crisis in America. There are so many rural areas where rural residents of our country have to drive so far just to get to a hospital.

And cuts in Medicaid, we heard it from the letters I read in the last section, will endanger those hospitals' survival.

Charlotte, NC, again, Kevin Woodson. I get a lot of letters, my staff, from Wisconsin and Charlotte, NC. OK.

My name is Kevin Woodson. I am a 69-year-old retiree living in Charlotte, North Carolina. I worked 38 years for two Fortune 50 companies, and I thought that I would have a fully funded pension plan to live off of in my retirement. However, I never got to 25 years in, so only got partial pensions.

This is why I need Social Security. It covers the holes the pensions don't cover in terms of medical benefits. It allows me the freedom to enjoy my life, take care of activities that I need in order to keep myself healthy. Social Security is dependable, something I rely on—

Not a Ponzi scheme—

and I hope that we don't touch Social Security and we don't have any issues trying to

keep that money flowing. It is money I paid into.

Margaret Silva from Surprise, AZ. I love that name. Surprise, AZ.

Hello, my name is Margaret Silva. I live in Surprise, Arizona, with my husband. I started working at the age of 15 doing volunteer work as a candy stripper at the hospital where my mother worked. I did not get paid. After that, I started working as a waitress earning .50 cents an hour. After graduating from high school, I took various jobs earning a little more, and then I started working at Mountain Bell, and I retired after 30 years from Qwest. So if they do Social Security cuts, I don't know what I am going to do.

I will be forced at the age of 74 to look for a job. So those are my hard-earned benefits. I worked for that. More than 30 years I worked for that. Thank you.

Wayne Behnke from Chippewa Falls, WI. I need to go to Chippewa Falls, WI. This is the third letter you guys are having me read, including people reaching out to me from Chippewa Falls. God bless you. I need to visit your community.

Hello, I am Wayne from Chippewa Falls. Soon to be 69 years old. I have been on Social Security for a couple years, my wife and I. I spent years in the service, Navy, and, again, like I said, my wife and I are going to have been on Social Security. Saying that, we would, if we lost our Social Security tomorrow, we would lose our house, our cars, and pretty much our livelihood because this is what we have worked for, and we don't need to lose it.

Why do you work for 55 years and pay into Social Security and then lose it? Recently, I tried to get back online and get on my Social Security account. I wasn't able to. Because of that, I went down to the Social Security office in Eau Claire, Wisconsin, and they said they couldn't do anything for me that I had to set up an appointment. So I come home later, called, set up an appointment, and it is still three days out before I can get my appointment. And they don't know if they can help me. So at this point in time, I really need to know what is going on with Social Security, Senator Booker, because if we lose it, everybody else that is on it loses it. We are going to be in a really sorry state.

Those folks who answer phones and set appointments, they are sure important. When somebody is in crisis, they have to wait a few days, their check is missed, and it is real consequences for real people.

Hello, my name is Manuel. My wife and I live—

Surprise, surprise—

in Surprise, Arizona. We are both on Social Security. That is what we depend on to live our lives in our retirement years. We have to pay our bills, we have to buy food, we basically have to live off of that. So if they take our Social Security, what are we going to live off? Are you going to take care of us? You know, we are American citizens, and we deserve, and we have paid into it, and we have earned it. And it is not just something given to us. So leave our Social Security alone. Let us live our lives. Let us live our lives out the way they should be. And we are supposed to be in our golden years, so it is important to us. It is important to all Americans out there that are seniors. Let us live our lives. Thank you very much, Senator Booker.

Patricia Naughton from Pittsburgh, PA, I lift your voice.

My name is Patricia Naughton, and I am from Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. I have been paying into Social Security since I was 16 years old. I am currently 70 and have been collecting Social Security for the last 5 years. Without Social Security, I wouldn't be able to pay my mortgage, utilities, food, medicine, copays, and many other things. I would not be able to survive without Social Security. There is no reason that seniors should be held hostage over Social Security. This is our money, our money that we put into the Social Security system for many years. We deserve not to be threatened by the loss. Thank you.

Kathleen Woverding, from Hanover, PA.

Hello, my name is Kathleen Woverding, and I currently live in Hanover, Pennsylvania. I am originally from New Jersey and taught in the public school system for 29 years as a school librarian. When I retired, I decided to move to Hanover, Pennsylvania—

Kathleen, you are missed in New Jersey—

and at the age of 62, I started collecting Social Security because of COVID. I needed the extra stability that Social Security provides. I no longer have to work a full-time job because of Social Security, although I do work a part-time job and still pay into the system. Social Security provides me with stability, financial stability. It helps pay the bills, and I really don't have to worry about my finances because it is Social Security.

If Social Security is taken away, I will lose everything I have worked for the last 60 years. I feel that Social Security is a godsend. Protect it, Senator Booker. Thank you.

Cynthia Marino from Pennsylvania:

My name is Cynthia Marino. I am a retired registered nurse from Lancaster, PA. My husband—

I am sorry, Cynthia.

My husband died in 1990, and two of my children received survivor benefits for 8 years, during which time I was able to get my bachelor's degree in nursing and work part-time. All three of my children went on to get college degrees.

When I was 61 years old, I went on Social Security disability, having a hip replacement. I was switched to regular Social Security when I turned 65. I now depend mostly on Social Security for my husband and myself, with small pensions from both of our jobs supplementing Social Security.

I am now able to live independently in a handicap mobile home thanks to the money from Social Security in the past and present. It is much cheaper than Medicaid funds to keep me in a nursing home. Thank you, Senator Booker. Protect it.

Thank you, Cynthia, for your story.

These are just some. These are just some. I lift their voices. I lift their voices with mine.

I want to go to the Detroit Free Press, but before I read this article, I know my Senator from New Jersey is here. I am going to read this article, and if he is interested in our sixth hour, if he has a question, I will yield for a question while retaining the floor. But I am going to read this article, and then we will go.

This is from the Detroit Free Press. My mom was born in Detroit. I love the city. My family owes it a lot. It is where my grandfather went to find a job on the assembly lines in Detroit, building bombers during World War II.

It says:

Kathie Sherrill has been retired for about 10 years now and typically didn't think twice about whether she'd receive her Social Security payments on time.

For the first time ever, the 74-year-old Troy retiree went online in March on the very day that \$2,800 was to hit her bank account through direct deposit. She suddenly felt compelled to make absolutely certain that her Social Security money was there when it was supposed to be.

Sherrill and other retirees are on edge. Big. Time. Call it Social Security insecurity.

"I have never really worried about it as much as I have this year," Sherrill said. The money, thankfully, was sitting in her account in March and she knew her checks and payments for her ongoing bills would not start bouncing.

"I think anybody, future or current people on Social Security, are definitely targeted," she said. "It's a worry that I'm sure everybody is having right now."

I know it because I heard from my mom and her whole senior community. Seniors are uncertain of what is next for Social Security.

Since early February, AARP has seen nearly double the calls to its customer care line at 888-687-2277 as more people began being troubled about Social Security, and it has shown no signs of abating, according to an AARP spokesperson.

Since Feb. 1, AARP said it has been receiving more than 2,000 calls into its call center per week on concerns relating to Social Security.

"Social Security has never missed a payment and AARP and our tens of millions of members are not going to stand by and let that happen now," said John Hishta, AARP senior vice president of campaigns, in a statement last week.

While those words sound reassuring, it's frankly not comforting to realize that seniors need to hear that their monthly Social Security payments will arrive as usual. I don't imagine anyone had this one on their bingo cards for March 2025.

This kind of worry and stress.

On social media, I spotted one comment that said: "Folks, the federal workers began advising last month that all Americans remove all funds from the account where they normally receive any federal payments (Social Security, federal tax refunds and the like). Keep the account but only use it as a place for feds to transfer money. Immediately move all transferred cash to a separate account."

The concern, according to the post: "DOGE can declare you dead and force your bank to send back any funds paid to you."

Whoa, a lot of retirement angst there and, yes, some wild notions and really bad advice. Moving Social Security money around to hide it in another account, different from where it's directly deposited, actually could put more of your money at risk when it comes to some debt collection.

Anyone who has tracked retirement policy, as I have, knows that the potential unraveling of the Social Security system has been discussed for decades. Many retirees just never imagined a convoluted scenario where someone would think Social Security, possibly, could implode in a few days.

The health of Social Security, which marks its 90th anniversary this year, isn't all that makes many retirees and those about to retire nervous. Their anxiety can go into overdrive watching the stock market slide on Trump tariff news—and seeing all the political ping-pong with Social Security money that belongs in their pockets.

The Trump administration has maintained that it wants to cut costs and fraud when it comes to the Social Security program, not benefits. But people remain skeptical, and some commentary isn't helping.

Acting Social Security Commissioner Leland Duke in interviews last week, including one with Bloomberg News last Thursday, actually threatened to temporarily shut down Social Security after a federal judge temporarily stopped members of Elon Musk's Department of Government Efficiency from digging through personal data at the Social Security Administration.

The DOGE operatives, according to the court, will first need to receive proper training on handling sensitive information, which some might say is the least they could do.

The American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees, or AFSCME, Alliance for Retired Americans, and the American Federation of Teachers filed a motion for emergency relief on March 7 to halt DOGE's "unprecedented, unlawful seizure" of sensitive data regarding millions of Americans.

No surprise, Duke soon found it politically prudent to back off from his threat.

"I am not shutting down the agency," Duke said in a statement, indicating he had received clarifying guidance from the court about the temporary restraining order.

President Trump supports keeping Social Security offices open and getting the right check to the right person at the right time," [Duke said].

Financial tech CEO Frank Bisignano, who was nominated by President Donald Trump to lead the Social Security Administration, ended up being grilled by Democrats about the bedlam during confirmation hearings before the Senate Finance Committee on Tuesday.

The angst isn't about to go away, particularly if people continue to face even longer waits on the phones or see Social Security offices closing in their communities, thanks to some key changes being made now [by Trump's administration].

Customer service is on the chopping block, as the Social Security Administration reduces the number of employees, restricts what services can be handled by phone and shuts some local offices where people could talk to someone face-to-face.

On Wednesday, the Social Security Administration announced that it would initiate a two-week delay for implementing a highly criticized move to end phone services and require in-person visits for some services.

"In-person identity proofing for people unable to use their personal 'my Social Security' account for certain services will be effective April 14," according to the announcement.

But individuals applying for Medicare, disability and Supplemental Security Income who cannot use a personal "my Social Security" account can complete their claim entirely over the telephone without the need to come into an office, according to the March 26 announcement. That's good news for many.

Even so, merely delaying the change doesn't help others and, frankly, customer service could still suffer longer term.

And it will get very ugly if current Social Security recipients miss out on even one dime of their benefits.

At one point last week, U.S. Commerce Secretary Howard Lutnick suggested that his 94-year-old mother-in-law wouldn't complain about missing a Social Security check for a month or so. Only fraudsters would call, he said during an "All-In" podcast.

My thought: Have you ever watched an exchange where someone on Social Security is being denied a coupon or a senior discount at

a store or restaurant? It is not pretty. Worse yet, has Lutnick ever talked with a friend or relative in his or her 70s or 80s who depends on Social Security to cover basic bills?

Social Security provides retirement, survivor and disability payments to 73 million people each month. That number includes about 56 million people who are age 65 or older.

Some people—and even Sherrill includes herself in that group—are better off than others. They won't miss paying an electric bill or the rent because they can turn to retirement savings or money from a traditional pension. Even so, Social Security remains an integral source of income each month for all retirees and others who receive benefits.

"I'm concerned about my financial future," Sherrill told me.

Social Security now represents about half of her monthly income.

She never imagined that any Social Security fix would involve cutting benefits for existing retirees. . . . Some GOP proposals have suggested increasing the age for full retirement benefits from 67 to 69 over an eight-year period beginning in 2026.

But she now fears that it's possible her benefits could get cut at some point down the road.

Overall, Sherrill has had fun in retirement. She has nine grandchildren and 12 great-grandchildren and wants to spend more time with them, not less.

Sherrill and her friends who are retired are cutting back on eating out and entertainment, just in case something happens to Social Security. Higher prices for many things put pressure on fixed incomes, too.

She wants to take less money out of her retirement savings now, so she has more money sitting on the sidelines in case her Social Security benefits are cut in the future.

Even so, she's staring at an unexpected \$600 new monthly car payment ahead because she needs to replace a car that was in an accident a few weeks ago.

If her Social Security payments are cut or stopped . . . "I may be selling it."

The wild swings for the stock market—and 401(k) plans—only created more jitters.

The economy seems uncertain. Consumer confidence is in worse of a place. Leaders are threatening Social Security services. Offices are being cut. People are being laid off. So people are worrying.

Taking a rough guess, she estimates that she has lost about \$30,000 on her retirement investments as the stock market tumbled in early 2025.

Over the years, she said, cuts to Social Security were always part of the political realm. But she felt that Congress provided a stopgap to any drastic moves. And she doesn't believe that's true anymore.

"I'm hoping that Congress wakes up, looks in the mirror and decides they don't like what they see," she told me.

One big problem with fueling an atmosphere of chaos is that many people do start worrying about everything, including the possibility that Social Security isn't a system that they can depend on anymore.

Sherrill said she just took a call from her college roommate who mentioned that she was going to look at her bank account online to see whether her monthly Social Security payment was stopped or had arrived as usual.

"I said, 'You're OK. I got [mine] this month.'"

So many people are afraid right now.

Mr. KIM. Will the Senator yield for a question?

Mr. BOOKER. Yes, I will yield for a question while retaining the floor.

Mr. KIM. Thank you, Senator BOOKER, and thank you for coming to the floor tonight and speaking up. I have a few questions for you. So why don't you catch your breath.

I wanted to start by saying how proud I am of you to represent our great State of New Jersey, alongside each other. And it is not just me. I want to tell you—because I know you have been here in this Chamber non-stop for hours—but I want to tell you that people are paying attention, and they join me in thanking you in this moment. In fact, I saw a few posts I thought I would share.

Stacy from Bayonne said on Facebook:

I couldn't be prouder to be a life-long New Jerseyan than I am tonight. Keep it up. Get in that good trouble. Lead the way and hopefully others will follow.

Janie in Princeton said:

Thank you. Proud that you are my Senator and that you are bringing "Big Jersey energy" to DC tonight.

Vicki in Ewing said:

We are sending our strength to you. Medicare and Medicaid should not be touched.

And someone on Reddit even said:

I hope he wore the most comfortable and supportive shoes he could find.

In your opening, you said something that resonated with me. You said:

Our constituents are asking us to acknowledge that this is not normal, that this is a crisis.

I can't tell you how important it is to internalize it. That is why we are here at this late hour in the U.S. Senate. That is why you are leading here to make the case to the American people that this is a crisis. That resonated with me because I hear this over and over again. I hear it from people all over our home State, whether at townhalls or other rooms that are packed with people saying this moment is not normal; this moment constitutes a crisis. I am glad you are speaking on the floor and said that because what you said isn't just CORY BOOKER saying that; it is that millions of New Jerseyans we represent are saying it. And you are lifting up their voice. It is not just you are saying that; it is that millions of Americans who see something fundamentally wrong, and they are angry about it.

I have some questions for my colleague. But I want to add some context for this because I want to dig in a bit on why people are so angry at this moment and why what with we are seeing from Donald Trump and Elon Musk isn't in response to that anger; it is the cause of it.

A common refrain in the townhalls that I held are that people feel like nothing is working for them. There is a promise, a uniquely American promise that is simply going unfulfilled for too many. That promise is simple: Your government will work for you; your economy will allow you to advance if

you work hard and give your kids a better future; and your country will keep you safe by ensuring the world is stable and secure.

Senator, you and I are here because we know that this promise is going unfulfilled. To say that the American promise is going unfulfilled would be a tragedy in its own right. It would be something that we as a Congress should put our entire focus into restoring. But the sad fact is that this isn't just about a promise unfulfilled; it is about a promise that has been hijacked. It is about a promise that has been distorted to work for those who have been paid to play to be denied for everyone else.

Let's start with the promise that your government will work for you. This is the basis of our democratic Republic. We are public servants in that we serve the people. It is the people's priorities that we put first. It is their lives that we work to make better every day. It is their futures that we are endeavoring to brighten.

But when the people look at Donald Trump and his administration, they don't see that. They see Elon Musk who donated nearly \$300 million to buy his way into a seat in power. The world's richest man has been handed the keys to our government. And the same person who has been handed nearly \$40 billion in your taxpayer dollars to prop up his corporations is now working to fire veterans from their jobs, make the Social Security Administration less responsive to seniors, and make it harder for your government to work for you. That is what we have seen in the collection of billionaires that buy their way to fulfill their own American promise—a government that works for them and only them; a government that keeps them rich and at a cost to your Medicaid, to your Social Security, to the food you put on the table; government where they pay and they benefit and if you can't, you are left behind.

That is not the government our parents were promised. That is not the government we were promised. That is not the government we want to pass down to our kids.

As Senator BOOKER mentioned, our Nation is in crisis. Bedrock commitments are being broken. That starts with the first American promise. We can rebuild and restore that promise by actually working to make our government work for the people. Where we see corruption, we must call it out and combat it. And the corrupting power of money in our politics is one example. And the extreme wealth of billionaires like Elon Musk is drowning out working Americans, and that must be addressed.

And as we approach the 250th anniversary of the independence of our country, we have an opportunity to remind people that the promise of America is something bigger than ourselves. And that public service, not private enrichment for those at the very top but

public service is core to what makes this country special.

So let's talk about that second American promise. This is the promise of the American dream, that Rockwellian notion of the house and the white picket fence and the kids in the yard only works if you can pay for that house. It only works if you can afford childcare and healthcare for those kids. It only works if you can work hard and deliver something bigger and better than you are handed. And right now, that is not happening.

While we are fighting to bring change to our economy to make life more affordable and the middle class more accessible, what we are seeing from Donald Trump and Elon Musk is another promise hijacked for those at the very top.

Senator BOOKER, I want to just take a step back as I get into these questions here because you are talking about Social Security, talking about Medicaid, talking about so many of these other issues here. But in that broader context, what we have situated here is the recognition that we live in the time of the greatest inequality in our Nation's history.

So it isn't just about these programs and how we rely on them, it is that we are seeing the wealth gap widening, and it is happening faster and faster.

In many ways, I consider this to be the great fragility of America right now. We are the greatest, richest, most powerful country in the world but not for everybody. And what we see right now, it is not just about Social Security; it is not just about the checks, but as you mentioned, Social Security offices are closing, worry about customer service, people call on the phone lines. And it feels like efforts are on the way to try to sabotage our Social Security, our Medicare, our Medicaid, and then have people say: Hey, look, it is not working, and that is why we need to get rid of these things.

And that sabotage is something people see right before their very eyes. I mean, you heard the Commerce Secretary talk about how seniors won't mind if there are late payments. He said those that complain are fraudsters, as you mentioned. That is directly trying to undermine people who are working hard over the course of their lives.

I have to say, it is a great irony in many ways, this idea that the richest man in the world is criticizing the hard-earned savings of seniors that are just getting a little bit every single month for them to just try to get by, and then he calls it a Ponzi scheme.

My father, as you mentioned, is one of those that depends on Social Security for his entire livelihood right now. I heard another person at a townhall describe the feeling that she has right now, and I think you can connect with it. She says it feels hard to breathe right now because there is so much anxiety in the American people. I am glad you are shining a light on this be-

cause people are scared and they are worried and they want to know what comes next.

My question to you here is something that was actually shared by a constituent of both of ours talking about all the concerns of Social Security of this time.

But I thought it was very poignant in pointing out that what we also need to put forward to the American people right now is a vision going forward of how to not just restore and protect this promise but how we take it to the next step. If we live in a time of the greatest amount of inequality, not just to think about how we hold on to a receding tide but how to try to put forward some vision that can try to inspire the same way that Social Security did and put forward generational change—I wanted to ask you that sense.

Do you believe in that sense that right now, more than ever, as people are faced with this anxiety that is hard to breathe, that, yes, we will stand here on the floor of the Senate and do everything we humanly can to be able to protect what they have. But do you agree that we also have to put forward that positive vision of where do we take Social Security, where do we take Medicaid, Medicare; where do we take our economy to better work for everybody so we are not just trying to figure out how to better divide and hold on to the pennies that the billionaires are willing to share with the rest of us while they don't give us anything else to be able to move forward on.

And how do we come up with a vision that tries to shrink that inequality and live in a society that is willing to share that wealth and recognize there is more than enough to go around? And that is not zero-sum and that we can be stronger together in that way.

I would love to hear how you can paint that vision for the American people.

Mr. BOOKER. I will answer your question. But knowing that my mom is watching right now, before I answer the question, I want to tell the folks who may not know about the relationship with my other Senator from New Jersey—it is probably one of the more interesting relationships in here.

I always tell New Jerseyans, I voted for ANDY KIM before anybody else did because I was on an interview committee for the Rhodes Scholarship in New Jersey. I was a former Rhodes, and I really wanted the experience of what it was like to be on the other side because my experience was quite interesting.

These incredible folks came in, young people from New Jersey who were amazing, applying for this extremely competitive scholarship. ANDY KIM was one among that number, and he blew the committee away. So way back—I am going to retain the floor but ask you a question. What year was that?

Mr. KIM. That would have been 2004. Twenty-one years.

Mr. BOOKER. How many years?

Mr. KIM. Twenty-one.

Mr. BOOKER. Twenty-one years ago. In 2002, I lost a run for mayor and in 2006, I ran again. I was in between trying to do my work in Newark.

ANDY blew me away. I knew then that he was this extraordinary man of character and brilliance, this great mix of heart and head, this great mix of honor, and a fierce ambition to make a contribution to the world. And if you follow ANDY's career, he has been a public servant in some of the highest levels of the administration.

But then he ran for Congress, and I remember that race. You electrified, not just the district you represented but really the whole State of New Jersey. And then he came here.

But the moment that I remember most was during the January 6 attack. I was here on the Senate floor in this very seat. I will never forget how back here, MARK KELLY, an unbelievable Senator—he and I were two of the last people off the floor, along with one of our Republican colleagues, trying to make sure if anybody broke through we would be there. I can't believe as a Senator I was thinking how to fight my way off the Senate floor.

But I remember we got to an undisclosed location. A lot of Senators were in safe spots, a lot of House Members were in safe spots debating about what to do. I am so happy we came back late and continued the business of government, transfer of power.

While all these Senators were dealing with big issues, whatever, ANDY KIM took a broom, plastic bags, and began cleaning up under the Capitol dome—remarkable humility shown in a humble gesture about his love of country.

Now, here we stand on the Senate floor at the earliest hours of the morning, closing in on 2 a.m. You asked me this question I didn't expect which is: Hey, CORY, this now seems to be a time where Democrats are finding themselves about what they are against; shouldn't we be talking about a vision of what we are for? I am very upset watching what is happening to Social Security, watching what is happening to insinuate fear amongst seniors who should be retiring with security and peace, cuts undermining thousands of people being laid off—all of that is worthy of us standing here and the things we are reading.

But what I think Senator KIM is really pointing to is the fact that there are bold visions for whom we are going to be as a country. He is one of these big believers that we can be a nation that boasts about we are a country where somebody doesn't retire and lives on such a meager check that they are technically at the poverty line. "Senator BOOKER, we have more wealth than nations all around the globe—stratospheric wealth in this country, GDP growth, and can't we design a system that doesn't have seniors stressed out and living—those that live off of their paychecks—living there?"

The other thing I know you know about—and I recently did a talk with a Republican friend of mine, Senator YOUNG—we worked on a bill together because we both recognize we are in a grip with seniors—that generation, baby boomers, a generation ahead of me—I almost said us, but you are technically a millennial.

Mr. KIM. That is right.

Mr. BOOKER. I am an Xer. But the generation ahead of me is so big that we are seeing this massive group of Americans, soon to be retiring, and lots of people recognize it, calling it the “great retirement crisis,” not because Social Security checks won’t be there. You were asking me: CORY, what is the great vision for them to be there? But because just the reality that the Social Security checks themselves are so meager, and many other people don’t have jobs where they have 401(k)s and the like. Senator YOUNG—again, this is not a partisan speech.

Later, I will be quoting from the Cato Institute, the Wall Street Journal, where there are lots of conservatives who point to this not being a normal time in America; this being a crisis moment in America, not just people on my side of the aisle but Republican Governors, Republican thought leaders—a lot of folks are saying there is a real crisis in our country being caused by the current President, who, in 71 days, most people can’t say yes; most people say no to the question, Are you better off than you were 71 days ago?

So I want to answer your question by saying this: Everyone should retire with a secure Social Security. I believe there are ways to secure the programs by asking the wealthiest people who pay the smallest percentage of their income into Social Security to pay a little bit more in Social Security taxes on their income, which is minuscule. As you said, there is a gravity of wealth that is being created in this country, which is, again, something I am not against in terms of just being successful. But this idea that we have a system that creates a fair retirement is one thing we can do.

I think, also, one of these things we should be talking about right now is how do we make the Social Security system not frustrating for people who complained before Donald Trump laid off tens of thousands of people with Musk, who complained about wait times, and other things. There are ways we can improve Social Security services as well.

So I think we can do things to secure Social Security in the long term with a simple fix, not by raising the retirement age for people who are struggling but by doing things by simply saying: Do you know what? Social Security taxes are already regressive because they cap out at a certain amount. Maybe skip some of the people in the middle, under \$400,000 or \$500,000 a year, and make people who are the wealthiest in the country pay a little bit more.

That would be my vision. A very small amount would create a secure system. I think we can also do a lot to improve the Social Security services.

Then what I did with Senator YOUNG—this is what is special about this place when it happens. It is for people to reimagine what economic security could be about. I am now very quietly—I think I have told you about this. I have this great idea that I have been talking about for years called baby bonds, or that every child born in America—and this is not a new idea. We actually scraped it from people years and years ago on both sides of the aisle in here, who had this idea that why not in a capitalist society have every child be born with a savings account—excuse me—a growth account. The government seeds it with some money, and through their entire lives, people can contribute into that tax-free, and it can grow, so that by the time—not by retirement—but by the time they are 20, 25, 30, they have thousands, if not tens of thousands, of dollars to invest in things that create wealth, because, right now, lots of people are working paycheck to paycheck and don’t have stock accounts or the kinds of things that could actually produce a lot more wealth.

I am just throwing that out as one idea, ANDY. I am going to pause because I know you have another question, and I am going to yield to a question while retaining the floor. But I just want to say there are so many bipartisan ideas with which to deal with wealth inequality. I mean, the child tax credit was, unfortunately, not made permanent. It cut child poverty in America in half. It worked for an entire year. I remember some of my colleagues, from Marco Rubio to Mitt Romney, talking about: Hey, we should be expanding the child tax credit. We should be having a bolder vision for America—for retirement security, for wealth creation, for economic security. But we are not talking about those bold ideas.

We have a President who has come in, and one of the first things he has done in 71 days is insinuate fear and insecurity about Social Security by threatening it, by creating and telling lies about it, and by having somebody like Elon Musk calling it a Ponzi scheme. That is why we get fear. Then they take a hatchet to the actual Agency that undermines its ability to deliver service in a good way.

Mr. KIM. Will the Senator yield?

Mr. BOOKER. I will yield to a question while retaining the floor.

Mr. KIM. What you raised is absolutely right, and it is front and center in everyone’s mind.

You know, when my parents immigrated here 50 years ago, they didn’t know anybody in the entire Western Hemisphere of planet Earth. But Americans called them. It inspired them.

I asked them once: What was it that drew you here?

And they said that they felt that, here in America, they could guarantee

that the family that they raised, that their kids—me and my sister—would have a better life and more opportunities than they did, and that was the sense of that generational progress that is made.

But now, you know, I am standing here with a 7-year-old and a 9-year-old—I am hoping fast asleep right now—and I don’t know if I can make that same promise to them right now, that I can guarantee them that they will have a better life and more opportunities.

So, you know, there is that growing cynicism and pessimism about that American promise I talked to you about, and I just feel like there is an unraveling happening here, where we see this sense of concern, and it is being weaponized by some who create that sense of zero sum to push us away from this idea that we are a part of something bigger than all of us and that we can all lift each other up in that great American project.

It is sad because, as we were getting to that 250th anniversary, you know, it should be a time when we rededicate ourselves to the American project—right?—like recommit ourselves to what the next 250 years will be. But we are entering it now with a sense of pessimism on that front. So, you know, I guess my question to you here is, how do we break out of that tailspin on that front?

Mr. BOOKER. So, ANDY, you have gotten me really excited—

Mr. KIM. Yes.

Mr. BOOKER.—because I love that you are a millennial. I am X generation. I love the baby boomers, but they are quickly leaving Congress. This is the last baby boomer President you will ever have. I am confident of that. And new generations are coming forward to lead in America.

It is time that we dream America anew. It really is. It is time that we revive and redeem the dream. I just am one of these people who thinks, like: OK, guys, we have some of the brightest minds on the planet Earth. Some of our Founding Fathers said we need a little revolution every once in a while, like we need new thoughts and new ideas and new visions that energize people, that take a lot of the old divisions in our country and erase them and remind people we have common cause and common purpose. I want to get people excited again about the American dream. I want to renew the dream, to redeem the dream. We can do that. I am so excited about it.

And on financial security, it is absurd that we don’t have the greatest plan to create wealth, not for the favored few simply—again, the top quartile in America has crushed it over the last 25 years. Under Obama alone, the stock market doubled. But most Americans don’t own stocks. So people who are sitting on passive wealth were able to grow and grow and grow and grow, while working Americans saw their prices going up, housing becoming

unaffordable, and the idea of the American dream under assault.

It ticks me off that other countries are trying to out-America us. They are trying to take our secret sauce that we seem to be turning our back on: affordable higher education, apprenticeship programs. I mean, with some of our European competitors, a job just appears before you, and you can go right into an apprenticeship program where you can earn and learn and end up in a career that gives you not just success but that you thrive in.

There is no idea that we can't conceive of as a country. This is an idea and a time that I just think that we need to start being bold again in our visions for collective prosperity, for everyone to thrive—not just the favorite few but the many. I am telling you that those ideas are out there, whether it is baby bonds or the child tax credit or investing in science and research. There are so many things.

But you are—can I say this to you affectionately? You are a nerd as am I. We are two guys who love to read, who love American history. We are two guys in this body—go back a century. They never imagined that we would be here. OK?

One of my favorite speeches of all time was when Daniel Webster got on Bunker Hill, and he delivered a speech—I am going to read the introduction to it—to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the Revolutionary War battle at Bunker Hill, in which the outnumbered colonists inflicted such heavy losses on the mighty British forces attempting to invade. I love one of the quotes. I can't remember it exactly, but the general—the person who was leading the British attack—wrote in their diary.

He wrote back to the King: We won the battle, but a few more victories like this and we are going to lose the continent.

That is how great these people were, and this is what I want you to know: It is a new generation, right?

Mr. KIM. Yes.

Mr. BOOKER. Those leaders are no longer around. I read this, and I get excited by the possibility for our generation and for the new leaders who are emerging in America. They have to. It is their obligation to not let the dream die and to redeem the dream.

So here it is. I am just dying to read this to you. Here it is, ANDY. I don't want to read too much of it to you.

OK. Here we go:

If in our case the representative system is ultimately to fail, this idea of a democratic government, popular governments must be pronounced impossible.

He is saying:

We have an obligation to make a more perfect Union. No combination of circumstances more favorable to this experiment can ever be expected. The last hopes of mankind, therefore, rest with us. Can we make this democratic experiment work?

And it should be proclaimed that our example had become an argument for the experiment. The principle of free government

adheres to this American soil. It is bedded in the soil. It is as movable as this Nation's mountains. And let the sacred obligations—

This is the part, Senator KIM.

And let the sacred obligations which have devolved on this generation, and on us, sink deep into our hearts [the sacred obligations]. Those are daily dropping from among us who established our liberty and our government. The generation that established this Nation are now dying. The great trust now descends to our hands. Let us apply ourselves to which is presented to us as an appropriate object. We can win no laurels in our generation in a war for independence. Earlier and worthier hands gathered [all of those laurels]. Nor are there places for us by the sight of Solon and Alfred and other founders of our state. Our fathers have filled them. But there remains to us a great duty of defense and preservation, and there is open to us also that noble pursuit to which the spirit of the times strongly invites us. Our proper business is improvement. Let ours be the age of improvement. In a day of peace, let us advance the arts of peace and the works of peace. Let us develop the resources of our lands, call forth its powers, build up its institutions, promote all its greatness, and see whether we also, in our day and generation, may not perform something worthy to be remembered. Let us cultivate a true spirit of union and harmony. In pursuing the great objects which our condition points out to us, let us act under a settled conviction, and an habitual feeling, that these twenty-four states are one country. Let our conceptions be enlarged to the circle of our duties. Let us extend our ideas over the whole of the vast field in which we are called to act. Let our object be our country, our whole country. . . . And, by the blessings of God, may that country itself become a vast and splendid monument, not of oppression and terror but of wisdom, peace, and liberty upon which the world may gaze with admiration for ever!

That is a bold vision—this bold vision that doesn't give up on America, that doesn't surrender to cynicism about America. That is who you are, ANDY KIM, and that is what gets me excited.

Right now, we are fighting against what I think are tyrannical forces. I am sorry. When a leader stands up not with humility like in George Washington's Farewell Address or like some of the great Founders in their inaugural addresses, but who stands up and says, "Only I can solve these problems," but who doesn't use his speeches to heal and to comfort but to talk about the enemies he is going to pursue—and those enemies are not the adversaries who seek to destroy us but are the enemies who are other Americans—and to create an environment where our seniors, who should be retiring in security, are fearful that their Social Security or their Medicaid or their Medicare is going to be under threat, that is insidious to me.

This is an un-normal time. This is why I am standing here. But you, my friend, my partner in the Senate—God, this partnership. I am so excited about the future. I am so excited about the promise. Let us fend off all attempts to

cut Social Security and Social Security services. Let us fend off all attempts to cut Medicaid and Medicaid care and CHIP and all the other things that we rely on.

But let us also not forget that our obligation is not to defend what it is but to have a vision for what can become. We now, when so many people are giving up on the American dream, on the idea of America, on which you said so wonderfully that my children will do better than me—that basic bedrock that our children, generation after generation, will do better and better and better—it is time to redeem the dream and dream America anew with bold visions. It is not how we will just help people survive in retirement, but they are visions of how we can all thrive in this great Nation that has enough resource and enough abundance—abundance—to provide for everyone's hopes and dreams.

(Mr. MCCORMICK assumed the Chair.)

Mr. KIM. Thank you so much. Keep up your energy.

I yield the floor.

Mr. BOOKER. Thank you. You have given me energy. I am sourcing my energy from you.

I don't want to just cast aspersions on—and we are saying things that I just want to back up in fact. All of those letters—all of those letters from seniors—I see my dear friend from Pennsylvania is now the Presiding Officer. He missed all of the letters I read from Pennsylvania. In all of those letters, people were using the words "Ponzi scheme." Where did that come from? I just want to read from "The Joe Rogan Experience." I actually liked it. I enjoy listening to Joe Rogan.

Elon:

Social Security is the biggest Ponzi scheme of all time.

Now, that is a big statement. It is the biggest Ponzi scheme of all time, Elon says.

And Joe Rogan says:

Why? Explain that.

Elon says:

Oh. So, well, people pay into Social Security, um . . . and—the money goes out of Social Security immediately. But the obligation for Social Security is . . . uh . . . your entire retirement career. So you're . . . you're paying . . . uh . . . with your, the kind of people . . . you're paying . . .

And I am reading this verbatim.

You're paying . . . uh . . . with your, the kind of people . . . you're paying . . . like—like—if you look at the future obligations of Social Security, it far exceeds, uh, the—the tax revenue—uh . . . far.

If you've looked at the debt, the debt clock.

Rogan says:

Yes.

OK. There's, there's, there's—

Three "there's." I am reading it verbatim—

our present-day debt, but then there's our future obligation. So when you look at the future obligation of Social Security, um, uh, the actual, uh, national debt is, like, double

what—what people think it is because of the future obligations.

Rogan:

Uh.

Elon:

So, uh, basically, people are living way longer than expected.

That was the evidence of a Ponzi scheme.

Now, let's correct something. The reason why we have a massive debt in America—lots of people should take ownership over it. But the biggest debt creator in the last, say, 25, 30 years, is the President of the United States, the current one, in his first term, by blowing massive holes in our deficits to give tax cuts that went way disproportionately to the wealthiest Americans and corporations. And he wants to renew those tax cuts that independent budget folks are saying could add trillions of dollars to our national deficit.

So if he is talking about the debt clock or whatever he is talking about, he is part of an administration—even though he is not elected and not approved by Congress and whatever, he and his President—the richest man in the world and the most powerful man in the world—together they are driving an agenda that is going to drive this deficit much bigger. And they are going to try to pay for some of it—not all of it because it is trillions of dollars of projected debt. They are going to try to pay for some of it by cutting NIH grants, by cutting Medicaid, by cutting staff at Social Security.

So, no, Social Security is not a Ponzi scheme. People paid into it. And as ANDY KIM and I just talked, there are ways to preserve it, strengthen it, and make it better.

It is a program that pays benefits after a lifetime of work. It has never missed a payment. It has never run out of money. It is an insurance program. But don't take my word. Here is Current Affairs magazine editor Nathan Robinson writing on March 7: "Why Social Security Is Not a Ponzi Scheme."

That is a great title.

Old age insurance is not a scam, and it's not destined to collapse. Proponents of privatizing or eliminating Social Security are constantly telling lies about it.

Here is the article:

Elon Musk has called Social Security a "Ponzi scheme," comparing it to a scam in which a con man must keep finding new suckers in order to disguise the financial unsustainability of his enterprise. [The] term has also been used by libertarian commentators at Reason and the Hoover Institute, who try to convince people that the program is fundamentally broken and unsustainable. Because both Social Security and Ponzi schemes take money in from new contributors which they pay to old ones, it is easy to craft a superficial resemblance between [the two]. But Social Security is not a Ponzi scheme, and it's important to understand why, because the comparison is used to generate the illusion of a Social Security "crisis" that can be used to justify major benefit cuts or even the elimination of the program altogether. [Under the Ponzi

scheme,] the differences between old age insurance and Ponzi schemes, we can train ourselves mentally to resist the propaganda that is used to try to convince the public to support undermining one of our most important social welfare programs.

Let's think about a few different cases in which money is pooled and paid out. First, let us imagine a company has a pension scheme. (I realize this may be difficult to imagine these days, but stick with me for a minute.) Workers pay 5 percent of their income. The employer pays in an amount equivalent to 15 percent of the worker's income. When the worker retires, they get a fixed benefit every year for the rest of their life, equivalent to some percentage of what their salary was. [Let's call that] Scenario A.

Now let us imagine a different scenario: Five (uncommonly astute) middle schoolers create a rudimentary insurance scheme to guard against being punished by their parents. The children all go to the mall every week to play arcade games together. They each get an allowance of \$10 per week, which they spend at the arcade. What they decide to do is spend \$9 each week instead and put \$1 per week into a fund. If one of them has their allowance taken away by their parents, the fund will pay their arcade money for the week. That way, nobody in the friend group is ever deprived of the ability to go to the arcade. We are going to call [that] Scenario B.

Finally, let us imagine a scenario in which a fraudster tricks a group of old people into giving him their money. He says that if they invest their retirement money with him, he can guarantee them a 20 percent per year return, risk-free. They invest. He provides them with statements showing that their money is indeed growing at 20 percent [a] year. When they ask [him] to pull a portion of their money out so they can spend it, he disburses it. But what he [is actually] doing is spending all of their money and providing fake statements. He is able to keep paying withdrawals because he is constantly recruiting new suckers, just enough to cover what people are withdrawing. Eventually, people get suspicious, too many try to withdraw their money at once, and he flees the country. This is a Ponzi scheme, named after the Italian con [man] Charles Ponzi, who fleeced people in this way. We will call the Ponzi scheme scenario C.

Notice that there are similarities and differences between [the] three scenarios. A similarity is that there is a fund that some people are paying into while others are being paid. Another similarity is that all three are potentially unstable. . . . In Scenario A (company pension), employees start living a very long time in [their] retirement, the amount of money in the pension fund might not be able to cover the promised benefits, necessitating an adjustment of the contributions from the next generation of workers. . . . Or if, in Scenario B (middle school arcade . . . insurance), one of the kids might be so unruly that his parents are suspending his allowance every other week, requiring an adjustment of the rules for payouts or contributions . . . to keep the fund sustainable. Scenario C [the] (Ponzi scheme) is the most unstable of all, because it depends on an elaborate fraud, on fake accounting that disguises the fact [that] nobody has the amount of money that they are being told they have. It . . . only last[s] until people try to actually use the money. . . . But scenarios A and B could also collapse if they are not managed well.

We can see that despite the commonalities . . . there are fundamental differences between scenarios A . . . B and scenario C. The first two are legitimate ways for people to pool and distribute money, and they can

work just fine . . . accomplishing their intended purpose. The third is a fraud in which people's money is being stolen. The difference is more important than the similarities.

I have laboriously laid out these examples in . . . hopes that we can better understand why Social Security can be made to look like a "Ponzi scheme" but [it] isn't . . . one at all. "Social Security is the biggest Ponzi scheme of all time," said Musk. "People pay into Social Security, and the money goes out of Social Security immediately. But the obligation for Social Security is your entire retirement career." Now, it's true that in an insurance system, the incoming payments from new people might be used to fund outgoing payments to people who were already part of the [Ponzi scheme.] But that's not what makes a Ponzi scheme a Ponzi scheme. Musk, not for the first time, doesn't know what he's talking about.

One of the reasons Social Security can be made to seem like a Ponzi scheme is [because] people may misunderstand how it works. People might think that Social Security saves their money over time, and then when they retire it pays "their" money back. That is not how it works. It's not like a savings account. The money I pay in is not saved up for me, it's paid out to today's beneficiaries. When I retire, my benefits will be paid by the money coming in from the next generation of workers. Discovering this fact can make people think [that] Social Security is [a Ponzi scheme, but it is not.]

. . . . a Ponzi scheme is a fraud in which the returns are fake. There is nothing fake about Social Security. As long as enough money is in the pool to pay out the beneficiaries, the operation is sustainable, and perfectly honest. The only reason it matters that retirees do not pay for their own benefits, but depend on the payments of the next generation of workers, is that if there isn't a next generation of workers, we . . . have [got] a problem. But fortunately, there is every reason to believe that human beings will continue to exist, work, and pay Social Security taxes.

Now, what Musk and others who claim Social Security is a "scam" or in "crisis" say is that in the future, there will not be enough workers [to pay] retiree[s] . . . the promised benefits. Musk says: "If you look at the future obligations of Social Security, it far exceeds the tax revenue . . . There's our present-day debt, but then there's our future obligations . . . So, when you look at the future obligations of Social Security, the actual national debt is like double what people think it is because of future obligations. . . . Basically, people are living way longer than expected, and there are fewer babies being born, so you have [many] people who are retired and that live for a long time and get retirement payments . . . However bad the financial situation is right now for the federal government, it'll be much worse in the future."

But while he's trying to get you to think this is a major problem or some deep fundamental flaw with . . . Social Security, it isn't. Every insurance plan has to make adjustments over time. If there are a lot of wildfires burning down houses, a company selling fire insurance might have to raise premiums. . . . The increased premiums might be small, but without them the program would go bankrupt. [This] doesn't mean, however, that we'd be justified in saying . . . fire insurance plans are a "Ponzi scheme" destined to go bankrupt.

The adjustments needed to make Social Security sustainable in the long term are minor. Yes, people are living longer and having fewer babies. That means there ultimately has to be some kind of adjustment to

either how much is being paid in, how much is being paid out, or both. Republicans want to cut benefits. Defenders of Social Security, instead, want to raise the money going into it by increasing taxes paid by the wealthy.

It is so interesting that we just saw that in the dialogue with my ideas with ANDY KIM.

The amount of taxes that would need to be raised in order to make Social Security solvent is negligible (the Social Security Administration has estimated that “increase in the combined payroll tax rate from 12.4 percent to 14.4 percent” to make the program sustainable for the next 75 years). As Dean Baker and Mark Weisbrot put it in the introduction to 1999’s *Social Security* [book entitled]: *The Phony Crisis*: “The only real threat to Social Security comes not from any fiscal or demographic constraints but from the political assaults on the program by would-be ‘reformers.’ If not for these attacks, the probability that Social Security ‘will not be there’ when anyone who is alive today retires would be about the same as the odds that the U.S. government will not be there.”

Of course, in the 25 years since this was written, the chances that the U.S. government itself someday “may not be there” could conceivably have gone up.

This is a funny author.

Musk is certainly trying to make sure as little of it remains as possible. But the point remains. The theory behind Social Security is sound. It is not . . . like an unsustainable con, although it’s also not like a savings account. It can easily be sustained indefinitely, with some minor adjustments to ensure that enough money is coming in to keep it going. (It is also the case that even the need to keep enough money flowing in is artificial. As Stephanie Kelton explains, the restrictions on Social Security’s ability to pay out are created by a legal choice, not an actual financial constraint facing the U.S. government, which could keep paying benefits even when Social Security’s funding “runs out” if it was authorized by Congress to do so.) Beware the rhetoric of those who describe it as in a “crisis” or being a scam. They either do not understand the fundamentals of how it works or they are deliberately trying to deceive you. (I cannot say for certain whether Musk is knowledgeable enough to understand the basics and is lying or simply cannot wrap his head around the basic way an old age insurance program works.)

The author continues:

As Alex Lawson of Social Security Works explained to me, the right has been trying to destroy Social Security since its inception. This is for a few reasons. First, a lot of vultures stand to benefit from privatization, just as the privatized “Medicare Advantage” program has enriched insurers like UnitedHealth. Second, the right, believing that individuals should be responsible for their own fates, has an ideological opposition to government social welfare programs—even if this results in a bunch of old people being poor. They see Social Security as an offensive “Big Government” intrusion into the free market, something that compels people to put money into a retirement program whether they want to or not. The problem is that most of the public doesn’t share this hatred for the concept behind Social Security, and the program is overwhelmingly popular [on both sides of the political aisle.] Because they have failed to win the ideological argument, the right must therefore convince the public of a different argument: That the program is collapsing and doomed and can only be “saved” through major benefit cuts, which will be stated as the euphemism of “raising the retirement age.”

Hence the propaganda about unsustainability and Ponzi schemes. This can be effective because if you don’t know much about how Social Security works, it’s easy to be convinced that there’s something fishy about its payment structure or that it is heading for some dire financial apocalypse. But this is not the case. Baker and Weisbrot are right that the threats to Social Security come from those who say they are trying to “save” it from a crisis. We need to have a clear understanding of what is going on so that we can fight to save a program that works just fine and can easily be made to continue providing retirement benefits to every subsequent generation of Americans, ideally ensuring that nobody has to endure old age in poverty.

So why are they cutting Social Security staff? Thousands of people. Again—I say this time and time again—I am standing here because this is not a usual time. I think our country is facing a growing crisis. But I am quoting so many Republicans because a lot of us who have run stuff know that you don’t just fire people and then realize the mistakes you have made and beg them to come back to work. They know that you don’t just fire people that do essential functions in a program before you have even done assessments of what your goals and ambitions are for Social Security.

It is clear that their goal and ambition isn’t to invest in customer service to improve the complaints that I have heard over the years about waits, unreturned calls, challenges at Social Security offices. That is not their ambition.

We have missed a big opportunity to come together in this Nation and start to really reimagine our government that works for people, that can do big things and serve folks. Instead, we are trying to demonize people; we are trying to lie about critical programs, calling this a Ponzi scheme; make up out of thin air that somehow we are paying thousands of people that are over 150 years old, fraudulently. We are better than that.

To that point, I just want to again make my facts clear. Here is an Associated Press fact-check from the President’s speech: “Tens of millions of dead people aren’t getting Social Security checks, despite Trump and Musk claims.”

The Trump administration is falsely claiming that tens of millions of dead people over 100 years old are receiving Social Security payments.

Over the past few days, President Donald Trump and billionaire adviser Elon Musk have said on social media and in press briefings that people who are 100, 200 and even 300 years old are improperly getting benefits—a “HUGE problem,” Musk wrote, as his Department of Government Efficiency digs into federal agencies to root out waste, fraud and abuse.

It is true that improper payments have been made, including some to dead people. But the numbers thrown out by Musk and the White House are overstated and misrepresent Social Security data.

Here are the facts:

What has the Trump administration said about payments to centenarians? On Tuesday, Trump said at a press briefing in Flor-

ida that “we have millions and millions of people over 100 years old” receiving Social Security benefits. “They’re obviously fraudulent or incompetent,” Trump said.

“If you take all of those millions of people off Social Security, all of a sudden we have a very powerful Social Security with people that are 80 and 70 and 90, but not 200 years old,” he said. He also said that there’s one person in the system listed as 360 years old.

Late Monday, Musk posted a slew of posts on his social media platform X, including: “Maybe Twilight is real and there are a lot of vampires collecting Social Security,” and “Having tens of millions of people marked in Social Security as ‘ALIVE’ when they are definitely dead is a HUGE problem. Obviously. Some of these people would have been alive before America existed as a country. Think about that for a second . . .”

On Wednesday, Social Security’s new acting commissioner, Lee Dukek, acknowledged recent reporting about the number of people older than age 100 who may be receiving benefits from Social Security. “The reported data are people in our records with a Social Security number who do not have a date of death associated with their record. These individuals are not necessarily receiving benefits.”

“I am confident that with DOGE’s help and the commitment of our executive team and workforce, that Social Security will continue to deliver for the American people,” Dukek said.

How big of a problem is Social Security fraud?

A July 2024 report from Social Security’s inspector general states that from fiscal years 2015 through 2022, the agency paid out almost \$8.6 trillion in benefits, including \$71.8 billion—or less than 1%—in improper payments. Most of the erroneous payments were overpayments to living people.

In addition, in early January, the U.S. Treasury clawed back more than \$31 million in a variety of federal payments—not just Social Security payments—that improperly went to dead people, a recovery that former Treasury official David Lebryk said was “just the tip of the iceberg.”

The money was reclaimed as part of a five-month pilot program after Congress gave the Department of Treasury temporary access to the Social Security Administration’s “Full Death Master File” for three years as part of the omnibus appropriations bill in 2021. The SSA maintains the most complete federal database of individuals who have died, and the file contains more than 142 million records, which go back to 1899, according to the Treasury.

Treasury estimated in January that it would recover more than \$215 million during its three-year access period, which runs from December 2023 through 2026.

So are tens of millions of people over 100 years old receiving benefits?

No.

No. No. But the letters I read from scared people across the country show what happens when a President lies and when his unelected, biggest campaign contributor, the richest man in the world, just continue to make public statements to insinuate fear and doubt and chaos and then make announcements that they have to take back that they are going to end the call-in service, which so many seniors rely on.

Then they create more fear when people see that posted government buildings that are going to be sold at auction to the private sector are actually the addresses of their Social Security offices.

Why?

Everywhere I am going around my State and everywhere I have gone around the country in the last few weeks and my mom and her mostly Republican senior community are all up in arms and feel this fear—or the people that we have read about who write letters about losing sleep—and it is because of the chaos, the crass cruelty, the unjustified cuts and attacks on a program that is a bedrock between security and financial ruin for so many Americans.

Here is the Wall Street Journal writing about this, how Trump and Musk are undermining Social Security:

Dealing With Social Security Is Heading From Bad to Worse. The agency that administers benefits is cutting staff and restricting services as part of a Department of Government Efficiency review.

The Wall Street Journal writes:

The federal agency that administers Social Security benefits is facing a customer-service mess. The Social Security Administration is cutting staff, restricting what recipients can do over the phone and closing some local field offices that help people in person. The number of retirees claiming benefits has risen in recent years as baby boomers age.

Few federal agencies reach as far into Americans' lives as the Social Security Administration, which delivers a monthly check to some 70 million people. Many fear that the changes, part of President Trump's push to overhaul the federal government through the Department of Government Efficiency, are eroding confidence in the nearly 90-year-old program.

The Wall Street Journal continues:

Agency officials have acknowledged that because of a planned reduction in services over the phone, there will be longer wait and processing times. An estimated 75,000 to 85,000 additional visitors a week could show up at local field offices, according to an internal memo sent by Doris Diaz, the acting deputy commissioner for operations. (Details of the memo, which was reviewed by The Wall Street Journal, were reported earlier by the Washington Post.)

That is likely to tax the agency's 800 number, where people typically make appointments for office visits. Already, Social Security recipients have long complained about customer service.

Holly Lawrence, 64 years old, made several unsuccessful attempts to reach a human before she filed her Social Security claim online. The Washington, D.C.-based freelance journalist said she called the agency's 800 number several times starting in February. Each time, she got an automated voice that warned of a two-hour wait. Her calls were disconnected before she could leave a message or request a callback.

She gave up trying to reach a customer-service agent and created an online account on the agency's website on March 3. She had to wait two weeks for an account activation code to arrive in the mail before she could submit her claim. She is now waiting for that claim to be reviewed and processed.

Lawrence said she has virtually no retirement savings. "I'm financially strapped and cannot afford to get a financial adviser. It was important to me to be able to talk to someone at Social Security," she said, adding that she is concerned the customer-service delays she encountered could negatively affect others "who don't have the strength to be persistent."

The Wall Street Journal continues:

Social Security has a reputation as the "third rail" of American politics, a benefit to which elected officials make cuts at the risk of their own re-election. President Trump has vowed not to cut benefits. But he and DOGE's leader, Elon Musk, have made unfounded claims of widespread fraud in the program.

I am going to repeat that sentence by the Wall Street Journal:

[H]e and DOGE's leader, Elon Musk, have made unfounded claims of widespread fraud in the program.

Commerce Secretary Howard Lutnick said in a recent podcast interview that if Social Security checks were hypothetically delayed, it might catch those guilty of fraud because they would make "the loudest noise screaming, yelling and complaining."

Critics say turmoil at the agency is undermining trust in the safety-net programs.

"They're killing these programs from the inside," said Illinois Gov. JB Pritzker, a Democrat. "The result of which is, we don't know what they are doing to tear down the scaffolding that holds Social Security together."

DOGE has gained access to systems containing personal information but a federal judge has temporarily blocked those efforts. On Friday, Leland Duke, acting Social Security commissioner, threatened to shut down the agency because of the order, but later reversed course.

Duke, the acting commissioner, said the changes "are designed to make sure the right payment is to the right person at the right time. It's a common-sense measure."

Even before DOGE's plans went into motion, the agency's customer-service operation had been showing signs of strain.

Roughly 47% of the quarter million people who call Social Security's 800-number on an average day have gotten through to a representative this year. That is down from nearly 60% in 2024. The average time to wait for a callback is over two hours.

There has been a steady decline in the agency's staff, and DOGE plans to cut employment by another 12% this year. That would bring the total number of employees to about 50,000, from about 57,000 today and nearly 68,000 in 2010.

"Customer service has been going downhill for years," said Bill Sweeney, senior vice president at AARP. "It's going to get worse."

Some of the Social Security Administration's changes amount to cuts in services.

The Wall Street Journal continues:

Starting March 31, people who want to file for retirement, survivor or disability benefits or change their direct deposit information can no longer complete the process by phone, the agency said Tuesday. Instead they must do so online or at a field office.

The agency said it is stopping phone claims as part of an effort to reduce fraud and strengthen identity-proofing procedures. The Social Security agency has estimated that improper payments represent 0.3% of total benefits.

Duke acknowledged that recent changes, including the shift away from claiming on the phone, are likely to drive up the numbers making appointments at field offices over the next 60 days. He said field employees would be trained over the next two weeks to respond to the changes.

"We're going to adjust our policy and our procedures to adapt to that volume," he said in a recent call with reporters. "These changes are not intended to hurt our customers."

Duke said Monday in a call with advocates that the phone service policy change

and quick timeline were directed by the White House, according to people familiar with the call.

Directed by the White House.

Kathleen Romig, director of Social Security and disability policy at the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, says it isn't clear why the agency chose to discontinue identity verification over the phone, while allowing it online and in person. She and other advocates say that by discontinuing the phone option, the agency is creating hurdles for those who lack internet service or live far from a field office.

The agency has also largely stopped serving walk-in customers in field offices, said Maria Freese, senior legislative representative at the nonprofit National Committee to Preserve Social Security & Medicare. Most wanting in-person service must book appointments on the 800-number.

In February, 45% of people who scheduled a phone or in-person appointment to file a claim got one within 28 days.

DOGE plans to close nearly 50 of the agency's approximately 1,200 field offices, according to Social Security Works, although a spokeswoman for the nonprofit said some of the offices on the list "don't seem to exist."

Frank Bisignano, chairman and CEO of Fiserv, Inc., has been picked by Trump to serve as [Social Security's] commissioner and will appear before the Senate Finance Committee on Tuesday.

I mean, this is the Wall Street Journal pointing out utter incompetence, utter incompetence. And they are rolling back, trying to catch up, but they don't seem to care, and the way they are going about this they are hurting seniors. They are undermining the security of the program.

The title of the Wall Street Journal's article is the best, it is taking services, Social Security services are now going from bad to worse, under this leadership, who promised they were going to serve people.

I see the Senator standing, and I will yield for a question while retaining the floor, if he has one.

Mr. MURPHY. Senator BOOKER, I am going to pose to you a pretty simple question here, but, first, let me lay down a little bit of a predicate.

You know, we have heard already some talk tonight about this extraordinary statement, but not terribly surprising, from the Secretary of Commerce, who is a close friend of the President, somebody who is very close to all of the decisions being made in the White House, where he said, you know, that if a Social Security recipient misses their check for a month, then they should not complain.

My mother-in-law wouldn't complain.

That is easy for him to say, you know, maybe you wouldn't complain if your son-in-law was a billionaire. You probably are not going to be harmed by missing a Social Security check if you have got a billionaire in the family.

But 99.99 percent of Americans do not have a billionaire that they can get on the phone if they miss a month, and 1 month's Social Security check disappearing is a cataclysm for a lot of families.

As I was listening to you, I just did a little bit of, you know, easy, back-of-

the-napkin math. So the average Social Security check, on a monthly basis, in this country is somewhere around \$2,000. Obviously, it varies based on how much money you put in and what your income was, but, on average, it is about \$2,000.

Now, some Americans have supplemental retirement income, but fewer and fewer do today because it is just not the case any longer that employers are going to provide for you a defined benefit plan. So if you were working minimum wage your entire life or if you were working a low-wage job, you are not going to have money to put away in Social Security.

I remember during one of my walks across the State of Connecticut, spending about half an hour walking with an elderly gentleman in Willimantic, CT, and he told me a story that is not atypical. He worked his entire life. Most of his adult life he worked for Walmart. He was really proud of working for Walmart. He helped a whole bunch of people in his community. He was working for a great American company, a company he was proud of. He was helping people every single day that lived in his neighborhood get what they needed when they came into the store.

But you know the wage he was making at Walmart. He was making very little, and they didn't have any defined benefit plan. They would let him save a little bit of money if he could find the means, but he couldn't because every single dime that he made from Walmart had to go to rent and groceries and medicine and cell phone bill and transportation.

And so he worked for 20 years at Walmart, and when he retired, do you know how much he had in savings? Zero. Zero. And he felt like he had done everything people had asked him for. He worked for a great American company. He helped people. He worked full time. He didn't miss time. He didn't goof around.

And when he retired, he had nothing—nothing—saved. So the Social Security check, which to him was probably about \$2,000 a month, was everything he had. And he is walking with me explaining to me what his life is like today. He was coming out of the liquor store, and that was one of the things he did every day was go down to the liquor store and, you know, buy a nip or two and, you know, just pass a couple hours. He didn't like to spend a lot of time in his house because he has roommates.

He lives in a small apartment with two other guys, strangers. He doesn't know them. And he says to me as we are walking: This is not how I expected my life to go. I thought if I worked my entire life and I played by the rules and I worked hard, you know, I would have a little bit more dignified retirement than this. I share a room with two other guys that I don't know.

And that is the reality for a lot of Americans. That is the reality for a lot

of retirees. You know, \$2,000 is the average Social Security check. I don't know why I picked Tallahassee, but I just picked Tallahassee. I said what is the average one-bedroom rent in Tallahassee? It is \$1,200, utilities are probably a couple hundred dollars, the average senior citizen spends \$500 a month on food. Rent, utilities, food, that is it. That is your \$2,000. You have nothing left if you are 1 of the 7 million Americans who rely only on Social Security like my friend from Willimantic.

You have nothing left for medicine, for transportation. You have got nothing left for a cell phone. You have nothing left to go to the movies once a month. You have nothing left for presents for your grandkids for Christmas or for their birthday. If you are relying on Social Security—and many people who have worked their entire life are—you go without that check for 1 month, your whole life falls apart.

And so this “cavalierness” that Musk and Trump have about Social Security, that the billionaires that advise them have about Social Security: Don't worry about it if you miss a check for a month or 2 months. You are a fraudster. You are trying to defraud the government if you complain about missing a Social Security check. It is so disconnected from reality.

I know we are going to talk later today about the plans to shut down the Department of Education. It shows this similar disdain for public education, the way that they are showing a disdain for working Americans who are relying on Social Security as their primary means of retirement income, the disdain for the 40 million working Americans who rely on Medicaid.

And it is not hard to understand why, because if you are a billionaire, if you are Elon Musk, if you are Donald Trump, you don't have to rely on the public school system. Your kids go to fancy private schools. You will never need to rely on Medicaid. You have lived fortunate lives—in Donald Trump's case because he was born into wealth. You will get a Social Security check, but that is not going to be your primary retirement.

And so you can understand, if you put a bunch of billionaires in charge of the government who don't lead lives that are remotely connected to how average people live, they will say things like Social Security is just one big Ponzi scheme, and that is the big one to eliminate or, you know what, America will be all right if we impose \$880 billion in cuts to the insurance program for 24 percent of Americans or let's shut down the Department of Education because, I don't know, public education doesn't matter to me.

So I think it is just the reality that we are living in today in which we have people who are making these decisions who just don't understand how normal people's lives work and, in particular, how a person's life falls apart if they have any diminution in their Social Security income, when the average

check is \$2,000 a month and the average expenses in most cities for a senior citizen who relies on Social Security are going to be far higher than \$2,000 a month.

Here is my question for you. You laid out what is going on with Social Security today. It is like the opposite of efficiency. It is called the Department of Government Efficiency. And what we know for certain in the Social Security system is that everything they are doing has the intent of making the system less efficient, right? You don't just close dozens of offices and shut down the phone system to make the system more efficient. You do that to make the system less efficient.

And so I am trying to figure out why, right? I am trying to figure out why. And I will give you, you know, two theories and then let you tell me if you think I am right or I am wrong. It could be a pretext to eradicate the whole system.

What did they say about USAID? They said that USAID was a corrupt enterprise. It was corrupt. No evidence of corruption in USAID. No evidence of corruption, no allegations of specific corruption, but they just made these accusations that USAID was criminal. Musk and Trump said this: It is a criminal enterprise. It is a corrupt enterprise. And that became their justification to eliminate it. Within weeks, USAID, one of the most important vehicles of U.S. national security was gone—was gone. They didn't run on that. Nobody saw that coming.

It was 2 weeks of allegations about criminality and corruption, and then USAID vanished. And people were like looking around, what happened? They didn't tell us they were going to do that, and now it is gone. They certainly didn't run on eliminating Social Security or cutting people's benefits. But, boy, the playbook seems a little familiar here that all of a sudden there are these lies being told. Lies being told. Let's say what it is about the corruption inside Social Security.

As you said, the improper benefit payments are minuscule, right, .3 percent of overall payments.

And so is this a pretext to ultimately make big cuts in Social Security or, alternatively, is it just part of a plan to just sort of put the entire country on edge, right? To just make everybody wake up in the morning wondering whether they are next, right? Is it my Medicaid benefit that is going to be cut? Is Social Security going to be there for me if I am a Federal employee? You know, is my job here next week?

And is that a means of distracting you from the corruption, the thievery that is happening at the highest levels of government? Is that in service of an agenda to try to convert this country from democracy to something else, if everybody is just so focused on the next hit, Medicare, Medicaid, Social Security, my son losing his Federal job? Is that a means to ultimately try

to drive an agenda through the back door while people are looking at the threats coming at them through the front door? It is clearly not about efficiency. I mean, that is what we know. The changes they are making to Social Security are not about efficiency, so the question is, What is the agenda here if it is not efficiency?

Mr. BOOKER. And, again, you and I and the Presiding Officer, there are a lot of people here I know that operate from just a place of just like decency. There are problems with government. We need to fix them. We need to make government more efficient. We need to deal with the national debt.

There are so many things that people on the right and the left don't agree on. You and I can agree that, God bless America, the government could be a lot more efficient.

But the question is, They are not playing on the level. There are lies about USAID like, I don't know, 5 million condoms going to Gaza or something outrageous and easily proven false, time and time again. The President of the United States, again, this doesn't shock people anymore, he is a President, more than any other modern President, by independent fact-checkers, has been proven to lie over and over again.

But as I sat there listening to his speech, and he just goes on and on about transgender mice when that was proven to be utterly a lie or else somebody just misreading the kind of mice that are used in medical experiments which have a similar word.

So are they lying in order to attack these programs? DOGE is insidious in the fact that they keep posting things and then having to pull them down because, just, independent folks.

And I have article after article—we are so far behind on this agenda of things to get through, I am not going to read them all, some of them I will submit to the RECORD—but not people on the left calling them out for what they are doing and saying being a lie about Social Security.

So you are pointing out a pattern. First, they tell terrible lies to try to whip up public sentiment against entities created in a bipartisan way, by the way.

Mr. MURPHY. Right.

Mr. BOOKER. Using congressional powers, approving spending, approving programs, approving Agencies. Let's create incredible lies. Magnify them on social media, try to spread them with our influencers and everybody. So now people believe that somehow, oh, the President talked about all this money going to transgender mice. That is a lie.

But we are going to use that as an excuse to attack the scientific funding. We are going to use that as an excuse to attack Medicaid. We are going to use that as an excuse to pull the people fighting Ebola out of East Africa.

And so I was told by a colleague of mine, a Republican colleague of mine:

When you come here, don't try to get in the head of your colleague and understand what their motivations are.

But this, to me, is a pattern in which they are trying to undermine public confidence. And the result of this pattern has seniors—letter after letter I wrote—using things like “I am losing sleep.” “I am terrified.” “I am scared.” “Help me, please.” Telling the most painful stories about retirement insecurity, about health challenges.

And so, again, I have this expectation, whether you are a Republican or Democratic President, you don't insinuate fear amongst vulnerable communities. You don't insinuate fears amongst our elders who deserve respect and deserve to retire with dignity. You don't do that. You stand boldly in front of them and say: Do you know what? There are some things we are going to improve. We are going to try to bring the best minds in America to make the best customer service because every independent group has been saying that the customer service is failing. Yeah, we want to go after fraud and abuse. We are not going to do it. The first thing we are going to do is fire the inspectors general who have a better record than Elon Musk does over this last decade rooting out fraud and abuse under Democrat and Republican Presidents. It just doesn't add up. It is not on the level.

So before I allow you to ask this next question: What does this amount to, Senator MURPHY? Ultimately, what this amounts to is an attack on the programs, the healthcare, the services, the retirement security that millions of Americans rely on. And often, for them, what they are relying on is the difference between safety and security and chaos and destitution. I am not exaggerating that.

When somebody's Social Security check is the only income they have and they have already downsized—as you said, brought in roommates—doing everything they can to cut costs because, under this President, costs are going up.

This is why we have to stand and not let this happen.

Mr. MURPHY. Will the gentleman yield?

Mr. BOOKER. Yes, I will yield for a question while retaining the floor.

Mr. MURPHY. So there is also a third agenda here. We were not necessarily both here at this time, but a few Republican administrations ago, there was an attempt to privatize Social Security, to take, you know, the corpus and move that money into the hands of the private sector for them to manage the money and, of course, charge a fee or a commission for the management of the money. The Social Security trust fund, if sort of fully handed over to investors on Wall Street, could make a lot of money for that industry.

The American people rose up against that. It was stopped in its tracks. But that is still a priority for a lot of allies

of the President, to get their hands on that money inside Social Security.

And, again, I am previewing a future conversation, but I keep on making the analogy to what is happening inside the education space because those same industries—whether it was the investment banks or private-equity firms—get wide-eyed at our public education dollars as well because they would love to get their hands on those public education dollars and have private equity companies running our elementary schools, middle schools, and high schools and skimming a little bit of money off the top to pay back their investors.

And so, you know, the other potential agenda here is to attack the public administration of Social Security, attack the public administration of our public schools in order to shift that administration—and the oversight of the investments in the case of the Social Security—to the private sector so that the President can hand those functions and that oversight to friends in the private sector. And, once again, it just becomes a money-making vehicle for folks who are already doing very well instead of an exercise in just trying to promote governance.

Instead of the agenda simply being the education of our kids or the administration of a benefit program, it just becomes about making somebody else money.

I pose that as a question to my friend because we saw this attempt to try to privatize Social Security, and you can certainly see at the end of this assault, this false assault on the inefficiency of the public administration, the solution being to turn the program over to the private sector, the privatization of Social Security that many Republicans have wanted for a long time finally coming to fruition.

Mr. BOOKER. Right. But that is the problem, right? Is that if you have an idea, bring it. Let's have an actual debate. Let's bring in experts. Let's have a debate.

The person you are talking about, Bush, who had that idea, he had the good sense to say: Do You know what? I am not going to try to kill the Agency. I am not going to lay off thousands of their employees. I am not going to drive the services it provides, make them worse, to be called out by right-leaning newspapers and right-leaning writers. I am actually going to bring my idea forward, and let's have the debate in Congress. Let's bring people together. Let's hold the hearings. Let's have the conversation.

I can deal with that because—this is going to surprise you, Senator MURPHY—I have had conclusions about policy positions that I have changed over the years. When I had a debate, I had a contest of ideas, people have persuaded me.

But that is not the way Trump operates. He tried to kill healthcare without a plan. The powerful letter I read by John McCain about why he voted

no, it was because it was first: Kill this thing that people rely on. Don't worry. Trust me. We will figure it out later.

That is what is happening with Medicaid right now. There is no conversation about how to better provide healthcare to the tens of millions of people that rely on Medicaid, from our seniors to expectant mothers to people with disabilities—no conversation. They are just sending people into dark rooms and saying: Here is \$380 billion I need. Find a way to cut it. Let's kill it and see what happens.

Mr. MURPHY. Ready, fire, aim.

Mr. BOOKER. Ready, fire, aim.

Senator MURPHY, I prepared for so many days on this, and we are talking about the points so I am going to submit—there are lots of articles here that I am going to submit to the RECORD.

Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to have printed in the RECORD a Washington Post article about “Long waits, waves of calls, website crashes: Social Security is breaking down.”

There being no objection, the material was ordered to be printed in the RECORD, as follows:

LONG WAITS, WAVES OF CALLS, WEBSITE CRASHES: SOCIAL SECURITY IS BREAKING DOWN
(By Lisa Rein and Hannah Natanson)

The Social Security Administration website crashed four times in 10 days this month, blocking millions of retirees and disabled Americans from logging in to their online accounts because the servers were overloaded. In the field, office managers have resorted to answering phones at the front desk as receptionists because so many employees have been pushed out.

But the agency no longer has a system to monitor customers' experience with these services, because that office was eliminated as part of the cost-cutting efforts led by Elon Musk.

And the phones keep ringing. And ringing.

The federal agency that delivers \$1.5 trillion a year in earned benefits to 73 million retired workers, their survivors and poor and disabled Americans is engulfed in crisis—further undermining its ability to provide reliable and quick service to vulnerable customers, according to internal documents and more than two dozen current and former agency employees and officials, customers and others who interact with Social Security.

Financial services executive Frank Bisignano is scheduled to face lawmakers Tuesday during a Senate confirmation hearing as President Donald Trump's pick to become the permanent commissioner.

For now, the agency is run by a caretaker leader in his sixth week on the job who has raced to push out more than 12 percent of the staff of 57,000. He has conceded that the agency's phone service “sucks” and acknowledged that Musk's U.S. DOGE Service is really in charge, pushing a single-minded mission to find benefits fraud despite vast evidence that the problem is overstated.

The turmoil is leaving many retirees, disabled claimants and legal immigrants who need Social Security cards with less access or shut out of the system altogether, according to those familiar with the problems.

“What's going on is the destruction of the agency from the inside out, and it's accelerating,” Sen. Angus King (I-Maine) said in an interview. “I have people approaching me all the time in their 70s and 80s, and they're beside themselves. They don't know what's coming.”

King's home state has the country's oldest population. “What they're doing now is unconscionable,” he said.

Leland Dudek—the accidental leader elevated to acting commissioner after he fed data to Musk's team behind his bosses' backs—has issued rapid-fire policy changes that have created chaos for front-line staff. Under pressure from the secretive Musk team, Dudek has pushed out dozens of officials with years of expertise in running Social Security's complex benefit and information technology systems. Others have left in disgust.

The moves have upended an agency that, despite the popularity of its programs, has been underfunded for years, faces potential insolvency in a decade and has been led by four commissioners in five months—just one of them Senate-confirmed. The latest controversy came last week, when Dudek threatened to shut down operations in response to a federal judge's ruling that Dudek claimed would leave no one with access to beneficiaries' personal information to serve them.

Alarmed lawmakers are straining to answer questions from angry constituents in their districts. Calls have flooded into congressional offices. The AARP announced on Monday that more than 2,000 retirees per week have called the organization since early February—double the usual number—with concerns about whether benefits they paid for during their working careers will continue. Social Security is the primary source of income for about 40 percent of older Americans.

Trump has said repeatedly that the administration “won't touch” Social Security, a promise that aides say applies to benefit levels that can only be adjusted by Congress. But in just six weeks, the cuts to staffing and offices have already taken a toll on access to benefits, officials and advocates say.

CREATING A FIRE

With aging technology systems and a \$15 billion budget that has stayed relatively flat over a decade, Social Security was already struggling to serve the public amid an explosion of retiring baby boomers. The staff that reviews claims for two disability programs was on life support following massive pandemic turnover—and still takes 233 days on average to review an initial claim.

But current and former officials, advocates and others who interact with the agency—many of whom spoke on the condition of anonymity for fear of retribution—said Social Security has been damaged even further by the rapid cuts and chaos of Trump's first two months in office. Many current and former officials fear it's part of a long-sought effort by conservatives to privatize all or part of the agency.

“They're creating a fire to require them to come and put it out,” said one high-ranking official who took early retirement this month.

Dudek, who was elevated from a mid-level data analyst in the anti-fraud office, hurried to cut costs when he took over in mid-February, canceling research contracts, offering early-retirement incentives and buyouts across the agency, and consolidating programs and regional offices. Entire offices, including those handling civil rights and modernization, were driven out. The 10 regional offices that oversee field operations were slashed to four.

“I do not want to destroy the agency,” he said in an interview Monday. “The president wants it to succeed by cutting out the red tape to improve service while improving security.”

Musk's DOGE team began poring through Social Security's massive trove of private

data on millions of Americans, working in a fourth-floor conference room at the Woodlawn, Maryland, headquarters, with blackout curtains on the windows and an armed security guard posted outside.

Their obsession with false claims that millions of deceased people were fraudulently receiving benefits consumed the DOGE team at first. Then came new mandates designed to address alleged fraud: Direct deposit transactions and identity authentication that affect almost everyone receiving benefits will no longer be able to be done by phone.

Customers with computers will be directed to go through the process online—and those without access to one to wait in line at their local field office. A change announced internally last week will require legal immigrants with authorization to work in the United States and newly naturalized citizens to apply for or update their Social Security cards in person, eliminating a long-standing practice that sent the cards automatically through the mail.

“We realize this is a significant change and there will be a significant impact to customers,” Doris Diaz, the deputy commissioner of operations, told the field staff on Monday during a briefing on the changes, a recording of which was obtained by The Washington Post. She said the agency was “working on a process” for homeless and homebound customers who cannot use computers or come into an office—and acknowledged that service levels will decline.

In the weeks before that Monday briefing, phone calls to Social Security surged—with questions from anxious callers wondering whether their benefits had been cut, if they would be cut and desperate to get an in-person field office appointment. That is if they could get through to a live person.

Depending on the time of day, a recorded message tells callers that their wait on hold will last more than 120 minutes or 180 minutes. Some report being on hold for four or five hours. A callback function was only available three out of 12 times when a reporter for The Post called the toll-free line last week, presumably because the queue that day was so long that the call would not be returned by close of business.

The recording that Kathy Martinez, 66, heard when she called the toll-free number two weeks ago from her home in the Bay Area said her hold time would be more than three hours—she was calling to ask what her retirement check would come to if she filed for benefits now or waited until she turns 70. She hung up and tried again last week at 7 a.m. Pacific time. The wait was more than 120 minutes, but she was offered a callback option, and in two hours she spoke with a “phenomenally kind person who called me,” she said.

Martinez said she wants to wait to file for benefits to maximize the size of her check. But “I'm kind of thinking, I wonder if I should take it now. When I apply, I will do it over the phone. But will there still be a phone system?”

NOT ACCEPTABLE

Aging, inefficient phone systems have dogged Social Security for years. A modernization contract with Verizon started under the first Trump administration suffered from multiple delays, system crashes and other problems. As commissioner during the last year of the Biden administration, former Maryland governor Martin O'Malley moved the project to a new contractor, Amazon Web Services, and data shows that the average wait time for the toll-free line was down to 50 minutes, half of today's average time on hold. But O'Malley ran out of time to switch the new system to field office phones, he said.

Now a perfect storm has overtaken the system. Turnover that's normally higher than 10 percent has worsened at the 24 call centers across the country. Some employees took early retirement and buyout offers—a number Dudek said was “not huge,” but that current and former officials estimate could be significant.

Shonda Johnson, a vice president representing 5,000 call center staff at the American Federation of Government Employees Council 220, said the job's low pay—starting salary is \$32,000 a year—anger at a return-to-office mandate after years of telework, rapid policy changes and frustration with how the Trump administration is treating federal employees have hurt morale to the point that people aren't giving their all to the job.

“When you're facing threats yourself, it kind of prevents you from being totally there for the public you're servicing,” she said.

Asked about degrading phone service, Dudek told reporters in a call last week that “a 24 percent answer rate is not acceptable.”

“I want people who want to get to a person to get to a person.” He said “all options are on the table” to improve phone service, including outsourcing some call center service. On Monday, Dudek said the agency is working with U.S. Postal Service on an agreement to take on new requirements to verify claimants' identities.

The new limits on phone transactions don't take effect until next week, but field offices have been deluged for weeks, even as DOGE is targeting an unspecified number of field and hearing offices for closure over the next three years.

In one office in central Indiana, the phone lines are jammed by 9 a.m. with retirees by the hundreds, taxing the beleaguered staff of less than a dozen who were already responsible for nearly 70,000 claimants across the state, according to one employee, who like others spoke on the condition of anonymity for fear of retribution. The employee said the questions have become predictable: What is the U.S. DOGE Service doing to Social Security? Will the office close? Will my benefits continue?

The employees, with no new training yet on the impending changes, have few answers. “I hope we're going to be here,” the employee tells caller after caller. “But I can't guarantee anything.”

Complicated benefits cases are falling by the wayside, the employee said. Online claims, which are completed by field staff, are backed up. “There is just no time to breathe or get anything else done,” she said. “We used to be efficient.”

Another employee in a regional office said the staff was told at a recent briefing that field offices across the country are seeing “exponential growth” in foot traffic.

The elderly are not only calling, but showing up at brick-and-mortar buildings to ask about the DOGE-led changes. In one Philadelphia office, the federal government's mandated return-to-office edict has left 1,200 staffers competing for about 300 parking spots each day, according to an employee. Staff wake up as early as 4:30 a.m. to try to snag a space, but many still fail, leading some to buy backup spots for \$200 a month nearby.

As morale has cratered, some employees have stopped wearing business clothes to the office and now come to work in jeans and a T-shirt because, as they tell colleagues, they no longer take pride in their work, the employee said.

OFF THE CHARTS

Scammers are already taking advantage of the chaotic moment, according to internal emails obtained by The Post. Last week,

staff in several offices warned employees that seniors were reporting receiving emails from fake accounts pretending to be linked to Social Security. The messages asked recipients to verify their identity to keep receiving benefits, per the emails.

“Sounds like scammers are jumping on this press release to trick the elderly,” one Social Security staffer wrote to colleagues on Thursday, referring to the agency's announcement of the in-person verification program.

In Baltimore, an employee who works on critical payment systems said nearly a quarter of his team is already gone or will soon be out the door due to resignations and retirements. Talented software developers and analysts were quick to secure high-paying new roles in the private sector, he said—and the reduction in highly skilled staff is already having consequences.

His office is supposed to complete several software update and modernization processes required by law within the next few weeks and months, he said. But with the departures, it seems increasingly likely that they will miss those deadlines.

His team is also called on to fix complicated cases in which technology glitches mistakenly stop payments. But many of the experts for those fixes are exiting.

“That has to get cleaned up on a case-by-case basis, and the experts in how to do that are leaving,” the Baltimore employee said. “We will have cases that get stuck, and they're not going to be able to get fixed. People could be out of benefits for months.”

Meanwhile, a DOGE-imposed spending freeze has left many field offices without paper, pens and the phone headsets staff need to do their jobs communicating with callers—at the exact moment phone calls are spiking, the employee in Indiana said.

The freeze drove all federal credit cards to a \$1 limit. Social Security saw the number of its approved purchasers reduced to about a dozen people for 1,300 offices, said one agency employee in the Northeast.

Each of these purchasers must seek green-lighting from higher-ups for anything other than a list of 12 specific preapproved transactions, according to emails obtained by The Post. The list includes “shipping costs,” “phone bills,” “Legionella testing” and “services to support fire safety and emergency response.” It does not include basic office supplies.

The field office in Portland, Oregon, is so slammed that the claims staff has told advocates to send questions or information by fax because they can't get to the phones, according to Chase Stowell, case management supervisor for Assist, a nonprofit group that helps the disabled apply for benefits, many of whom are homeless.

“The attrition rates in Portland are off the charts,” Stowell said. “They just don't pick up the phone. They were already short-staffed. They've told us they just don't trust that there's a reliable system to get ahold of them by voicemail.”

The service issues keep bubbling up to members of Congress. Hundreds of Maryland residents turned out for a town hall meeting last week hosted by Baltimore County Council member Pat Young about a mile from Social Security headquarters.

Asked by one retiree in the audience to provide “a little bit of hope” that his Social Security benefits would not be cut, Sen. Angela Alsobrooks (D-Maryland) conceded, “The truth of the matter is that we don't know what they intend.”

Mr. BOOKER. Thank you to the Presiding Officer and my friend whom I am keeping up at 3 a.m. He is a kind and generous man to be here.

Here is a closure of Social Security offices, 47 closures across the country in red States and blue States, everywhere between. Closures of Social Security offices. I know everybody is talking about cutting Social Security, but what they are doing right now—right now—is grinding the services of Social Security, grinding them down.

The article from the Associated Press, “A list of the Social Security offices across the US expected to close this year,” can be found online at <https://apnews.com/article/social-security-offices-closures-doge-trump-b2b1a5b2ba4fb968abc3379bf90715ff>.

I want to read some of the places: Alabama, 634—this is without the rest of the language I just put in the record, but just for folks out there who are watching. These are the places, Social Security offices that provide really important services to your community, that this administration and Elon Musk are closing: Alabama, 634 Broad Street; Arkansas, 965 Holiday Drive, Forrest City; 4083 Jefferson Avenue, Texarkana.

In the great State of Colorado, they are closing 825 North Crest Drive, Grand Junction. In Florida, they are closing 4740 Dairy Road in Melbourne. In Georgia, they are closing 1338 Broadway in Columbus. In Kentucky, they are closing 825 High Street in Hazard. In Louisiana, they are closing 178 Civic Center Drive, Houma.

In Mississippi, there are three places they are closing: 4717 26th Street, Meridian—Meridian, excuse me, to the great people who live there—604 Yalobusha Street in Greenwood, 2383 Sunset Drive in Grenada, MS. In Montana, they are closing 3701 American Way.

They are closing Social Security offices in North Carolina: 730 Roanoke Avenue, Roanoke Rapids. They are closing 2123 Lakeside Drive in Franklin, NC. They are closing 2805 Charles Boulevard in Greenville, NC—I know that town. They are closing 1865 West City Drive, Elizabeth City, NC. North Dakota, they are closing 414 20th Avenue SW—forgive me the great people who live in this community—Minot. I am sure I am butchering it.

In Nevada, where my mom lives, in the city my mom lives, they are closing 701 Bridger Avenue, Las Vegas.

In New York, 75 South Broadway, White Plains—my mom worked there—and 332 Main Street in Poughkeepsie, NY. In Ohio, 30 North Diamond Street, Mansfield. In Oklahoma, 1610 SW Lee Boulevard. In Texas, they are closing two offices: 1122 North University Drive. I know the people are going to write me letters that I am mispronouncing their town names. Nacogdoches?

Anyone from Texas here? No?

I am sorry. 8208 NE Zac Lentz Parkway. In West Virginia, they are closing 1103 George Kostas Drive. In Wyoming, they are closing 79 Winston Drive, Rock Springs, WY.

They are cutting the Social Security staff. How deeply are they cutting?

They are cutting thousands. We have already talked about it.

Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to have printed in the RECORD an article from the Associated Press, "Social Security Administration could cut up to 50% of its workforce."

There being no objection, the material was ordered to be printed in the RECORD, as follows:

[February 27, 2025]

SOCIAL SECURITY ADMINISTRATION COULD CUT UP TO 50% OF ITS WORKFORCE

WASHINGTON (AP)—The Social Security Administration is preparing to lay off at least 7,000 people from its workforce of 60,000 according to a person familiar with the agency's plans who is not authorized to speak publicly. The workforce reduction, according to a second person who also spoke on the condition of anonymity, could be as high as 50%.

It's unclear how the layoffs will directly impact the benefits of the 72.5 million Social Security beneficiaries, which include retirees and children who receive retirement and disability benefits. However, advocates and Democratic lawmakers warn that layoffs will reduce the agency's ability to serve recipients in a timely manner.

Some say cuts to the workforce are, in effect, a cut in benefits.

Later Friday, the agency sent out a news release outlining plans for "significant workforce reductions," employee reassignments from "non-mission critical positions to mission critical direct service positions," and an offer of voluntary separation agreements. The agency said in its letter to workers that reassignments "may be involuntary and may require retraining for new workloads."

The layoffs are part of the Trump administration's intensified efforts to shrink the size of the federal workforce through the Department of Government Efficiency, run by President Donald Trump's advisor Elon Musk.

A representative from the Social Security Administration did not respond to an Associated Press request for comment.

The people familiar with the agency's plans say that SSA's new acting commissioner Leland Dudek held a meeting this week with management and told them they had to produce a plan that eliminated half of the workforce at SSA headquarters in Washington and at least half of the workers in regional offices.

In addition, the termination of office leases for Social Security sites across the country are detailed on the DOGE website, which maintains a "Wall of Receipts," which is a self-described "transparent account of DOGE's findings and actions." The site states that leases for dozens of Social Security sites across Arkansas, Texas, Louisiana, Florida, Kentucky, North Carolina, and other states have been or will be ended.

"The Social Security Administration is already chronically understaffed. Now, the Trump Administration wants to demolish it," said Nancy Altman, president of Social Security Works, an advocacy group for the popular public benefit program.

Altman said the reductions in force "will deny many Americans access to their hard-earned Social Security benefits. Field offices around the country will close. Wait times for the 1-800 number will soar."

Social Security is one of the nation's largest and most popular social programs. A January poll from The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research found that two-thirds of U.S. adults think the country is spending too little on Social Security.

The program faces a looming bankruptcy date if it is not addressed by Congress. The May 2024 Social Security and Medicare trustees' report states that Social Security's trust funds—which cover old age and disability recipients—will be unable to pay full benefits beginning in 2035. Then, Social Security would only be able to pay 83% of benefits.

Like other agencies, DOGE has embedded into the Social Security Administration as part of Trump's January executive order, which has drawn concerns from career officials.

This month, the Social Security Administration's former acting commissioner Michelle King stepped down from her role at the agency after DOGE requested access to Social Security recipient information, according to two people familiar with the official's departure who were not authorized to discuss the matter publicly.

Sen. Ron Wyden (D-Ore.) said in a statement that "a plan like this will result in field office closures that will hit seniors in rural communities the hardest."

Other news organizations, including The American Prospect and The Washington Post, have reported that half of the Social Security Administration's workforce could be on the chopping block.

Mr. BOOKER. Thank you. The article that I won't read out of generosity to my dear friend that is presiding, but it details in painful ways what these cuts could mean to people in the country.

Just trying to move a little quicker through my documents because I am way behind.

The impact of these cuts—one of the big places they are going to impact is in rural America, already suffering so much. There is a lot of sources that are talking about the rural areas of our Nation they are going to cut.

And I would like to enter into the RECORD another Associated Press article entitled "New Social Security requirements pose barriers to rural communities without internet, transportation." A new requirement where Social Security recipients go online or in person to a field office to access key benefits instead of just making a phone call will be difficult for many people to meet.

This is an article from March 22, which can be found online at <https://abcnews.go.com/US/wireStory/new-social-security-rules-present-barriers-rural-communities-120054669>.

Thank you very much to the kind friend who is up with me late—or early, I should say.

One more article I want to ask for the RECORD. I feel like I can take liberties with the Presiding Officer because I have known him for 20-plus years, consider him a real friend. He married up, and he is going to teach me how to do that.

I guess I am not allowed to insult a colleague on this. That is a violation of rule 19, I think, but that is a joke.

But you did marry up. You know that.

THE PRESIDING OFFICER. I did.

Mr. BOOKER. So this is former Social Security officers who are speaking out about what is happening. People who worked at the Agency see what is

happening. Two former senior officials at the Social Security Administration—one under a Democratic President, one under a Republican President—wrote this column published in The Hill. The title of the column is "Social Security faces a crisis with staff cuts, closures."

Again, these are folks from both sides of the aisle yelling into the wilderness, hoping that more people will understand what is happening to Social Security, what these cuts in staff are actually going to do to the quality of life for millions of Americans who rely on Social Security, disproportionately impacting people that are living in rural areas.

Red States, blue States, Republicans, Democrats—this is not a normal time, America. The bedrock commitment made is being undermined by the most powerful man in our country and the richest man in the world.

The title of the article, "Social Security faces a crisis with staff cuts and closures," written by, again, somebody who worked under a Republican, somebody who worked under a Democrat.

Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to have that printed in the RECORD.

There being no objection, the material was ordered to be printed in the RECORD, as follows:

SOCIAL SECURITY FACES A CRISIS WITH STAFF CUTS, CLOSURES

(By Jason Fichtner and Kathleen Romig)

The Social Security Administration is in crisis, and people's benefits are at risk.

We do not say this lightly. We both served in senior roles at the Social Security Administration—one of us under a Democratic president and the other under a Republican. Both of us have decades of expertise on Social Security and related systems. We know from experience that our Social Security system is resilient and has overcome many challenges. The administration of the programs Social Security delivers is in greater danger now than ever before.

Over the last month, the Social Security Administration has announced plans to cut at least 7,000 staff and consolidate service delivery by closing six regional offices. According to the Trump administration's acting Social Security commissioner, these cuts are driven by Elon Musk's Department of Government Efficiency.

The Social Security Administration was already facing serious customer service challenges, even prior to these cuts. These sudden, seemingly indiscriminate cuts would risk jeopardizing Americans' access to the benefits they have earned.

When Americans claim their benefits, or want to resolve an issue, they have three options: Go to a field office, call Social Security's 800 number or go online to SSA.gov. These cuts will affect all three options. It will mean lines around the block at field offices, even longer wait times on the already overburdened 800 number, and possibly even a slower, glitchier website.

Also, due to a newly announced policy, millions of people won't even have the option to use the phone and will have to go to overcrowded field offices instead.

Compromising customer service and access to benefits is more than an administrative issue. It is a de facto cut to a program Americans across the political spectrum support and rely on for financial security. Americans

will find it far more stressful and time-consuming to access the Social Security benefits they've earned. Some may not be able to claim benefits, or resolve issues, at all. People may have to wait on the phone for hours to claim retirement benefits. Widows and widowers with young children who just lost their spouses may struggle to claim survivor benefits.

These cuts will hit people with disabilities hardest. Already, 30,000 Americans a year are dying while waiting for a hearing on Social Security Disability Insurance benefits, which can take months or even years. These cuts are likely to make that wait even longer. Any one of us could get hit by a car tomorrow and need those benefits as soon as possible—not years from now.

Degraded customer service isn't our only concern. Due to the enormous loss of institutional knowledge and expertise from recent staff departures and more to come, Social Security may experience catastrophic system failures.

Social Security's infrastructure is antiquated and complex. For example, key systems use COBOL, a programming language developed in the 1950s and 1960s, with which many computer engineers are unfamiliar. If Social Security's computer systems experience an outage, which has happened twice in recent years, the agency may lack the expertise to resolve it.

Social Security has never missed a payment in its nearly 90 years. Unless Congress acts soon, that could change in the near future. This is not a partisan issue. Democratic, Republican and independent voters all greatly value and need Social Security. In red states and blue states alike, Americans want access to their hard-earned benefits. The Trump administration's own acting Social Security commissioner has stated publicly that the DOGE-led cuts could "break things," and that the recent changes are being effectuated by "outsiders who are unfamiliar with nuances of SSA programs." The Social Security commissioner from President Trump's first term has also raised concerns, as have a growing array of Social Security experts across the political spectrum.

We urge Republicans and Democrats in Congress to work together to protect Social Security. The time to act is now, when it is still possible for the agency to reverse course on at least some of the staff cuts and access to sensitive data and systems. If members of Congress wait any longer, they will soon find their phone lines and district offices flooded with furious constituents who can't access benefits. Service delivery delayed can turn into service delivery denied if Congress doesn't stand up and act soon to prevent a collapse of the Social Security Administration.

Mr. BOOKER. I want to end with what I have been trying to do since I started some, I think, about 8 hours ago—yeah, 8 hours ago, I began. I want to begin by doing what I said I was going to do, is not just lift my voice but lift the voice of New Jerseyans and Americans. And so here are some words.

This is one employee from New Jersey who contacted me to say that the teleservice center has received many calls from the public from New Jersey to Georgia and other States. What they all have in common is the fear of losing their livelihood as a result of identification verification, in-person visits. Seniors, disabled, and others that are economically disadvantaged need a

voice, Senator BOOKER. And the voice I hear all throughout the day from seniors are voices of fear. Please review any policy of in-person identification for the public.

A person from my State begging because they are hearing the fear of the seniors that they pledged themselves to serve.

Another Social Security employee from New Jersey contacted me and said:

I worked at Social Security for almost 19 years. I was approaching my 19 years in July. However, I took the early-out retirement because there is a lot of uncertainty within the agency.

The resignation of others also brings additional phone calls and workloads into the office. This adds additional stress and no additional bodies to handle the workloads. It also provides poor, unfair service to the public.

Here is another story from a Social Security employee in New Jersey:

I am a claims representative for our Social Security field office. The most dramatic changes I have noticed from our recent change in operations is that our appointment calendar seems to be filling up more quickly for simple post-entitlement changes that were formerly handled over the phone. This occupies appointment space for most urgent and critical issues that would warrant an office visit.

We have identified verification protocols already in place to keep identity thieves in check. To the extent that some fraudsters are still getting through requiring people to come to our office and verify their identities is obviously a less efficient solution to the problem. A better solution to enhance security is to use two-step verification systems and document fraud attempts in our technician dashboards so scammers can't just shop around for field offices to fool.

Regarding the in-person identifying policy, I believe that it is causing more harm than good. I've had claimants appearing in person frantic that they will lose their benefits because of this.

My office lost four staff members. Two are members of management. This is nothing but chaos here. I can foresee more loss and further decline and poor morale.

That is from a Social Security employee in my State describing what is going on in their office.

Another New Jersey Social Security worker:

I work in one of the smaller offices in New Jersey, and we are currently combined with another office that is undergoing renovations, which has caused the number of claimants coming into the office to double over the last few months.

Although we do have extra staff because the staff have been deployed to our location, it doesn't change the infrastructure of the building, such as the number of desks available to do in-person interviews and provide adequate waiting space for double the amount of claimants. In our office, we only have nine desks where we can interview the public safely and use safety protocols. Three of these are front windows where we can do quick changes and six of them are where we could do short interviews for benefit applications.

Right now, being that most interviews are being done over the phone, we have over 20 people interviewing at a time now. Imagine having to do these interviews in person. We can only have six to nine interviews at a time instead of 20-plus because there are

only six to nine desks available. This doesn't seem very efficient.

Maybe they should—too bad they can't call the Department of Government Efficiency, which caused the problem.

Here is another Social Security worker and their story:

Foot traffic in a field office on a daily basis is already overwhelming. The public coming in randomly to show their identity would be a disadvantage for the elderly, people with vision issues, disabled, and someone with no car.

This really hits home with me. My older brother lost his right leg to diabetes, is legally blind, unable to drive. He called me concerned about this, knowing there is no way he can get to his field office and cannot afford to lose his retirement. I am hoping this is reconsidered.

Social Security is not a program; it is a promise. We owe it to seniors and working people who paid into Social Security their whole lives to make good on the promise of a secure retirement, not to attack Social Security, to drive them to fear and worry, and when they call for help, to put them on hold for hours or drive them to offices that may be closing or are overcrowded or are unable to help our elders.

Does this sound like America at its best? Does this sound like America being made great again? This is outrageous. These are our elders. They deserve dignity, respect, and they deserve their Social Security.

I am going to move on to the next item, but I want to reiterate again that I am determined to stand here as long as I physically can. We are 8 hours into it. Dozens and dozens of people—I read their stories. As I have gone around the country and I have gone around my State, there is this growing anger and rage and fear. There is chaos. There is confusion.

They read the newspapers and see that programs are helping them when an unexpected disease or cancer or crisis hits them, and they see that a bunch of folks are trying to figure out how to cut \$880 billion from things like Medicaid.

The stories got me a little emotional just because I am hearing about so many people who—not to their fault, not to their problem—are hit by a crisis, a challenge, an accident at work are now sitting back and are going to see what we do.

People have told us that their whole delicate, fragile world works because they have a transportation program that could be on the blocks of cuts in Medicaid or their home healthcare worker or their medications.

Even while these big issues are being discussed, we are seeing, as we have been documenting here, again, from Republicans and Democrats, how the administration is already taking steps to roll back programs, to seize funding that people have used to access the ACA or to lower their prescription drug costs or that is funding the research that we are competing with China on through the NIH. Republicans and

Democrats, we have read already, have been saying: Hey, wait a minute, you shouldn't cut things that produce money for your country in the long term.

But now here is something that I want to get into, which is education in our Nation. I believe that genius is equally distributed in the United States. There are as many geniuses being born in the wealthiest parts of New Jersey and Pennsylvania as are being born in the lowest incomes.

In a global knowledge-based economy, the most valuable natural resource any nation has is the genius of its children. One genius—one Einstein, one Madame Curie—one genius could change humanity forever.

I hear the stories about China graduating more people in STEM than we have total graduates in our entire country. It is a global competition. If we are to be this Nation that ANDY KIM talked about where every generation has the right as an American to expect that the next generation will do better, not worse, so much of this revolves around what we all know: how important education is to a democracy especially—the best ideas, the best innovations, the best artists, innovators, entrepreneurs, scientists, doctors, teachers. We need to invest in the best pipeline possible.

But now, not with Congress, which established the Department of Education, but by Executive fiat undermining separation of powers, the administration wants to dismantle, defund, destroy the Department of Education, scatter its responsibilities across Agencies that themselves are going through massive personnel cuts and are not equipped to handle it.

This is ultimately about whether or not we as a nation believe that every child deserves an education. We should organize ourselves to meet that calling. Our Nation's children are that precious resource. One of the most noble professions are people that teach our children.

So let's go right into it. At the signing ceremony to commemorate the establishment of the Department of Education, President Jimmy Carter said:

Today's signing fulfills a longstanding personal commitment on my part. My first public office was as a county school board member. As a state senator and governor, I devoted much of my time to education issues. I remain convinced education is one of the most noblest enterprises a person or society can undertake.

Pastor Carter also said that the Department of Education was created because education is so important to our Nation's future that it must have a robust level of national support.

Here is a letter I really wanted to read. I am a member of a Baptist church with the great Pastor Jefferson, but I actually studied Torah. In my Torah study with Rabbi Davidson, when I heard about all these cuts in the Department of Education, he wanted me to hear from a great rebbe,

Rebbe Menachem Schneerson, a Lubavitch rebbe who in 1979 wrote a letter not in support of religious schools but wrote a letter in support of public education, in support of the creation of a special Department of Education.

He wrote this letter in 1979. I was so moved by it—thank you, Rabbi Davidson—I want to read it here.

This is the rebbe:

I am certain that you will agree that the state of education in this country, as many others, leaves much to be desired;—

He was not happy—

that the status quo (as reflected in juvenile delinquency, [et cetera]) is far from satisfactory, and, what is worse, has been steadily eroding; and that some determined nationwide effort is called for to upgrade the quality of public education in this resourceful country.

I trust you will agree that such an enormous effort, which is surely in the highest national interest, can come only from the Federal government with the fullest cooperation of State, County and City.

In my view, a separate, adequately funded Cabinet-level Department of Education, subject to legislative safeguards to ensure that the traditional primacy of States and localities in education affairs would not be jeopardized, could well meet the challenge.

The main reasons why I support said proposal are as follows:

1. The creation of a distinct Cabinet-level Department of Education would have a salutary impact on all who are involved in education, particularly parents, teachers, and students. The very innovation of upgrading the status of Education from that of an adjunct to, or division of, another national agency, would pointedly underscore its proper place among the Nation's priorities.

Look how prescient the rebbe was and what he might say if he was alive today.

2. The workshops of child education are the school and the home. For various reasons, which need not be discussed—

"I am worried about the home," he basically says. Too much of school is left to the streets.

Insofar as the street is concerned there is very little we can do as things now stand. More can be done, and needs to be done. . . . But in the final analysis it is the public school where the greatest improvement can and must be achieved.

3. Among the factors that lie at the roots of shortcomings of public education, two—in my opinion—command primary attention: One has to do with the general curriculum, which should place much greater emphasis on character building and moral and ethical values. The other has to do with the quality of teaching—by qualified, dedicated and motivating teachers. The latter point requires the upgrading of teachers' salaries on par with comparable professions in other fields of science and relieving them, as far as possible, of other frustrations and stresses.

I want to do a side note here. I am a big believer that we should slash public school professionals' tax rates. We need the best minds coming into the profession. Why not as a country say: If you are going to take a job as a teacher—which, unfortunately, pays too low in our country—let's do that instead of, again, giving these massive tax cuts disproportionately to the wealthiest in our country.

The upgrading of the Nation's educational system will, of course, require considerable Federal [investment]. But this is one area where spending has built-in returns, not only in the long term, but also in . . . immediate gains in terms of diminishing expenditures in the penal system, crime prevention, reduction in vandalism, drug abuse. . . . In the longer term, it would also bring savings in expenditure on health and welfare, and—one may venture to say—even in the defense budget, since a morally healthy, strong and united nation is in itself a strong deterrent against any enemy.

5. The creation of a separate Cabinet-level Department of Education, as I understand it, has been conceived not for the purpose of merely improving administrative efficiency, nor merely as coordinator of existing programs, or for similar technical reasons. The main purpose is to breathe the new life into the whole educational system of this Nation, and to involve the whole Nation, through its Federal government, in this massive and concerted effort. As such—I am convinced—[a national Department of Education, Cabinet-level] deserves everybody's support.

Thank you, rebbe.

Unfortunately, this administration has not listened to the rebbees.

What does the Department of Education do, and how is this administration attacking it? Let me read you an excerpt.

The New York Times: "Can Trump Really Abolish the Department of Education?" March 20:

President Trump signed an executive order on Thursday that directs the federal Department of Education to come up with a plan for its own demise. Only Congress can abolish a Cabinet-level agency, and it is not clear whether Mr. Trump has the votes in Congress to do so.

I will tell you, in the Senate, if he needs 60 votes, he doesn't.

But he has already begun to dismantle the department, firing about half of its staff, gutting its respected education-research arm, and vastly narrowing the focus of its civil rights division, which works to protect students from discrimination.

Mr. Trump's long history of attacking the Department of Education represents a revival of a Reagan-era Republican talking point. It has unified Democrats in fiery opposition.

Yeah.

But is shuttering the department possible? And if not, how has Trump begun to use the agency to achieve his policy goals?

What does the department do?

Founded in 1979, its main job is distributing money to college students through grants and loans. It also sends federal money to K-12 schools, targeted toward low-income and disabled students, and enforces anti-discrimination laws.

The money for schools has been set aside by Congress and is unlikely to be affected by Mr. Trump's executive order.

I don't agree with the New York Times because time and time again, the money set aside by Congress is being clawed back by the President against the people that the Constitution of the United States of America says has spending power.

Those federal dollars account for only about 10 percent of K-12 school funding nationwide. While Mr. Trump has said he wants to return power over education to the states, states and school districts already control

K-12 education, which is mostly paid for with state and local tax dollars. The federal department does not control learning standards or reading lists.

The agency does play a big role in funding and disseminating research on education, but those efforts have been significantly scaled back by the Trump administration.

It also administers tests to track whether American students are learning and how they compare with their peers in other states and countries.

God forbid we measure people's performances.

It is unclear whether those tests will continue to be delivered given the drastic reductions in the staff and funding necessary to manage them.

Still, closing the department would not likely have much of an immediate effect on how schools and colleges operate. The Trump administration has discussed tapping the Treasury Department to disburse student loans and grants, for instance, and Health and Human Services to administer funding for students with disabilities. . . . Any effort to fully eliminate the department would have to go through Congress. Republican members would mostly hear opposition from superintendents, college presidents, and other education leaders in their school districts; schools in Republican regions rely on federal aid from the agency, just as schools in Democratic regions do.

"They are going to run into opposition," says Jon Valant, an education expert at the Brookings Institution. "They have a laser-thin majority and a filibuster to confront in the Senate."

Even if congressional Republicans stuck together . . . Dr. Valant predicts their constituents would protest, given the department's role in distributing money in programs like Pell grants, which pay for college tuition, and I.D.E.A., which provides support to students with disabilities.

"It's a very hard sell. . . . I am . . . skeptical."

Efforts to eliminate the Department threaten the enforcement of critical laws. There is the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, which has supported school districts since 1965 in low-income areas; the Individuals with Disabilities Act, which ensures 7.5 million students with disabilities receive an education; the Higher Education Act, which helps more students afford college; and title IX protections to guard against sex discrimination. This doesn't just hurt our country, but undermining those resources for our students hurts generations to come.

I ask unanimous consent that the New York Times article entitled "Trump Firings Gut Education Civil Rights Division" be printed in the RECORD.

There being no objection, the material was ordered to be printed in the RECORD, as follows:

[Mar. 13, 2025]

TRUMP FIRINGS GUT EDUCATION
DEPARTMENT'S CIVIL RIGHTS DIVISION
(By Michael C. Bender and Rachel Nostrant)

Decades ago, Congress guaranteed all students an equal opportunity to an education. But now the office created to enforce that promise has been decimated.

The Education Department's Office for Civil Rights was slashed in half on Tuesday as part of President Trump's aggressive push to dismantle the agency, which he has called

a "con job." The firings eliminated the entire investigative staff in seven of the office's 12 regional branches, including in Boston, Cleveland, Dallas and San Francisco, and left thousands of pending cases in limbo.

The layoffs struck every corner of the department, which manages federal loans for college, tracks student achievement and supports programs for students with disabilities.

But education policy experts and student advocates were particularly distressed about the gutting of the civil rights office, which fielded more than 22,600 complaints from parents and students last year, an increase of more than 200 percent from five years earlier.

Some voiced particular concern about what could happen to students with special needs, whose access to education is often left to the federal government to enforce. Many questioned how the Trump administration would be able to handle the office's case load moving forward—or if it would at all.

"The move to gut this office and leave only a shell means the federal government has turned its back on civil rights in schools," said Catherine E. Lhamon, who led the office as assistant secretary for civil rights in both the Obama and Biden administrations. "I am scared for my kids and I am scared for every mother with kids in school."

The Office for Civil Rights, established by Congress, opened along with the rest of the Education Department in 1980. One of the office's first leaders was Clarence Thomas, now a Supreme Court justice. It is relatively inexpensive compared with other agency programs, with a cost of about \$140 million in the department's \$80 billion discretionary budget.

The majority of civil rights complaints typically involve students with disabilities, followed by allegations of racial and sex-based discrimination. Many of the disability cases involve complaints that schools are failing to provide accommodations for students or that schools are separating disabled students from their peers in violation of federal law.

Mr. Trump and the education secretary, Linda McMahon, have maintained that staffing cuts at the department will not disrupt services for the 50 million pupils in elementary and secondary schools or 20 million college students.

But the only preparation the Trump administration announced before the layoffs was that the department's Washington-based headquarters would be closed on Wednesday as a security precaution.

"We'll see how it all works out," Mr. Trump said of the layoffs while speaking to reporters at the White House.

Madi Biedermann, the Education Department's deputy assistant for communications, said changes were underway in the civil rights office to process cases and praised the remaining staff members for their commitment and years of experience.

"We are confident that the dedicated staff of O.C.R. will deliver on its statutory responsibilities," she said.

One civil rights investigator wept in an interview on Wednesday as she spoke about the abrupt firings and what they would mean for parents fighting for fairness for their children.

This investigator, who requested anonymity out of fear of retribution, had talked to parents on Tuesday morning about a possible resolution to a yearslong push to have their disabled son's needs met at school.

In the afternoon, the investigator prepared a new case about a school retaliating against a Black student who had complained about racial slurs from classmates and reviewed an offer from another school to resolve a complaint from a student whose wheelchair had

been repeatedly stuck—and occasionally tipped over—from crumbling walkways on campus.

In the evening, the investigator was fired. With work access cut off, there was no way to follow up with any of the parents she had spoken with that day, or to contact the witnesses she was scheduled to interview on Wednesday about a college student's discrimination complaint.

"I was really trying to help, and now I can't even talk to them, and I'm so sorry," the investigator said. "I would never treat anyone like this. I would never just not show up or stop talking to someone, but I have no way to reschedule or let them know what's going on."

Disability rights advocates said that any impediment to the department's ability to enforce civil rights laws would cause widespread harm to the nation's education system.

Zoe Gross, the director of advocacy for the Autism Self Advocacy Network, said that she was particularly concerned about what might happen to the office's data collection efforts, which have been used to spot potential red flags and identify trends.

For example, when some states reported zero instances of disabled students who had been restrained or separated from their peers, O.C.R. investigated and found that cases were not being reported because school officials had misinterpreted rules for disabled students. The federal government then intervened.

"All of these kinds of things you need the department to do and help with," Ms. Gross said. "And without the Department of Education and the Office for Civil Rights, we're going to see basically states left on their own to navigate that."

Many of the office's past cases have served as catalysts for broader change.

During the Obama administration, the office's investigations into sexual assault and harassment identified more than 100 colleges and universities that were inadequately reporting and responding to allegations.

As a result, many schools adopted internal enforcement policies that have made it easier for students who have been sexually assaulted to receive large damage awards. These investigations have also been routinely referred to as validation for the collegiate #MeToo movement.

Sex-based cases also include harassment involving gender identity, an issue that fueled Mr. Trump's campaign last year and motivated executive orders early in his administration aimed at preventing schools from recognizing transgender identities, barring transgender girls and women from competing on girls' and women's sports teams and terminating programs that promote "gender ideology."

Restrictions during the coronavirus pandemic led to their own genre of discrimination complaints as schools closed, struggled to carry out online learning and then were slow to reopen.

Department officials said they still intend to pursue civil rights complaints and have discussed relying more on mediations as a way to quicken the pace of investigations, as well as other available legal tools to rapidly resolve cases.

The office had already moved to align with Mr. Trump's priorities. It paused ongoing investigations into complaints of schools banning books and dismissed 11 pending cases involving schools that had removed books from their libraries. The cases primarily delved into issues of gender and racial identity.

Under the Biden administration, the office vigorously investigated complaints of racial discrimination amid the so-called racial

reckoning in the aftermath of the death of George Floyd. Some complaints reflected the debate about schools' roles in addressing systemic racism or charged that certain programming was exclusionary of non-minorities. Several longstanding diversity and inclusion efforts—which Mr. Trump has now ordered “illegal” and “harmful”—came under a microscope.

The civil rights office has also seen a rise in allegations of antisemitism, particularly on college campuses, and other religious-based discrimination. The Trump administration has supported those investigations, which they have used to strip federal funding from one university and threaten dozens more with similar consequences.

Before firing 1,315 employees on Tuesday, the Trump administration had already encouraged 572 workers to quit or retire early and had let go 63 employees who did not have union protections.

Taken together, 47 percent of the department's work force had been eliminated in the first 50 days of Mr. Trump's return to the White House.

Mr. BOOKER. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that “How Education Department Cuts Could Hurt Low-Income and Rural Schools in Particular,” an article of March 21, 2025, be printed in the RECORD.

There being no objection, the material was ordered to be printed in the RECORD, as follows:

[Mar. 21, 2025]

HOW THE EDUCATION DEPARTMENT CUTS
COULD HURT LOW-INCOME AND RURAL SCHOOLS
(By Jonaki Mehta)

President Trump's efforts to shutter the U.S. Department of Education are in full swing.

On Thursday, he signed an executive action instructing U.S. Secretary of Education Linda McMahon to “take all necessary steps to facilitate the closure of the Department of Education,” and to do so “to the maximum extent appropriate and permitted by law.”

Before that, the department had already announced it was shrinking its workforce by nearly half, with cuts to all divisions.

On Thursday, President Donald Trump signed an executive action to begin dismantling the U.S. Department of Education.

Meanwhile, the administration has promised that “formula funding” for schools, which is protected by law, would be preserved. That includes flagship programs like Title I for high-poverty schools, and the Rural Education Achievement Program (REAP), which sends money to rural and low-income schools.

But nearly all the statisticians and data experts who work in the office responsible for determining whether schools qualify for that money will soon be out of jobs, making it unclear how such grants would remain intact.

At the start of the year, the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) employed more than 100 people. On Friday, all but three employees will be placed on administrative leave, and eventually laid off. That's according to multiple NCES employees, who asked that their names not be used because they feared retaliation for speaking out. An internal email obtained by NPR also confirmed how many staff would remain.

“That will have an absolutely devastating impact,” says Matthew Gardner Kelly, who studies the country's K–12 funding systems at the University of Washington. Since 1867, NCES has been a central, reliable source of information that helps educators, researchers and the public understand the state of education in the United States.

Gardner Kelly says the loss of NCES staff will hit low-income schools especially hard.

“It's not just that loss of information, it's what will happen to a school district's budget in the absence of funds that can't be allocated without the necessary staff at NCES.”

NPR reached out to the Department of Education for comment and did not hear back.

The federal government only provides a fraction of the money that goes to schools—states and local governments are responsible for the lion's share of that funding. But the federal government plays an outside role in helping high-needs schools get the money they need to stay afloat.

Congress established Title I to provide money to K–12 schools in low-income communities. In the current fiscal year, the Department of Education set aside more than \$18.38 billion for Title I. Nearly 90% of U.S. school districts benefit from the program, which has historically enjoyed bipartisan support among lawmakers.

The Rural Education Achievement Program (REAP) awards money to low-income and rural school districts. More than a quarter of the country's public schools are in rural areas. And while REAP is a fraction of the size of Title I—\$215 million for the current year—Amy Price Azano of Virginia Tech's Center for Rural Education says those dollars stretch much further in rural communities.

“We work with school districts that have 10 people in a graduating class. So when you're talking about enough money to get the one student who needed a paraprofessional to walk across that stage,” a little bit goes a long way.

These federal grants can pay for things like school staff salaries, supplies, technology, tutoring programs and a range of basic services that low-income schools may not otherwise be able to afford.

NCES employees told NPR that the cuts to the Education Department likely won't impact REAP or Title I grants for the 2025–26 school year, but the fate of these grants beyond that seems incredibly uncertain.

For grants that go to rural schools through the REAP program, NCES plays a direct role in creating the relevant data and providing assistance to local school leaders.

But by the end of the day on Friday, all but three NCES staffers will be locked out of their computers and on administrative leave.

“The key issue is that—as things stand now—the data needed to drive the next round of Title I, and grants to rural schools, and grants to other programs, isn't going to happen as a result of the cuts to NCES staff and contracts,” said one former NCES employee.

Several employees told NPR that, after the layoffs, it is unlikely the REAP program will be able to get money to schools for the 2026–27 school year.

The same goes for Title I, with an added challenge: The Trump administration is poised to shrink the ranks of the Census Bureau. A reduction in its staff could further complicate the distribution of Title I funding.

Thursday's executive action lays out the Trump administration's goal of returning “authority over education to the States and local communities.”

But one of the key benefits of grants like Title I and REAP is that while the federal government, including NCES, determines which school districts are eligible, it is ultimately up to local leaders to decide how best to use that money.

NCES staff also provide expertise, oversight and guidance to ensure those leaders have what they need to plan budgets effectively for each school year.

William Sonnenberg, who is now retired, spent nearly five decades working on Title I for NCES until 2022.

“I don't think it's an exaggeration to say in a given year, I would get thousands of calls from local superintendents or other kinds of people at the school district or at the state level in Title I offices, asking for guidance,” he says.

One NCES employee said, “Everyone acknowledges three people cannot come anywhere close to fulfilling statutory obligations.”

Without data oversight and guidance from NCES, Sonnenberg worries federal grant money may not reach the low-income students who need it most.

Rural education expert Amy Price Azano says, while rural schools are used to having fewer resources, the loss of REAP funds will strain them even more.

“They're doing more with less anyway. And so the risk now is that they will have to be even more resilient. They will have to do even more with even less.”

Mr. BOOKER. Again, rural communities are really taking a hit.

If I can give disability rights testimonials: Gutting the Department of Education will be devastating for students with disabilities. Right now, the Department of Education—the Individuals with Disabilities Act guarantees more than 7 million students in America the right to a free, appropriate public education. It ensures that—it provides services like speech therapies, counseling, and personalized learning plans. Without Federal oversight, these protections could disappear; schools could delay evaluations, cut corners, or deny support altogether for parents.

Consider Kathryn, a resident of Westwood, NJ, right by Harrington Park, where I grew up. Kathryn has 7-year-old twin boys who receive special services. They currently attend an out-of-school-district specialized program but are very much a part of the Westwood Regional School District and may even one day transition back into the school.

In her words:

The Department of Education plays a critical role in enforcing the IDEA and ensuring that students with disabilities receive the accommodations and support they need to succeed. Without this oversight, many students risk losing essential services, widening existing gaps and disparities, and they will face greater barriers to academic success and reaching their highest potential.

This is not a partisan issue; it is a matter of assuring that all students, regardless of ability, have equal access to education.

Her story is one of thousands of parents, educators, and advocates across the country who are standing up for children's rights to an equitable education. Kathryn's family is for her boys, and every child deserves a fair shot at success. Their fight for inclusive education is essential.

Here is Ashley from Wayne, NJ, who knows firsthand how important the Department of Education's funding is. Her daughter, who is legally blind, relies on Bookshare—an online learning tool—that provides successful materials to students with print disabilities

at no cost to schools or families. Without it, her daughter would be left behind.

As Ashley put it:

This is a service she absolutely needs in order to access information that regularly sighted people do not even have to think about. Cutting programs like this isn't just irresponsible; it would be cruel.

Kimberly from Dumont, NJ, the mother of twin boys with nonverbal level 3 autism:

They attend an amazing school in Nutley because of IDEA. Without it, their future would be uncertain.

In her own words, she says:

It was not long ago that kids like them would have had to have been institutionalized. Now they are able to have a beautiful life and go to school. I am terrified of the future if IDEA is eliminated. I am begging you. Please consider families like mine.

Kimberly, I see you.

Michelle from New Jersey shares this fear. Her daughter, who has neurofibromatosis, who is 1—excuse me—and has apraxia, depends on in-class support to succeed. She knows firsthand how essential the Department of Education is in protecting students with disabilities.

These are her words:

Gutting, weakening, and ultimately closing the Department of Education is disastrous and dangerous for the disabled students who depend upon it.

She reminds us that education is a civil right and that laws like the IDEA and section 504 ensure that students with disabilities receive the support they need to succeed.

Alana from my State is deeply concerned about her 20-year-old son, who depends on the protections of section 504 to have a fair shot at the future. Her 10-year-old child with autism relies on these protections every single day. She is asking for help because, as she put it, "Section 504 and its rules are very important to the disability community. We need your help to save it."

Roger, who is a grandfather from New Jersey, is also pleading for action. His granddaughter has relied on a 504 plan since the seventh grade and will continue to need it as she applies to college. He raises the essential question: Which programs are directly helping students? The answer is clear: Laws like IDEA, IEP, and section 504. They are not luxuries; they are lifelines.

Again, this is not about politics, and, as we see from various writings, people from both sides of the aisle are worried and concerned.

I ask unanimous consent that this article from one of the publications in my State—"What happens to special education programs in New Jersey if Trump shuts down the Department of Education?" by Gene Myers—be printed in the RECORD.

There being no objection, the material was ordered to be printed in the RECORD, as follows:

[Mar. 21, 2025]

WHAT HAPPENS TO SPECIAL EDUCATION PROGRAMS IN NJ IF TRUMP SHUTS DOWN THE DEPT. OF ED?

(By Gene Myers)

President Donald Trump's drive to shut down the U.S. Education Department could reverberate through one community in New Jersey like few others: students and families who rely on special education programs for children with disabilities.

While the federal department has limited involvement in funding and standards for the general education population, it administers \$15 billion a year that helps pay for classes, therapies and other resources for special education. It's also the chief enforcer of laws that guarantee students with disabilities the right to a public education tailored to their needs.

The Trump administration has promised to preserve those functions in other parts of the government. But in New Jersey, advocates have raised alarms about shifting back to an era when state and local government often shortchanged the education of their most vulnerable students.

"Families are terrified. Educators are worried," said Peg Kinsell, policy director at SPAN Parent Advocacy Network in Newark, which works with the disability community. "Nobody knows what's happening next, and that's a scary place to be."

Trump on Thursday signed an executive order that seeks to eliminate the DOE, two weeks after letting go about half the department's staff. The move is likely to set up another legal challenge testing the bounds of Trump's power, with critics arguing the president can't shut down the agency without approval by Congress.

Harrison Fields, White House principal deputy press secretary, said in a statement to USA TODAY that the order "will empower parents, states, and communities to take control and improve outcomes for all students." He said recent test scores on the National Assessment of Educational Progress exam "reveal a national crisis—our children are falling behind."

Federal funding for students with disabilities under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, Title I funding for low-income schools and federal student loan payments will remain unchanged under the order while Education Secretary Linda McMahon works on a plan to "bring these funds closer to states, localities, and more importantly, students," a White House official said.

About 7.5 million students rely on special education services in the U.S. The number has nearly doubled since the 1976-77 school year, the year after the IDEA was adopted and declared that schools had a legal responsibility to provide a "fair and appropriate" public education to students with disabilities.

New Jersey is home to one of the largest such populations in the country, according to Rutgers University's New Jersey State Public Policy Lab. Among Garden State public school students, 18%, about 240,000 in total, are served under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, according to the Lab.

New Jersey's proposed 2026 budget anticipates \$457.7 million in federal funding allocated to local school districts for special education services. At the local level, the money pays for staff as well as occupational and physical therapies and services required by students' individual education plans, according to the federal Education Department.

While it's still early, advocates say a sharp reduction in federal staff could weaken en-

forcement of IDEA and other disability rights laws and jeopardize funding and oversight.

Who'll enforce civil rights laws?

The Department plays a role in enforcing civil rights protections under IDEA and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, a 1973 law that prohibits discrimination based on disability in programs receiving federal funding. Under the legislation, schools are required to provide equal access to education through accommodations such as extended time limits for tests and accessible transportation.

Kinsell said that handing enforcement back to the states would be a dangerous step backward.

"Giving it back to the states brings us down a really dark path," she said. "Before IDEA was passed in 1975, many states simply refused to educate kids with disabilities. They segregated them, or didn't let them attend school at all."

Before the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act was enacted, just one in five children with disabilities were taught in public schools, the federal DOE says on its website.

Dismantling the department would fulfill a goal long sought by the political right. The Heritage Foundation, a conservative Washington, D.C.-based think tank, contends that education policy should be made by states and local communities, not the federal government. The federal agency adds a layer of expensive bureaucracy that doesn't directly educate students, the Foundation's Jonathan Butcher and Lindsey Burke argued in a paper last summer.

Local control would allow for more innovation and flexibility in how education is delivered, they added, arguing the DOE imposes a one-size-fits-all solution that often doesn't suit local needs.

But the National Education Association, the union that represents 3 million teachers and other educational professionals in the U.S., cautions that without the department's oversight, inequities in special education services across states could grow significantly.

States already vary in how they implement IDEA, but federal monitoring helps ensure some consistency, the Association said. Without that safeguard, some states, especially those with tight budgets, might restrict eligibility or cut services, the NEA said in a statement.

Some Republicans would like to see federal education funding turned into block grants, in which states would get a lump sum to spend as they choose. Kinsell worries that would undermine services further for disabled students.

"Right now, IDEA funds are designated for special education students," she said. "If it's block-granted, states could take that money and spend it on something else, like building a gym, instead of serving kids with disabilities."

In addition to funding and legal enforcement, the Education Department collects and monitors data on how schools serve students with disabilities, tracking issues such as disproportionate discipline and lack of inclusion. Without DOE leadership, Kinsell said, such problems could go unchecked.

Cuts could affect not just enforcement but also vital programs like technical assistance, professional development and research, she argued. "There's a lot of parts of the law beyond enforcement—training, curriculum development, research—that help states implement appropriate education," Kinsell said. "If those are gone, the whole system suffers."

Further complicating matters, Kinsell said, are proposals to split up existing federal offices. "They're talking about moving

the Office for Civil Rights to the Justice Department, disability programs to Health and Human Services, and vocational rehab to the Department of Labor," she said. "That would scatter programs that need to work together."

While no one knows what's next, Kinsell said she expects that reducing or eliminating the department will have real impacts on families.

"The state of confusion is palpable—for advocates, for families, for educators," she said. "It's like watching the floor get pulled out from under everyone who relies on these supports."

Mr. BOOKER. I want to say something about student loans too.

The Department of Education is also responsible for operating the \$1.6 trillion Federal student loan program, which benefits 42.7 million borrowers in America, and it allows students to access higher education—something that is shown unequivocally to strengthen our economy.

This administration plans to move student loan funding to the Small Business Administration—a plan that even some of my Republican colleagues in Congress have expressed serious concerns about.

Here is an article: "Republicans hesitant to stand behind Trump's plan for student loans."

Although SBA . . . managed a wealth of COVID relief programs, it normally runs a much smaller operation than [the] student debt [program].

President . . . Trump has yet to win over his own party with his push to "immediately" transfer the Education Department's massive student loan operation to another agency slated for deep staff cuts.

Trump was expected to propose moving the agency's \$1.6 trillion portfolio to the Treasury Department—a concept long-discussed on Capitol Hill and suggested in Project 2025, The Heritage Foundation's conservative policy blueprint. Instead, the president announced this month that the [SBA] would get it, surprising many lawmakers and conservatives who track the issue.

Although the SBA, which provides financial support to companies for disaster relief, training and other needs, managed a wealth of COVID relief programs, it normally runs a much smaller operation than student debt. It is also slated to lose 43 percent of its staff.

Now . . . Republicans are worried about the size of the debt and the staffing needed to manage the complex system of servicers, borrowers, and loan applications. And with about 43 million borrowers—and a record number of them starting to fall behind on their payments since the pandemic-era hiatus ended in 2023—transferring this work may be one of the most challenging hurdles for unwinding the agency President Trump has pledged to close.

"A lot of us were thinking it would go to Treasury. We are talking about the huge nature of student loans," House Education and Workforce Chair Tim Walberg said in an interview. "They have much larger staffing capabilities right now than the SBA, but the president may have something specific in mind that I'm not aware of."

Early legislation from Senator Mike Rounds . . . aimed at dismantling the Education Department also recommended the Treasury Department for the job. And at a recent House Rules Committee meeting, Walberg suggested that moving the portfolio to the SBA—which likely requires an act of Congress to complete—might not be "perma-

nent." Some Republican lawmakers have been hesitant to say the move is official.

Neither the Education Department's Federal Aid office, which manages the loan program, nor SBA have provided a timeline or detailed plans to move the portfolio. But Education Department officials skeptical of Trump's SBA plan met the week after his announcement to discuss if the Treasury Department should manage this massive portfolio instead of the SBA, according to a person granted anonymity to discuss the matter.

Some conservatives are concerned about the SBA's lack of experience with colleges and universities and the time crunch its staff will be under to learn the complex student loan system.

The plan to move the portfolio "sounds rushed, it sounds like no one has been briefed on it, and it is not clear what the purpose is," said Jason Delisle, who served on the Education Department's review group on Trump's presidential transition team.

FSA largely works with direct loans, meaning that instead of a bank lending the money, the Education Department disburses the funds directly to the institution in the student's name. Colleges and universities, however, aren't on the hook if the loan isn't repaid—the borrower is.

SBA only started working with direct loans at a massive scale in the aftermath of the pandemic.

"They're laying off 43 percent of the SBA staff at the same time [SBA is] being handed a \$1.6 trillion portfolio that is three times the size of what they have," said Michael Negron, who worked on small business and student loans for the National Economic Council during the Biden administration.

The administration has not clearly stated whether FSA workers who have expertise on the student debt system would be transferred to the SBA, which is a concern for Negron. That doesn't mean it's impossible. SBA could be a good fit, he said, but the conditions need to be right.

"There is a world where this could work," he said optimistically. He is now a fellow at Groundwork Collaborative, a leftwing think tank.

The White House did not acknowledge questions about how it would transfer.

"President Trump is doing everything he can within his executive authority to dismantle the Department of Education and return education back to the states while safeguarding critical functions for students and families," press secretary Karoline Leavitt said in a statement. The President has always said Congress has a role to play in this effort, and we expect him to help the President deliver.

You know, that sounds like a President who doesn't care about Congress, who cares about what he is trying to do. He hasn't approached this in an intelligent way, making grand statements and opinions without considering the Department you are transferring loans to might actually be incapable, with a severely diminished staff, of doing the job.

Here is an incredible article by Fareed Zakaria about what is really going on and how it affects the United States, especially relative to other nations:

There is no area in which the United States' global dominance is more total than higher education. With about 4 percent of the world's population and 25 percent of its gross domestic product, America has 72 per-

cent of the world's 25 top universities by one ranking and 64 percent by another. But this crucial U.S. competitive advantage is being undermined by the Trump administration's war on colleges. Hat tip to the New York Times's Michelle Goldberg for raising this issue as well.

"We have to honestly and aggressively attack the universities in this country. . . . The professors are the enemy," said JD Vance during a speech to the National Conservatism Conference in 2021. The administration has put those words into action. The most dramatic assault has been financial: a freezing or massive reduction in research grants and loans from the federal government. Some of these efforts are under court review, but the cumulative impact could be billions of dollars in cuts to basic research, much of it disrupting ongoing projects and programs.

High quality research in the United States has emerged in a unique ecosystem. The federal government provides much of the funding through prominent institutions such as the National Institutes of Health and the National Science Foundation. Private foundations and companies account for most of the rest. Professors at universities, both public and private, use these funds to conduct the research. No other country has a system that works as well. What is at risk now is what Holden Thorp, the editor in chief of the Science family of journals, calls, "the social contract that the federal government and institutions have had to enable the scientific research enterprise in America in the last 80 years."

That is what is at risk.

Take Duke University, which ranked No. 11 in total grants received from NIH last year. Of its \$1.33 billion research budget, \$863 million came from Washington, according to the [AP]. That includes funds for critical research projects on cancer and other diseases but also support[s] . . . more than 630 PhD students at the medical school. If the cuts go through, those projects and students will have to be pared back substantially. Just on Thursday, Johns Hopkins . . . announced huge layoffs, saying it would let go of more than 2,000 employees after losing \$800 million in federal grants.

One crucial mechanism to cut funding is through a massive reduction in the overhead, or indirect, costs that universities get reimbursed for by the federal government. Overhead often makes up 40 percent or 50 percent of a grant, but last month, NIH ordered that it be capped at 15 percent. [That] sounds more rational than it is. Universities divide their costs on science grants into research costs (the salaries of the professors and graduate students) and overhead (the costs of the buildings, labs, energy and utilities and administrative staff). When you are building a complex lab to conduct experiments, the structure and equipment is often far more costly than the salaries and stipends of the researchers. Michigan State University has declared that these cuts could make it stop construction of a \$330 million research building for cancer, cardiovascular disease and neuroscience studies.

Government funding plays a unique role [in America]. It often supports basic research, the kind that companies have less incentive to do, and its results cannot be hoarded by any one company but rather are provided free to the entire scientific and technological community so that all can use it to experiment and innovate.

It is an American system that has reaped billions and billions of dollars in rewards to our economy.

The mapping of the human genome cost less than \$3 billion and took 13 years. Because it was government-funded, one of its

key requirements was that the research should be made publicly available for all within 24 hours of being generated.

The other assault on the universities is a strange new attack on free speech.

Fareed writes:

It began from a principled critique that bureaucracy, universities and elites had all become too woke. But the government's response to this problem has been Orwellian, searching through these institutions for any mentions of the words "diversity" or "identity" or "inclusion" and then shutting down those programs without any review. Worse, it now punishes universities for having on their campuses people who might espouse certain views on topics like Israel and Palestine—and now is punishing the protesters themselves. I have long argued that universities have a huge problem: They have far too little intellectual and ideological diversity—which is the most important kind of diversity on a campus. But the way you fix that is not to restrict radical left-wing speech but to add voices and views from other parts of the spectrum. The answer to censorship by the left is not censorship by the right.

The fury with which the Trump administration has turned on academia resembles nothing so much as the early days of the Cultural Revolution, when an increasingly paranoid Mao Zedong smashed China's established universities, a madness that took generations [in China] to remedy. Meanwhile, in Beijing last week, the Chinese government announced its intention to massively increase its funding for research and technology so that it could lead the world in science in the 21st century. So, as America appears to be copying the worst aspects of China's recent history, China is copying the best aspects of America's, striving to take the edge [away from] . . . the United States [as though we are going] through [our] . . . own cultural revolution.

Learn from the fascists in China. Fareed's article is over. This is me now.

Learn from the fascists in China and don't do what the Chinese did. What America has done to lead humanity in the sciences, in innovation, in research, in breakthroughs, in science—we are the global model. And one administration, in 71 days, has our best universities cutting the number of Ph.D. students they bring in, cutting the research that they are doing, cutting the planned development of research buildings. This is insanity, insanity.

We are America. Why is the President of the United States attacking the science and the research at the top universities on planet Earth, bullying them, undermining them?

I have had universities from my State. I have had universities from my neighboring State—not Connecticut, New York. And I have had my college, Stanford, come to see me—top researchers. The academic community—not the political community, not the history majors, not the political scientists, not the literature students, not the Af-Am departments—the scientists of America have been coming to the Senate to say: What the heck? What is going on? How could you take America's edge, America's advantage, America's strength, America's brilliance and

undercut it in 71 days of your administration?

We are killing the golden goose. Why? Because we have a President who is taking money that we already approved—the article I branch of government—and claiming that he could claw it back, all on some trumped-up charge that these institutions are too woke. The solution to that is not to cut science funding.

This should make people mad. But more importantly, it should make people stand up and not be bystanders and wait until we lose our edge because our adversaries globally are smiling as we destroy our institutions, from Duke to Rutgers, to the University of Michigan, to Berkeley, to Stanford.

This is madness. This is insanity—and one of a dozen reasons why we are going through this, a dozen reasons why I am standing here, that we should not be doing things normally. If we are complicit in what Trump is doing—I am hearing it not from political people but from scientists who show up in my office from Cornell, medical researchers who show up in my office from our research hospitals in New Jersey and are saying—they are not political. They are just saying: What the heck? You are undermining the research of today that will affect the breakthroughs 5 years from now, 10 years from now.

What is China doing while we are doing this? They are investing in record numbers, record levels. The country of Tiananmen Square, cracking down on college students, is now trying to act like America, while America is acting more like them because our President is violating the separation of powers, taking away the money we approved. And we are letting it happen by doing things normally here and not holding one hearing.

Here is another example of what Fareed was talking about. It is an article entitled: "Graduate student admissions paused and cut back as universities react to Trump orders on research." Again, this is not from a political magazine. It is not from the New York Times or the Washington Post or the Wall Street Journal. This is from STAT News. When did science become political?

Acceptances for biomedical graduate students and postdoctoral scholars are being cut back at some universities and medical centers across the country as many grapple with the potential impact of the Trump administration's order to cut National Institutes of Health research funding.

That paragraph alone should have people—all in this Chamber—upset. Let's just give European universities, Australian universities, Canadian universities, Chinese universities a leg up because we are going to cut the number of graduate students and postdoctoral students. The geniuses in our country will have less opportunity.

The cuts come even as the proposed reductions to funding for overhead expenses, set to start Feb. 10, were temporarily halted last

week by a federal judge, at least until a court hearing this Friday. Universities appear to be exercising caution, with some freezing positions and not taking new applications, or accepting fewer students than normal, according to interviews, public announcements, and internal emails obtained by STAT. The abrupt narrowing of training opportunities is leaving many future researchers at the start of their scientific journey in limbo.

The academic calendar runs to the rhythm of its own seasons; right now is typically the time of year when offer letters for Ph.D. programs and postdoc positions in labs start hitting inboxes. Universities and academic medical centers were in the thick of that process when the NIH—

Under President Donald Trump—policy about overhead costs, known as indirect costs, landed.

"This couldn't be worse timing for doing this," said Waverly Ding, an associate professor at the University of Maryland who studies the biomedical sciences workforce. "It's creating a jolt in the market that is going to be disabling for labs, especially the smaller ones, because they won't have the human capital to do their science. It's also going to create chaos for Ph.D.s. It's going to be a cascading kind of chain effect through the entire ecosystem."

I know we don't read science—actually, we have a few doctors in here that do—but look at the alarm that they are sounding that this is not normal.

The slowdown is happening at some universities and not at others; some students may be unaware of the issue as they anxiously await acceptance letters without fully understanding the role national politics is playing in those decisions. Some faculty are grappling with admissions that are paused and then unpaused, while others say they are receiving little information or guidance from leadership.

At the University of Southern California—

And as a former Stanford football player, it is hard for me to talk about USC. I had to jab them, Senator MURPHY.

At the University of Southern California, faculty in some departments were told last week to pause admissions, and not formalize offers to students—even those who had visited and been given verbal acceptances. "The awkward part is that we already told these applicants that they were provisionally accepted and invited them to an in-person recruitment day; many have already purchased flight + hotel reservations"—

I mean, that is just cruel—one professor said in a faculty discussion list-serve observed by STAT.

I know Senator MURPHY hangs out in faculty discussion list-serves.

That pause on admissions, in psychology, was lifted this week, STAT was told.

Jennifer Unger, a professor who runs a doctoral program in health behavior research in the department of population and public health sciences at the University of Southern California Keck School of Medicine, said Wednesday she was still not able to admit the six graduate students her department had accepted after a visit day on Feb. 3.

"We had just flown them out, we told them we love you, we want to admit you, and then everything just stopped," Unger said. "On the day Trump announced they were cutting indirect costs . . . USC paused all Ph.D. admissions."

"I just don't know what to tell them," Unger said of the students. "Some of them

have other offers and will likely go somewhere else. We've probably lost them."

Despite USC's "unpausing" of admissions in many departments, Unger said Wednesday she was still not able to admit students. She hoped her portal to admit students would open soon, but said the disruption was coming at a time when her field, public health, was already reeling from the actions of the Trump administration, something affecting potential graduate students as well.

"It's very stressful for them, this is a major life decision," she said, adding they were already worried about their futures. "They were asking, 'Do you think we'll be able to get a job in this environment? Do you think we'll get grants?'"

The dean of the Graduate School at USC told STAT late Friday that the university briefly paused Ph.D. admissions to "assess the uncertainties around federal funding," but that the admissions process was now open.

Some schools were continuing to accept students or had accepted graduate students before the recent turmoil and said those offers are intact.

"We have no knowledge of any disruptions to graduate student admissions in the science fields . . .," Rachel Zaentz, senior director of communications [said].

In some cases, the pauses to hiring and admissions were implemented ahead of the NIH policy change—evidence of how quickly the Trump administration's threats to withhold federal research dollars over diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts are shifting the financial footings of universities.

On Feb. 6, faculty at Vanderbilt University were instructed to reduce graduate admissions by half across the board, according to an email obtained by STAT.

Reduce graduate admissions by half.

On the same day, faculty at the University of Washington School of Public Health received an email to pause offers to doctoral students as well as offers of financial support to graduate students. Faculty hiring was also frozen, the email said. This Tuesday, the public health school sent out another email informing the community that some faculty hiring and Ph.D. student offers would continue, but at a greatly diminished level.

The school is also planning to take more "cost containment measures," including hiring freezes and reappointment freezes . . . through the end of the academic year due to the volatility caused by the Trump administration. Existing offers will be honored, wrote Hilary Godwin, dean of UW's school of public health.

Marion Pepper, chair of UW's immunology department, said she was instructed by university leadership to keep her program's next graduate cohort smaller than the usual five to nine students admitted each year. That's easier said than done, because the proportion of students who accept offers of admission varies year-to-year. Pepper told STAT that while she expects the incoming class to be slightly smaller than normal, she has spoken with program heads at UW and elsewhere who are reducing class sizes by half or more.

"I know for other programs, they're feeling very bleak about how they're going to keep labs running without funding or students," Pepper said. "It's pretty overwhelming."

Medical schools are hit hard. Medical research is hit hard.

It's unclear how many other universities are taking similar preemptive belt-tightening measures, but schools of public health and medical schools are particularly vulnerable, because they tend to have many faculty, postdocs, and graduate students supported by grants.

Boston University School of Public Health has also ordered an across-the-board hiring freeze on all new faculty and staff positions—including student workers and postdocs. In a campus-wide announcement, Dean ad interim Michael Stein said the move was being made due to "the uncertainty of the moment." A spokesperson for the school told STAT that graduate admissions are unaffected by the freeze.

Unger said USC had cut funding for some [teaching assistants] in her department earlier this year before the new executive orders, which reduced the number of graduate students her program could accept from 10 to 6.

On Feb. 11, Columbia University's medical school faculty were told that the school was putting a temporary pause on hiring as well as other activities like travel and procuring equipment, according to an email obtained by the Columbia student newspaper, the Columbia Spectator. A spokesperson for Columbia declined to comment on the pause.

In other cases, schools may accept fewer graduate students than they had planned, not because of an overt directive from university leaders, but because faculty feel unsure about future funding, given the Trump administration's intent to cut billions of dollars in overhead funding.

At the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, 25% fewer graduate students will be admitted this year—

Twenty-five percent fewer—

based on a survey of faculty members taking new students, said Mark Peifer, a professor of cell biology there. This means the school will admit about 75 students across the biomedical sciences. He noted the numbers of graduate students vary each year so the decline was not unprecedented.

And the numbers continue to go down.

In an interview with STAT, Robert Ferris, the director of UNC's Lineberger Comprehensive Cancer Center, said that hiring freezes, fewer Ph.D. student offers, and other similar cost containment measures are being considered as the center is eyeing the same financially turbulent waters as other research institutions. "Every one of those things is on the table, unfortunately," Ferris said. "There's so much uncertainty. Can we hire this faculty member? Can we purchase this equipment?"

They just don't know exactly what or how many measures the center may have to take, he said, as there are simply still too many unknowns—for instance, the outcome of the NIH indirect rate cut policy is still up in the air. "Not knowing how it's going to shake out," he said, "it just freezes everybody into inaction."

Adding to the uncertainty is disruptions to key parts of the NIH approval process for proposed research grants. Although some meetings of study sections—in which grant applications are reviewed—resumed at the start of the month, meetings of advisory councils have not. Each of the 27 institutes of the NIH has its own advisory council, which meets three times a year to issue final funding recommendations on new research projects. None of these councils—

None—

has met since the Jan. 22 communications freeze was ordered across all federal health agencies.

A law called the Federal Advisory Committee Act requires that advisory councils post meeting details in the Federal Register 15 days prior to their scheduled date. But because submissions to the Federal Register have been put on hold indefinitely, these meetings can't take place. And without these meetings, no new grants can be funded.

According to one NIH employee, at least one NIH meeting scheduled for this Friday to allow an institute director to provide updates that could proceed because it had been posted to the Federal Register was nonetheless canceled Wednesday. This was because the meeting specified it would include a session open to the public—but because a ban remains in place on any public communications, meetings with open sessions cannot be held. "And they can't update the federal registry with a revised agenda stating no open session because the federal registry is closed."

Principal investigators who had been counting on awards to pay the salaries of new graduate students and postdocs are now left wondering if their labs will be able to make it through the summer, let alone take on new members.

Referencing the hold on submissions to the Federal Register, MIT neuroscientist Nancy Kanwisher posted on social media Wednesday: "So much for the grant I submitted last September, which was supposed to be reviewed next week. Hardly the biggest tragedy on the current scale of things, but it will force me to severely downsize my already small lab."

Fears were similar for one computational genomics researcher at a prominent East Coast institution who asked for anonymity for fear of being targeted by the new administration. "We have people coming to visit the lab next week, and these are students we haven't made offers to yet because we can't," he said. "I don't know what I'm going to tell them."

Beyond the immediate harm to young scientists, he worries about the long-term damage to fields like computer science and biomedical engineering—areas where the U.S. has long been the world leader. "If we stop training students, we're going to lose that lead very quickly," he said. "It's not clear anyone else is going to pick up the ball. We're just going to be worse off and people won't even be aware of it—it's hard to notice when it takes 20 years instead of 10 to get a cure."

Cuts within NIH are also adding to the rapidly constricting pool of places prospective scientists can go to train. Since the 1960s, the NIH has provided opportunities for recent college graduates to spend one or two years in a full-time research position within one of the institute's labs, which many scientists see as a key tool for recruiting young people into biomedical fields. On Feb. 1, a notice appeared on the NIH website announcing that all training programs had paused recruitment "pending guidance from Health and Human Services."

The NIH's Postbac Program, which provides recent college graduates with research positions and career advising and last year admitted roughly 1,600 people, will not be accepting any new applicants for 2025, according to an NIH employee who asked for anonymity for fear of repercussions.

Of course, that is my add.

"It's a vital link in the training of doctors and biomedical scientists in the country," the NIH employee said. "You can't find a medical school or biomed program that doesn't have students from the postbac program."

And it is ending.

While the Trump administration may be hoping that the headwinds it's creating for academic hiring may push recent graduates or newly minted Ph.D.s into private industry, it's unlikely to play out that way because of the speed and scale of the disruption. "Pharmaceutical firms are not going to suddenly open up more jobs for graduates to

adapt to this situation," said Ding. More likely is that people will start looking for opportunities outside the U.S., or wind up without jobs altogether, she added.

At this point, it's still too early to say if these are the first signs of losing a generation of American scientists. But even people like Ding, who track the data that could provide clues about how extensive the damage will be, are facing uncertainty about their ability to continue their own work.

Her plans to hire a postdoc are currently on hold as she waits to find out if a grant she has through the National Science Foundation—which is facing its own drastic cuts—will come through.

(Mr. HUSTED assumed the Chair.)

I mean, honestly, I am here because I said at the beginning, some 9 hours ago, that I was going to stand here because what is going on in America is not normal. We have gone through healthcare cuts. We have gone through Social Security being attacked and undermined and slashed, and the Department of Education. But if those things don't worry you, statements like this should:

It is still a little too early to say that these things are the first signs of losing a generation of American scientists.

I know this. I have been privileged. I studied at Oxford University overseas. I have studied at Stanford University in Silicon Valley, and I have studied at Yale.

I watched friends get degrees in the sciences and things I couldn't spell, and they had options, not just in America. But for the brightest minds on the planet Earth, there is a global competition going on for them from Canada to Oxford, to countries in Asia.

If you are telling me that thousands of people, right now, 71 days into the Trump administration, are losing opportunities in the sciences to do research in the most important areas of human endeavor can't get hired, they will go elsewhere.

For over a generation, America has led the planet Earth because of this combination between research universities, private sector industry, and government. How do I know this? Because I am here because of it. The whole computer revolution in America was because incredible computer science researchers at academic institutions were partnering with industry and being funded in many ways by the government, and it helped companies like IBM with their mainframes dominate.

My dad was one of IBM's first Black people hired as a salesman in the Washington, DC-Maryland area. My parents were IBMers because when scientific endeavor explodes into new industry, new ideas, new biomedical breakthroughs, it creates a ripple effect in our economy lifting so many people up.

And in 71 days, Donald Trump's actions have led scientific articles like this to talk about a postbac program that provides bright recent college graduates—brilliant people, 1,600 of them—to usually get jobs to be canceled.

And this article laments from scientists—not political people, not poli-

ticians—that this is a crisis. It is a crisis in America, and we haven't held one hearing on this in Congress.

Yet university after university—I can't be the only Senator having this happen—not just from my State. The universities are coming from New York to California, sounding the alarm that we are going to lose our competitive edge against one of our greatest competitors, China, which is doubling down, as the article said, in research on the sciences.

But let me just give you some examples, and then I will yield for a question. I want to talk about some New Jersey institutions that have written me:

Rutgers has been a partner in the Air Force Research Laboratory Minority Leaders Research Collaborative Program, a grant which has been led by the Ohio State University and is on pause.

God forbid they use the word "minority."

And the annual program review and summer internship programs are not expected to happen this year.

Rutgers School of Nursing has been working with the Institute of Human Virology in Nigeria on an action to sustain precision in HIV response toward epidemic control, and they were funded through a CDC and PEPFAR grant. A stop work order came in.

Multiple Rutgers entities have received communications from Federal Agencies related to DEIA cancellation of apprenticeship programs.

Many conferences have been canceled that are trying to find the best minds wherever they might be because there is many geniuses at Howard and Fisk and Morehouse that are often overlooked.

Annika Barber, a faculty at the Rutgers department of molecular biology and biochemistry writes me this:

Rutgers holds an NIH initiative for maximizing student development training grant that supports an additional five doctoral students. This grant expires in January 2026, and we put in for renewal this fall, for which I wrote a letter of support. However, it seems likely that this grant proposal will not even be reviewed.

I just completed the first year of funding on my NIH Maximizing Investigators' Research Award and put in my progress report for the next years of funding. These are non-competing renewals, which means they don't go through peer review. In the past, they were reviewed by the NIH program officials to ensure the funds were being managed in accordance with the approval grant and the research funds.

However, NIH has been extremely slow to process even these noncompetitive renewals. This type of grant requires a plan for enhancing the work.

I want to read this last letter. It is handwritten:

I am writing you not only as a concerned parent that believes in progress, education, and the power of science to improve lives.

My daughter is a Ph.D. in neuroscience, dedicating her life to research that has the potential to save countless lives. As a minority in science, she has worked tirelessly to overcome barriers in a field that is already competitive and abandoned.

Watching the current political attacks on research funding is devastating not just her

future but the future of the American country. Science is not political. It serves all people.

Yet funding cuts to Agencies like NIH and the National Science Foundation threaten to halt critical research that leads to medical breakthroughs. These cuts will not only slow progress in fighting diseases like cancer, Alzheimer's, and Parkinson's, but they will also discourage young, diverse scientists, many of whom have already fought hard to be in these spaces, from staying in the field. This is not just about scientists. It is about every American.

Diseases do not know political parties. Without adequate research funding, we are all at risk of losing the chance for better treatments, new cures, and improved healthcare. If we truly want a stronger and more innovative America, we must invest in science, not abandon it.

Defunding research will also harm our economy. Scientific innovation drives job creation, medical advancements, and global progress. A country that does not invest in science is a country that falls behind.

Mr. MURPHY. Does the Senator yield?

Mr. BOOKER. I will yield for a question while retaining the floor.

Mr. MURPHY. I thank the Senator.

What the Senator is outlining is an extraordinary assault not just on education but on the knowledge economy.

I want to bring manufacturing jobs back to this country, but I understand—I think everybody understands—that we are not going to be a nation filled with low-skilled manufacturing jobs. We are going to be a nation that does high-skilled manufacturing. We are going to be a nation that invents things. We are going to be a nation that is dependent on engineering and on invention. We are going to be a knowledge economy.

We are today, but we are going to be even more reliant on maintaining and expanding our knowledge edge on the rest of the world, given the fact that the pace of change and the oncoming transformation that will come from robotics and AI will make it even more important for a nation to have the most highly skilled, most highly educated workforce possible in order to stay ahead of the curve and not have employment be buried by automation and artificial intelligence.

So this is a moment in which we should be doubling down on our support for the knowledge economy, on an integration of public sector research and private sector research, which has always been the genius of American economy. We did that integration better than anybody, and it is not coincidental that we leap-frogged the rest of the world when it came to that innovation economy.

But what the Senator is explaining is that the Trump administration is waging a war on the knowledge economy. It is literally signing our economic death warrant by coming after the foundational strength of our Nation, which is that public-private sector integration.

I just checked in with the University of Connecticut, which is going to lose \$165 million because of this illegal

change that the Trump administration has implemented, dramatically cutting the amount of research dollars that go to institutions with NIH grants.

I will just read half their list. They gave me a list of all their research projects that are going to either be eliminated or slowed for diminished:

A project for improving physical and cognitive function in aging; a project for improving outcomes for people with autism; a project for understanding neural mechanisms for language and reading, including people with dyslexia; funding for prevention and care for HIV patients; projects for studying the leading causes of death and disability in the United States, including cancer, obesity, Alzheimer's disease, and substance abuse; projects studying treatments for rare diseases and genetic disorders with specific impacts on health, including sickle cell, mitochondrial disorders, Rett syndrome, Prader-Willi syndrome, muscle and bone regeneration research, tick-borne diseases.

The University of Connecticut faces the same crisis as all the other institutions listed in that incredibly long STAT news article.

And as you mentioned, research is not going to wait around for this crisis to pass. They are going to accept offers from research institutions in other countries, from our European allies to our Asian competitors. We are going to lose our competitive edge when it comes to research.

It is worth noting that this change in research funding is illegal. Article I vests the spending power of the Federal Government in Congress. That is plain and simple, and there are lots of good reasons why our Founding Fathers did that, Senator BOOKER. They were determined to keep the spending power out of the hands of the executive branch because they had seen how the British King used the Treasury in order to compel loyalty and to punish opposition: You get money if you are loyal to me.

You get money if you are loyal to me; I withhold money from you if you are disloyal to me.

And so Congress got the spending power. We decided the exact rate of reimbursement for medical research. We were very specific about it in the statute that we passed, Republicans and Democrats.

This cut in funding for institutes of higher education's research that has been implemented by the administration is illegal on its face.

Congress said exactly how research funding should be allocated; the President is ignoring that statute and implementing a unilateral cut.

It has been enjoined by the Federal court. Hopefully, if the courts follow the law, it will be permanently stopped.

But it is important to note that it stands in a larger context of the Federal Government using its spending power—excuse me—the Trump administration trying to seize control of Federal spending in order to do that work that our Founding Fathers were so worried about.

We have seen over the past several weeks the administration march through school after school, trying to cut individual deals with institutions of higher education. We will release your funding only after you sign a bilateral agreement with the administration lining your institute of higher education's priorities up with the political interests of the administration.

This is exactly what our Founding Fathers were trying to avoid: the Executive using the spending power to compel loyalty from individuals and institutions. What they are doing is illegal.

And it is beyond me why my Republican colleagues, our Republican colleagues, stand idly by while the spending power vested in Congress by the Constitution is ripped from us.

But, Senator BOOKER, I guess I am going to ask you the same question I did when it came to this assault on Social Security, and it is a simple question. And I will lay out a little bit of a predicate. The question is: Why?

What the administration has done is extraordinary, proposing to close the Department of Education—wildly unpopular. Nobody is asking for that—waging this illegal and unconstitutional assault on our knowledge economy, suspending funding for institutions of higher education, research budgets, when, plainly, the statute says they cannot do that. So why engage in this extraordinary action to essentially destroy America's knowledge economy from elementary school all the way up to graduate education?

Well, as we have talked about, as you laid out, it can't be because you are trying to help the economy. This destroys the economy. I mean, this is the worst thing that you could probably do for the economy is to wage this open, transparent, proudful assault on research because we will not survive as an economy unless we are the place where cutting-edge research and invention happens. We just won't.

And so researchers now, who are having all of their offers suspended by major colleges and universities, they are looking elsewhere. Maybe they are hoping that the offer still comes through, but they are dialing up other competitors, many of them outside of the United States.

There was a story out of the University of Cambridge in England a couple weeks ago in which their administrators were talking about the bounty that they are receiving as some of the highest class researchers in the world are coming to them because they don't believe that they will have any source of stable funding from the United States.

Mr. BOOKER. Wow.

Mr. MURPHY. So it can't be about helping us create jobs or supporting our economy. This is, no doubt, an assault on the economy.

One of the complaints that I hear often about elementary and secondary education is that the Department of Education was engaged in micro-

management, right? That it was a Federal school board, and we want to get the Federal Government out of the business of dictating what local schools will do.

Well, that is not a credible explanation for what is happening because, in fact, the Trump administration is telegraphing that they are going to actually jump into the micromanagement of our local schools.

Nobody has any idea what "DEI" means. Let's just be honest. It means something different to every single official in the Trump administration. It is just a proxy to impose a set of reactionary, rightwing values on our schools or on our Federal Agencies.

I asked a question of the nominee to be the alleged last Secretary of Education as to whether or not African-American history could be taught in our high schools any longer, and her answer was essentially maybe not. I don't know, but DEI might mean that you can't teach African-American history. It might mean that the Federal Government is going to comb through every syllabus in every high school in the entire country and tell you what courses you can teach and what courses you can't. And if there are any words in there that our AI algorithm doesn't like—like "African"—can't teach it. That is a level of micromanagement never seen before in the Federal Government.

And so the reason that they are cracking down on the Department of Education or eliminating funding for research is not because they are trying to get the Federal Government out of the management of our schools, because they are doing exactly the opposite. They are telling you that your school is not going to be able to make decisions on what classes it offers its students. It is going to be Linda McMahon, the former CEO of the World Wrestling Federation, that is going to be in charge of whether your school can teach African-American history. OK?

So then what is the reason, Senator BOOKER? And I will, you know, just give you a couple suggestions: Well, maybe it is just to compel loyalty, right? Maybe it is just to use that money to compel loyalty so that boards of education or colleges are only teaching conservative or right-leaning curriculum.

Maybe it is to try to quell protests on campuses so that there isn't an ability for students to robustly protest the policies of the regime.

Maybe it is just to destroy the idea of objective truth. I mean, this whole scandal over Signal has lots of elements to it, but I think one of the most worrying things for the American public, why it is still a story a week later, is because the Secretary of Defense looked the American public in the eye and said: 2 plus 2 equals 9. Right? He said: Those Signal texts you saw did not involve war plans, did not involve classified information.

The American public was like: Wait a second. We read them. I am not dumb. I know those were war plans. I know that that was classified information.

But if you are in the business of trying to unwind democracy, you have to destroy objective truth. You have to make everything political. You have to make everything subjective.

Where is objective truth midwived? It is in our education system. That is where we learn 2 plus 2 equals 4 every time. But if you want to undermine the foundation of a democracy, then you undermine the place where truth happens.

Mr. BOOKER. Yes.

Mr. MURPHY. OK. Maybe it is the same agenda with Social Security, just come up with an excuse to privatize it all. Just take all the money that is going to good, public sector research and just move it all into the private sector so it can be a source to reward the friends of President Trump. That could be a rationale as well.

Or maybe it is even simpler. Maybe it is just to own the libs. Maybe it is just that, historically, Democrats on the left have maybe talked about education more than Republicans have, even though, to me, it was always something we both cared about. Whether or not I agree with George Bush's "No Child Left Behind" plan, at least he was walking into the Capitol with a plan to try to improve education.

But maybe it is just that Democrats on the left have historically talked more about education. And if you believe, as Donald Trump does, that all politics is zero sum, anything the Democrats are for must be, by definition, bad for America. And Democrats seem to like college, and they seem to really support our schools, so we have to destroy our colleges, and we have to destroy public education. Because if the left is for it, it must be evil. Maybe that is the reason they are doing it.

But that is the question I pose to you because it has nothing to do with our economy. It has nothing to do with getting the Federal Government out of the management of schools and colleges. There is another agenda here, and it doesn't seem to be an agenda that squares with anything that the American people have been asking, Senator BOOKER.

Mr. BOOKER. I just want to answer you. Again, I would drive myself mad trying to understand what the ambitions of Trump were or the ambitions behind some of the crazy stuff in Project 2025 that he said wasn't there, and he tried to run away from it because it was so unpopular, and now so much of it is being done. It almost sounds too partisan, too insane.

What I do want to do, Senator MURPHY, in answer to your question—all I can do is try to be as fair and factual in describing what is happening in our country and appeal to people who are moderates in this country, the people who are fair arbiters of what is happening, to try to appeal to them that this is a crisis.

So when university after university after university is cutting scientific research, stopping bringing in the best minds, Ph.D. candidates, post-docs, when they are telling you that they are stopping investment in state-of-the-art research buildings, when they are telling you that they are shutting down programs to bring the youngest, brightest minds in and our competitor China is doing the exact opposite, flowing money through because China understands if we get two steps ahead of America on quantum computing, we can break all kinds of encryptions. We can locate every submarine they have. China understands if we can get two steps ahead of America on artificial intelligence, it is an endgame for them.

This is a global competition, and a President, in 71 days—if you are a moderate in America and just want America to win in human endeavor, look at what the President is doing. And here is to the point you were driving, Senator MURPHY. It is Orwellian.

The bastions of freedom that are our universities, as an article from Fareed Zakaria has said, even if universities got too woke and too excessive, the antidote to that isn't to try to shut down the thought of the left. It is to try to make a fair, more competitive marketplace for ideas from all around the political spectrum.

But this isn't about politics; it is about science; it is about research; it is about cutting NIH funding, science funding. But I want to stick with that because that is the controversial nub, right?

Like, we need to go after DEI programs. I am hearing it all the time. It was like the confusion I had 5 years ago when people were asking me: Oh, the Republicans are talking about critical race theory. As my father says, I have more degrees than the month of July, but I am not hot. But I had to go back and research: What is critical race theory? Oxford, Stanford, Yale grad, I wasn't sure what they were talking about. And this is the rub on that because I don't want to just talk about what is obvious, which should enrage people on both sides of the aisle, not just enrage people on both sides of the aisle because of the China outcompeting us, but because we allocated this money in a bipartisan way that he is now trying to pull back. That should raise a violation of article I of the Constitution.

But I want to stick in this more controversial era that you talked about that has, all across the country, people banning books. When I heard Toni Morrison's "The Bluest Eye" was being taken out of libraries, when I heard my favorite author James Baldwin was being taken out of libraries—what kind of world do we live in where, somehow, studying what they call Black history is something that we have to—that Trump feels like it is a rally for people to stop, where a person working for the Department of Education can't look you in the eye and say: Yes, we need to

study Black history? Black history is American history.

I had a brilliant friend of mine, brilliant. He looked at me with deadpan embarrassment and told me he just found out that year about the bombing in Tulsa, OK, something I worked with Senator LANKFORD to do more to memorialize, but he just never knew about it; that this thriving African-American financial community was the first recorded aerial bombing—not Pearl Harbor—in the United States of America, and he was never taught it.

Is that Black history or is that American history?

Why do these people who attack our history think they have to sanitize, homogenize, "Disneyfy" American history to make us proud? I am more proud of our country when we tell the truth about what happened, when we learned from the wretchedness and the difficulties and the bigotries and the hates and demagogues who pit us against each other and how we all overcame that. That is our greatness. How the genius of inventors that were women or Blacks in the most oppressive of times still manifested their genius that transformed humanities. These are stories that should make every American more proud.

So, yes, when you have a President now that is making people scrape through programs that they don't even know what they are doing, but if there were more diversity in it, that is bad? That is insanity.

My mom worked for IBM before they used words like "DEI." One of her jobs was to find a bigger pool of highly qualified applicants. You know what she did is what is being stopped by the Trump administration. She just made sure that they were going to HCBUs to find the brightest students so that their applicant pool would be better. This isn't about preferential treatment for one group over another; it is about trying to create a more competitive pool where we get the best of the best. It is about merit-based.

And this President talked about merit—and I watched Senator WHITEHOUSE ask one of the top lawyers of the EPA if he ever brought a case, if he ever had a hearing, if he ever did a deposition—no, no, no. Wait a minute. How are you qualified for this job?

And that is the conflict in the logic that I am observing. In one sense, they are exalting the wealthy elites. I have never imagined that I would see a Presidential inauguration where the billionaires, leaders of tech companies, would sit in front of Cabinet members, many of whom were billionaires themselves—but that kind of elitism. Yet they call academic excellence, brilliance, and achievement in the sciences at these universities the elites we need to go after.

If we start going after our educational institutions and weakening their ability to advance excellence in human endeavor, we are injuring ourselves, and we have models for that. As

Fareed Zakaria says, the best example was Mao Zedong and the cultural revolution where one of the first groups they went after were their universities. Now they are reversing that. They watched what we did so well. They are doubling down on their funding of universities. They are taking their best scientists and taking away their passports because they don't want them to come here and study. They are trying to get ahead of us in DeepSeek and AI. They are trying to get ahead of us in quantum computers. They are trying to get ahead of us in robotics. They are trying to get ahead of us in biomedical engineering. They are trying to get ahead of us in all of these things. They know the way they do it is do what America did in the sixties, seventies, eighties, the nineties, the aughts, 2010—to do what they did all those times and look at them now.

Mr. MURPHY. Will the Senator yield?

Mr. BOOKER. I will yield while still retaining the floor.

Mr. MURPHY. I take the Senator's point, my friend's point. I am probing tonight for the why because it is the obvious question. It doesn't make sense, right? On its face, this intentional chaos—this intentional chaos in Social Security, in Medicare, in higher education, it doesn't make sense. It is not about efficiency. It is not about jobs. So what is it about?

But your point is a good one. That may not actually be the conversation that a lot of apolitical Americans are asking. They may just be looking at this on the face and say: How does this impact me? It doesn't matter to me why it is happening; it matters how it is going to impact me.

There is no doubt that this assault on higher education has none; it does. We are, as you said it better than I have, we are just in a race.

Mr. BOOKER. Yes.

Mr. MURPHY. We are just in a race, and we just decided to slow down to a walk, which is a shame because we are fast. We are fast. This country is quick. And our coach just told us, start walking while the other guys speed up.

This is why we have urgency because the race—this one is not. Maybe it is a marathon. But it is one of those races where if the other team gets too big a lead, it is going to be hard to catch up.

So in the next 3½ years, if we just stand down in terms of supporting the knowledge economy, we are going to shed millions of jobs—millions of jobs. And once those centers of excellence, research excellence are outside the United States, it is not like the next President can just come back in and fix it. That becomes a permanent liability for us.

The reason that I am here on the floor with you, Senator BOOKER, is because I agree with you that this is not normal. But I also agree with you that we have to wake our colleagues up fast because like a second ago, I thought we all agreed on the fact that we need to

support the knowledge economy. Like 2 seconds ago, we were all raising hands together, Republicans and Democrats, that we finally started putting big new dollars into NIH. We did a \$2 billion increase, I think, a few years ago, and it was a big bipartisan achievement. And all of a sudden, just because Donald Trump is in the White House, we have lost the bipartisan consensus of the knowledge economy.

Mr. BOOKER. I want to interrupt you before you go to your last question. I know you want to get your last question out before I get to the next area so related to this, immigration. I mean, the brightest minds on the planet Earth are coming here.

Mr. MURPHY. I am good. I made my point.

Mr. BOOKER. I want to say something to you. You got me triggered when you said we had some consensus over the last 4 years. I love how you say just yesterday. I remember the CHIPS and Science Act. That was a bipartisan bill. I was sitting in a SCIF with all of us, and I watched a whole national security apparatus talk about why science endeavors and chipmaking and the breakthroughs that are happening on chips are so essential for our national security and how we had to stay ahead of the competition. And we marched out of that meeting in a bipartisan fashion. We saw this in the bipartisan work we have been doing on AI here, talking about how America has to lead in this area.

And with all of that bipartisan vigor, we let a President come in and in 71 days, halt scientific research, pausing literally experiments in their tracks, halting researchers in their tracks, shaking universities to the core that are afraid of free expression for getting on the wrong side of “Dear Leader” that it might cost them their science funding. So you are putting your finger on it.

But can I just say something on a personal level because I just want to remind folks, as we are closing in on the 10th hour, that you and I were here for 15, and you are here because you agree with me. You agree with me that from science and research to higher education, Department of Education, Social Security, to healthcare in America, we are at a crisis. Any one of those alone should have Americans—but the case we are making going through all these, we are pulling from people on the left and the right. We quoted Republican Governors. We have quoted Republican mayor organizations, represented by organizations. We quoted Republican business people. We quoted the Wall Street Journal. This is not a partisan crisis that people across the spectrum are pointing to.

But I do want to point out, you have been such a good friend to me to spend 10 hours, almost, on the floor, and it means a lot to me tonight. Thank you for that.

As I switch to immigration, I appreciate the sentiments that you have and

that you had after the Pulse shooting that you were so worried about when I listened to your maiden speech when you first got here in the Senate that we would normalize gun violence in this country. What I am worried about—I share your worry there. I grew up in a time where fire drills were the big thing. And the space between people ducking and covering because of nuclear fears and left school before we were a country that had more active shooter drills than fire drills, and we just sort of are normalizing this terror in our country and haven't stepped up to the challenge of really doing something about it.

This is one of these crises where if we act like business as usual, 71 days so far of the Trump administration, when we get to 100 days, catastrophic things could have happened to Medicaid and healthcare, crashing of research for science, attacks on programs our senior citizens rely on. We, as a country have to, as I said at the very beginning 10 hours ago almost—we have to do what John Lewis challenged us to do: To stand up, to speak up, to get in good trouble, necessary trouble.

And tonight, my friend, in the wee hours—there are so many songs about 4 o'clock in the morning. It is like the hour nobody should be awake. I want to thank the Presiding Officer for being here. I want to thank the clerks and parliamentary staff and the impositions. But the cries of American citizens for their leaders to do something different, to stand up, to speak up—I felt like this has to be done. Let's keep going. Almost 10 hours in, I am thankful.

We are going to start the next session. Like I am trying to do in all of these, I am trying to elevate the voices that don't get to come to this place—voices I am hearing from, voices that identify themselves as a Republican veteran, a Democrat. Most of them are just people saying this is not normal. Many of them are saying, “Do something.” Some of them get me very emotional saying, “What can I do?” I get that question a lot: “Tell me what I can do to try to stop this.”

We are going to take this issue of immigration. And here is—I am not sure where this person is from. My staff has covered it up, probably to protect the person's identity. I am going to read this handwritten note. It is from New Jersey.

Thank you, Senator Booker. Please continue to fight the good fight against the injustices being done by the current administration. I am the pastor of Emanuel Lutheran Church in New Brunswick. As a faith leader and your constituent, I am deeply concerned about the treatment of LGBTQ people and immigrants by this administration. The demonization and marginalization of these groups is unchristian and deeply offensive to the values of my faith. I ask that you continue to oppose all Executive orders and legislation that targets these groups. You have been a consistent ally. Please continue to be a champion for justice for all people, but especially the most vulnerable.

Another person, late yesterday, in fact:

Court filings of the Trump administration reveal that a mistakenly deported Maryland father with protected legal status to this horrific prison in El Salvador—Abrego Garcia is married to a U.S. citizen and has a 5-year-old disabled child who is a U.S. citizen. He has no criminal record in the United States. Despite receiving a legal status call withholding of removal where a United States immigration judge found that he would more likely than not face persecution if deported to El Salvador, the Trump administration deported him, where? The very country from which he fled gang violence.

Here is a story that was written about him in *The Atlantic*.

The Trump administration acknowledged in a court filing on Monday that it had grabbed a Maryland father with protected legal status and mistakenly deported him to El Salvador. It was said that U.S. courts lack jurisdiction to order his return from the mega prison where he's now locked up.

The case appears to be the first time the Trump administration has admitted to errors when it sent three plane loads of Salvadorian and Venezuelan deportees to El Salvador's . . . "Terrorism Confinement Center" on March 15. Attorneys for several Venezuelan deportees have said that the Trump administration falsely labeled their clients as gang members because of their tattoos . . . But in Monday's court filing, attorneys for the government admitted that the Salvadorian man, Kilmar Abrego Garcia, was deported accidentally. "Although ICE was aware of his protection from removal to El Salvador, Abrego Garcia was removed to El Salvador because of an administrative error," the government told the court. Trump lawyers said the court has no ability to bring him back now that Abrego Garcia is in Salvadorian custody.

Simon Sandoval-Moshenberg, Abrego Garcia's attorney, says he's never seen a case in which the government knowingly deported someone who had already received protected legal status from an immigration judge. He is asking the court to order the Trump administration to ask for Abrego Garcia's return and, if necessary, to withhold payment to the Salvadorian government, which says it's charging the United States \$6 million a year to jail U.S. deportees.

[The] Trump administration . . . told the court to dismiss the request on multiple grounds, including . . . Trump's primacy in foreign affairs.

"[P]rimacy in foreign affairs." I am not going to stop now, but I ask anybody who has read the Constitution to understand that the President of the United States is not King. He does not have primacy in foreign affairs.

I continue with the article:

"The claim that the court is powerless to order any relief," Sandoval-Moshenberg told me, "if that's true, the immigration laws are meaningless—all of them—because the government can deport whoever they want, wherever they want, whenever they want, and no court can do anything about it once it's done."

Court filings show Abrego Garcia came to the United States at the age of 16 in 2011 after fleeing gang threats in his native El Salvador. In 2019, he received a form of protected legal status known as "withholding of removal" from a U.S. immigration judge who found he would likely be targeted by gangs if he was deported back.

Abrego Garcia, who is married to a U.S. citizen and has a 5-year-old disabled child who is also a U.S. citizen, has no criminal record in the United States, according to his attorney. The Trump administration does

not claim he has a criminal record, but called him a "danger to the community" and an active member of MS-13, the Salvadorian gang that Trump has declared a Foreign Terrorist Organization.

Sandoval-Moshenberg said those charges are false, and the gang label stems from a 2019 incident where Abrego Garcia and three other men were detained in a Home Depot parking lot by a police detective in Prince Georges County, Maryland. During questioning, one of the men told officers Abrego was a gang member, but the man offered no proof and police said they didn't believe him, filings show. Police did not identify him as a gang member.

Abrego Garcia was not charged with a crime, but he was handed over to U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement after the arrest to face deportation. In those proceedings, the government claimed that a reliable informant had identified him as a ranking member of MS-13. Abrego Garcia and his family hired an attorney and fought the government's attempt to deport him. He received "withholding of removal" six months later, a protected status.

It is not a path to permanent U.S. residency, but it means the government won't deport him back to his home country because he's more likely than not to face harm there.

Abrego Garcia has had no contact with any law enforcement agency since his release, according to his attorney. He works full time as a union sheet metal apprentice, has complied with requirements to check in annually with ICE, and cares for his five-year-old son, who has autism and a hearing defect, and is unable to communicate verbally.

On March 12, Abrego Garcia had picked up his son after work from the boy's grandmother's house when ICE officers stopped the car, saying his protected status had changed. Officers waited for Abrego's wife to come to the scene and take care of the boy, then drove him away in handcuffs. Within two days, he had been transferred to an ICE staging facility in Texas, along with other detainees the government was preparing to send to El Salvador. Trump had invoked the Alien Enemies Act of 1798, and the government planned to deport two plane loads of Venezuelans along with a separate group of Salvadorians.

Abrego's family has had no contact with him since he was sent to the megaprison in El Salvador, known as the CECOT.

C-E-C-O-T.

His wife spotted her husband in news photographs released by Salvadorian President . . . Bukele on the morning of March 16, after a U.S. District Judge had told the Trump administration to halt the flights.

"Oopsie," Bukele wrote on social media, taunting the judge.

Abrego Garcia's wife recognized her husband's decorative arm tattoo and scars, according to the court filing. The image showed Salvadoran guards in black ski masks frog-marching him into the prison, with his head down—

Shoved down—

toward the floor. The CECOT is the same prison Department of Homeland Security Secretary Kristi Noem visited last week, recording videos for social media while standing in front of a cell packed with silent detainees.

If the government wants to deport someone with protective status, the standard course would be to reopen the case and introduce new evidence arguing for deportation. The deportation of a protected status holder has even stunned some government attorneys I've been in touch with who are track-

ing the case, who declined to be named because they weren't authorized to speak to the press. [One of those people texted me: "What" period "the" period "explicative" period.]

Sandoval-Moshenberg told the court he believes Trump officials deported his client through extrajudicial means because they believed that going through the immigration judge process took too long and feared that they might not win all of their cases.

Officials at ICE and the Department of Homeland Security did not respond to a request for comment. The Monday court filing by the government indicates officials knew Abrego Garcia had legal protections shielding him from deportation to El Salvador.

"ICE was aware of this grant of withholding the removal at the time [of] Abrego Garcia's removal from the United States. Reference was made . . . on internal forms" . . . Abrego Garcia was not on the initial manifest of the deportation flight, but was listed as "an alternate," the government attorneys explained. As other detainees were removed from the flight for various reasons, Abrego Garcia "moved up the list."

The flight manifest "did not indicate that Abrego Garcia should not be removed," the attorneys said. "Through administrative error, Abrego Garcia was removed from the United States to El Salvador. This was an oversight," [the government admitted.] But despite this, they told the court that Abrego Garcia's deportation was carried out "in good faith."

I am going to go into a section now, and I am going to read things by conservative Justices and liberal Justices to some of the most conservative Supreme Court Justices who say that this is outrageous in this Nation.

There are parts of this Constitution that I am going to talk about that talk about due process, that talk about fundamental American ideals. But this is a story and a few others I have heard where Americans who have the status to stay here, who have an American spouse and American children who will be traumatized by this—in this case, a disabled child whose working father is struggling to take care of one of our children, an American child with an American mother—we were told that the President said he was going to be focusing on criminals, and these trumped-up charges, where they admit in court they made a mistake but write such mocking things to judges like "Oopsie" on social media, this cruelty—this is not who we are.

So let's talk about the Constitution first, the Fifth and the 14th Amendments.

The Fifth and 14th Amendments say that no one should shall be deprived of life, liberty, or property without the due process of law. The central promise of those words is an assurance that all levels of the American Government must operate within the law and the bounds of this Constitution. Everybody in this Chamber swears an oath to uphold the Constitution.

But every single day, it just seems our President is challenging constitutional principles. He is pushing past constitutional boundaries. Every day, we are hearing new stories of immigrants—some here illegally, some awaiting trial, most charged with no

crime—being rounded up, detained, arrested, deported, and often just “disappeared.” This is happening without charges, evidence, trials, hearings—without, as the Constitution says, due process.

This is what other governments have done. We have talked about it. On the Foreign Relations Committee, we complain about it to nations across the Earth when they do not show due process, when they disappear people. Maybe you are an immigrant who has never broken the law. Maybe you are a citizen. Even if you think the administration’s immigration agenda doesn’t apply to you, please know that the reckless behavior we are seeing erodes all of our rights.

As for the American mother and the American child right now whose husband was unjustly and illegally deported and is right now in an El Salvadorian prison, think about that.

Denying due process is a slippery slope. We have seen it in other countries. With democratic backsliding, it is a slippery slope. If people can be detained and deported without a hearing, detained and deported without due process, without seeing a judge, nothing will stop them from slipping toward deporting others and making mistakes with an American.

I am one of these people in this body who think our immigration system is in desperate need of reform. It was last updated 40 years ago, so 40 years ago was the last time we acted to update our immigration laws. The failure to update our laws has resulted in our country’s inability to manage unprecedented levels of immigration—not just affecting our country but affecting others. It is an unprecedented influx of applications to enter the United States, which has put pressure and strain on our immigration system and has slowed down the processing times for millions of people trying to immigrate or naturalize legally and made it more difficult to incentivize the world’s brightest minds to come here to contribute to our country’s long-term success.

For millions of Americans, immigration is not a political issue; it is a personal one. There are immigrants around my State and in every State who have waited year after year for Congress to find a bipartisan agreement to improve our system in ways that most Americans agree on, whether you are right or left. They have been waiting for people in Congress to fix our outdated immigration laws, to secure our borders, to dedicate the resources necessary for USCIS to fix the outrageously long processing times for immigration and provide a pathway to legal status for long-term American residents who have followed our laws and have contributed to our society. Some of them know no other country because they came here when they were just months old.

Our immigration laws are so outdated that even the conservative Cato

Institute published a comprehensive policy analysis in 2023, titled “Why Legal Immigration is Nearly Impossible.” In it, the Cato Institute explains:

Today, fewer than 1 percent of the people who want to move permanently to the United States can do so legally. Legal immigration is less like waiting in line and more like winning the lottery. It happens, but it is so rare that it is irrational to expect it in any individual case.

The Cato Institute continues:

For some immigrants, this restrictive system sends them into the black market of illegal immigration. For others, it sends them to other countries, where they contribute to the quality of life in their new homes. And for still others, it requires them to remain in their homeland, often underemployed and sometimes in danger. Whatever the outcome, the system punishes both . . . prospective immigrants and Americans who would associate, contract, and trade with them. Congress and the administration can do better.

I have met with conservatives, I have met with business groups, and I have met with agricultural leaders who all talk to commonsense things we should be doing to improve our immigration system—to protect our borders, yes, but to improve our economy, to improve our scientific research, and to improve our quality of life.

The only way to fix our broken immigration system is for Congress to fix it, to pass comprehensive immigration reform. But instead of a leader—strong leaders who go before Congress taking on the most complex issues but yet have the courage to stand before Congress and pull them together to do hard things—instead of doing that, the last time we made progress in this body, President Trump actively blocked bipartisan legislation. Now he has imposed policies that aren’t just going after criminals; they are dragging in so many others.

When President Trump stopped Republicans from voting on the bipartisan bill that was negotiated in the Senate last year, he stopped us from making strides towards the larger fixes we need.

The administration’s immigration plans are not helping American citizens who are submitting applications so that their spouse or fiancé who is waiting in another country can finally join them in the United States.

The administration right now is not helping American citizens who have been waiting for years for a visa for their brother or their sister or their mother or their father. Uniting families is an American value.

Americans aren’t getting any relief from these extraordinarily long wait times. On the USCIS website, you can check the average processing time for these cases, and most Americans would be shocked—maybe even horrified—to learn just how long it will take for you as an American citizen to bring a husband or a wife or even a child back to the United States with you.

We checked this past weekend, and here are the numbers. For the I-129 fi-

ance visa, the processing time for 80 percent of the cases is 8 months to 3 years. For an I-130 visa, if you are a U.S. citizen petitioning for your spouse, parent, or minor child, then the wait time is anywhere from 17 months to 64 months. That is an average from anywhere from a year and a half to over 5 years. For an I-90, if your green card is destroyed in a flood or a fire, 80 percent of people will be waiting for almost a year and a half—17 months—to just get a new copy.

These numbers are shocking, and they don’t even take into account long wait times for visa appointments at the U.S. consulate or Embassies. In India, for example, the average wait time for an appointment is well over 400 days.

American citizens, including thousands of my constituents in New Jersey, are so angry. They are waiting far too long for their cases to be prioritized and adjudicated.

But when Trump reallocates all the resources within our immigration system to conducting the largest mass deportation of people in history, American citizens are paying the price not just from USCIS processing times; we pay the price because to do this, he is diverting actual law enforcement resources away from solving crimes and stopping terrorism. His actions are actually making us less safe. We pay the price because these policies are eroding constitutional principles as well as making us less safe by taking law enforcement away from their efforts.

This plan is about conditioning Americans to the suspension of due process, first for immigrants. If we let due process erode for immigrants, it erodes for Americans.

Let me outline a little bit about how this is happening and why this is a crisis.

Two weeks ago, Trump invoked the Alien Enemies Act. The Alien Enemies Act of 1798 allows the President to detain or deport the natives and citizens of an enemy nation that we are at war with—the 1798 Act. The President can detain or deport these immigrants without a hearing, with no due process, even ones who are lawfully present in the United States.

The Alien Enemies Act was last used during one of our country’s darkest moments—the internment of Japanese, German, and Italian nationals during World War II—but even then, we still ensured that due process was followed.

Prior to detention, people subjected to the Alien Enemies Act in the 1940s appeared before the alien enemy hearing board, where they could at least present evidence that they had no ties to Axis powers.

As one circuit court judge recently said of Trump’s use of the Alien Enemies Act:

There’s no regulations, and nothing was adopted by the agency officials that were administering this. [The] people weren’t given notice. They weren’t told where they were going. They were given those people on those

planes on that Saturday and had no opportunity to file habeas or any type of action to challenge the removal.

The standards of 1940 during World War II were higher than the standards of this President.

The following are people who Trump has targeted and removed without criminal charges, without a hearing, without evidence, to a prison rife with human rights abuses in El Salvador. These are the people he has sent there: a tattoo artist seeking asylum who entered the country legally; an aspiring pop musician with a tattoo of a hummingbird; a 24-year-old who used to teach swimming classes for children with developmental disabilities and has a tattoo of an autism awareness ribbon in honor of his brother; a Venezuelan who had fled violence in Venezuela last year and came to the United States to seek asylum. His lawyer wrote on social media:

ICE alleged that his tattoos are gang related. They are absolutely not. Our client worked in the arts in Venezuela. He is gay, LGBTQ. His tattoos are benign. He has no criminal record.

Another Venezuelan removed to the El Salvador prison is a barber with no criminal history. Another is a professional soccer player, has a tattoo with a soccer ball and rosary closely resembling the logo of his favorite soccer team.

This is stunning what we are doing. These people were swept up and sent to another prison known for its human rights abuses because they were Venezuelan and had tattoos, benign tattoos.

An article was published in one periodical about the anguish from families. Here are a few excerpts from the article:

“‘You’re here because of your tattoos.’ The Trump administration sent Venezuelans to El Salvador’s infamous prison. Their families are looking for answers.”

On Friday, March 14, Arturo Suarez Trejo called his wife, Nathali Sanchez, from an immigration detention center in Texas. Suarez, a 33-year-old [male] native of Caracas, Venezuela, explained that his deportation flight had been delayed. He told his wife he [still] would be home soon. Suarez did not . . . go back to Venezuela. Still, there was at least a silver lining: In December, Sanchez had given birth to their daughter, Nahiara. Suarez would finally have a chance to meet [their] three-month-old baby girl he had [never] . . . ever seen.

But, Sanchez told [the outlet] she [had] not heard from Suarez since. Instead, last weekend, she found herself zooming in on a photo the government of El Salvador published of Venezuelan men the Trump administration had sent to President Nayib Bukele’s infamous Terrorism Confinement Center, or CECOT. “I realized that one of them was my husband,” she said. “I recognized him by [his] tattoo . . . by his ear, and [a scar on] his chin. Even though I couldn’t see his face, I knew it was him.” The photo Sanchez examined . . . a highly produced propaganda video promoted by Secretary of State . . . and the White House—showed Venezuelans shackled in prison uniforms as they were pushed around by guards and had their heads shaved.

The tattoo on Suarez’s neck is of a colibri, a hummingbird. His wife said it is meant to

symbolize “harmony and good energy.” She said his other tattoos, like a palm tree on his hand—an homage to Suarez’s late mother’s use of a Venezuelan expression about God being greater than a coconut tree—were similarly innocuous. [Needless to say], they may be why Suarez has been effectively disappeared by the US government into a Salvadoran mega-prison.

We must keep our country safe from violent criminals, people with long criminal records who are not citizens. I think every American would agree they should be deported. Immigrants to this country, surprisingly, have a much lower rate of breaking laws. But if they break laws, I agree.

Maybe you are an immigrant who has never broken a law. Maybe you are a naturalized citizen. Maybe you were born here. The problem with this idea of disappearing people with no due process is that once that foundation is laid, if they are able to defend that lack of due process, to use that law from the 1700s, we begin a process in this country that even conservative Justices of the Supreme Court said is unjustifiable.

Denying people due process pushes us down a road where more exceptions can be made. You cannot deny fundamental rights to another and not endanger them for yourself.

We have created a system now, if Trump is successful, where you can just say, you can just claim, you can just point to someone and say they are from X country or claim that they are part of a gang, and without any due process, without any vetting, without going before any independent arbitrator, you are disappeared because there is just no way to challenge them. No due process for noncitizens means that we are a country in violation of those ideals I talked about from here that say at the beginning of this country, very simply, no one shall be deprived of life, liberty, or the pursuit of property—no one—without due process of law. As soon as we break that, as soon as we violate that, we are going down a road.

Antonin Scalia—I confess, I have disagreed with him on so many things, but this conservative Justice once sat in an interview with Ruth Bader Ginsburg. They had a relationship that I think was special, and it shows that even people who have distinctly different views can still make real human connection in our country. They were asked by an interviewer whether undocumented people have the five freedoms—freedom of religion, freedom of speech, freedom of the press, freedom of assembly, and freedom to petition the government—and here is what the conservative Justice Scalia said:

Oh, I think so. I think anybody who is present in the United States has protections under the United States Constitution. Americans abroad have that protection. Other people abroad do not. They don’t have the protections of our Constitution, but anyone who is present in the United States has the protections of the United States Constitution.

Antonin Scalia, one of the most conservative members of the highest Court in our land.

And, of course, Ginsburg—his ideological opposite—she concurred when she said:

When we get to the 14th Amendment, it doesn’t speak of citizens as some constitutions grant rights to citizens, but our Constitution says “persons” and that the person is every person who is here in our country, documented or undocumented.

Our Constitution is clear on the face. If you are an originalist like Antonin Scalia, and you read the Constitution’s words, you have to stand for the idea that no one should be denied due process; that the government can’t walk up to a human being and grab them off the street and put them on a plane and send them to one of the most notorious prisons in the world and just say, as one of our authorities did, “Oopsie.”

Think about that. And that happened to a father of an American child. Think about that. It happened to a husband of an American woman. Think about that. That happened to a man who a judge already said he had the right to stay.

When the rights of some are violated, it is a threat to the rights of all of us.

In January, ICE agents in New Jersey raided a small business without a warrant and detained a Puerto Rican military veteran, a Boricua, an American citizen—detained him even after he presented his valid ID to those ICE agents. This is one example of so many.

Some Americans Have Already Been Caught in Trump’s Immigration Dragnet. More Will Be.

An article by Nicole Foy.

About a week after President Donald Trump took office, Jonathan Guerrero was sitting at the Philadelphia car wash where he works when immigration agents burst in.

The agents didn’t say why they were there and didn’t show their badges, Guerrero recalled. So the 21-year-old didn’t get a chance to explain that although his parents were from Mexico, he had been born right there in—

The “City of Brotherly Love.”

An agent pointed his gun at Guerrero and handcuffed him. Then they brought in other car wash workers, including Guerrero’s father, who is undocumented. When agents began checking IDs, they finally noticed that Guerrero was a citizen and quickly let him go.

“I said, ‘Look, man, I don’t know who these guys are and what they’re doing,’” said Guerrero. “With anything law-related, I just stay quiet.”

Less than two months into the new Trump administration, there has been a small but steady beat of—

More and more—reported cases like Guerrero’s.

In Utah, agents pulled over and detained a 20-year-old American after he honked at them. In New Mexico, a member of the Mesquero Apache nation more than two hours from the border was questioned by agents who demanded to see their passport. Earlier this month, a Trump voter in Virginia was pulled over and handcuffed by gun-wielding immigration agents.

It’s unclear exactly how many citizens have faced the Trump administration’s dragnet so far. And while previous administrations have mistakenly held Americans too,

there's no firm count of those incidents either.

The government does not release figures on citizens who have been held by immigration authorities. Neither Customs and Border Protection nor Immigration and Customs Enforcement, which handles interior immigration enforcement.

Experts and advocates say that what is clear to them is that Trump's aggressive immigration policies—such as arrest quotas for enforcement agents—make it likely that more citizens will get caught up in immigration sweeps.

"It's really everyone—not just noncitizens or undocumented people—who are in danger of having their liberty violated in this kind of mass deportation machinery."

Asked about reports of Americans getting caught up in administration's enforcement policies, an ICE spokesperson told—

The outlet—

in a written statement that agents are allowed to ask for citizens' identification: "Any US immigration officer has authority to question, without warrant, any alien or person believed to be an alien concerning his or her right to be, or to remain, in the United States." The agency did not respond to questions about specific cases.

The U.S. has gone through spasms of detaining and even deporting large numbers of citizens. In the 1930s and 1940s, federal and local authorities forcibly exiled an estimated 1 million Mexican Americans, including hundreds of thousands of American-born children.

That is our past: An estimated 1 million Mexican Americans, including hundreds of thousands of American-born children, swept up and deported.

[A] U.S. Government Accountability Office report found that immigration authorities asked to hold roughly 600 likely citizens during Trump's first term. The GAO also found that Trump actually deported about 70 likely citizens.

The GAO report did not get into any individual cases. But lawsuits brought against federal immigration agencies detail dozens of cases where plaintiffs received a settlement.

This will accelerate if there is no due process. In its first administration, there was some process, but this will accelerate if there is no due process.

I live in Newark, NJ, and there are dozens of languages spoken in my city. And some of the elders from some of these many different ethnic groups—from European folks who don't speak English to folks from Asia that don't speak English—imagine one of these Americans gets stopped and doesn't have papers on them, and they see a tattoo and, next thing you know, they are sent to Louisiana or Texas. The next thing you know, they are on a flight.

That is not hyperbole. That is not some impossible thing. We know, once due process is eliminated in this country for some, all are in danger. It is a constitutional slippage that Scalia and conservatives who believe in the Constitution nobly object to.

Canadian citizen Jasmine Mooney was detained by ICE for 2 weeks. I saw an interview of her, this White woman, stunned. Here is what she wrote, this Canadian:

There was no explanation, no warning. One minute, I was in an immigration office talk-

ing to an officer about my work visa, which had been approved months before and allowed me, a Canadian, to work in the US. The next, I was told to put my hands against the wall, and patted down like a criminal before being sent to an ICE detention center without the chance to talk to a lawyer.

I grew up in Whitehorse, Yukon, a small town in the northernmost part of Canada. I always knew I wanted to do something bigger with my life. I left home early and moved to Vancouver, British Columbia, where I built a career spanning multiple industries—acting in film and television, owning bars and restaurants, flipping condos and managing Airbnbs.

In my 30s, I found my true passion working in the health and wellness industry. I was given the opportunity to help launch an American brand of health tonics called Holy! Water—a job that would involve moving to the US.

I was granted my trade . . . work visa, which allows Canadian and Mexican citizens to work in the US in specific professional occupations, on my second attempt. It goes without saying, then, that I have no criminal record. I also love the US and consider myself to be a kind, hard-working person.

I started working in California and travelled back and forth between Canada and the US multiple times without any complications—until one day, upon returning to the US, a border officer questioned me about my initial visa denial and subsequent visa approval. He asked why I had gone to the San Diego border the second time to apply. I explained that that was where my lawyer's offices were, and that he had wanted to accompany me to ensure there were no issues.

After a long interrogation, the officer told me it seemed "shady" and that my visa hadn't been properly processed. He claimed I also couldn't work for a company in the US that made use of hemp—one of the beverage ingredients. He revoked my visa, and told me I could still work for the company from Canada, but if I wanted to return to the US, I would need to reapply.

I was devastated; I had just started building a life in California. I stayed in Canada for the next few months, and was eventually offered a similar position with a different health and wellness brand.

I restarted the visa process and returned to the same immigration office at the San Diego border, since they had processed my visa before and I was familiar with it. Hours passed, with many confused opinions about my case. The officer I spoke to was kind but told me that, due to my previous issues, I needed to apply for my visa through the consulate. I told her I hadn't been aware I needed to apply that way, but had no problem doing it.

Then she said something strange: "You didn't do anything wrong. You are not in trouble, you are not a criminal."

I remember thinking: Why would she say that? Of course I'm not a criminal!

She then told me they had to send me back to Canada. That didn't concern me; I assumed I would simply book a flight home. But as I sat searching for flights, a man approached me.

"Come with me," he said.

There was no explanation, no warning. He led me to a room, took my belongings from my hands and ordered me to put my hands against the wall. A woman immediately began patting me down. The commands came rapid-fire, one after another, too fast to process.

They took my shoes and pulled out my shoelaces.

"What are you doing? What is happening?" I asked.

"You are being detained."

"I don't understand. What does that mean? For how long?"

"I don't know."

That would be the response to nearly every question I would ask over the next two weeks: "I don't know."

They brought me downstairs for a series of interviews and medical questions, searched my bags and told me I had to get rid of half my belongings because I couldn't take everything with me.

"Take everything with me where?" I asked.

A woman asked me for the name of someone they could contact on my behalf. In moments like this, you realize you don't actually know anyone's phone number anymore. By some miracle, I had recently memorized my best friend Britt's number because I had been putting my grocery points on her account.

I gave them her phone number.

They handed me a mat and a folded-up sheet of aluminum foil.

"What is this?"

"Your blanket."

"I don't understand."

I was taken to a tiny, freezing cement cell with bright fluorescent lights and a toilet. There were five other women lying on their mats with the aluminum sheets wrapped over them, looking like dead bodies. The guard locked the door behind me.

For two days, we remained in that cell, only leaving briefly for food. The lights never turned off, we never knew what time it was and no one answered our questions. No one in the cell spoke English, so I either tried to sleep or meditate to keep from having a breakdown. I didn't trust the food, so I fasted, assuming I wouldn't be there long.

On the third day, I was finally allowed to make a phone call. I called Britt and told her that I didn't understand what was happening, that no one would tell me when I was going home, and that she was my only contact.

They gave me a stack of paperwork to sign and told me I was being given a five-year ban unless I applied for re-entry through the consulate. The officer also said it didn't matter whether I signed the papers or not; it was happening regardless.

I was so delirious that I just signed. I told them I would pay for my flight home and asked when I could leave.

No answer.

Then they moved me to another cell—this time with no mat or blanket. I sat on the freezing cement floor for hours. That's when I realized they were processing me into real jail: The Otay Mesa Detention Center.

I was told to shower, given a jail uniform, fingerprinted and interviewed. I begged for information.

"How long will I be here?"

"I don't know your case," the man said. "Could be days. Could be weeks. But I'm telling you right now—you need to mentally prepare yourself for months."

Months.

I felt like I was going to throw up.

I was taken to the nurse's office for a medical check. She asked what had happened to me. She had never seen a Canadian there before. When I told her my story, she grabbed my hand and said: "Do you believe in God?"

I told her I had only recently found God, but that I now believed in God more than anything.

"I believe God brought you here for a reason," she said. "I know it feels like your life is in a million pieces, but you will be OK. Through this, I think you are going to find a way to help others."

At the time, I didn't know what that meant. She asked if she could pray for me. I held her hands and wept.

I felt like I had been sent an angel.

I was then placed in a real jail unit: Two levels of cells surrounding a common area, just like in the movies. I was put in a tiny cell alone with a bunk bed and a toilet.

The best part: There were blankets. After three days without one, I wrapped myself in mine and finally felt some comfort.

For the first day, I didn't leave my cell. I continued fasting, terrified that the food might make me sick. The only available water came from the tap attached to the toilet in our cells or a sink in the common area, neither of which felt safe to drink.

Eventually, I forced myself to step out, meet the guards and learn the rules. One of them told me: "No fighting."

"I'm a lover, not a fighter," I joked. He laughed.

I asked if there had ever been a fight here. "In this unit? No," he said. "No one in this unit has a criminal record."

That's when I started meeting the other women.

That's when I started hearing their stories. And that's when I made a decision: I would never allow myself to feel sorry for my situation again. No matter how hard this was, I had to be grateful. Because every woman I met was in an even more difficult position than mine.

There were around 140 of us in our unit. Many women had lived and worked in the US legally for years but had overstayed their visas—often after reapplying and being denied. They had all been detained without warning.

If someone is a criminal, I agree they should be taken off the streets. But not one of these women had a criminal record. These women acknowledged that they shouldn't have overstayed and took responsibility for their actions. But their frustration wasn't about being held accountable; it was about the endless, bureaucratic limbo they had been trapped in.

The real issue was how long it took to get out of the system, with no clear answers, no timeline, and no way to move forward. Once deported, many have no choice but to abandon everything they own because the cost of shipping their belongings back is too high.

I met a woman who had been on a road trip with her husband. She said they had 10-year work visas. While driving near the San Diego border, they mistakenly got into a lane leading to Mexico. They stopped and told the agent they didn't have their passports on them, expecting to be redirected. Instead, they were detained. They are both pastors.

I met a family of three who had been living in the US for 11 years with work authorizations. They paid taxes and were waiting for their green cards. Every year, the mother had to undergo a background check, but this time, she was told to bring her whole family. When they arrived, they were taken into custody and told their status would now be processed from within the detention center.

Another woman from Canada had been living in the US with her husband who was detained after a traffic stop. She admitted she had overstayed her visa and accepted that she would be deported. But she had been stuck in the system for almost six weeks because she hadn't had her passport. Who runs casual errands with their passport?

One woman had a 10-year visa. When it expired, she moved back to her home country, Venezuela. She admitted she had overstayed by one month before leaving. Later, she returned for a vacation and entered the US without issue. But when she took a domestic flight from Miami to Los Angeles, she was picked up by ICE and detained. She couldn't be deported because Venezuela wasn't accepting deportees. She didn't know when she was getting out.

There was a girl from India who had overstayed her student visa for three days before heading back home. She then came back to the US on a new, valid visa to finish her master's degree and was handed over to ICE due to the three days she had overstayed on her previous visa.

There were women who had been picked up off the street, from outside their workplaces, from their homes. All of these women told me that they had been detained for time spans ranging from a few weeks to 10 months. One woman's daughter was outside the detention center protesting for her release.

That night, the pastor invited me to a service she was holding. A girl who spoke English translated for me as the women took turns sharing their prayers—prayers for their sick parents, for the children they hadn't seen in weeks, for the loved ones they had been torn away from.

Then, unexpectedly, they asked if they could pray for me. I was new here, and they wanted to welcome me. They formed a circle around me, took my hands and prayed. I had never felt so much love, energy and compassion from a group of strangers in my life. Everyone was crying.

At 3am the next day, I was woken up in my cell.

"Pack your bag. You're leaving."

I jolted upright. "I get to go home?"

The officer shrugged. "I don't know where you're going."

Of course. No one ever knew anything.

I grabbed my things and went downstairs, where 10 other women stood in silence, tears streaming down their faces. But these weren't happy tears. That was the moment I learned the term "transferred".

For many of these women, detention centers had become a twisted version of home. They had formed bonds, established routines and found slivers of comfort in the friendships they had built. Now, without warning, they were being torn apart and sent somewhere new. Watching them say goodbye, clinging to each other, was gut-wrenching.

I had no idea what was waiting for me next. In hindsight, that was probably for the best.

Our next stop was Arizona, the San Luis Regional Detention Center. The transfer process lasted 24 hours, a sleepless, grueling ordeal. This time, men were transported with us. Roughly 50 of us were crammed into a prison bus for the next five hours, packed together—women in the front, men in the back. We were bound in chains that wrapped tightly around our waists, with our cuffed hands secured to our bodies and shackles restraining our feet, forcing every movement into a slow, clinking struggle.

When we arrived at our next destination, we were forced to go through the entire intake process all over again, with medical exams, fingerprinting—and pregnancy tests; they lined us up in a filthy cell, squatting over a communal toilet, holding Dixie cups of urine while the nurse dropped pregnancy tests in each of our cups. It was disgusting.

We sat in freezing-cold jail cells for hours, waiting for everyone to be processed. Across the room, one of the women suddenly spotted her husband. They had both been detained and were now seeing each other for the first time in weeks.

The look on her face—pure love, relief and longing—was something I'll never forget.

We were beyond exhausted. I felt like I was hallucinating.

The guard tossed us each a blanket: "Find a bed."

There were no pillows. The room was ice cold, and one blanket wasn't enough. Around me, women lay curled into themselves, heads covered, looking like a room full of corpses.

This place made the last jail feel like the Four Seasons.

I kept telling myself: Do not let this break you.

Thirty of us shared one room. We were given one Styrofoam cup for water and one plastic spoon that we had to reuse for every meal. I eventually had to start trying to eat and, sure enough, I got sick. None of the uniforms fit, and everyone had men's shoes on. The towels they gave us to shower were hand towels. They wouldn't give us more blankets. The fluorescent lights shined on us 24/7.

Everything felt like it was meant to break you. Nothing was explained to us. I wasn't given a phone call. We were locked in a room, no daylight, with no idea when we would get out.

I tried to stay calm as every fiber of my being raged towards panic mode. I didn't know how I would tell Britt where I was. Then, as if sent from God, one of the women showed me a tablet attached to the wall where I could send emails. I only remembered my CEO's email from memory. I typed out a message, praying he would see it.

He responded.

Through him, I was able to connect with Britt. She told me that they were working around the clock trying to get me out. But no one had any answers; the system made it next to impossible. I told her about the conditions in this new place, and that was when we decided to go to the media.

She started working with a reporter and asked whether I would be able to call her so she could loop him in. The international phone account that Britt had previously tried to set up for me wasn't working, so one of the other women offered to let me use her phone account to make the call.

We were all in this together.

With nothing to do in my cell but talk, I made new friends—women who had risked everything for the chance at a better life for themselves and their families.

Through them, I learned the harsh reality of seeking asylum. Showing me their physical scars, they explained how they had paid smugglers anywhere from \$20,000 to \$60,000 to reach the US border, enduring brutal jungles and horrendous conditions.

One woman had been offered asylum in Mexico within two weeks but had been encouraged to keep going to the US. Now, she was stuck, living in a nightmare, separated from her young children for months. She sobbed, telling me how she felt like the worst mother in the world.

Many of these women were highly educated and spoke multiple languages. Yet, they had been advised to pretend they didn't speak English because it would supposedly increase their chances of asylum.

Some believed they were being used as examples, as warnings to others not to try to come.

Women were starting to panic in this new facility, and knowing I was most likely the first person to get out, they wrote letters and messages for me to send to their families.

It felt like we had all been kidnapped, thrown into some sort of sick psychological experiment meant to strip us of every ounce of strength and dignity.

We were from different countries, spoke different languages and practiced different religions. Yet, in this place, none of that mattered. Everyone took care of each other. Everyone shared food. Everyone held each other when someone broke down. Everyone fought to keep each other's hope alive.

I got a message from Britt. My story had started to blow up in the media.

Almost immediately after, I was told I was being released.

My ICE agent, who had never spoken to me, told my lawyer I could have left sooner

if I had signed a withdrawal form, and that they hadn't known I would pay for my own flight home.

From the moment I arrived, I begged every officer I saw to let me pay for my own ticket home. Not a single one of them ever spoke to me about my case.

To put things into perspective: I had a Canadian passport, lawyers, resources, media attention, friends, family and even politicians advocating for me. Yet, I was still detained for nearly two weeks.

Imagine what this system is like for every other person in there.

A small group of us were transferred back to San Diego at 2 am—one last road trip, once again shackled in chains. I was then taken to the airport, where two officers were waiting for me. The media was there, so the officers snuck me in through a side door, trying to avoid anyone seeing me in restraints. I was beyond grateful that, at the very least, I didn't have to walk through the airport in chains.

To my surprise, the officers escorting me were incredibly kind, and even funny. It was the first time I had laughed in weeks.

I asked if I could put my shoelaces back on.

"Yes," one of them said with a grin. "But you better not run."

"Yeah," the other added. "Or we'll have to tackle you in the airport. That'll really make the headlines."

I laughed, then told them I had spent a lot of time observing the guards during my detention and I couldn't believe how often I saw humans treating other humans with such disregard. "But don't worry," I joked. "You two get five stars."

When I finally landed in Canada, my mom and two best friends were waiting for me. So was the media. I spoke to them briefly, numb and delusional from exhaustion.

It was surreal listening to my friends recount everything they had done to get me out: Working with lawyers, reaching out to the media, making endless calls to detention centers, desperately trying to get through to ICE or anyone who could help. They said the entire system felt rigged, designed to make it nearly impossible for anyone to get out.

The reality became clear: ICE detention isn't just a bureaucratic nightmare. It's a business. These facilities are privately owned and run for profit.

Companies like CoreCivic and GEO Group receive government funding based on the number of people they detain, which is why they lobby for stricter immigration policies. It's a lucrative business: CoreCivic made over \$560m from ICE contracts in a single year. In 2024, GEO Group made more than \$763m from ICE contracts.

The more detainees, the more money they make. It stands to reason that these companies have no incentive to release people quickly. What I had experienced was finally starting to make sense.

This is not just my story. It is the story of thousands and thousands of people still trapped in a system that profits from their suffering. I am writing in the hope that someone out there—someone with the power to change any of this—can help do something.

The strength I witnessed in those women, the love they gave despite their suffering, is what gives me faith. Faith that no matter how flawed the system, how cruel the circumstances, humanity will always shine through.

Even in the darkest places, within the most broken systems, humanity persists. Sometimes, it reveals itself in the smallest, most unexpected acts of kindness: A shared meal, a whispered prayer, a hand reaching out in the dark. We are defined by the love

we extend, the courage we summon and the truths we are willing to tell.

That is the end of the article.

The stories continue. A 10-year-old citizen in Texas recovering from brain cancer was detained at a Border Patrol checkpoint and, eventually, the American citizen was deported to Mexico with her undocumented parents, even though they were in need of medical attention for their brain cancer.

Here is the article from NBC: "U.S. citizen child recovering from brain cancer removed to Mexico with undocumented parents."

A family that was deported to Mexico hopes it can find a way to return to the U.S. and ensure their 10-year-old daughter—

My fellow American—

who is a U.S. citizen, can continue her brain cancer treatment.

Immigration authorities removed the girl and four of her American siblings from Texas on Feb. 4, when they deported their undocumented parents.

The family's ordeal began last month, when they were rushing from Rio Grande City, where they lived, to Houston, where their daughter's specialist doctors are based, for an emergency medical checkup.

The parents had done the trip at least five other times in the past, passing through an immigration checkpoint every time without any issues, according to attorney Danny Woodward from the Texas Civil Rights Project, a legal advocacy and litigation organization representing the family. In previous occasions, the parents showed letters from their doctors and lawyers to the officers at the checkpoint to get through.

But in early February, the letters weren't enough. When they stopped at the checkpoint, they were arrested after the parents were unable to show legal immigration documentation. The mother, who spoke exclusively to NBC News, said she tried explaining her daughter's circumstances to the officers, but "they weren't interested in hearing that."

Other than lacking "valid immigration status in the U.S.," the parents have "no criminal history," Woodward said.

Protection, which detained and deported the family, according to the lawyer, said in an e-mail Wednesday:

For privacy reasons, we do not comment on individual cases.

On Thursday, a CBP spokesperson said via email that the reports of the family's situation are inaccurate because "when someone is given expedited removal orders and chooses to disregard them, they will face the consequences" of the process.

They reiterated that they couldn't speak about the specifics of the case for privacy reasons.

The 10-year-old girl was diagnosed with brain cancer last year and underwent surgery to remove the tumor. Doctors "practically gave me no hope of life for her, but thank God she's a miracle," the mother said.

The American citizen is a miracle.

The swelling on the girl's brain is still not fully gone, the mother said, causing difficulties with speech and mobility of the right side of her body. Before the family was removed from the U.S., the girl was routinely checking in with doctors monitoring her recovery, attending rehabilitation therapies and taking medication to prevent convulsions.

"It's a very difficult thing," the mother said. "I don't wish anyone to go through this situation."

"What is happening to this family is an absolute tragedy and is something that is not isolated to just them," said Rochelle Garza, president of the Texas Civil Rights Project.

"This is part of a pattern in practice that we've seen in the Trump administration," Garza said, adding that she has heard of multiple other cases concerning mixed-status families. But for now, this is the only case of this nature the organization has taken on.

The Trump administration's border czar Tom Homan has said, "families can be deported together," regardless of status. Homan said it would be up to the parents to decide whether to depart the U.S. together or leave their children behind.

But undocumented parents of U.S.-born children, if picked up by immigration authorities, face the risk of losing custody of their children. Without a power-of-attorney document or a guardianship outlining who will take care of their children left behind, the children go into the U.S. foster care system, making it harder for the parents to regain custody in the future.

According to the girl's mother, she recalled feeling like she could "not do anything," she said in Spanish, "You're between a rock and a hard place."

NBC News is withholding the name of the mother and the rest of the family members, since they were deported to an area in Mexico that is known for kidnapping U.S. citizens.

In addition to the parents and their 10-year-old sick daughter, four of their other American children, ages 15, 13, 8, and 6, were also in the car when they were detained. Four of the five children were born in the U.S.

According to the mother, the family was taken to a detention center following the arrest, where the mom and daughters were separated from her husband and sons and she realized she wouldn't be taking her daughter to her doctors.

"The fear is horrible. I can't explain it, but it's something frustrating, very tough, something you wouldn't wish on anyone," she said, adding that her sick daughter was laying on a cold floor beneath incandescent lights.

Hours later, the family was placed in a van and dropped on the Mexico side of a Texas bridge. From there, they sought refuge in a nearby shelter for a week.

Mom said that safety concerns keep them up at night and the children haven't been able to go to school.

The 10-year-old daughter and 15-year-old son, who lives with a heart disorder known as Long QT syndrome, which causes irregular heartbeats and can be life-threatening if not treated well, have not received the healthcare they need in Mexico. The teen wears a monitor that tracks his heart rate.

"The authorities have my children's lives in their hands," she said in tears.

The authorities have my children's lives in their hands.

Both parents arrived to the U.S. from Mexico in 2013 and settled in Texas hoping for "a better life for their family," the mother said. She and her husband both worked a string of different jobs to support their six children. The couple also has a 17-year-old son they left behind in Texas following their deportation.

Just two weeks ago, another undocumented mother in California caring for her 21-year-old daughter, a U.S. citizen undergoing treatment for bone cancer, was detained by immigration authorities and later released under humanitarian parole.

"We are calling on the government," Garza said, "to parole the family in, to correct the harm . . . and to not do this to anyone else."

Mr. MURPHY. Will the Senator yield?

Mr. BOOKER. I think I need to. I will yield to a question. I will yield to a question while retaining the floor. And I thank my brother, I thank my friend who has now stood with me for almost 11 hours.

Mr. MURPHY. Those are hard stories to read, Senator BOOKER, but I appreciate your showing the coldness of this current administration's immigration policy.

The tragedy to me is that there is an opportunity to fix what is, undoubtedly, a broken immigration system, and yet we are into day 71 and Donald Trump has not proposed to us any proposals to fix the broken system. Instead what he is doing is spending like a drunken sailor on an enforcement system that wastes tens of millions of taxpayer dollars.

You described this harrowing experience that this Canadian woman had, and as I was listening to this 2-week ordeal that she went through, being transported from site to site, being processed and reprocessed, as the top Democrat on the Homeland Security Subcommittee of Appropriations, I am just cataloging in my brain how much money that cost us. Ultimately, this was somebody working in the United States, this was somebody that posed no threat to the U.S. citizens, but we probably spent several million dollars on that 2-week ordeal.

Overall, the Trump administration is going to blow through all of the money allocated to Border Patrol. They are going to have to come back to Congress for a massive additional appropriation, all at the same time that they are shuttering medical research in this country; they are closing down Social Security offices. There are measles outbreaks all across the country. Planes seem to be falling out of the sky as the FAA is enduring layoffs. There are consequences to these spending decisions.

The amount of money that is being spent at the border, much of it wasted in a showy, ineffective response, the consequence of that is that the services that the average, everyday Americans need, like help on their Social Security claims, are being impacted.

But we need to fix the broken immigration system, and we had an opportunity to do that last year when Republicans and Democrats came together and wrote a bipartisan border security bill that, frankly, would have allocated tens of billions of additional dollars that would have fixed our broken asylum system, would have given the President new authorities, and Donald Trump instructed all the Republicans in this Chamber to oppose it.

In the end, I think four Senators, including the author, Senator LANKFORD, supported it, but every other Republican here opposed it. And the reason

Donald Trump told them to oppose it was that he would fix it when he became President. But we are now in day 72, and there has not been a single proposal from Donald Trump to fix the broken immigration system, just a whole bunch of spending, essentially money down the drain because the system itself needs to be reformed.

And so it speaks to my confident belief that Donald Trump does not want to fix our immigration system. He wants to keep this issue open as a sore in our politics. If I were wrong, he would have proposed legislation here to deal with the underlying inefficiency of the system, instead of just throwing money at the problem.

And so we will see what the result of this campaign is. We were told that immigrants to this country represented a very specific national security threat; that we needed to crack down on immigration, including expelling from this country legitimate asylum seekers because that was what was necessary to protect the Nation. Well, we will see what the crime data tells us for the first few months of this administration.

I have a feeling I already know what the story is; crime is not going to have gone down. Why? Because, in fact, whether people want to acknowledge this or not, natural-born American citizens commit crimes at rates higher than first-generation immigrants or people born outside of the United States of America.

But Senator BOOKER, I guess the question I want to ask you is this: I think you and I agree that Americans right, left, and center acknowledge that the immigration system is broken. They didn't love it when they saw thousands of people crossing on an average day. And they know that when it takes 10 years to process an asylum claim, something is wrong, and that it then just provides incentive for people to come here without documentation. But my impression is that the cross section of Americans that believes that the existing immigration system is broken also believes three other things: One, that the way to fix it is to change the laws, and they believe that we have not done our job until we have changed the laws; for instance, building a better asylum system. And once again, not a single proposal from the Trump administration on how to fix our broken immigration system, not a single proposal.

Second, I believe that they understand that immigration is a core strength of this Nation, not a liability, and that if we want to thrive as an economy, we are going to have to bring people to this country legally. But to turn our backs on immigration as a mechanism to grow economically, that is not in line with what Americans believe, even those that think the existing system is broken.

And then, lastly, I just don't believe this country is as mean as Donald Trump thinks it is.

Mr. BOOKER. Yes. Yes, yes.

Mr. MURPHY. I get it that everybody wants this Nation to be a nation of laws, but when an American citizen looks at a child with a medical condition, when an American citizen looks at an individual who will face certain death from a drug gang if they stay in their home country, when they look at individuals in war-torn nations overseas, they believe that America is strong enough, is big enough, is generous enough to be able to protect those people from harm. Why? Because that is what America always has been.

And so this idea that President Trump has that Americans are mean and spiteful and don't want to help people just because they were born outside of the United States or their parents were born outside of the United States, I just don't think that is right. It obviously betrays the best traditions of this Nation, but I think it also fundamentally misreads the American people.

So I think people want our immigration to be fixed, the system to be fixed, but I think they want us to do it. They understand the laws are broken. They do not want to abandon America's tradition of bringing people here from all around the world.

They understand that our economy and our economic prosperity is linked to our ability to bring hard-working immigrants to this country, and they are just not as mean as Donald Trump thinks they are.

Mr. BOOKER. Senator, I appreciate your question, but I just have to say this to you. You worked so hard with Senator LANKFORD, and one of the things I have to say—and I hope I don't hurt his politics by telling people how much I love Senator LANKFORD. We disagree fundamentally on a lot of issues, maybe that will help. We both are people, though, of faith. We just recently worked together in a massive—I think there must have been like a thousand people there, maybe 500 at least, at a National Prayer Breakfast event. He is such a man of character. What I like about him, I know his values because every day, he tries to be a good Christian.

(Mrs. MOODY assumed the Chair.)

And this idea of love thy neighbor or you are a stranger in a strange land—I just took a lot of pleasure watching you, my friend, whom I have known for the last 12 years, and sitting down in this honest, sincere negotiation.

Let's be real. Everybody on your side of the aisle didn't agree with you, and everybody, before Trump's involvement, on his side of the aisle didn't agree, but you guys had the makings of a comprehensive bill that would have passed.

I tell you also I came in here in 2013 right after the Gang of 8. They did the same thing. They got the bill out, and it died in the House.

There are people in America, despite Lankford and you—who many people would put on opposite sides of the political spectrum—on these issues, they

agree. Why do they agree, Senator MURPHY? Because our economy is dependent upon immigration.

You want to talk about a conservative-leaning group, Senate moderate Republicans, the national chamber of commerce will tell you that our economy will be crippled if we don't find a way to bring more people in legally to work on work visas.

When I go to the tech community or the biotech community or the AI community or the community that is trying to go forward in quantum computing, all of them are saying this is crazy that we are not allowing the brightest minds on the planet—when they get here and get Ph.D.s and have things half of Congress can't spell, that we drop kick them out of the country.

There are so many points of agreement. Take Dreamers, who people on both sides of the aisle held up as a group of people that are Americans in every way except for a piece of paper.

I could go through everything in the immigration world we need to improve on, including the need to secure our southern border. I listened to you on this section, and I look at you, and I remember your frustration. You are standing up in front of our caucus saying: We are so close.

Mr. MURPHY. Can the Senator yield?

Mr. BOOKER. I will yield for a question while retaining the floor.

Mr. MURPHY. I just want to drill down on this for a moment. It gets back to a theme that you have been hitting on throughout the evening and early morning, and that is that not everything has to be zero-sum politics. This is part of what is so exhausting about the last 71 days for many, many Americans. I think it is part of why Donald Trump's approval ratings are tanking by the day.

You and I are pugilists when we need to be, right? We fight when we think that there is a worthy fight. That is what this is today—it is a fight. We understand it is a fight for our values. But we don't think everything has to be a fight. We see our jobs as standing up for our convictions but then finding that common ground.

I did not expect to be in that room with Senator LANKFORD. I was surprised, pleasantly, when we came to an agreement. You spent months and months hammering out really difficult criminal justice reform with a colleague of yours that you have equal numbers of disagreements with because we feel like we have a call from our constituents to fight but then find the common ground.

But this administration has zero interest in common ground. Every single day, they wake up thinking only about conflict, thinking only about defeat of their opposition. And they have been frustrated because they have been trying to do a lot of illegal things, and the courts have been telling them no. They are now talking about extraordinary measures, like impeaching judges or defunding the courts.

Instead, they could reach out to Democrats. They could decide to do what every previous President has tried to do, which is, instead of ramming through a one-side-only policy on immigration, for instance, come to people of good will on the opposing party and try to work out a compromise.

This is what exhausts the American people, is this administration's complete and total unwillingness to find common ground on anything. That is not where the center of this country is.

On the issues of immigration, we found common ground last year. It was hard. It did not satisfy everyone. But we have proven that on this issue—it is hot. It is difficult for even family members to talk about it sometimes. Even on this issue of immigration, we can find that common ground.

So we are here—you are here because there is a fight to be waged, but I think we both wish on a litany of these topics that we were instead sitting down with our colleagues. But that is just not in the DNA of this administration. That is part of why this President is becoming more and more unpopular by the day, is because they expect any President—any President—to make at least a minimalist effort to try to reach out and find compromise, and that never happens from the Trump administration.

Mr. BOOKER. I thank you for the question I see in there.

Again, great Presidents have great ideas they bring to Congress, and they fight to pull together and cobble together legislation that will last. The problem we have right now is this whiplash between Trump's Executive orders and Biden's Executive orders and Trump's Executive orders, and it is not solving the problems. We have shown there is enough common ground to do something on it.

I don't want to stick with common ground now, actually, because there are some things in here that are not common ground, like private prisons.

I am one of these folks that don't want to criticize. I have flown out to a private prison down south to get a tour. I met really kind and nice people. But there is something problematic to me about a profit motive for imprisoning, shackling, detaining, and holding people and this combination of that and a corporate reality where you are giving campaign contributions to people that will then turn around and give you government contracts to restrict the liberties of human beings.

The story that I read about this woman feeling like they lied to her lawyer and said if she had only said she could pay for her own flight home, and they were keeping her. Every day they were keeping her, they were getting more money from American taxpayers.

This isn't a system designed for justice. This isn't a system designed for the rights of human beings in our country. This is a system that has every day an incentive to deny liberty, to

hold people. It is wrong. It is wrong. It is broken.

With a President that doesn't care about these things, that is giving greater latitude so that more stories like the Canadian woman's story—it is stunning.

I want to keep moving, though. I just want to talk about children and the way this system is extended to children. Last week, the government canceled a contract to provide legal services to 26,000 unaccompanied immigrant children.

Remember what Anton Scalia said about due process in his strict interpretations of the literal writings of our Founders.

So 26,000 unaccompanied migrant children no longer have legal representation. We started on that idea. We started on that idea. We started on the idea—the 15th and 14th Amendment—that “no one shall be deprived of life, liberty, or property without due process,” and our country has now rolled back.

Trump got rid of a policy that prevented ICE from arresting kids at schools and people from their places of worship. Now, every day, families face the impossible choice of whether to send a kid to school and risk permanent separation from their families.

There is a story from New Jersey. Recently when I was home in Newark, NJ, a woman in my neighborhood came up to me to tell me a heartbreaking story. One morning, she was on her way to walk to school, and a mom of other children—I won't make this anonymous. One of my closest friends—she is like a sister to me. She lives in The Ironbound in Newark. She was very emotional because her neighbors were so terrified that they came to her and asked her to walk their children to school. They were American children.

There are so many teachers and school administrators who are speaking out now that they have been ordered that they must allow ICE to enter their schools.

Trump has plans to revoke temporary protected status protection for hundreds of thousands of people from various countries—from Venezuela to Haiti—paving the way for those deportations. We know who they are. He has done this despite the State Department maintaining a “Level 4: Do Not Travel” warning for Haiti and Venezuela due to widespread violence, danger, sexual assault, kidnappings, and more.

He claims that he is tough on crime because he wants to go after child sexual abusers, but you are sending children running into schools and churches and sending them back to environments that are known for sexual assaults on young girls.

The Department of Justice Office of Civil Rights recently dropped its case that it filed against Southwest Key, the Nation's largest provider of housing for migrant children, in which the DOJ alleged sexual abuse and neglect perpetrated against undocumented

children in Federal custody. It was a case DOJ brought against this company, which housed migrant children, because of alleged sexual abuse.

What did our government do under Trump? They dropped charges. They dropped charges. Why? Why? Children being sexually assaulted—it is not worth an investigation? Is it because the administration thinks that pursuing the lawsuit and holding perpetrators accountable will somehow interfere with their immigration agenda? They literally let alleged sex abusers go free with no explanation—the hypocrisy.

Family detentions have restarted. They failed in the past to meet basic child welfare standards and exposed children to trauma. The President's own Department of Homeland Security concluded in 2018 that family detention centers posed a high risk of harm to children and families. Despite his own Department of Homeland Security back in 2018 saying that, they have restarted.

One of the points I want to make is on crime. I was a mayor. The No. 1 issue my residents were concerned about was fighting crime, fighting crime, fighting crime.

I went back to Newark recently for a horrible, tragic death of a police officer by a 14-year-old with a ghost gun. It was horrible. The sendoff—hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of police officers from all over our State, from New York. This police officer was murdered by a 14-year-old. I still pray for his family, his mom.

As I was standing there looking at this parade of police officers who were waiting for the casket, I had police officers come to me and complain that they are having a harder and harder time in New Jersey solving crimes because now victims of crime—victims of sexual assault, victims of robbery—who happen to be undocumented are afraid to go and talk to local police because of all this rhetoric that is creating the fear that they will be turned over to ICE.

Imagine, in our country there are people out there who are sexually assaulting people but who are getting away with it because they are targeting immigrants. And if you don't think that hurts Americans' safety, you are wrong.

When you are afraid to go and talk to police officers to report crimes, when you are subverting people's constitutional rights and incarcerating people in foreign prisons with no criminal records, it does harm to children.

We talked about all of the diverting of law enforcement resources away from investigating national security threats, terrorism, drug smuggling, human trafficking, illegal arms exports, financial crimes, and sex crimes. It is taking law enforcement away from investigating those crimes and forcing all Federal law enforcement Agencies to enforce boat-level immigration crimes or, I should say, un-

documented people with no criminal activity beyond their being in our country.

Reuters wrote about this misguided redirection of Federal resources. I will read their article:

Federal agents who usually hunt down child abusers are now cracking down on immigrants who live in the U.S. legally.

Homeland Security investigators who specialize in money laundering are raiding restaurants and other small businesses, looking for immigrants who aren't authorized to work.

Agents who pursue drug traffickers and tax fraud are being reassigned to enforce immigration law.

As U.S. President Donald Trump pledges to deport "millions and millions" of "criminal aliens," thousands of federal law enforcement officers from multiple federal agencies are being enlisted to take on new work as immigration enforcers, pulling crime fighting resources away from other areas—from drug trafficking and terrorism and sexual abuse and fraud.

This account of Trump's push to reorganize federal law enforcement—the most significant since the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks—is based on interviews with more than 20 current and former federal agents, attorneys, and other federal officials. Most had first-hand knowledge of the changes. Nearly all spoke on the condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to discuss their work.

"I do not recall ever seeing this wide spectrum of federal government resources all being turned toward immigration enforcement," said Theresa Cardinal Brown, the former Homeland Security official who has served in both Republican and Democratic administrations. "When you are telling agencies to stop what you are doing and do this now, whatever else they were doing takes a back seat."

In response to questions from Reuters, Homeland Security Assistant Secretary Tricia McLaughlin said the U.S. Government is mobilizing federal and state law enforcement to find, arrest, and deport illegal aliens. The [FBI] declined to respond to questions about its staffing. In a statement, the FBI said it is "protecting the U.S. from many threats."

The Trump administration has offered no comprehensive accounting of the revamp. But it echoes the aftermath of the 2001 attacks, when Congress created the Department of Homeland Security and pulled together 169,000 federal employees from other agencies and refocused the FBI on battling terrorism.

Trump's hardline approach to deporting immigrants has intensified America's already stark partisan divide. The U.S. Senate's No. 2 Democrat, Dick Durbin, described the crackdown as a "wasteful, misguided diversion of resources". . . . It is "making America less safe" by drawing agents and officials away from fighting corporate fraud, terrorism, child sexual exploitation, and other crimes.

The focus on immigration is drawing significant resources from other crime-fighting departments, according to the more than 20 sources who spoke.

Until January, pursuing immigrants living in the country illegally was largely the job of two agencies: Immigration and Customs Enforcement, or ICE, and Customs and Border Protection, with a combined staff of 80,000. Other Departments spent . . . [on crime].

In Detroit—where immigration prosecutions have been rare—the number of people charged with immigration offenses rose from 2 in February . . . to 19 last month.

Case managements records from the Justice Department show that fewer than 1% of the cases brought to prosecutors by the DEA and ATF over the past decade involve allegations that someone had violated immigration law.

Since January, however, DEA agents have been ordered to reopen cases involving arrests up to five years old, where prosecutors have declined to bring charges.

As Trump and billionaire Elon Musk flash the size of the Federal Government bureaucracy, jobs that deal with immigration enforcement appear largely exempt.

In a January 31 email to ICE employees, a human resources official told them they wouldn't be eligible for retirement buyouts offered to some 2.3 million Federal workers. "All ICE positions are excluded," said the previously unreported email.

Mr. WELCH. Madam President, will the Senator yield for a question.

Mr. BOOKER. Yes, I will yield for a question while retaining the floor.

Mr. WELCH. Thank you.

Senator, I have been listening to many of your hours of speech. You are talking about immigration now, and I have another question about the immigration policy.

You know, I think all of us understand that it is absolutely essential that our country secure its borders, and, from time to time, the country forgets that. But I think we have had this debate about immigration that has been going on for several years.

I don't know if the Senator had an opportunity to address the opportunity we had in the Senate when, last year, there was a realization on the part of both the Republicans and Democrats that the only way we were going to get a secure border and a beneficial, sensible immigration policy was to work together. I know the Senator was watching that very carefully when we had the terrific work of Senator LANKFORD from Oklahoma, Senator MURPHY from Connecticut, and Senator SINEMA, of course, from Arizona.

Despite the enormous political tension that surrounds the immigration issue, but for understandable reasons, the three of them worked very hard and came together for a tri-partisan proposal, in effect—Senator Sinema, of course, being the Independent, who always played a constructive role in trying to bring the parties together. What was included in that legislation was a major commitment—embraced by Senator MURPHY on behalf of the Democrats—for border security. There was an acknowledgment that we have to control our borders. It is really that simple.

Mr. BOOKER. Yes. Yes.

Mr. WELCH. But when you control your borders, you also have the opportunity to have an immigration policy that the Congress and the President think will benefit the American people. That benefits us, of course, if there is security at the border, but it also benefits us if we have legal immigration that is controlled by the American people.

Of course, you know, I have noticed that Elon Musk, who is against immigration and is for everything that

President Trump is for—he likes having very highly educated computer people who can help him go from very rich to even richer. So he carves out an exception for people who will be beneficial and helpful to him in his various enterprises.

But, you know, we have got in Vermont a lot of dairy farms, and we have a tourist industry, and we have a really hard time filling those jobs. So legal immigration can really be helpful and constructive and beneficial to the people of the State of Vermont.

I know, in talking to my colleagues on both sides of the aisle, many of us in our States have tourist industries, and we have agricultural enterprises, just to mention two, where the reality is we don't have the number of people we need to fill those jobs. You know, it is not just a matter of paying more, because I do think we have to be very mindful that we want to do every single thing we can to help elevate the wages of American workers.

And, by the way, this is a little bit of an aside. Why in the world haven't we raised the minimum wage?

I mean, I know, Senator, you are for that, and I certainly am. But it astonishes me that we still have it at—what is it?—\$7 or \$7.50? I mean, it is unbelievable what the minimum wage is. A lot of States have raised it. Vermont certainly has.

But we, on immigration, had the opportunity and the bill and the will to make enormous progress so that we would have an immigration policy that secured the border, had the validation of bipartisan majorities in the House and in the Senate, would have also addressed the issues about legal immigration that would help us strengthen our economy, and also would have included a pathway to citizenship for Dreamers—folks who were brought here by their parents when they were 4 or 5 or 6 years old and whose only country they know is the United States itself. You know, my understanding from talking to my colleagues on the other side of the aisle is that there is an enormous amount of respect for many of these Dreamers, many of whom have been heroes for us in the military.

So this is not a Republican—in my view, it is not a Republican-Democratic situation. It is a desire on the part of almost everyone in this body to accommodate the reality of a child's being brought here by his parents, going to school, getting an education, serving his country—firefighters, marines, teachers—doing all these things that are really helpful to our country, and are here through absolutely no fault of their own. If we were to require them to be deported—and that is an effort that the current administration is making—you literally would be taking people who might be 30 or 40 years old now, who have families, and send them back to the country from which their parents brought them. And they don't even speak the language, and, you know, that obviously makes no sense.

When I talk to Vermonters who have very, very strong views of having a strong border and I ask them about this situation, they think: Wait a minute. Well, that is different. You know, that is a person who lives here. That is like my neighbor.

So I was so disappointed when we were on the cusp of being able to get this legislation passed when then-Candidate Trump, in his candid way, said, "Kill it," and he was candid about why. It would "give the Democrats a win."

I never saw this as a win for Democrats. You know, I saw this as a win for America.

The reality is that, when we have to do really hard things here—and we are not doing hard things these days, but when we are trying to do hard things that are really important for the American people—my experience is you really do have to get to a bipartisan place because, you know, we have lost elections, and we lost the last one, and that is on us. It is not on the voters. They made a decision. That is their right to do, and we have to learn, and we have to listen. But when we were listening and hearing loud and clear from the American people that we want a secure border and then we worked with our colleagues on the other side of the aisle to get a secure border, why in the world would the leader of the party kill it? Why? I mean, we know the reason. He thought it was good politics.

But this is not about what is good partisan politics. It is about what is good policy that is going to help the American people.

So among the many things you are focusing on, of course, is this question of immigration, and this is incredibly important. But I wanted to be clear that I, as one Member of the U.S. Senate, am absolutely all in for the immigration reform that we need. And that is a secure border. That is legal immigration as we determine the type of immigration that would be beneficial to the American people and sustainable, and it also includes a pathway to citizenship for these children who, in many cases, were brought here by their parents, who had no agency, no involvement whatsoever in the decision to come here, how they got here.

Pardon me. For those of us who don't stay up all night, some of us use alarms to wake up. So pardon me for being here earlier than I thought I would be here. And you are here maybe later than you thought.

But you know, it is such a privilege for you, and it is such a privilege for me. It is such a privilege for the other 98 citizens of this country who serve with us in the U.S. Senate that any chance we get—any chance we get—to do something that is helpful to the people we represent, don't we want to grab it? Don't we want to do it?

And does it matter if our name lives in memory that we were here? It doesn't. What matters is what we do here and whether, when we leave, we

can look back and have the satisfaction of knowing we gave it our best.

There is enormous pressure on folks in this job from the crosscurrents of the political world that we live in. And all of us are fallible. All of us have plenty of opportunity to get it wrong, and we do. But what I have seen in the people I have admired on both sides of the aisle—and I think of Senator McCain, whom Senator MURPHY worked with so much. There was a heart and soul to that man, and it was the heart and soul and his spirit that guided him.

And when I think about immigration, and we are talking about how tough it is, he worked together with the so-called Gang of 8 to come up with a reform that this Senate passed years ago.

I was in the House then, and I remember being so excited—so excited—when I heard that the Senate had actually come up with a proposal that just made sense. It wasn't perfect. What is? You know, Senate to Earth: What is perfect? We do the best we can, but that is about it.

But do you know what? When I say "that is about it," that is what life is. Do your best and then move on.

By the way, that is one of the reasons why I think, Senator, the bipartisanship, which we don't have now at all, but it has to ultimately—we have to have enough humility to understand that neither side has the answers. And where we try in earnest to come up with the best solution we can at the moment, where we listen to each other, what happens is that if we didn't get it fully right—and we never will—we understand that we have an opportunity to fix it and make it better based on that experience.

When there is just our way or the highway, there is no resolution and no progress. No. 1, you don't get the bill passed, as we saw with the immigration bill. Then, No. 2, if you get it passed, the other side just tries to tear it apart and repeal it as opposed to improve it.

Every single one of us knows that the American people want progress. But when what we are talking about is something that is hard—and it truly is hard, the issue of immigration—we are talking about something that is hard politically, that spirit of wanting to get to a solution, that was what animated the work of Senator LANKFORD, Senator MURPHY, and Senator Sinema. They wanted to get to a solution, even though they had significantly different points of view going in on what was the right outcome. But they wanted to get to a solution where they represented the points of view of the disparate views of our caucus, and they came up with a compromise that, by all accounts, would be such a better place for us to be now than what we are in: no progress.

We haven't been able to act on that immigration bill since the Senate acted, with the leadership of Senator McCain and others.

I was mentioning how excited I was. I was in the House at the time, and I was so excited that this bill came over. You know, Vermonters were asking me all the time: PETER, we have got to do something about our borders. We have got to do something to make sure our farmers don't fear having their farms raided and them not being able to milk their cows. It is that essential, right? And I am talking about a lot of pretty conservative people, politically, who politically sometimes agree with me, sometimes don't. But what was so exciting to me was that on the cusp of this coming to the House, I was thinking: I am going to have a chance to vote for secure immigration, securing our borders, a rational immigration plan, and I am going to be able to give fairness to the Dreamers. I was so excited about that.

Then what happened is it was announced that the House would not even take up the bill. Why? It was the same reason that then-Candidate Trump proposed to his colleagues or to his party members in the Senate: Kill it. And why was that?

Really, in all candor, it is the most cynical of all reasons. Sometimes people in politics prefer to have the issues that they can fight about rather than use the responsibility and opportunity they have to solve the problem.

That is pretty much what happened with that. And here we are, and we are seeing it again.

You know, there is another thing that is happening with the immigration policies of the current administration. There is a lot of cruelty, this part of it. Yes, we have to have a secure border. Yes, criminals who came here illegally should be deported. But should the consensus that we have about a secure border, about the legitimacy of deporting criminals who are here illegally be used to justify a wholesale roundup, where the people who are rounded up are almost randomly picked up on the basis of good information, but it is clear in this roundup, where so many people were flown to the jails in El Salvador, that the minimal amount of due process, which is inquiry into who is this person, where are they from, does this tattoo mean they are in a gang or is that a tattoo of Mom—are we a society where we don't provide that minimal inquiry that is called due process, that our country was founded on? It appears, in many cases, we haven't done that.

Then, what we are seeing also is that a number of people are being rounded up who are here legally. They are here on a student visa, and they published an opinion in a school newspaper expressing their point of view about the suffering in the Middle East. This country, of course, is founded, among other things, on the First Amendment right to free speech. It is a pretty astonishing thing that people who express that, who are here legally, by the way—legally, legally, legally. I want to emphasize that—are suddenly con-

fronted by people who are essentially bearing masks, put in handcuffs, taken away, and then put in a jail at some unknown place until some maybe days later when you find out where they are. How does that solve the border crisis? How does that protect the liberties that have been the hallmark of the United States of America since the Constitution?

It is cruel to have a person who essentially “disappears.” That is the term I know Senator MURPHY used once and, I think, unfortunately, accurately.

We have a challenge. It is really not who wins this vote, who wins that vote. And it is not even who is in the majority and who is in the minority because this country only works and this Senate only works when whatever your political views are, you approach the problems that America has from the perspective of your obligation as a U.S. Senator to make progress, to make it better.

I was in the State senate for 13 years. I am not going to say my life has been downhill since then, but what I so appreciated about the Vermont Senate—and I learned, working with other people, that “bipartisan” doesn't have a meaning almost now because it is like you have got to be on one side or the other.

But I remember when I first went to the State senate, Senator BOOKER, I won an election that was an upset. So I was feeling pretty good about myself. When I got there, it was a majority in the Republican Party, and I was ready to cause trouble—not necessarily in the John Lewis good way. It might have been more of a PETER WELCH ego way. I had a lot to learn.

What every member who was showing up—and these two Republican Senators who were just really icons for me in my life, as it turns out, they and the Lieutenant Governor made decisions about who would be on what committees. And I really wanted to be on the Finance Committee, but that is not a committee you get on when you just show up and you have won an election and you are acting like you are more important than you are. They put me on the Finance Committee, and I said: I am doomed.

The reason is, I know I had to cooperate. They had been so good to me and so generous. They gave me a seat at the table. It was such a thrill for me to be able to actually sit at the table with these people whom I held in such high regard and who knew so much more than me. But they invited me in. They didn't push me aside just because I had different points views and was from a different party.

A few years later, I became Senate president, so I had a lot to do with who was on what committees. And I remembered I started then the process that we still do in Vermont, and I appointed a number of Republicans to chair committees.

I was in the Senate a second time with the now-Governor of Vermont,

Phil Scott, and he became the chair of the Institutions Committee. That is a big deal in Vermont. When I tell folks we did that in Vermont, where sometimes you would appoint somebody who is from the other party, they want me to have a mental status exam around here. You know, you just don't that kind of thing.

What I do know and what I do see is that there are a lot of people here who do have that—I will call it the Murphy-Lankford-Sinema attitude: Let's solve the problem. Let's make progress. Let's find a way where we can move ahead.

You are talking about immigration, which because we have been going around and around on this for so long without making progress, it is almost creating this cul-de-sac or this sink-hole where people think it is pointless; why even talk about it; why try to solve it.

It can't be done. But we know it can be done because we are the people here, 100 of us, that actually have the ability to do it. And I would say we have the responsibility to do it because it is a serious issue that faces the American people, and they are entitled to the safety of a secure border. The Dreamers are entitled to some justice and respect for the commitment they have made to be fully participating citizens here in the United States.

So I just applaud the efforts of my colleagues who, despite all of the outside noise, do want to make some progress. When we don't make progress, we descend into a bad place.

You know, yes, deport a criminal. Our people are entitled to safety. People are not entitled to come here illegally, and people who are illegally here certainly are not entitled to commit any crimes.

But when we go round and round and just use the challenge of immigration reform as a political cudgel, we end up going into some pretty dark places. And that is where we are heading now, where a person gets rounded up who is legally here because the administration doesn't like the opinion they expressed. It is not that their opinion was necessarily subversive. It is not even wrong; it is debatable. You and I would have an opportunity to debate, you know, what should be our policy in the Middle East, what should be our policy on immigration.

But the administration decides: That speech, I don't like. Arrest that person. Disappear that person.

And then we get into debates that are really not about making progress but mutual recrimination.

So I am just very delighted that you are focusing a good part of your effort here on the vital question of immigration.

I do hope—I haven't been watching everything, but if it is OK, I just want to direct your attention to these tariffs that are happening a little bit. I know you are going to have an opportunity to talk about a fair number of things;

you already have. But I have never seen anything so dumb and reckless as these tariffs on Canada.

We have a library in Newport, VT—Derby Line, actually—the Haskell Free Library. And half of it is in Vermont, and half of it is in Canada. Is that cool or what? Canadians come in what I call the backdoor but they call the front door, and we come in the front door which they call the backdoor, and we read books together. We have had this library for decades.

We had a roundtable up on the Canada-Vermont border, and the Member of Parliament from Stanstead, which is the town next to Newport, Madam Bibeau, was with us. And we were with some folks who ran businesses on the Vermont side and on the Canadian side and some of whom had operations on both sides. Most of these were family businesses; some were very large, some were small. They ranged from, like, farmers on the Vermont side, who got a lot of their fertilizer from Canada. And that is true, by the way, all across the northern border. It can be Minnesota. It can be Idaho. So many of our farmers all along the Canadian border have cross-relationships with Canada. They get their fertilizer. It is going to cost 25 percent more.

We all know how hard our farmers work. Nobody works harder. The margins of what they make are tiny. And you add a 25-percent tariff, and these people are just—they don't know what is going to happen.

Our maple syrup makers, back and forth. We get a lot of syrup from Canada and blend it and make it into products with Vermont syrup. Canada is the biggest producer of the second best maple syrup in the world. Vermont is the biggest producer of the best maple syrup in the world—in the United States. But the equipment that our sugar makers use is largely manufactured in Canada. A 25-percent tariff on that, that is going to hammer the Vermont maple producers. Again, they operate on a small margin.

A lot of these farms, as you know, and the sugar producers—or, we have got a family company up there, a second generation, that makes high-quality furniture—these are family businesses, and they have tight margins. They are competing. They are really working hard. The Northeast Kingdom is really a pretty low-income part of Vermont, with wonderful, incredibly hard-working people who are very proud of where they live and who they are and who their neighbors are.

They are asking really tough questions about how they can make it and whether they can stay in business. And this is not the same as immigration, but there is an element here that is the same as immigration.

Shouldn't any policy that we pursue start with the premise that we will do no harm? So it might be a policy the Presiding Officer is advocating. And I know when the Presiding Officer served in your previous job, you would be

wanting to make certain that what you did, did no harm. In fact, you would be insisting that it did some good.

And my question with the tariffs is whether the administration is starting out from the premise that I think all of us should start with: Yeah, we may have an idea. We hope it might work. But we have to make sure it does no harm.

Mr. BOOKER. I was going to ask a question. Did the Senator finish his question?

Mr. WELCH. That is a long question, and I am waiting for a long answer.

Mr. BOOKER. I want to first start by saying that the Senator has a reputation around this place; that there is a deep, penetrating goodness that is in you. I love to watch my Senate colleagues when other people are not—it is a habit of mine—because I think what you do when no one is watching is really telling. There is a belief I have that someone who is nice to you but not nice to the waiter is not a nice person.

And we have a body full of people that show some deep, decent goodness. You are one of those people. And what I love about watching you is that it could be the farthest ideological person away from you, and you just have this—like, you look at people like you see their divinity, whether it is the person at the highest position, a leader of the Senate on either side, or someone who holds the door.

What I love about you is, when I watch you, you are one of the Senators—some people just keep to their side of the aisle—I always look up, and I find you over there talking to somebody. And I just rely on that decency in you as a friend, and I have come to love you like a brother, and I want to thank you for being here before your alarm in the morning goes off. It really touches me.

And I don't know if you remember this, but about 12 hours ago, you sat right here and you embraced me in a hug, and I leaned on that hug because I wasn't sure that I would even make it 12 hours. I take strength from you, my friend. And I take strength from you to hold to my kindness, to look for it everywhere.

This is a story I don't think I have ever shared with you, but it speaks to how we get things done and how we should get things done.

When I first got to the U.S. Senate, my mentor, Bill Bradley, gave me three real lessons for me to learn. I think I have obeyed two out of the three. One was to know the rules of procedure really well. That is the one I have probably failed. I am still learning things, 13 years into this, about the rules of procedure. The second one was become a specialist in some areas; don't be a mile wide and an inch deep. I feel like I have done a pretty good job on that.

But the one that he told me that was most fruitful—I already mentioned one of the benefits I had in doing this with

John McCain earlier in this 12 hours—he commanded me to go and meet with all your Republican colleagues; take them out to dinner, sit with them for lunch, whomever they are.

I went out to dinner with TED CRUZ. It was hard—to find a restaurant—because I am a vegan and TED CRUZ is from Texas. But I still remember that we went out and how people were sort of shocked just to see two human beings breaking bread.

But the story I want to tell my friend about is when I went to see Jim Inhofe, a Republican from the same State as Lankford. And I couldn't get him to meet with me. I couldn't get on his schedule.

And I found out that he had Bible study in his hideaway, and so I go up to his hideaway for Bible study. THUNE was there. And we all have implicit biases. We all have implicit biases. My implicit bias was that I did not expect of this older, conservative man that I would walk in and see on his mantle this beautiful picture, centered, of him hugging a little Black girl. I am embarrassed by that, that it so surprised me.

And I—especially in those days, I didn't talk to, like, the senior giants in the Senate. I didn't call them by their first names. I still have a problem calling Senator DUREN by his first name, for example. He is a lion of the Senate, in my opinion, and one of the kindest people to me since I have been here.

So I go to him—I go to Jim Inhofe. I go, “Mr. Chairman, sir,” and I look at the picture and I go, “Who dat?”

And he smiles and chuckles, and then he tells me the most beautiful story of his family adopting this little Black girl out of some of the most terrible circumstances. And I was so moved.

And thinking about my friend Bill Bradley, I would have never known this incredibly beautiful thing about someone who is my—ideologically, we disagreed on so many things, but knowing this personal moment, it created this thread between us—not a rope, not a cord, but a thread—that connected me to him, and it created a deeper affection.

So fast-forward many months in this body, and there is a big education bill, which CHRIS MURPHY referenced earlier. A big education bill was going through the Senate because No Child Left Behind—we were going back the other way. Senator DUREN has told me about this pendulum that sometimes swings and swings back in its place. And it was a deal.

Lamar Alexander was in the well of the Senate. He was the manager of the bill. And there were no amendments allowed. No amendments allowed. Of course, I am sitting back here. This is where I sat. And you talk about egos. My ego—I had this great amendment, and I was frustrated that they were having this rule—no amendments—but I have a great amendment to do something about homeless and foster children, who have the worst educational

outcomes, and I thought I had a modest amendment to try to make a difference for American children who are in foster care or that were homeless.

And I am frustrated. I am sitting back here, something that I dream of doing again one day—sitting—and just kind of upset. And then I see, walking through those doors, Senator Jim Inhofe, and he walks to the well kind of talking. And I remember the story he told me about this little Black girl in his family, and something tells me to get up. And I walk into the well, down these steps, and I say to him, “Mr. Chairman, sir, I know how much you care for children in tough circumstances. I have an amendment.”

And I explained my amendment to him, and he looked at me and gave me the Senate version of no, which is, “I will think about it.”

And I got frustrated, and I said, “Thank you, sir, for considering it,” and I walked back and I sat down right here. And then when I picked my head up, he is marching into our side—like you do on the other side—like his GPS coordinates were off. He marches up to me and just sort of grunts at me, “I’m in,” and then turns around and starts walking away from me.

I step up and I say, “Wait. Excuse me. What do you mean?”

He goes, “CORY, I am going to co-sponsor your amendment.” And I was so happy.

And now I go over to Senator GRASSLEY and say the same thing to him—a relationship that, thanks to DICK DURBIN, I really bonded; I have a sweet relationship with him even though, again, we disagree on so much. He doesn’t even make me wait. He looks at me, and he goes, “You got Inhofe?” And he signs on my amendment.

(Mr. YOUNG assumed the Chair.)

By the time I go to Lamar Alexander, I look up and I am like, I got a full house. Sorry, I got no other Democrats, but I got all these Republicans. He looks at me, and he laughs. He goes “Really?” and he puts the amendment on the bill. It is the law of the land right now.

So what you said in the beginning of your long windup question, my dear friend, my dear brother, is how real change is made.

That man, DICK DURBIN, when I first got to the Senate, he knew how much I cared about criminal justice reform. He brought me to the table. I started working—as I presided, I started working in conversations with MIKE LEE, in conversations with CHUCK GRASSLEY. We cobbled together a bill. It wasn’t done by Executive fiat; it was done in the Senate—87 votes. It is the law of the land. Thousands have been liberated from unjust incarceration.

So my point to the Senator is that his spirit is so right, is so true about what it takes to make real change, but the President we have right now doesn’t seem to be coming to this body with any kind of bold, bipartisan legislation to solve the problems of our Na-

tion, to cobble together the common ground of this country on immigration. No. He is not acting like that. He is using language like “Presidential primacy.” He is defending his corrupt practices in immigration by saying things like “Presidential primacy.” He is invoking the Alien Enemies Act. He is invoking the Alien Enemies Act—an act from the 1700s—to deny due process, and Antonin Scalia, a textualist, said that whether you are born in this country or not, you have due process here.

The Constitution states only one thing twice: Both the 5th and the 14th Amendments say that no one—not no citizen—no one shall be deprived of liberty or property without due process of law. Yet this President is disappearing people and, as we documented here, disappearing the wrong people; as we documented here, unjustly detaining Americans, separating families—all while pushing his agenda and doing things that the values of people on both sides of this aisle don’t believe in, like stopping the investigation of children for alleged sexual molestation. This is wrong.

I sat down with some of the advocates who were telling me and who are trying to fight to stop the law from being broken, and they scared me, DICK DURBIN, because they said what I said on this floor: If someone is willing to violate the Constitution for some, it endangers the constitutional rights for us all. Do not think this is, oh, those people. If they are violating the rights of some, it is a threat to the rights of all.

I am standing here because of a national crisis that is growing. We talked about Social Security. We talked about healthcare. We talked education. This is a crisis for us.

This is what the person said. They talked about the Insurrection Act. They have been hearing people in the administration talk about the Insurrection Act.

Every person in this Congress and across this country wants a safe and secure border, but scapegoating immigrants to erode basic constitutional freedoms does not make America safer, does not make our communities safer, does not reform our immigration system like we should be doing in a bipartisan manner like LANKFORD and MURPHY. It does not stop our longstanding problems in our agricultural industry and our tech industry.

History has shown that when due process and basic constitutional rights are eroded for some people, it does not stop. It continues to erode. The shoreline that kept you safe will shrink until it reaches you.

I am reminded of German Pastor Martin Niemöller’s quote about fascism in Germany:

First they came for the socialists, and I did not speak out—because I was not a socialist.

Then they came for the trade unionists, and I did not speak out—because I was not a trade unionist.

Then they came for the Jews, and I did not speak out—because I was not a Jew.

Then they came for me—and there was no one left to speak for me.

Well, everything that has happened in the last few months contradicts American values, shared values. I am most concerned about what this signals for the future and the potential indication of this President of the Insurrection Act.

Some of our country’s most prominent lawyers have warned that the invocation of these two antiquated laws—the Alien Enemies Act and the Insurrection Act—may result in the true erosion of our constitutional rights.

Trump’s recent indication of the Alien Enemies Act is the first step to securing people without due process, which Justice Scalia said is wrong, and then on the first day in office, Trump directed the Secretary of Defense and the Secretary of Homeland Security—Trump directed them to initiate a 90-day review to determine whether the President should invoke the Insurrection Act of 1807. That 90-review—when do the 90 days come up, folks? This month. In 19 days. April 20.

The President of the United States has already invoked a 1780-something law and also asked his immigration folks, his homeland security folks, to do a 90-day review about the Insurrection Act of 1807.

Now, there are probably people watching and saying: What is the Insurrection Act? I had to look up what the Alien Enemies Act was. So let me tell folks what the Insurrection Act that our President on his first day in office—of all the things a President has to do, he turned to the Secretary of Defense and the Secretary of Homeland Security to initiate a 90-day review of the Insurrection Act.

America, what is the Insurrection Act of 1807? It is among the President’s most powerful authorities. He can deploy the U.S. Armed Forces and militia during a national emergency. He can declare a national emergency.

This President has already wrongfully declared national emergencies. He declared a national emergency on energy. Senator Kaine talked about the outrageousness of somebody declaring a national emergency on energy when we are at the highest level of petrol chemical extraction in our country’s history. Until he started rolling back what we were doing on wind and solar, we had an all-of-the-above strategy. Nobody “drill baby drilled” more than Joe Biden.

The Insurrection Act gives the ability of the President to declare a national emergency to suppress insurrections, to quell civil unrest or domestic violence, and to enforce the law when he believes it is being obstructed.

When can the President invoke the Insurrection Act? Well, nothing in the text of the law defines insurrection, rebellion, or domestic violence. Those are prerequisites for deployment, but they don’t define those things.

One of Trump's first Executive orders signed the evening he took office on January 20 was titled "Declaring a National Emergency at the Southern Border of the United States." In that order, he said "America's sovereignty is under attack." He has already declared a national emergency.

Neither Congress nor the courts played a role in deciding what constitutes an obstruction or a rebellion. If Trump does unlawfully invoke the Insurrection Act, he can conceivably use our military to carry out his deportation agenda within our country's borders, all without any due process or opportunity to prove that their presence in the U.S. is lawful or even that they are a citizen.

Trump himself said he wants to deport American citizens to foreign countries. Trump himself has said: I want to deport American citizens to foreign countries.

On February 4, he said:

I am just saying if we had a legal right to do it, I would do it in a heartbeat. I don't know if we do or not. We are looking at it right now.

This is what he has asked his Secretary of Defense and his Secretary of Homeland Security to say: Can I invoke the Insurrection Act?

So don't be mistaken. This is not just about immigrants. This is not just denying immigrants the due process that Antonin Scalia said that immigrants have a right to so you don't disappear the wrong people like the Trump administration has done, that you don't wildly disagree with what a citizen is saying and use that as a pretext to disappear them.

He is creating the pretext to invoke that 1807 law, the Insurrection Act, and if he does that, when they came for the immigrants and denied them due process, he is trying to get us to surrender our commitment to the constitutional guarantees that Americans have. He has said he would invoke—he would deport Americans if he could.

When the President denies due process to some in America, it threatens the due process of all.

Let's see what happens on April 20 if this President, who has already invoked the Alien Enemies Act, follows through and invokes the Insurrection Act. But why wait until April 20? Raise your voice now. Stand up now. Do something now. Cause some good trouble now. Let this President know that if he does ever do that, there will be a rising up of people's voices, a rising up of good trouble, as John Lewis would say, to say: Not in my country. This is unacceptable.

Mr. DURBIN. Will the Senator yield for a question?

Mr. BOOKER. To Senator DICK DURBIN, to somebody who has been my mentor and friend, I will yield for a question while retaining the floor.

Mr. DURBIN. Thank you. I first want to acknowledge this extraordinary moment in the history of the Senate. I believe you have been holding the floor

now for more than 10 hours, and perhaps we will go on even longer.

You have been joined by your colleague and friend Senator MURPHY of Connecticut. I am sorry to take the early morning shift, but I didn't want to miss this moment in history, not just for the historic nature of it but for the substance of it as well.

I just remind my colleague and fellow member of the Senate Judiciary Committee that it was only maybe 3, maybe 4 weeks ago that we had witnesses before the Judiciary Committee, and I asked a question. One of them is pending on the calendar, the Executive Calendar, on the floor. His name is Dean Sauer of Missouri. He is seeking the position of Solicitor General of the United States. Along with him was the lady aspiring to be the Assistant Deputy Attorney General for Civil Rights, Harmeet Dhillon, and Aaron Reitz, who has been approved by the Senate for a legal policy position.

The questioning went to the basics of our Constitution, which you have noted here today; that is, what is the check and balance on a President? What is the accountability of a President under the Constitution?

As I read it—and I don't profess to be expert; I am still learning—as I read it, the accountability of the President is in article II—in article III, I am sorry, article III, the judiciary.

Ultimately, the President can be held accountable by impeachment in Congress or by decision of the court. Some of the orders that he is promulgating are inconsistent with law and the Constitution.

The question that was asked of the witnesses who are seeking positions in the Department of Justice: Can a public official defy a court order? It seems so fundamental and basic. The answer is no, of course, but these three witnesses all equivocated in their own ways, which raises a question: If this President is not held accountable by court order, what, then, can control a President who misuses their office, to the detriment of the Nation, of the people who live here? That, I thought, was a fundamental question.

It was interesting to note—you may remember—that one of our Republican colleagues on the Senate Judiciary Committee, Senator JOHN KENNEDY of Louisiana, after hearing these witnesses equivocate on whether a public official can defy a court order, came to the committee and basically said: What are you saying? The answer is obvious.

You can criticize a decision of the court within the bounds of propriety as a member of the bar. You can appeal a decision of the court, but if that doesn't satisfy you, your recourse is to quit, resign, leave. The Constitution has the last word. The courts have the last word. And I think that is a question that you are raising today.

Where is the accountability of the President of the United States when he misuses the power of office?

In the cases that you have mentioned, the Alien Enemies Act—it is a law that has been around since 1807 or somewhere around that time—I think it is clear, unless you have declared a war or unless you are invaded, you cannot invoke the Alien Enemies Act as this President has done, and he is being challenged in that regard.

Yesterday, our friend Senator GRASSLEY, who chairs the Judicial Committee—and I say "friend." Some people back home say: Don't say that anymore. We don't talk to those people. They are wrong. This is a body where we do talk to one another, and we should for good reason.

Well, he raised the question yesterday, why is President Trump being challenged so often in court? Well, he has issued 102 Executive orders. I don't know if that is a record, but I will bet it is, 102 Executive orders. Questioning something as basic as birthright sovereignty, birthright citizenship.

And so the point that I am getting to is in obvious situations here where President Trump has gone too far, where is the accountability? It is not going to be an impeachment. We are realists. We know that the Republican House of Representatives is not likely to ever consider that. It could be in the courts.

And if it goes to the courts, the question is, Will this President follow a court order if it goes against his policy? And if he won't follow that court order, where is the accountability? Where is the check and balance? Where is the constitutional framework which is supposed to be at the foundation of this democracy?

I think you are raising important questions, and the Insurrection Act, the use of our military for political purposes, is a frightening prospect. It is something we have avoided throughout our history and should continue to.

And I just commend you for raising this point because I believe it is timely. It is timely as the questions that we ask of these Department of Justice nominees about the enforceability of court orders.

And the question is now, Will the American people speak up? I am counting on some of our Republican friends to speak up too. Throughout history, there have been moments when the party, other than the President's party, showed extreme courage, political courage, and spoke up. We need that kind of voice now. I thank you for raising it on the floor this morning. My question to you is, at this moment in time, as we ask these nominees whether they would follow a court order or defy a court order, doesn't that get to the basics of our constitutional democracy?

Mr. BOOKER. Yes, yes, yes, it does. I mean, you put forth this litany where what we have to ask ourselves is at what point do my colleagues in the House and the Senate and the Republican Party say enough? Enough. God bless JOHN KENNEDY for calling out the

absolute absurd. I was in that hearing where you have nominees for some of the highest positions in the administration failing to say that they will abide by a court order.

I mean, that is something we haven't heard people on either side of nominees just say so bluntly now, not, yes, I will follow the orders of a court. They are equivocating. And God bless one of my colleagues, JOHN KENNEDY, who said: That is absurd. You either obey the order or you resign because we have a Constitution.

And so when is it enough? When is it enough? This is the week, this is the month of Passover, and there is a wonderful song I love singing when I am at a Pesach seder—the Dayenu. "It would have been enough," is the song, if God just delivered us from Egypt. It would have been enough if he parted the seas. Dayenu. This is kind of a twisted version of that. When is it enough when the President of the United States starts a meme coin on his first day, violating the emoluments clause immediately and enriching himself?

When is it enough when he takes an Agency that is on the frontlines of stopping infectious diseases, like Ebola or drug-resistant tuberculosis, from coming here? Is that enough? When we created that in Congress, and he has no right to stop that Agency, would that have been enough?

When is it enough for him to issue Executive orders that trample on the highest ideals of this land, when he mocks members of the courts so badly that even the current Chief Justice admonishes him? When is it enough when Elon Musk is indiscriminately firing people and then realizing oops, we need the FAA safety folks; oops, we need the nuclear folks who are helping us keep our regulations? When is it enough that you will say: "OK. I will call them in and have a hearing to create some transparency in what he is doing?"

When is it enough when he activates the Alien Enemies Acts and starts disappearing human beings without due process? When is it enough?

Well, it is enough for me. It is enough for me. Twelve hours now I am standing, and I am still going strong because this President is wrong. And he is violating principles that we hold dear and principles in this document that are so clear and plain. The powers of the article I branch are spelled out, and he is violating them. Don't take my word for it, Republican-appointed judges, Democrat-appointed judges are saying it and stopping him, and then he maligns the judge that did that.

When is it enough for people to speak out and not just fall in line, to put patriotism over a person that is in the White House?

So to your question, sir, to my friend, and I am sorry to get a little animated at this early morning hour, but I am so frustrated and not just because of that, but I am reading the stories.

We are going into the next section, which is national security, and I am

reading the stories of our citizens of this country, not just New Jerseyans, there are a lot we have read in these 12 hours, but there are people from all over the country who are reaching out to my office.

And I know they are yours, Senator DURBIN. You are the second highest ranking Democrat in here. I know they are reaching out to you because you are a man that stands for justice. I know they are reaching out to your office, too, because you are one of the outposts for sanity in a Congress that is being too complicit to an Executive that is overstepping his authority and violating the Constitution and hurting people who rely on healthcare and Social Security.

I am reading these stories, sir, because of the voices of the Americans that don't have the privilege of the 100 of us, who don't get to stand here, but I believe the power of the people is greater than the people in power. Those are the ideals of our democracy and our Constitution.

So I am rip-roaring and ready. I am wide awake. I am going to stand here for as many hours as I can, 12 hours, and I recognize that my other friend, another person I consider more than a friend, like a sister to me, from the State of New York, my neighbor.

Mrs. GILLIBRAND. Senator BOOKER, would you yield for a question?

Mr. BOOKER. My sister, for you I will yield for a question while retaining the floor.

Mrs. GILLIBRAND. Senator BOOKER, I have been listening to this debate all night, and I have got to say, you are on fire. And you are on fire because the American people are very, very angry about what is happening. They are not happy with what this administration has done. It is contrary to what was promised. It is contrary to what was expected.

And I know we are going to talk about national security in a few minutes, but can I ask a question about one of the topics you talked about last night? Because it was exactly what my constituents were talking to me about yesterday.

So I was in New York yesterday, and we talked about these cuts to Social Security. I have to say, I was stopped by a gentleman who worked at Amtrak and said: Madam Senator, Madam Senator, I just want to thank you for protecting my Social Security. That has never happened to me before. Never happened at Amtrak to be stopped by someone who worked there to thank me for one thing I had done that day.

But I am telling you, Senator BOOKER, when Elon Musk starts firing people in Social Security and tells the Social Security Administration, "You cannot answer the phone," what are our mothers and fathers and grandmothers and grandfathers supposed to do? Many of them are not readily available to be on a computer. Many of them can't ask their question online. And, worse, Elon Musk is expecting

them to show up in person at a Social Security office.

How many of our older Americans are not able to drive anymore or are uncomfortable driving? How many of our older Americans feel uncomfortable getting in the subway to get to a Social Security Administration because there are stairs or because the lighting is not good enough?

These are the challenges that our older Americans have, and so I just want to talk about the things you told us last night about the risk to Social Security.

Social Security is our seniors' money. It is not the government's money. It is their money. So what happens when you make it hard for a senior to call and make sure their check is on the way or their check never showed up, and they can't find it?

For a lot of older Americans, that Social Security check is the only money they have for that month. It pays for food, right? It pays for heating bills. It pays for their medicine. It pays for the rent. It pays for everything they need to survive. And Elon Musk's office doesn't believe anybody should be answering the phones. Who is he to tell America how to run its Social Security Administration when our seniors need those checks?

They have crippled the phone service, even though—get this one—they can't answer the phone, crippled the phone service. You can only make an appointment on the phone. So how are you supposed to make an appointment if you are going to go in? I mean, that is absurd. They plan to cut 7,000 staff. That is a lot of staff.

Mr. BOOKER. Seven thousand.

Mrs. GILLIBRAND. Seven thousand staff, even though the Social Security Administration staffing is already at a 50-year low. So they are lying when they are saying this is about efficiency. They just want the money, and what do they want the money for? Tax cuts for billionaire buddies of Elon Musk. It is an obscenity. It is an absurdity. It is an outrage, and everyone in America should be concerned. Hands off our Social Security, Elon Musk and President Trump. Hands off.

They are rallying all across the country to say: Hands off my Social Security, hands off my Medicare, hands off my Medicaid.

It is an outrage. And I don't think people should stand for it because your Social Security check is your hard-earned money. It is not for Elon Musk to play with, to shift around, or send it to tax breaks for his billionaire friends.

Now, I have to say, my office has been working closely with one senior. Now, she is a New Yorker with a disability, and she was told that she had to call a specific representative's extension by the end of March. Well, that was yesterday. And if she didn't get this person, her application could be denied.

She has called every day, sometimes more than once a day. She has been on

hold for 4 to 5 hours just to reach this representative. As of yesterday when we reached out to her, she had still not reached the representative.

So Americans across the country are panicked. They are stressed. They are worried that they won't get their hard-earned money back, their retirement, to pay for the things that they need.

Now, this is the money they spent their entire careers paying into. You know, every time you get a paycheck, Senator BOOKER, there is a line that says Social Security because that money has been taken out of your paycheck and put into Social Security so it is there for you when you retire. It is your retirement. The pages sitting here right here, you are paying into your Social Security.

Now, imagine, this is your first paycheck, isn't it? I bet it is your first paycheck. Your first paycheck, you are putting in dollars that, you know, you want saved so that when you—you can't even imagine what it is going to be like to be 65. But the day you are working here, the fact that you spent all night here supporting Senator BOOKER, that is your retirement. Wouldn't you be pissed off if Elon Musk took your retirement money? You should be. He doesn't have any right to it, and what he is doing is he is doing it by cutting staff.

So if you need help because your Social Security didn't arrive, then how are you supposed to get that check? They can't issue you a new one unless they know that it didn't show up in the mail like it is supposed to.

Ultimately, cutting individuals from Social Security doesn't just affect them; it affects the entire economy. So you can imagine if all our seniors are getting this Social Security benefit, you can't go then buy your groceries. You are not going to be able to then go buy whatever you need for your home. Those stores will get less money, and that means there will be less resources in the economy.

Social Security, if you didn't know it, is our country's largest anti-poverty program. It keeps people out poverty. That is what it does. When we designed Social Security, however many decades ago, it was so that our seniors don't die in poverty, because they were dying. About half of seniors, at that time, were dying in poverty. They didn't have enough food to live.

And so we created Social Security. It is one of the most popular programs. It is one of the most respected programs.

So reducing access to this key program, Senator BOOKER, is an outrage. It is harmful. It is cruel. It is hurtful.

So I know that this is something that you have really spent a lot of time on last night, but don't you think it is cruel to not allow phone service? Don't you think it is wrong to make it harder for people to get access to their hard-earned money? Don't you think this is something that America did not sign up for in this election?

Mr. BOOKER. I read last night—thank you for the question, my friend.

I read last night some of the most painful letters of people over and over again, from throughout my State and throughout other States, who are living in fear, who use words like “terrified” and told stories that they couldn't sleep because of the rhetoric of this President, the rhetoric of Elon Musk calling it a Ponzi scheme, telling lies during the joint address.

Mrs. GILLIBRAND. Yes.

Mr. BOOKER. And then I read stories from people that work in Social Security. They are telling about not having desks and the waiting lines and inefficiencies that this has created, and the horrible, deteriorating customer service.

Mrs. GILLIBRAND. Yes.

Mr. BOOKER. And I have been trying, as much as I can, during these last 12 hours, to read stories of Republicans.

Mrs. GILLIBRAND. Yes, this affects everyone.

Mr. BOOKER. To read editorials from the Wall Street Journal, to just show that this isn't a partisan thing. This isn't about left or right. It is about right or wrong. It is about will we, as a country, honor our commitments that we made.

And then I read from independent folks that are saying: This is crazy that this program is even in jeopardy.

Mrs. GILLIBRAND. I have another question for you because I know you want to move on to some national security issues this morning.

Mr. BOOKER. And I will yield for a question while retaining the floor.

Mrs. GILLIBRAND. Thank you, Senator BOOKER.

So the other thing that stressed out my constituents that I talked about this weekend is air safety. They are very, very stressed out about these cuts to the FAA.

You know, there was a plane crash not too far from here—a helicopter crash. Everyone in that helicopter perished.

We have been reading about stories across the country about flight safety and the fact that there are near collisions all the time.

We had a horrible crash in New York, in Buffalo, the Colgan Air crash. I have gotten to know the families over the last several years because they have worked together for legislation to make sure that we have pilot safety.

But what I have been watching in terms of this administration is they don't seem to care. They just have made up this idea that cuts across the board are necessary to get rid of fraud and waste in the budget.

And I agree we can make government more efficient, but the way you do that is at least learn what each of these Agencies does, study what is happening in them and how to make them more efficient. Make sure the right number of personnel are hired. Make sure the right training is offered. Make sure there are no wasteful programs. That is good government.

That is not what Elon Musk and his DOGE boys are doing. That is nothing like what they are doing. They are just cutting everything because they want to make space for these tax cuts for their billionaire buddies.

It is really disgraceful. It is something that I don't quite understand.

So over the past 2 months—just the past 2 months—we have seen horrifying accidents and near-misses at airports all across the country, and there was another close call just this past Friday, again, at DCA. Many of these accidents have been a result of chronic understaffing and antiquated technologies at the FAA.

But instead of fixing those problems, the first thing that the Trump administration did when it came to power was fire people.

I think he is kind of stuck in the loop of “The Apprentice”: You are fired. You are fired. You are fired.

I don't get it.

Good government is important, and I support efficiency. That is not what they are doing. It is like they are on a power trip, and they just want to fire everybody across the board—just fire them all.

So while the court forced the FAA to rehire workers—thank God for the courts. Thank God for the judges that are doing their jobs and looking at these lawsuits appropriately. Many Federal workers have simply moved on and found new jobs because these are highly skilled, highly sought-after employees, people that we really want working in the Federal Government to keep our country safe.

Now, just weeks after the horrific plane crash here, with 67 people getting killed in Washington, the administration fired hundreds of Federal Aviation Administration employees, jeopardizing the public safety and threatening our national security. So that made no sense. It was right on the heels of some horrific accident that we all witnessed.

Now, over 90 percent of U.S. airport terminal towers don't have enough air traffic controllers. Critical shortages remain for other aviation safety personnel, such as safety inspectors and mechanics, to make sure that, when we get on that plane, that plane is ready to go.

In New York, nearly 40 percent of positions are unfilled at two facilities on Long Island that direct air traffic for Newark, our shared airport, JFK, and LaGuardia. As a result, over these past few years, the United States has experienced a substantial and alarming increase in the number of near-misses.

According to an analysis in the New York Times, in 2023, close calls involving commercial airlines occurred, on average, multiple times each week, and the number of significant air traffic control lapses increased 65 percent over the previous year.

What did they cite as the major reason behind the increase? A shortage of air traffic controllers.

While the Trump administration claims no air traffic controllers or critical safety personnel were fired, we

know that many of those who were let go played essential roles in maintaining our air traffic control infrastructure. Others were responsible for maintaining navigational, landing, and radar systems.

We also know that safety inspectors, systems specialists, and maintenance mechanics are among the workers who were affected. And at least one of the employees fired worked for FAA's National Defense Program, which protects our air space from enemy drones, missiles, and aircraft used as weapons.

I want to talk about those missiles and drones as well. I really want to talk to you about what your thinking is here that we don't have a plan. You have the incursions in New Jersey and incursions in New York at the same time, and we don't have assurance that those drones aren't being operated by China or Russia or Iran or another adversary for a nefarious purpose. We have to get to the bottom of this, and that is something that, Senator BOOKER, you and I have been at the forefront when questioning the administration about what they are doing on this issue.

So the question I have is this: Why did the administration fire these workers and so easily part with them? Who will perform these duties going forward? What risk analysis was performed to ensure this won't make flying less safe?

Now, I asked these questions of the Secretary of Transportation in a letter on February 20, over a month ago. And what was their response? We don't know. They haven't answered my letter. They are not willing to engage the Senate in actual policy and decisions that keep our State safe.

What is worse is that we don't know if this is where it ends or if more reductions are coming and more reductions that allow for safety for our FAA.

Now, DOGE's so-called workforce optimization initiative—it is BS. They don't do the analysis first. They just make the cuts.

We need the Secretary and the Acting FAA Administrator to respond to Congress's questions and oversight. The American people deserve to have a Federal Aviation Agency that is dedicated to actually doing the job of protecting us, protecting this country.

The Trump administration needs to take immediate steps to address FAA staffing shortages across the entire Agency, not just air traffic controllers.

So, Senator BOOKER, the question I really want to ask you is this: For your State, for New Jerseyans, what are they thinking? How do they receive this information? What do they say when they read about drone incursions over one of your arsenals, over one of your sensitive military bases? What do they think about cutting staff at the FAA when they watch all this information about crashes?

I know my constituents are pretty stressed out about it. They don't understand why someone is making these cuts.

Again, the "why" is the most important question. It is not for efficiency. It is not to get rid of the fat. It is not to get rid of the fraud. Never heard an allegation that there is fraud in the FAA. Never heard an allegation that there is fat in the FAA. They have been understaffed forever. So they are lying about the purpose.

So what is the purpose? What is the purpose? What are they going to do with that money, Senator BOOKER? I would like to know.

Mr. BOOKER. So I appreciate this more than you know, and there is a line threaded throughout your entire question about the way they are going about doing this from so many Agencies. First, they are trying to kill certain Agencies—the Department of Education, which they can't legally do. USAID, they can't legally do. We created that—the article I branch of government.

But on some of these other Agencies like Social Security, where you started, we know it is: Ready, fire, aim. And actually the "aim" part never happens. They are savagely cutting personnel and organization after organization.

Seniors, thousands of them, are already writing in about the undermining of service. The Wall Street Journal article we read last night said that the customer service at Social Security is going from bad to worse and painted horrific pictures that are putting seniors in crisis, not to mention the closing of Social Security centers in rural areas, where people have to now drive hours and hours and hours.

And so at the FAA, it was one of the early outrages that they fired people that they then realized they needed and tried to find some way to pull some of them back.

And you and I both know the way they talk about government workers—a large percentage of them are veterans—the way they demean and degrade them, the way they accuse them of being parts of corruption, fraud, or fat, when the stories we have been reading of what some of these folks do is extraordinary.

And so your question, though, brings up a lot of national security issues, and I am going to bridge to that because you and I both were really, really incensed that we weren't getting enough information when we had these incursions. And I want to start—what I have been doing in other sections is just reading, elevating on this floor the voices of people from our country, trying to elevate more of the voices to let people know we see you, we hear you. Your outrage, your hurt, your fears—they have value.

Mrs. GILLIBRAND. I have another question before you start your letters, Senator BOOKER, if you will take another question, if you will yield.

Mr. BOOKER. I will yield for a question while retaining the floor.

Mrs. GILLIBRAND. So because you are going into the national security section, I want to give you a couple of

questions to pepper your answers because I sit on the Special Committee on Intelligence in the Senate. I also sit on the Armed Services Committee. And so national security is an area where New Yorkers care a deep amount about, and I have been spending the last 15 years focused on how we keep this country safe and what we should be doing. And so I get a lot of questions from New Yorkers about this issue.

So I want you to address the drone issue, for sure, because that is something you and I have been working on continuously since we have seen these incursions.

And just to give a little more context for New Yorkers who might be listening to this debate, we have had drone incursions over sensitive military sites for quite some time now, and it is something that I have been working on on a bipartisan basis through the Intelligence Committee. Some of these incursions are every night, over and over again, over sensitive military bases. There was one over Langley. We have had them over arsenals in New Jersey, over sensitive sites in New York. We have had them over military bases across the country.

And, you know, I don't like it when the answer is, "Oh, we know where most of this is. This is mostly FAA traffic." I don't like it when I hear it from this administration—or any administration—because it is not true. Some of the drone sightings are planes in the air, helicopters, you know, maybe weather balloons, maybe enthusiasts, but they do not know if all are. And with these specific incursions, they do not know the origin of them. They do not know whose they are. They do not know who is operating them. They do not know the purpose of these drones. These drones could easily be spying. They could be planning attacks. They could be doing anything nefarious. We have no basis to say it is all known, and we are not concerned.

So this is something we are going to get to the bottom of. I am very incensed about it. It does not leave our personnel safe. It does not leave our secrets safe. So drones is one issue.

The second issue, if you could address it, is on the national security side: cyber security. I think that—and election security.

One of the cuts that the DOGE boys made—which I literally cannot understand why they would ever do this. This is making us weaker. It is making us less safe. It is not good for America. It shows how ill-advised this process is and how uninformed this process is and how we can see through these cuts and how insincere this process is. This is not about waste. This is not about fraud. This is not about good government. This is about making massive cuts for tax breaks for billionaires because that is where they want to spend your tax dollars—New Yorkers' tax dollars and New Jerseyans' tax dollars. They want to take it and give it as tax breaks to billionaires.

OK. So this is the question. They have cut all of the personnel—or the main personnel—at an organization called CISA that we are supposed to be doing election security with. So the people who actually were working with the States to make sure our election system can't be hacked—they fired those people. They fired the senior personnel at the Department of Defense, our most experienced generals across the board, members from the Joint Chiefs of Staff. They just fired them. For what reason? I don't know. No substantive reason was ever given, but these are the senior personnel who actually keep us from wars, who have the judgment and the experience to advise the President, to advise Congress, to advise us on how to keep us safe.

Then the last group they cut were the lawyers. Do you remember that Shakespeare play: The first thing we do is kill all the lawyers? Well, the context in which that was given was in order to have a coup. So Shakespeare, hundreds of years ago, said: If you want to have a coup, the first thing you do is you kill all the lawyers. Well, they fired all the lawyers—the senior lawyers—of the Department of Defense. They fired the generals who actually know how to keep us safe, and then they fired the personnel at CISA, who are responsible for election interference. They fired the people at the FBI, who were also responsible for election interference. So, again, these firings make no sense. I don't think they are making us less—I don't think they are making us more safe. I think they are making us less safe. When you fire the people who know what they are doing and are dedicated to keeping us safe, it doesn't make us safer.

What do you think, Senator BOOKER, about any of the topics that I raised, specifically on the drones, the firings of the election protection personnel at CISA, the firings of the generals, the firings of the senior lawyers at the Department of Defense, or the firings of the FBI personnel, who are also expert at election interference? These are the smartest, most capable, the most sophisticated, senior personnel who are there to help us keep this country safe. I really want to hear what you are hearing from your State and what you are thinking about this reckless, reckless approach to national security.

Mr. BOOKER. I am so grateful for the questions from my colleague and my friend.

I want folks to know, probably the best dinner I had here when I came here was with the Senator from New York, who really gave me a quick run-down on how to get things done in this body. I have watched her work on both sides of the aisle, relentlessly, to get things over the finish line and to help people in our region—from the 9/11 folks, who were our first responders, to get their healthcare; to fight to support the military, to empower the military; but to fight against sexual assault in the military. She is one of these phenomenal people.

A lot of the questions we are going to get to, including that question that was obviously painful about national security, is like, hey, one of the strategies of Russia—and we know this—is to attack the elections of other democracies, to try to sow discord, to try to undermine the very voting process, and the Trump administration pulled away a lot of the people from the DOJ and elsewhere when their sole purpose was to fight against foreign election interference.

So how can we have a nation where the President is in charge of national security and is not doing things to address the issues that were in your questions?

I want to start by reading a couple of constituent letters. I know we want to step back and talk a little bit about immigration, as my colleague and my friend and my partner in leadership in the Senate TINA SMITH is here, but I want to get into some of these letters because I said over 12 hours ago that we were going to continue to elevate the voices of people out there.

So this is coming from—I just want to—from someone from New Jersey. They are writing:

Dear Senator Booker, I am writing to express my deep concern regarding the current state of our Nation and the lack of response to the looming constitutional crisis. It is becoming increasingly difficult to ignore the actions of a President who routinely lies and makes outrageous proposals such as annexing Greenland, Mexico, and Panama or even renaming the Gulf of Mexico. Those proposals not only undermine our international standing but also disrespect the foundations of our country.

Furthermore, I am alarmed by the growing threat to press freedom. Recently, for example, the Associated Press was barred from the White House press room simply for referring to the Gulf of Mexico rather than the Gulf of America—a clear sign of the President's disregard for free speech and a free press's role in holding power to account.

The President is actively trampling on the Constitution and blatantly ignoring the rule of law—

As Senator GILLIBRAND was saying:

He has taken steps to slash vital Federal Agencies and disaster relief programs, undermining our Nation's capacity to respond to crises. His decision to appoint unqualified individuals to high positions for the purpose of following his will is another example of how our democratic systems are being systematically weakened.

Additionally, his reckless and irresponsible approach to foreign policy is making the world more dangerous. His insistence on blaming Ukraine for Russia's invasion and ongoing war is not only historically inaccurate but also deeply damaging to our allies and global stability. Even worse, his administration has entertained so-called peace settlements that exclude Ukraine from the process entirely, effectively allowing Russia to dictate terms without any Ukrainian input. Such actions betray our commitments to sovereignty and democracy and embolden authoritarian regimes worldwide.

Domestically, his agenda is destructive. His administration has pursued the withdrawal from the USAID, the gutting of critical global humanitarian and development efforts that have long served U.S. interests abroad.

At home, he is enabling tech billionaires like Elon Musk to take a chain saw to government Agencies, arbitrarily dismantling institutions that provide essential public services. His attacks on the NIH and its funding jeopardize critical medical research and public health initiatives, undermining scientific progress for purely ideological reasons.

Beyond these threats, his treatment of our closest allies is both reckless and embarrassing. His taunting of Canada, whether through inflammatory rhetoric or deliberate policy snubs, weakens our diplomatic ties and disregards the importance of maintaining strong relationships with our neighbors. This petty, shortsighted approach to international regulations has isolated the United States at a time when global cooperation is more critical than ever.

My greatest frustration, however, is the lack of action from our Representatives and Governors. Too many are cowering in fear of the President's authoritarian tactics. I am troubled by the absence of pushback. I am troubled by the absence of pushback. I am troubled by the absence of pushback. We are witnessing the erosion of checks and balances, and the consequences could be dire.

I was heartened by Governor Janet Mills, of Maine, standing up to the President's orders. Unfortunately, his response was a threat to her political future—further evidence of the intimidation tactics being employed.

I implore you, Senator Booker, to show some moral courage and take meaningful action to stand up to this growing threat to our democracy. Please let me know how you are responding to the situation and what steps you, Senator Booker, are taking to defend our Constitution and the rule of law. Thank you for your time, and I look forward to hearing from you soon.

I hope at this early morning hour, at almost 8 o'clock, that maybe you are listening, because I hear you; I see you; and I am standing here because I am part of letters like yours. This is not normal. These are not normal times, and we must begin to do as John Lewis said: Get in good trouble. Get in necessary trouble.

I want to read from another constituent. I just want to see where this person is from. I am not trying to violate the privacy, which my staff doesn't want me to do.

Mr. MURPHY. Chippewa Falls.

Mr. BOOKER. What's that?

Mr. MURPHY. Chippewa Falls.

Mr. BOOKER. We know Wisconsin is getting a lot of love here. I told my colleague I kept seeing folks from two towns—one in your State and one in the great Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, but this person, alas, is from Jersey.

I wrote to ask you to do all you can to resolve funding for the National Institutes of Health and USAID. I work in information technology at Princeton University, and I have seen firsthand the destruction the termination of funds is causing to research and education. We are losing the momentum of research and causing a deep and lasting loss of educational resources. The NIH and the National Science Foundation provide funds for basic research as well as applied topics. The benefits of this research will be long lasting, and the cost of disruption will be very high.

Similarly, the disruption of USAID is tragic. My daughter works for an organization

working with USAID on climate mitigation and adaptation. She has lost job security as a result of the Trump administration's actions. Work she has built on in Ethiopia, Kenya, and elsewhere will be disrupted due to lack of funding.

Thank you for your leadership as our Senator. I am proud to be represented by you as well as our new Senator, Andy Kim.

The promise of our country is great, but we must redefine our purpose and imagine a new future. Your experience and knowledge will be critical to our country's success.

Let me go with two more and then turn to my colleague. This is a short one.

I am writing to express my concerns about the chaos and lawlessness coming out of the White House. USAID must be restored. Please use powers to restore democracy to the United States of America. This is not what democracy looks like. Thank you.

Somebody from New Jersey.

And one more. One more. One more voice.

As a parent of a USAID Foreign Service Officer recently in Ukraine and now in Kenya, I am outraged and horrified by the coup now being staged by Elon Musk under the authority from the President. To be called "criminal" after putting your life at risk in the service of America's interests is itself to be a victim of criminal-like behavior.

I have seen the beautiful roads and railroads in Africa, built by the Chinese. In one fell swoop, Trump has given that continent to the Chinese and the Russians. He did the same thing years ago by canceling participation in the Pacific free trade pact, forfeiting our power and our good will, making China the largest player in the region. I saw the good will in the eyes of passersby from the Philippines to Georgia to Tajikistan. Now I hear it turn to hostility.

Think of sports fans in Canada, booing our National Anthem. Think also of the infants who will now die of AIDS because USAID's treatment program was abruptly stopped, along with vaccinations programs and programs for stopping diseases such as Ebola, monkey pox, hemorrhagic fever. These diseases will come home with even a 90-day pause of workers in these programs. We will lose jobs, and rent, and some never will return. Refrigeration of medicines will be at risk. Clinics and offices will become unavailable. Humpty Dumpty will not be quickly put back together again.

Some of what Trump wants to do will ultimately need approval of Congress. I urge you to fight every one of his proposals and appointments. Slow the legislative process as much as you can, please. I hope Trump will lose his majority. Thank you for your attention.

I will be of service in any way possible to right these wrongs.

I love when constituents don't only point out what is wrong but stand up and say: I will be of service. Let me know how I can help.

Your voice is helping tonight. Speaking to these issues is helping tonight.

I know my Senate colleague is here. She has a question. I will yield while retaining the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. CASSIDY). The Senator from Minnesota.

Ms. SMITH. Mr. President, thank you, and thank you to my colleague from New Jersey for yielding for a question.

I want to just start by thanking my colleague, who is one of my dearest friends in the Senate, for using your voice in such a powerful way over the many, many hours that you have been holding the Senate floor. I know you well enough to know that you are not doing this because of your belief in the power of your voice; you are doing this because of your belief in the power of all of the voices that you have been amplifying all through the night and your belief of the importance of the millions of Americans who are so frightened and concerned and horrified by what they see this administration is doing and wanting to feel like there is somebody here who is fighting for them and who is listening to them.

The way in which you are reading these letters today and all through the night, Senator BOOKER, I think is a tribute to your respect for all of those Americans. So I am so grateful for that.

I wanted to take a moment, if I could, to ask you to yield for a question related to what you have been talking about.

You know, I certainly agree with you that these are not normal times in our Nation. As elected officials, it is our duty to speak up and to fight back against the abuses and the overreach of this administration and to raise up the voices of our constituents who, as I said, are both frightened and furious about what is happening.

My question to you, Senator BOOKER, is about some of the Trump administration's recent actions regarding immigration. My question is in three parts.

First, I think that we can all agree that our current immigration system in this country is broken. It is not working well for anyone. It is not working well for American businesses that depend on a global talent pool. It is not working well for families who want to reunite with their loved ones. It is not working well at all for those who seek refuge from persecution and believe in the promises that are carved into the Statue of Liberty.

To my colleague, I ask these questions, and I think about the issues, about the shortcomings of our immigration as the Senator from Minnesota, where our meat processing sector relies so much on immigrant labor, where the University of Minnesota is a beacon for international students studying science and technology and agriculture, where the resorts in Minnesota rely on folks from all over the country to come and make them work as little mom-and-pop, 12-cabin operations up on lakes in northern Minnesota and the manufacturers rely on, as I said, the best and the brightest from all over the world coming to serve in our State and serving our economy.

I think we know, my colleague from New Jersey, that there have been real and serious bipartisan attempts at comprehensive immigration reform debated in this body. While I might not

have agreed with everything in these proposals—I suspect you might not have as well—I think we both, I am sure, strongly believe that immigration is an issue that merits real debate and real policy solutions. Our colleague who was here on the floor with us this morning, Senator MURPHY from Connecticut, has worked so hard to find real, bipartisan solutions.

I believe that comprehensive immigration reform needs to ensure our national security. It needs to provide a fair and workable path for immigrants who want to come and contribute to the American dream, which is what truly makes this country great.

But here is the rub: The Trump administration's recent actions show that they are not interested in serious policy reforms that would make Americans safer or make our immigration system work more efficiently and fairly. Instead, what I think we can see is that this President has prioritized using our immigration system as a tool to restrict First Amendment freedoms, to subvert due process, and to further weaken America's global standing with our allies and our regional partners as he seeks to emulate the authoritarian regimes he so openly admires.

As just one example, in recent weeks, we have seen a number of international students targeted for arrest and deportation merely on the basis of their pro-Palestinian advocacy. These are young people who played by all the rules. They entered this country with permission in order to further their education and have not been accused or charged with any criminal activity.

Their views on the war in Gaza may differ sharply from mine or others, but I believe that the First Amendment guarantees them the right to express those views without facing punishment or reprisal from our government.

Nonetheless, the Trump administration has admitted that they are doing exactly that—seeking to punish lawfully present immigrants and in some cases even green card holders because of the political views they have expressed. The Secretary of State has invoked a rarely used section of statute that allows him to unilaterally designate for removal any alien who may cause "potentially serious adverse foreign policy consequences."

As if that is not enough, many of these arrests have been carried out in a manner that seems calculated to maximize fear and intimidation in immigrant and activist communities. Here is an example for my colleague to respond to. I want to take the case of the recent arrest of Rumeysa Ozturk, a Turkish graduate student at Tufts University who was studying the relationship between child development and our social media-saturated, globally connected world. She is here on a valid student visa, she is not accused of any crime, and by all accounts, she is a loved and valued member of the Tufts community. Her only purported offense was being one of four coauthors of an

op-ed in the student newspaper that urged the administration of Tufts to engage with students' calls to divest from businesses with ties to Israel and the IDF. For that offense, her visa was revoked with no notice, and she was arrested on the street and spirited more than 1,500 miles away, which is likely a violation of a judge's order, to await her probable deportation.

I am sure many of my colleagues, including my colleague from New Jersey, have seen the video of her arrest, which was captured by a neighbor's security camera. It is utterly chilling. She is surrounded by officers in plainclothes, with no visible insignia, no markings at all on their clothing. She is handled roughly. Her belongings are taken away from her and her hands are cuffed before being loaded into an unmarked car.

It is no exaggeration that her arrest looks like a kidnapping—one that you might expect to see in Moscow rather than the streets of Boston.

Of course, the terror of what she experienced is horrible to think about, but I also think about the thousands and thousands and thousands of other students here with a student visa or, you know, other lawful immigrants who see this and think to themselves: This could happen to me. This could be something that happens to my roommate or my student or anybody.

It seems like such a breakdown in the rule of law and the way our country should operate.

So I would like to ask my colleague: Does this seem normal or appropriate, for Federal law enforcement officers of the United States to conduct routine arrests in plainclothes, with unmarked cars, and with this overwhelming show of force for individuals who pose no obvious physical threat to those law enforcement?

Furthermore, is this not exactly the sort of operations that you would order if your goal is to intimidate and dissuade immigrant and activist communities from exercising their constitutional rights to free speech?

Does punishing people for their political speech seem consistent with American democratic values? I can't believe that we would think that it would be consistent.

I wonder if my colleague from New Jersey would like to respond in any way to this.

Mr. BOOKER. I want to respond deeply. I, first, want to thank my colleague for being here in the morning. She is one of my colleagues that I confided in when I told her it was enough for me, I needed to do something different, and she readily encouraged me to be here on the floor for what is now about 13 hours. She has encouraged me. She has encouraged my heart and is just one of my dear friends. I am just so grateful to see her this morning.

I want to say something before I begin answering her question. In my hometown where I grew up in Bergen County, there is a family, the Alexan-

ders, whose son Edan is an American who is being held by Hamas. He is being likely tortured and in trauma and in pain. He is a U.S. citizen. He is an American.

I had a friend with me just recently, a man who was driving me around. I have this ribbon that I often use that I keep in my pocket. It reminds me of him and my determination to bring him home—bring him home. I want his family to know that, as a State Senator, he is in my thoughts.

I also feel there are so many New Jerseyans who are affected by this crisis, who lost family members in the region. We must bring peace.

Then my friend Senator SMITH asked this question about—which is a real test because when you disagree with someone's statements so much, but the very nature of the First Amendment—what makes this document so precious is that it says that no matter how reprehensible your speech is, this document says you have the right to say it.

I remember the controversy over an NFL player who kneeled. One of the voices that sticks in my head is a White guy from the military who just said: I fought battles—I think it was Afghanistan—and I am offended by his taking a knee, but the very reason I fought was so that he would have the freedom to do it.

So I came back. I was there on October 7. I have very hurt, strong feelings about what is going on over there and urgent desires to end the nightmare, to bring people like Edan home, to end the nightmare for so many Israelis and Palestinians. I find so many things people are saying so unhelpful to the crisis and to the moral truth that I believe in. But I will fight for people's rights.

So here is a situation where you see a video, and it just doesn't seem like who we are. If you are revoking somebody's visa, make a phone call. Tell them: You have 30 days to leave. But there should be due process. You should have to prove your claims in court. If this person is somehow aligning with some kind of enemy, prove it. But what I saw there doesn't reflect the highest ideals.

God, if this Constitution was easy, it wouldn't be worth the paper it is written on.

So I love my friend because she wades into some difficult waters, but she is guided by the oath that she took to defend the Constitution, and in these complex and difficult times, she is standing up.

And I tell you, when we were in the immigration section last night—or earlier, I should say—we read the most painful stories. My brother over on the other side of me—I have got some of my really dear friends on the floor right now: Senator MURPHY, Senator WARNOCK, Senator SMITH.

My brother Senator WARNOCK knows that we are a nation that is paying hundreds of millions of dollars over the years of the Trump administration to

fund private prisons that are being paid, incentivized, to take away people's liberties. We read stories in the immigration section about people that got trapped in those systems that should never be there—horrible stories, painful voices I have read, about folks who were caught up in a system.

And I just loved that one article from the Canadian who was, for weeks, put in a private prison. And suddenly, when she heard the lies of the people who found ways to keep her there—the “aha” moment that she realized: These people, every day I am there, they get profit. They are not incentivized by justice; they are incentivized by profit.

I read stories, Senator SMITH, of people who were sent to that horrible jail in El Salvador that the government admitted they made a mistake. They disappeared someone who has American family members. Story after story I read that just are such a betrayal not of democratic values but of American values because we all in this body know we need to do more to protect our borders, to keep us safe, to arrest criminals, be they undocumented or documented. That is an urgency we all feel.

But when you sacrifice your core values, when you sacrifice them to a demagogue who says, “This is all about your safety,” when you sacrifice your core principles for your safety, you will achieve neither. You will neither be safe nor morally strong.

The true leaders on both sides of the aisle that I have heard over the years talk on these issues say we can do both; we can make our country safe, and we can abide by our values. And in a complex world where country after country disappears people, when authoritarian countries disappear their political enemies, their political adversaries, disappear people who say things they politically disagree with—those countries are looking to us.

Did you know, when Donald Trump started using that phrase “fake news, fake news, fake news,” that in Turkey, Erdogan started arresting people on charges of fake news—because we are looked to. I believe, like Reagan said, we could be that city on the hill, but we are up high, and folks are going to look to us.

But what is the world order going to be? What is democracy globally going to look like? Are we going to defend democracy and democratic principles or will we behave like the authoritarians that we should be against?

So this is a fundamental question you ask, and it has been resonating all these 13 hours. We keep coming back to the Constitution because so many things the Trump administration is doing, from the separation of powers to violating the very first words of our Constitution, the very first words, this commitment we make when we swear oaths, all of us: “We the People of the United States” of America—this is our mandate—“in Order to form a more perfect Union, establish Justice”—it

comes really quick. It comes really quick. Is it just to disappear a human being with no due process?

I quoted Antonin Scalia, this conservative that was sitting on a stage with somebody he had a lot of affection for, Ruth Bader Ginsburg, and this moderator asked him: Does somebody in our country have the rights of this document? And he said: Yes, especially the 14th Amendment that doesn't say any "citizen"; it says no "person," no body.

So where do we stand when our Founders, those imperfect geniuses, say: "We the People . . . in Order to form a more perfect Union"—"We the People of the United States, in Order to form a more perfect Union, establish Justice, insure domestic Tranquility, provide for the common defence, promote the general Welfare, and secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity"—what Nation are we turning over to the next President, to the next Congress, when this Congress is sacrificing the powers that are given right underneath that preamble? It is article I which spells out: "All legislative Powers herein granted shall be vested in a Congress of the United States, which shall consist of a Senate and House of Representatives."

And then it goes on to talk about what we have the power to do. We set the laws.

This President is invoking emergency powers like the alien insurrection act, a 1790-something law that the last time it was used was in World War II to detain Japanese Americans—something so shameful—to put them in concentration camps here in America.

He wants to take power from our Congress. And the thing that is killing me, that is actually breaking my heart, Brother WARNOCK, the thing that is actually breaking my heart is that we are letting him, that we are letting him take our power.

If Elon Musk were a Democrat and Joe Biden said, "Hey, go after the spending power of Congress," all the things that they approved—it is hard to do bipartisan things here. God bless PATTY MURRAY and SUSAN COLLINS coming together and getting spending bills—hard work—done. Lord knows, I sometimes play a little Motown in here. I ain't too proud to beg. I go to the Appropriations leader and say: Hey, my New Jerseyans in this county need this. We work on all these—I fight for programs with LINDSEY GRAHAM and USAID with now-Secretary of State Marco Rubio, programs that he approved.

The Department of Education. I have worked with Republicans to put things in the Department of Education. There are people here that worked in a bipartisan way to try to simplify the FAFSA forms. I could go through all the work we have done that now this body—the article I branch of the Constitution, right under the mandate of the United States of America, as TINA SMITH is telling us, right after "We the

People of the United States, in Order to form a more perfect Union, establish Justice"—the Senator, my friend, and so that is why we are here. That is why, now, the Senate is filling up. It is friends galore. We have AMY KLOBUCHAR now on the floor.

That is why we are here. No business as usual. No business as usual. We are not doing the usual order. We are talking about these things. We are making the case. We talked about immigration. We talked about Medicaid. We talked about Medicare. We talked about healthcare. We talked about medical research. We talked about Social Security. We are marching through. We are marching through. Thirteen hours. I have more in the tank.

And so I thank you for that question. It brings up very emotional things for me; I will be honest. It brings up pain and frustration and hurt. It brings up, for me, the pain of so many New Jerseyans that have reached out—the Palestinian doctors in my State who worked with my office to get Palestinian babies into America for care. It brings up the hurt of being there and seeing the worst slaughter of Jews since the Holocaust.

So many things are painful, but if we sacrifice our values, it reminds me of the mosque being built, 9/11. It reminds me of all these difficult points: the marchers in Skokie, of KKK—all these difficult points where the values of this Constitution were tested, where we were being measured.

But I have to say, what this President is doing with the alien insurrection act, what this President is doing with no due process, what this President is doing with flushing the Department of Education, with getting rid of the USAID, with attacking thousands of people that serve our veterans and that serve our Social Security—those things should be obvious to this institution, to the Senate, that that is wrong, that they have unelected—the biggest campaign donor, unelected, who is getting our personal information, and there is no transparency. Nobody in this body can say they know what confidential information was let out, Elon Musk has, and knows what they do with it because they didn't bring him here to answer for it.

So I thank my colleague for the question. And I know Reverend WARNOCK is going to ask me one. I just want to take us a couple pages into this for a second.

The American people alone, our approach to foreign policy practiced by the President—what the President has done is left our allies feeling abandoned, feeling degraded and insulted. He has left our adversaries feeling emboldened and has done things that have hurt our national security, that has made Americans less safe.

In the short time President Trump has been in office for a second term, Americans have already been put in harm's way because of the reckless ap-

proach of the administration. It all begins, in fact, with his extremely poor judgment. This administration has prioritized the obsequiousness to Donald Trump over the expertise when it comes to some of the most important national security jobs, and it has sidelined dedicated professionals who have devoted their lives to keeping our country safe.

This administration has also demonstrated an inability to distinguish between America's adversaries and America's allies and a disturbing failure to understand how America's partnerships and investments abroad protect and benefit communities here.

I am reminded of General Mattis saying: If you are cutting things like the USAID or the State Department, buy me more bullets.

But this is something that folks on the floor have talked about. I see one of my friends and somebody I really look up to—I see TIM KAINE—who sits a little bit higher up on the dais than I on the Foreign Relations Committee, somebody I have turned to many times. And he was astonished by this. And I know he, like me, has had private conversations with our Republican colleagues about this. But this body has not called for one hearing or one investigation. No accountability.

What am I talking about? It is when, last week, we learned Vice President JD VANCE, Secretary of Defense Pete Hegseth, Secretary of State Marco Rubio, Director of National Intelligence Tulsi Gabbard, Director of the CIA John Ratcliffe, Trump's National Security Advisor Mike Waltz, Special Envoy for the Middle East Steve Witkoff, and several other high-ranking officials in the Trump administration discussed attack plans against the Houthis in Yemen in a group chat over the commercial messaging app Signal.

We learned of this because the President's National Security Advisor mistakenly invited the editor-in-chief of The Atlantic, Jeffrey Goldberg, on the text chain. And after Jeffrey Goldberg published a story describing this jaw-dropping national security failure where they could have broken at least two laws that I am aware of just by doing that—from the preservation of public records all the way to disclosing national security, highly classified information—the President and his Cabinet members didn't step up and say, "We made mistakes," didn't step up and say, "This is clearly abjectly wrong," didn't step up and say, "There will be accountability," didn't step up and say, "We will take actions." No.

What they decided to do when they were exposed is actually target the reporter with a barrage of insults and not acknowledging any wrongdoing. Unsurprisingly, the Trump team's response led Jeffrey Goldberg to publish the rest of the Signal chat messages, which exposed more administration lies.

We are going to go into that, but I really want to turn to my brother. And

I said earlier about Senator MURPHY's speech, one of my favorites I have ever actually heard when I was in the Senate—Brother WARNOCK gave a speech that was one of my favorites in the Senate, too, when he talked about the difference between January 5 America and that fateful day, January 6.

He has been a friend of mine for a long time. I think he might be the only person in this body—I started this talk 13 hours ago by talking about getting into good trouble. I think you might be the only person in this body that was arrested in this building for protesting before you came to serve in this building as a U.S. Senator.

I am going to stick to what I am told to say. If you ask me that you would like to speak—you have to say, "I would like to ask you a question." I think that is how this goes.

Mr. WARNOCK. Will the Senator from New Jersey yield for a question?

Mr. BOOKER. Why, yes. I will yield for a question while retaining the floor.

Mr. WARNOCK. Good morning, and let me just say, CORY BOOKER, how very, very proud I am of you. It is a real honor to serve in this body.

I know that all of my colleagues who are here agree that it is an honor for the people of your State to say that when we take stock of all the issues that we wrestle with, as we look into the eyes of our children and consider what we want for them, and into the eyes of our aging parents as they deal with the blessings and the burdens of getting older, since all of us can't go to Washington, we are going to send you.

And we are going to trust that, in rooms of power where decisions are being made, you are going to center the people and not yourself. You are going to be thinking about ordinary people.

And so CORY BOOKER, I want to thank you for holding vigil. As I prepare to ask you a question, I just want to thank you for holding vigil for this country all night.

Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel said that when he marched with Dr. King, he felt like his legs were praying.

So in a very real sense, your legs have been praying as you have been standing on this floor all night. And thank you for praying not just with your lips but with your legs for a nation in need of healing.

I just got off a prayer call that I do every Tuesday morning at 7:14 a.m.

That is 2 Chronicles 7:14:

If my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then I will hear from heaven, and I will forgive their sin, and will heal the land.

The Nation needs healing. We need spiritual healing. We need moral healing.

But, literally, there are people all across our country who need healing, who need healthcare. So that is why I was so proud to come to this Senate after being arrested in the Rotunda a few years before that, proud to join you

in the Senate, proud that we were able to pass, just a couple of months after I got here, the American Rescue Plan, which did so much incredible work.

In that American Rescue Plan, there was the expanded child tax credit, which literally cut child poverty more than 40 percent in our country. I wish we could get it extended.

One of the other things we did was we lowered Georgians' and Americans' healthcare premiums by hundreds of dollars on average.

We passed a tax cut—and that is so relevant in this moment because that is what this body is prepared to do, I guess, in the next few days—pass the tax cut, but that tax cut is literally going to be for the richest of the rich, the wealthiest among us.

But we passed a tax cut that brought healthcare into reach for tens of thousands of Georgians and millions of Americans in the American Rescue Plan. These tax credits are so critical that the nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office said that the number of Americans without healthcare would grow by 3.8 million people in just 1 year if the premium subsidies were allowed to expire.

Forgive me for my phone ringing. My 8-year-old and 6-year-old are calling me. They are not impressed with what I am doing.

Mr. BOOKER. That is an important phone call.

Mr. WARNOCK. They are not impressed.

But we know that this would impact thousands of Georgians who have only recently been able to receive healthcare. We passed in that American Rescue Plan these tax credits, which put healthcare in reach, and now they are set to expire if we don't do our work. That is why what you are doing, CORY BOOKER, is holy work. It is within a political context, but this is holy work.

If these tax credits are allowed to expire, a 45-year-old in Georgia with \$62,000 in annual income would see premiums go up by \$1,414 a year.

A 60-year-old couple in Georgia with an \$82,000 annual income would see premiums go up by a staggering \$18,157 a year. Think about that.

Nearly one-third of Americans have less than \$500 in savings in their bank account. Imagine the healthcare costs for a 60-year-old couple going up by more than \$18,000.

A health insurance premium hike like this would be more than an inconvenience. It wouldn't just be a nuisance. It is literally the difference between having healthcare coverage and not having healthcare coverage.

So I am thinking about people like that. I am thinking about my constituent Cassie Cox from Bainbridge, GA. She wasn't able to afford healthcare on the Affordable Care Act marketplace until the premium tax credit brought healthcare into reach.

Shortly after she became insured, she severely cut her hand, which landed

her in the emergency room with 35 stitches. With insurance, it still cost her about \$300. Had it not been for the tax credits that allowed her to get healthcare, she could have been in financial ruin.

She is one of the hundreds of thousands of Georgians at risk of losing their coverage if these tax credits are allowed to expire, if we don't do our work, if we are more focused on the wealthiest of the wealthy rather than the concerns of ordinary people.

Senator BOOKER, should Democrats and Republicans come together to extend the premium tax credit for hard-working folks in New Jersey and in Georgia? What do you think?

Mr. BOOKER. That is my easiest colleague's question I have gotten within these 13 hours.

Yes, they should. I was talking in the healthcare section about, while there are these big issues that we should be concerned about—\$880 billion for Medicaid—cutting all of that out to give to the wealthiest, as you said—God bless them; they don't need our help; they don't need more tax cuts—to give them tax cuts, and explode the deficit, this is literally taking from working Americans.

The letters we read, the voices of Americans, the fear, the anguish, the hurt, the worry, people who were suffering from Parkinson's, who had children with disabilities, who had elder parents living with them, so many people telling them—not \$880 billion, their whole financial well-being was hanging on a thread and just cutting transportation programs involved.

But I said, while all that was going on, the Trump administration was still doing other things to attack ACA enrollment, to attack the tax credits that people are relying on, and doing other things to drive up costs.

I know some of my colleagues are on the floor, like AMY KLOBUCHAR. We have centered the lowering prescription costs, and he is doing things to drive out-of-pocket costs up. There is a cruelty in that.

And I intend to still be standing at noon, when we have the pause in the Senate for the Pledge and the prayer.

And, Pastor, I want to talk to you in the way that you talked to me last night.

I called my brother, I called my friend, and told him I was doing this—and WARNOCK shifts gears a lot in my life. Sometimes, he is my colleague. Sometimes, he is my brother. Sometimes, we talk about the state of unmarried guys in the Senate. I won't put you on blast, sir.

Mr. WARNOCK. The bald-headed caucus.

Mr. BOOKER. The bald-headed caucus.

But the one time you shifted gears into being my pastor and my friend, we prayed together last night. And most Americans identify in our faith—the Christian faith. And you and I know—I would yield for you to ask a question,

but I am yielding just to have you talk about Matthew 25.

Mr. WARNOCK. Right. Right. I am a Matthew 25 Christian.

Mr. BOOKER. You and I both. That is what we hold in common.

Mr. WARNOCK. It is a long chapter, but in the section we are talking about, in Matthew 25, Jesus says: I was hungry and you fed me. I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink. I was sick.

Mr. BOOKER. What were you?

Mr. WARNOCK. I was in prison, and you came to visit me. And someone asked: Lord, when were You sick? When were You in prison? When were You an undocumented immigrant?

Mr. BOOKER. Yes. Yes.

Mr. WARNOCK. And the answer comes: In as much as you have done it to the least of these, you have done it also unto me.

Another part of that text says: And when you don't do it for the least of these, you don't do it for me.

The Scripture says that the one who gives to the poor renders to the Lord. This is holy work.

Mr. BOOKER. Sir, my friend, I don't understand how a nation could allow a President to be so cruel that he would take away healthcare from people struggling with children that are facing the worst of health challenges, people who have a spouse like the person who wrote to me—no, it wasn't a spouse. She wrote me herself. She had Parkinson's.

I got upset because that is how my father died. I watched, year after year after year, how it affected my family, how it demanded from my mother, how it cost thousands of dollars for his care. And thank God we have the privilege. But this person was writing because they were afraid, and they didn't know what the costs would be.

How can our country say that kind of cruelty—how could a nation where the majority of its people are people of faith, be they Muslim or Jain or Baha'i or Hindu or Jewish—how can the central precept of our country, founded on principles that are reflected in the Good Book—how could we say that we should cut healthcare from the sick and the needy to give bigger tax cuts to Elon Musk?

Mr. WARNOCK. Will the Senator from New Jersey yield for a question?

Mr. BOOKER. I will yield to you, my brother, while retaining the floor.

Mr. WARNOCK. You know, this is the reason why every Sunday and every weekend, when I leave here, I return not only to Georgia, but I return to my pulpit. Some folks ask: Why do you continue to lead Ebenezer Church?

I return to my pulpit every Sunday because, notwithstanding wonderful people like you, I don't want to spend all my time talking to politicians. I am afraid I might accidentally become one.

So I want to connect and check in with ordinary folks because I was focused on this healthcare issue long before I came to the Congress.

Dr. King said that of all injustices, inequality in healthcare is "the most shocking and the most inhumane."

Mr. BOOKER. I read that last night, Pastor. I read that last night.

Mr. WARNOCK. "The most shocking and most inhumane."

It is the reason why, as a pastor, inspired by Dr. King, leading the congregation that Dr. King led—way back in 2014, when the Affordable Care Act was passed, were you here? You came after.

Mr. BOOKER. I came after.

Mr. WARNOCK. You came right after that.

I got arrested in the Governor's office in Georgia, fighting for healthcare.

Mr. BOOKER. I didn't know you were a two-time arrestee, man.

Mr. WARNOCK. I got a long record, brother, but, also, good trouble.

Mr. BOOKER. Oh, good trouble.

Mr. WARNOCK. Good trouble.

We had a 1960 sit-in in the Governor's office. Waves of us got arrested. They arrested one wave. Then another wave came, and another wave came. We were trying to get Georgia to expand Medicaid.

Mr. BOOKER. Yes, I remember that.

Mr. WARNOCK. We passed the Affordable Care Act here, but Georgia was digging in its heels, and said: No, we are not going to expand Medicaid.

So when I got here, Senator KLOBUCHAR, I made it a priority of mine to get incentives for Georgia to expand Medicaid. And you remember, I went to our caucus and I said: Look, Georgia and about 9—then 10—other States have not expanded. They should have done it a long time ago. Let's see if we can make it even easier for them.

As a freshman Senator, I was able to convince our caucus to give \$14.5 billion for nonexpansion States, which includes \$2 billion just for Georgia to incentivize Medicaid expansion.

Why? So that working people in the gap, people who literally go to work every day, can get healthcare. Georgians left at \$2 billion sitting on the table and almost 600,000 Georgians in the gap. The Governor's plan has literally enrolled a whopping 6,500 people in healthcare, but we got nearly 600,000 people in the gap. This is not theoretical stuff.

Every time I talk about this, I have to talk about Heather Payne, because Heather Payne is a resident of Dalton, GA. She spent her career taking care of others. She is a traveling nurse. Heather worked throughout COVID as an ER and labor and delivery nurse, yet, often, she did not have healthcare coverage herself because she fell into the healthcare coverage gap. Sometimes she had health insurance coverage; sometimes she didn't.

She made too much money to qualify for Medicaid, but the only coverage options available to her were unaffordable, costing anywhere between \$500 and \$1,000 a month. And so about 2½ years ago, Heather Payne, a traveling nurse, noticed that some-

thing was wrong in her body. And even though she noticed that something was wrong, Senator KLOBUCHAR, she literally had to wait for months before she could see a doctor, to save up her money.

And then she finally went and saw a neurologist who said: Do you know what? You have actually had a series of small strokes. And even after getting that diagnosis, she had to put off serious medical procedures because she cannot work as an ER nurse anymore and is still waiting to get approved for disability so she can get Medicaid coverage.

And so this nurse, who has spent her whole life healing other people, can't get healthcare. I think it is wrong that in the richest country on Earth, we don't want to lower the cost of healthcare for people who are working hard in our communities every day, literally keeping us healthy.

I am going to ask you another softball question, Senator BOOKER. Should people like my friend Heather Payne have access to affordable healthcare?

Mr. BOOKER. Yes.

Mr. WARNOCK. In the first few months of the Trump administration, it has been clear that this administration is not working for—

Mr. BOOKER. I am going to just say this just to try to stay in the parliamentary—I yield for a question while retaining the floor. I yield for another question while retaining the floor.

Mr. WARNOCK. The administration is working for the billionaires. They are working for people like Elon Musk. Healthcare is a human right. Healthcare is basic. And while we are speaking about health, we have got to cheer on our Federal workers who are keeping us healthy. And there are folks in this administration who say that they want to make them the villains. That is what Russell Vought said, that "when they wake up in the morning, we want them to not want to go to work," our Federal workers, "because they are increasingly viewed," he said, "as the villains."

I have got news for Russell Vought. The people who staff our VA hospitals are not villains. The people who keep our food safe and our water clean are not villains. The people who keep our military bases operating are not villains. And so we stand with them in this moment because they are keeping all of us healthy.

And so in closing—and nobody believes a Baptist preacher when he says in closing—let me say that, again, you are doing holy work here, brother, by holding this floor.

You are literally holding vigil for our Nation. We are beset by the politics of fear. The scripture tells us that perfect love casts out all fear. We are witnessing, again, this ugly game, the politics of us and them.

Mr. BOOKER. Yes.

Mr. WARNOCK. And there are a lot of folks who, because so much of what

has been going on in our Nation across Republican and Democratic administrations—let's be honest—has not been working for ordinary people. And the gap between the haves and the have-nots has gotten larger and larger. And when people are vulnerable, sometimes they give in to the politics of fear, somebody telling them that they have got all the answers.

And so we saw this in this last cycle; we are seeing it in this moment in our country—the politics of us and them. And sadly, hard-working, working-class people are waking up this morning, and they are discovering that they thought they were in the “us,” and they are discovering that they are in the “them.” That the “them” is larger than they thought.

And so we have got to hold vigil for each other, for workers, for women, for immigrants, for immigrant families, for our sisters and our brothers, red, yellow, brown, Black, and White; for the aging who need Social Security; for the working poor who need Medicaid; for those who are seeking asylum and they just need a dignified path; for those who have been working here for years and they need a dignified path to citizenship. We have got to hold vigil for each other.

And so thank you for this work. This is not the end, but the beginning. The struggle continues. Dr. King said that the true measure of a person is not where he stands in moments of comfort and convenience but where he stands in moments of challenge and controversy.

So thank you for praying for this Nation with your lips and with your legs. I am going to ask you one last question. Do you intend to keep praying?

Mr. BOOKER. Amen, hallelujah, yes, I do. Thank you for that question.

I know there is going to be a question coming to me, I just want to say pray Isaiah 40:31 for me.

Mr. WARNOCK. Got it, got it. I am going to ordain this man.

Mr. BOOKER. All right. The article I was going to start reading—

Ms. KLOBUCHAR. Senator BOOKER.

Mr. BOOKER. I yield for a question while retaining the floor. The Senator asked a question. I yield for a question while retaining the floor.

Ms. KLOBUCHAR. So you will yield for a question?

Mr. BOOKER. Yes, while retaining the floor, yes.

Ms. KLOBUCHAR. Very good. I want to, first of all, thank you, thank you for waking us up this morning, literally. All night as Reverend WARNOCK would tell you, I know you were in here doing your work, but it was raining, there was thunder, it was really bad. And then when we woke up this morning, you were still talking. You were still talking, and the sun was out, and you are giving people hope.

When I think about what you are doing, you are like an alarm clock right now for this country, and, slowly but surely, we have seen people realize, this isn't just a bunch of campaign

rhetoric that is going on, this is actually happening. And people are stepping up. They are fighting it in the courts. They are fighting it in Congress. With what you are doing today, with what—as you know, last week when we got the horrible news that the Defense Secretary of the United States was using an unauthorized line to just talk with his friends like he was spiking a football, about putting the lives of our servicemembers at risk, people stood up. Democrats stood up. They asked the tough questions.

And one of the things that bothers me is that it is so hard to see your way out of it. A lot of people feel like we are just wallowing right now. But what you are telling us today is there is another way. Because if we just wallow, these guys are going to continue to cut kids' cancer treatment. If we just wallow, they are going to cut Medicaid when one out of two seniors in my State who are in assisted living are on Medicaid, or they are going to continue to mess around with these tariffs, which really are national sales tax, something like \$2,500 for every single family.

They are going to continue to be callous. I had someone say to me last night: Do they care? Do they care when those USAID workers who devoted their lives to feeding the hungry around the world, when they have to stand outside the building and watch them literally take the name of their life's work off the brick on that building? Do they care?

And one of the things that we have done—the Democrats have done—has stood up. And what is coming upon us in these next few weeks is this tax bill that, basically, will give billionaires tax cuts on the backs of regular people—ransacking the government, firing veterans, messing around with Social Security.

I had a guy tell me that he spent 3 days after his wife died in Minnesota—3 days—just trying to figure out how he gets the death benefit, why did this dang check show up at his door? He is trying to do the right thing. He calls, he gets put on hold. He sends an e-mail, no one writes him back. He drives into Brainerd, MN, 30-mile drive. He is like 80 years old. He drives in there, and then they finally help him. Then he gets back, and something else goes wrong. Then he tries to call again. Finally, ends up at our door at our office, and we figure it out for him.

There is 70-some million people that that is going to happen to if these guys don't get their act together. So it is a real good question: Do they care? But when we have this tax bill coming up in front of us in these next few weeks, I think people have got to understand what is going on.

They have to understand that even—the thing, the House budget that came out that will be the subject of this, it is over \$2 trillion tax cuts for people making over \$400,000 a year like Elon Musk, that don't need it.

And so there is actually a way to stop it that is in the hands of the Republicans right now.

If just two or three of them stood up on the House floor and did what you did—Senator BOOKER, if they said no, and if four of them in the U.S. Senate, four of them stood up, four Senators stood up, then we could have the discussion about, OK, let's make government work, we are all in, but let's not do it on the backs of regular people. Let's not do it on the backs of kids that are in cancer research or veterans who are trying to simply get their well-earned benefits because they put their lives on the line in the battlefield. Or let's not do it on the backs of farmers in Minnesota and Georgia who simply have these small farms and they are trying to get by. And then, suddenly, wham, Donald Trump decides shock and awe, let's do a tariff and let's get mad at all our allies across the country like Canada. Oh, that is a good idea.

Those are the things they are doing. So my question of you is, how many people need to stand up in the U.S. Senate to make this happen? Because I know Democrats are united. I know we are all standing up, but tell me how many people need to stand up on the other side, if they joined up and joined you, what a difference it would make? (Mr. RICKETTS assumed the Chair.)

Mr. BOOKER. So I want to thank the Senator for the question, and when I think of people who stand in adversity, I still see you standing in a snowstorm and the strength that you have had and stood up to fight for affordable healthcare, stood up and fought for affordable prescription drugs, stood up and fought for farmers and police officers and communities.

You are that kind of person that gives me strength that I have learned so much from. And you have brought this issue up, what you just said on the floor, to let you know, this is not performative for her. She has brought this up in our small meetings with CHUCK SCHUMER. She has brought this up in our caucus meetings. I have seen her talk about it in her own State. This question of what will it take?

And here is something that pains me to hear, that Elon Musk is calling Republicans up and saying: If you take this stand, I am going to put \$100 million in a primary against you, that they are bullying people who dare to stand up and say, maybe this appointee is not the most qualified person you could find to lead this Cabinet position, or maybe it is wrong to cut this Agency that we together created in Congress.

There are people who are asking those questions, but we have seen them get dragged through X, mob attacked when it comes to their virtual presence, and threatened to be primaried.

But we know, because you are somebody that works on both sides of the aisle, that there are really good people of conscience on both sides of the aisle.

And as the great pastor said: There are enough sins in this body to go around for all of us.

But this is not a partisan moment; it is a moral moment. This is not a left or right moment; it is a right or wrong moment.

Mr. WARNOCK. Right.

Mr. BOOKER. We have a President that is shredding the very Agencies that Americans who are struggling are relying on.

Working people that, over the last 71 days, are finding higher prices, that are finding housing prices go up. Farmers in your State—my State too; it is our fourth largest industry. I have had farmers come to me from as far away as Texas and tell me: They are clawing back these contracts that we have already relied on to buy things, and now you are putting me in a situation where I might lose my farm.

You see veterans who come to our offices—I know they come to your office, Senator KLOBUCHAR; you are a Senator from Minnesota, but you are a national figure, so I know they are coming to your office—and they are saying things to me like: I am a veteran. I could go do other jobs. I wanted to work on suicide prevention and mental health issues, and I am being fired?

And you said it right. I have heard you say it in private. I have heard you say it in public. I know it irks you because you are one of those sort of balanced people. OK, we have a big deficit. That is a real problem. Maybe they are trying to lower the deficit, but they are not. That is the irony. They are not. They are about to explode trillions of dollars, most of which disproportionately goes to the wealthiest people, as you have been pointing out in our private phone calls over and over again, Senator KLOBUCHAR.

So your question to me is spot on. It is spot on. And it is why I am standing here right now at the top of another hour, because of what you are saying relentlessly, persistently, and unyieldingly.

Why are we hurting American farmers? We just talked about rural hospitals here for about 20, 30 minutes and what the threats are to them. We talked about rural Social Security centers and the threats that are to them. We talked about communities all over our country that are being hurt. And your question, why? To give tax breaks that will disproportionately go to the wealthiest Americans.

You and I are not those people that demonize wealth. We don't demonize success. I want more people to start businesses. I want more people to dream of moving on up like the Jeffersons. I want more people to have that vision. I am not one of those people that are going to be mad at you because you are very successful. I am going to be one of those people that say: You don't need more tax cuts.

We as a society have an obligation to each other, to those farmers, to those rural folks, to the cops I stood with at

the funeral of one of their colleagues in Newark 2 weeks ago. We have an obligation to them to help them get equipment to protect themselves.

This country cannot do something that is so monumentally fiscally irresponsible.

Who was the one person in the House that voted—a Republican that voted against it? A guy named MASSIE? And I watched. I had to smile and laugh because he said the quiet part out loud. He was sitting there looking at something. I saw him in an interview. He said: By their own numbers, this doesn't add up. They are adding to our deficit by the trillions.

He stayed true to his principles.

What happened to all those mighty deficit hawks in the House of Representatives on the Republican side that caved to the pressure of a President?

Ms. KLOBUCHAR. Will the Senator yield?

Mr. BOOKER. So happy you asked it in the right fashion.

I yield for a question while retaining the floor.

Ms. KLOBUCHAR. Very good. That was perfect.

So I think one of the things you talked about was just this deficit and what is happening and what we are seeing with their proposal that is going to come right before us. By some estimates, it is going to add \$37 trillion—\$37 trillion in 30 years as we go ahead. I mean, I literally cannot believe that when, in fact, we could step back now, and we can say: What things can we do? What things can we do on the Tax Code? There are a whole lot of things we can do to strengthen Social Security, strengthen what we have in our government.

When you step back and look at the economy—and I heard this the other day on a business channel. Just about a month or two ago, man, we were coming out strong. We are a country that came out of the pandemic in a stronger way than so many other countries did around the world. We are ready. Inflation was at least steady, and it was starting to come down here. Now, all of a sudden, we see chaos is up, corruption is up, and, yes, costs are up. Ask anyone at the grocery store.

One of the problems when you look at what we could be doing to address the debt is that the proposals out there are just going to make it worse. That means more interest payments. That means more interest payments on the backs of regular people. That means there is less we can do to help them as we look at what is happening now.

One of the things you raised, Senator BOOKER—and I appreciate how much you know about this—is just this prescription drug negotiation and Medicare. So what do we finally do?

Decades before you or Senator MURPHY or Senator WARNOCK got here, before I even got to this place, they made a sweetheart deal with the pharmaceutical companies, and they actually

baked in so they didn't have to negotiate prices for 73 million people on anything. They could just charge whatever they wanted for these prescription drugs.

What happened? Well, guess what happened. Suddenly, the drugs for seniors are 2 to 1 what they are in places like Canada—our neighbor, our friend—2 to 1 what they are over there. You have people driving up to Canada from Minnesota because we can see Canada from our porch, and they are going up there, trying to get less expensive drugs.

What is going on? So a whole bunch of people started to say: Let's look at this. It took years to get this done. Finally—finally—we passed a bill that said they have to negotiate, and we took the first 10 drugs. The last administration got to pick those drugs, and they picked blockbuster drugs—drugs like Eliquis, drugs like Xarelto, drugs like Januvia, Jardiance. I memorize them because I can always find people that take them. I don't make them raise their hands if they take them. But these are blockbuster drugs, and they reduced the price by like 70 percent for our seniors. That is going to kick in soon, but not if this administration messes it up.

What we have seen is everything from giving Signal lines about secret battle plans to reporters to deciding they are going to shut down the people that worked on protecting our nuclear facilities and then, oops, we made a mistake. How about when they said: We want to do something about avian flu, but we are going to fire all the people that work there. Oh, no, we are going to hire them back. That is what has been going on right now.

So when I look at this really complicated prescription drug negotiation where you are taking on some of the biggest companies in the world, I look at it and say to myself: OK. So our Secretary of Health, Kennedy—he won't even agree when he is asked under oath if he is going to keep this up. They fired a bunch of people that would work on it. They haven't shown they are going to keep this negotiation going.

Meanwhile, we have put in place a \$2,000 cap for our seniors out-of-pocket on drug costs under Medicare. That is really good. We put in place that insulin limit, 35 bucks a month.

We thank Reverend WARNOCK, and we thank you, Senator BOOKER, Senator MURPHY, and everyone that worked on that. We got that in place.

So now we have the big thing, which is the negotiation of all these drugs, because 15 more drugs are coming our way for negotiations, again blockbuster drugs—Ozempic—blockbuster drugs. Those drugs are coming their way for negotiations, but they have not committed to do that. They have not committed to do that. Even if they did commit to do it, do they even have the people to negotiate, to take on these major companies?

So my question to you, Senator BOOKER, after being up all night, after getting us through the storm of last night and into the bright sunshine of today, after holding the floor all this time—I can't even imagine how much your feet must hurt, but those hurting feet are nothing compared to why you are doing it, to how the rest of the people in the country—how they are hurting.

My question is, How can they move forward without trying to save money for the people of this country? Because what I see happening—and there are so many signs. You see it every single day. When they are getting rid of some of the people who work on it, then you are not going to be able to get the Social Security for my friend that I met from Crosslake, MN; then you are not going to be able to get that stuff done.

But I think, as we look at those cuts, it is not just the word “cut”; it is, what effect does it have on real people when they can't get their services, when our veterans, who also have complex ways that they have to deal with the government, have no one answering the phone, when they have gotten rid of veterans that have actually done the work? So my question here for people who translate this into the real world is, What is all this going to mean for people in the real world, what they are doing right now?

Mr. BOOKER. Thank you for the question, Senator KLOBUCHAR. I love that you are bringing it back to real people and what effect it is having.

What you are spelling out is something that is really important. There is a strategy that they have expressly said: They want to overwhelm you—not us. They want to overwhelm the American people. They want to flood the zone.

So I see a whole bunch of trying to do things to distract us: Gulf of Mexico, Gulf of America, Greenland—all these things to try to whip us up and not pay attention to what most Americans are concerned with: Can they make ends meet?

Even the big reconciliation bill that they are going to try to do that we have to find a way to appeal to a small group of Republican Congresspeople to stop the cutting of \$880 million out of Medicaid—we went through in great detail at length last night why that is bad, but you are pointing to something even more insidious, which is that big things are going on. They actually are cutting the support to get more people signed up with the ACA—already happened. Make it harder to sign up for the ACA. They have already cut the tax credits that are helping people that are in the ACA get resources to help with their healthcare costs. They are going after these things.

Here is one that you know really well. They are going after—as we talk about all of these parents struggling with children and family members with chronic diseases, we know one of the things that help people with chronic

diseases is having access to fresh, healthy foods. But they are cutting access to that for our kids going to school.

This administration has not only overseen in 71 days a rise in inflation, a rise in the cost of groceries, a lowering of people's 401(K)s with the stock market going on; it is not only bringing economic chaos, but they are already hurting people on the basic delivery of their services—from taking thousands of jobs out of Social Security, making it harder for people who have some problem to get it solved, to the VA, to the ACA.

Ms. KLOBUCHAR. Will the Senator yield for a question?

Mr. BOOKER. I will definitely yield for a question while retaining the floor.

Ms. KLOBUCHAR. I was thinking—as you talked about the Affordable Care Act and all the work that went into it and what came out of it, I was remembering the constant attempts to repeal that bill. I was remembering when Senator John McCain—I think you were here for this—came in and kind of did the unexpected, right? He came in here, he bucked his party, and he said no. He didn't agree with Donald Trump about this. He didn't agree with his leaders on this. He did what he thought was right.

My issue is that we all have those moments where we have to make decisions about what we think is right.

And I think about Donald Trump and he is—just now, just this week, he said he wanted to violate the Constitution, which he said practically every single hour, but he said that he would try to serve another term and that he would do this, he would do that. He is literally treating this Presidency like he is the King, and I guess Elon Musk is the court jester at his side or the White House IT guy. But the point is that he is treating this like a King.

You serve on the Judiciary Committee, and you are a student of history. You are also a scholar in terms of understanding this government and how it works. I think one of the things that are most unsettling for people, that they just don't understand, is, how you could have a President in place that doesn't respect that democracy?

I remember when we all gathered for the inauguration, and I had 4 minutes, because of my job with the Rules Committee, to address those gathered in that Rotunda. I noted that our democracy can be a hot mess right now, but it is still the best form of government that we have, that our democracy is truly our shelter in the storm. It is our shelter in the storm, to quote a great songwriter from the State of Minnesota.

The reason we don't have—I know you may have a few songwriters from there. If the Senator could yield for one question, who is your best songwriter and singer from the State of New Jersey? Just to make clear who it is.

Mr. BOOKER. Is that your question?

Ms. KLOBUCHAR. Do you yield for a question?

Mr. BOOKER. I will answer that question by avoiding it because in New Jersey, there are so many great patron saints, from the great Bon Jovi, to the great Bruce Springsteen, to the incredible Queen Latifah, to the “Chairman of the Board” from New Jersey, the great Frank Sinatra. So I am not going to pick. We have so many great singers, rappers like Redman. We are just a thriving State of—Count Basie. There are just too many. I would not force you to do that. Of course, if it is Prince—

Ms. KLOBUCHAR. Prince and Bob Dylan. But that aside, I am very impressed, Senator BOOKER, that after, what, 12 hours now, 13 hours, you still are able to make sure that you mentioned every songwriter.

But that aside, Bob Dylan once had that great line, “shelter in the storm.” Our democracy is a shelter in a storm.

Then I noted that in some countries, Presidential inaugurations are held in gilded palaces—not in the United States of America. In the United States of America, it is held in the people's House.

That is what you are doing right now, Senator BOOKER. Because the people's House is where the action should be. That is article I, and the Constitution specifically says here that we have equal branches of government.

And the final thing is that the power in that Rotunda that day—and this is where we get into Donald Trump thinking he is King. The power of that Rotunda didn't come from the people in there. It came from the people outside. That is why you see the people standing up right now—our constituents going to these townhalls, standing up, breaking the phone lines in the U.S. Senate, sending in the emails with their stories that you have heard from the Senators and that have read on the Senate floor about things that have happened to your constituents. That is the power from the outside.

The question that I ask of you is just tell me what you think people can do when you have a President in there that he thinks he is King and he thinks that a democracy is just something that he can shove aside and say whatever he wants and break every rule that people depend on, that they depend on to be able to vote and participate and have their case made. Tell me what you think. What is the answer to that?

Mr. BOOKER. Thank you, Senator. I will answer that.

I see RON WYDEN has come to the floor—for both Amy and me, one of the chair people or, at this point, the ranking member of one of the great committees.

To AMY KLOBUCHAR's question, I read a lot of angry letters—people who were demanding of me to do something to stop them—do something different: Stand up. Speak up, Senator. I am afraid.

Stand up. Speak up, Senator. I am so angry.

Stand up. Speak up, Senator. The services for my disabled child are threatened.

Stand up, speak up.

That is one of the reasons I am doing this, why my staff and I talked about this for so many days. Do something to show, to let our constituents know, to elevate their voices on the floor, to read their letters, to read their statements. It is not just New Jerseyans like you, but hundreds and hundreds of people who are calling us from other States.

But I am most moved by the letters that tell me about their pain or their challenges or their fears. But they end that question with your question: I am here to help. Tell me how I can help.

I am here to help. Tell me how I can help.

And you said it, Senator.

I read the letter of John McCain last night, his letter explaining his vote. It was so beautiful. It was tough, like he was. It was hard on the whole body. But he called to principles. Senator SCHUMER was here when I read it. It was eerie because he was describing what was wrong then, which is the same thing here—that we do need to make our country better. We do need to have a bolder vision for healthcare, a bolder vision for Social Security. We need to make them work for the people, but we are not doing it here in this body.

And this man who is not acting like a President but is trashing our constitutional traditions, violating our laws, as he is getting tied up in court but ignoring court orders—and when he gets a decision he doesn't like, he trashes the judges so badly that the Supreme Court itself finds that it has to go out and tell him to stop it.

What stopped healthcare from being taken away the last time wasn't the persuasive powers of anybody on this side of the political aisle of the Senate convincing anybody over there. I would like to think it was my eloquence for LISA MURKOWSKI. I would like to think it was my high-minded intellect that, somehow, was damaged playing too much football, but that, somehow, I got the right argument to SUSAN COLLINS. That wasn't it. I would like to think it was my ability to stand up to John McCain, himself. No, none of that. It was the people. It was the people.

You remember the little lobbyists in their wheelchairs, rolling up to Senators and speaking their heart, telling them their pain, their fear. It was people coming here and marching; people coming and flooding the calls, like they are doing now; people writing letters; people marching; people in their States, from all political spectrums, coming in and saying: This is wrong. This is wrong. This is wrong.

And so if you are asking me what we can do, I know what we can do, but we have to, as the great song—Senator

KLOBUCHAR, I had my staff print a bunch of statements I sent them. I sent them because I knew they were some of my favorite people from history. There is one here by Webster, one by Jefferson, "Letter from Birmingham Jail," Langston Hughes, something by Harper Lee, Emma Lazarus.

But here is one. Here is the answer in a poem. And forgive me for reading this. I wanted to do it at some point today. This is perfect. I see my Senator here may have a question. But I love this poem. It was written and put to song by a man named James Weldon Johnson. He was an educator, a poet, a civil rights activist. He was born in the great State of Florida. He said that this is what we have to do: "Lift Every Voice and Sing."

Lift every voice and sing,
Till Earth and Heaven ring,
Ring with the harmonies of Liberty;
Let our rejoicing rise
High as the list'ning skies,
Let it resound loud as the rolling sea.

[We must] sing a song full of the faith that the dark past has taught us,
Sing a song full of the hope that present has brought us;
Facing the rising sun of a new day begun,
Let us march on till victory is won.

It doesn't ignore the wretchedness of our history. It speaks to the truth and the excitement and the hope about that past and the virtues that our ancestors gave us. It goes on:

Stony the road we trod,
Bitter the chast'ning rod,
Felt in the days when hope unborn had died;

Yet with a steady beat,
Have not our weary feet
Come to the place for which our fathers sighed?

We have come over a way that with tears has been watered.

We have come, treading our path through the blood of the slaughtered,
Out from the gloomy past,
Till now we stand at last
Where the white gleam of the bright star is cast.

The last stanza:

God of our weary years,
God of our silent tears,
Thou who has brought us thus far on the way;

Thou who hast by Thy might,
Led us into the night,
Keep us forever in the path, we pray.

Lest our feet stray from the places, our God, where we met Thee,
Lest our hearts, drunk with the wine of the world, we forget Thee;
Shadowed beneath Thy hand,
May we forever stand,
True to our God,
True to [this] our native land.

What can we do? Do like our ancestors did. What can we do? Do like the people who never gave up, even when this country they loved didn't love them back. They kept fighting, kept pushing.

Senator KLOBUCHAR, in my time in the Senate with you, we have seen some of the most amazing, shocking moments with the Obergefell case in the Supreme Court recognizing the humanity, the dignity, the equal rights of

the LGBTQ Americans to have love and marry.

We have seen fights, in this time that we have been here, where we have seen victories on healthcare that made such a difference in people's lives. We have seen the fights while we have been here, some of the most painful moments, where we have seen the arc of the moral universe bent not by the people here, not by the people in this body. Do you think we got suffrage because a bunch of men on the Senate floor said: OK, guys, come on. Put your hands in here. Ready to give women the right to vote on three. Ready, break.

That is not how it happened. That is not how it happened. The power of the people is greater than the people in power.

Do you think we got civil rights because one day, Strom Thurmond, after filibustering for 24 hours—do you think we got civil rights because he came to the floor one day and said: I have seen the light. Let those Negro people have the right to vote.

No, we got civil rights because people marched for it, sweat for it, and John Lewis bled for it.

So I am scared too. But fear is a necessary precondition to courage. I am angry too. But my mom told me: Never let your anger consume you. Channel it. Fuel it so it can help your love be greater and stronger.

AMY KLOBUCHAR, that is what this moment needs. Our job in this body is to be truth tellers. Our job, just as you said so brilliantly, is to elevate the voices of the people of the country.

You are right, AMY KLOBUCHAR. This is the people's House. It is article I of the Constitution, and it is under assault. Article I is under assault. Our spending powers, our budgetary powers, the power to establish Agencies like the Department of Education and USAID—it is under assault by a President that doesn't respect this document.

And how do we stop them? I am sorry to say, we hold powerful positions. We were elected by great States, but we are in the minority right now. You spelled it out in the beginning of your questions to me. It will take three people of conscience on that side. It will take four here.

I am going back to my book because there is somebody that you know—I don't know if my staff put it in at the last moment. Yes, they did—Margaret Chase Smith, whom you know.

Margaret Chase Smith, a U.S. Senator from Maine, a Republican. When a demagogue rose in the land exploiting people's fear, deporting Jews who were not citizens of this country because they were accusing them of being Communists, at a time that this body was being twisted and contorted to the will of a demagogue, where nobody had the courage to stand up, it was a woman from the Republican Party that stood—I don't know—somewhere in this body.

Her feet might have been tired. Her heart might have been hurt. She might

have been afraid of the consequences to stand up to people preaching the Red Scare. But this woman in this body, a rare thing in those years—this woman in this body, which our Founders—to those imperfect geniuses who wrote this Constitution, a woman in this body wasn't imagined by our Founders. Thank God they called upon us to make a more perfect Union. And generations of activists finally made it real that women could serve in this body. She had the courage, the audacity to call her own party to task.

I read her words. She said:

I don't believe that the Republican party is in any sense a party of fear, but I do believe that the Republican Party has made an alliance with the Four Horsemen of fear—the fear of communism, the fear of labor unions, the fear of the future, the fear of progress. I think it is high time that we remembered that we have sworn to uphold and defend the Constitution.

She continues:

I think that it is high time that we remembered that the Constitution, as amended, speaks not only of the freedom of speech but also the freedom of trial by [jury].

This great Senator, this great Republican, said:

Whether it is criminal prosecutions in the court or character prosecutions in the Senate, there is little political distinction when the life of a person has been ruined.

Those of us who shout the loudest about Americanism in making character assassinations are all too frequently those who, by our own words and acts, ignore some of the basic principles [of what it means to be an American]—the right to criticize.

Without thinking the President is going to drag you from the Oval Office for criticizing him.

The right to hold unpopular beliefs.

That if you have a belief I find contemptible, it does not mean I can disappear you from a city street.

She goes on:

The right to protest.

That just for assembly and speaking up, that is not a right to cut hundreds of billions of dollars for universities' science funding.

The right to independent thought.

The exercise of these rights should not cost one single American citizen his reputation or his right to a livelihood nor should he be in danger of losing his reputation or livelihood merely because he happens to know someone who holds unpopular beliefs.

Like a law firm that represents suing the President and now has their very firm, their very livelihoods, the legal secretaries and others come after them.

Margaret Chase Smith goes on to call her party to be a woman of conscience; to stand up and say "the American people are sick and tired of being afraid to speak their minds lest they be politically smeared as 'Communists' or 'Fascists' by their opponents. Freedom of speech," she says, "is not what it used to be in America. It has been so abused by some that it is not exercised by others."

Dear God, if I stand up in this body and say it is wrong to put Pete Hegseth

in the Cabinet as Secretary of Defense because he is unqualified—he is unqualified; he is unqualified—look at a Signal chat to see how unqualified he is.

Margaret Chase Smith continues:

As a Republican, I say to my colleagues on this side of the aisle that the Republican party faces a challenge today that is not unlike the challenge it faced back in Lincoln's day. The Republican party so successfully met that challenge that it emerged from the Civil War as the champion of a united nation—in addition to being the party which unrelentingly fought loose spending and loose programs.

I doubt if the Republican Party could—simply because I don't believe the American people will uphold any political party that puts political exploitation above national interest. Surely we Republicans aren't that desperate for victory.

I don't want to see the Republican Party win that way. While it might be a fleeting victory for the Republican Party, it would be a more lasting defeat for the American people. Surely it would ultimately be suicide for the Republican Party and the two-party system [itself] that has protected our American liberties from the dictatorship of a one-party system.

You ask me, AMY KLOBUCHAR, what do we need to do? We need to call to the conscience of our comrades in the people's branch and say: How could you go along with a reconciliation that will put trillions of dollars of debt on our children and our children's children? How could you go along with cutting \$800 billion for Medicaid only to give tax cuts to the wealthiest, to disproportionately go to the wealthiest? How could you, in good conscience—if you are a fiscal hawk, if you are a Christian conservative, how could you hurt the weak to benefit the rich and powerful? That is the answer to your question.

The people of the United States of America—all of us—have to stand up and say: No, not on my watch. I am a Republican; I am a veteran; I am a police officer; I am a firefighter; I am a teacher—not in America. We won't allow this. We won't allow this. We won't allow this.

Mr. WYDEN. Will the Senator from New Jersey yield for a question?

Mr. BOOKER. I will yield for a question while retaining the floor.

Mr. WYDEN. I thank my colleague.

I have been listening to this, a Herculean presentation, for hours and hours. Your remarks reflect the urgency of our times, Senator BOOKER, and I thank you for it.

Let me frame the question this way: I hold open-to-all townhall meetings in every county in my State each year. I have had more than 1,100 of them. And since Donald Trump took office, what we have seen in these townhall meetings is fear and terror, and, I might add, record turnouts.

I was in a small town in central Oregon recently, Sisters. We had almost 1,400 people there. And what people asked about and you have touched on this morning, is, of course, Medicaid and Social Security because these are

programs involving healthcare and retirement that are really the connective tissue between the government and our people.

These programs make it possible for people to pay for essentials. They are not going to fancy places. They are buying groceries. They are paying rent. They are buying medicine.

We had one separate townhall meeting, I say to my colleague, just with Federal employees whose goal is to get out in the woods and help prevent fire in Oregon. I organized this meeting. They, too, are terrified. They have dedicated their lives to trying to help.

We serve the American people. And I am telling you, I have seen service in action over the last few hours with your reflecting the urgency of our times. Our salaries are paid for by taxpayers, and I am particularly troubled by the fact that we are getting all these reports that many Senators are saying: I am not going to do townhall meetings.

They are on the other side of the aisle. As I said, I have had 1,100 of them, 10 of them so far this year. It seems to me, that is refusing to answer to constituents.

You have been here all night, and you are setting a very clear example about what it means to push back against authoritarianism.

So just like I have townhall meetings, my question to my friend from New Jersey is, What are you hearing from home? It is a pretty straightforward question, but it sure as heck is what the times are all about because people are saying: What are you doing back there? What is important to you?

I talk about town meetings. I had a tele-townhall, I say to my friend, during the speech that was being made on the floor of the House. I had 30,000 people participating. That is a lot for my small State. So I know what I am doing, and I think the American people would like to hear a bit about what my colleague is hearing from his State and why it is so important that he is out here mopping his brow today trying to stay on his feet, making the case for the urgency of our time. What are you hearing?

Mr. BOOKER. Thank you. Thank you, Senator.

I am hearing a lot of fear, a lot of anger. I am hearing heads of hospitals say that this is outrageous, the threats to our hospitals in New Jersey. I am hearing heads of critical health services tell me what the Medicaid cuts will mean to their organizations. I am hearing from Catholic priests who are doing extraordinary things in service of their communities. I am hearing from citizens who are veterans who got fired from their jobs.

I am hearing from people, as I read letters, who work in the Social Security Agency and the chaos that has been created and the deteriorating service to seniors. I have heard from seniors who are terrified about what is being done to Social Security and how it might affect their lives.

I am hearing demands from our constituents, people demanding, Senator, that we do something about the outrages they are seeing.

I think that when I hear New Jerseyans, by larger and larger numbers—and I will be back in my State. I know we were planning meetings and a townhall and a lot more this weekend. But I have to say now, more than ever, we need more of it. We need more of it.

And one of the reasons I am here is because I want to elevate those voices of my constituents. I want to tell the stories that my constituents are writing in about and lift their voices and tell them that they are seen; they are heard.

I have been going through section by section, as you pointed out: Social Security, a section on healthcare, a section on education and the Department of Education and the work that it does. I have been going point by point through.

This is the agenda. I didn't know how much of it I could get through. But we laid it out. We have binders for each one of these issues. Immigration, we went through. We have housing, the environment, farmers and food, veterans, the corruption that has been normalized by this President, the rule of law, public safety—all the ways that we know that there is a crisis in our country, and we, as a nation, need to be more attuned to it and doing more to meet this crisis, to rise up and defend our country, defend our well-being.

And all the while, things are happening that you know. You are the chairman of the Finance Committee, and you have these insights. We have talked about them, about what is about to happen in this reconciliation process. I mean, that is one of the more stunning things that is almost immediate on this floor.

I think we are going to see about the tariffs tomorrow and see how far the President will go. But we do know, whatever it is, it is going to affect prices that are going to continue to go up for Americans. This inflation has continued to go up for Americans as the stock market continues to go down, as people's 401(k)s have lost so much money.

The uncertainty I am hearing from businesses in New Jersey, the chaos that they feel about the economy—the consumer confidence in this country has gone way down.

If you ask the question: Are you better off than you were 71 days ago, not many Americans could say that they are better off. Their costs are higher. Their groceries are higher. They are soon to see everything from car prices to food go higher. Their retirement security is under attack. Their healthcare is under attack. They are losing their Department of Education. They are less safe from infectious diseases abroad. There are so many things that we have to talk to and try to stop.

You are our leader on the Finance Committee, and you know that the tax

thing they are trying to run through now. I am trying to get my head wrapped around these whacky parliamentary things that even the podcast I listen to in the morning to inform me say they even spoke about this years and years ago. But they said, oh, this is too crazy. We can't do this, to try to tell the American people somehow that the trillions of dollars of tax cuts that we are going to give disproportionately to the wealthiest people of all, oh, there is nothing to see here; that has a zero impact on the budget, so we can do it through reconciliation. That is the biggest hocus-pocus, manufactured artifice that I have ever seen to obscure the truth in America.

What the Republicans are trying to do is cut massively into healthcare for Americans in order to give tax cuts disproportionately to the wealthiest who don't need it and to drive up the deficits, making our children and our children's children have a more dangerous economy and higher and higher debt payments to make—debt payments that will skyrocket higher than any expense the government makes.

We are literally about to see something go through reconciliation that threatens to sacrifice our children's future so that the richest of the rich can get richer.

I know there are a lot of people who are angry, who are worried, who are feeling overwhelmed, who are struggling to make ends meet. But I know of only one way to do this—and I am trying to do it myself—is to do things differently, to stand up, to speak up, to not act like this is just normal in our country.

There is not a President, from Eisenhower to Reagan to Bush, on the Republican side who could ever imagine a day where, in a U.N. vote, we side with Russia and China against the Western democracies that we saved in World War II; that we stormed the beaches of Normandy for; that we did the Berlin airlift for; that we did the Marshall Plan for.

We designed the world order, and now we are turning our back on it. We designed the rules-based world order, and we are turning our back on those organizations, from trashing NATO to getting out of the World Health Organization, to getting out of the group of countries coming together to deal with climate change.

We are not leading the planet Earth anymore. Our allies are saying openly they can't trust us. The quotes are unbelievable by our allies:

Generations of Americans all know one thing: Russia is our adversary. This principle was reinforced after Russia's brutal, unprovoked invasion of Ukraine in February of 2022.

The American public knows a lot about Putin and his cronies and what they have done to the brave people of Ukraine. Russia has abducted over 19,000 children, taking them from their families and homeland.

Russia has targeted civilians, bombing hospitals and schools, including a strike on a children's hospital during the supposed cease-fire negotiations just a few weeks ago.

Russian forces have raped and assaulted Ukrainian civilians, and Russia has tortured prisoners of war.

One would think, given all the horrors inflicted by Russia, that the United States would continue to treat Russia as the adversary and the pariah as other Western democracies treat it. But that is not what Trump has done. He has done the opposite.

On the third anniversary of Russia's unprovoked invasion of Ukraine, the administration joined Russia and North Korea in voting against the resolution condemning the innovation that has killed over 12,000 Ukrainian civilians and injured 30,000. Imagine that.

I had the Foreign Minister of a great ally in NATO in my office looking at me and saying, basically, What the heck?

My friend CHRIS MURPHY, on the floor, we sit close to each other. He is further up the dais than I in Foreign Relations, and this stuff is insanity.

Here is NBC News:

President Donald Trump has said Ukraine—not Russia—started the war. He's called [the] Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy—not Vladimir Putin—[he called Zelenskyy] a dictator. Meanwhile, Trump's administration is standing down on a suite of tough anti-Kremlin policies.

In just over a month, Trump has executed a startling realignment of American foreign policy, effectively throwing U.S. support behind Moscow and rejecting the tight alliance with Kyiv cultivated by former President Joe Biden.

The extraordinary pivot has upended decades of hawkish foreign policy toward Russia that provided a rare area of bipartisan consensus in an increasingly divided nation. Trump's recent moves have drawn international attention, unsettling U.S. allies in Europe and thrilling conservative populists who favor a turn away from Zelenskyy.

The new posture was put in stark relief on Friday during a tense Oval Office meeting—

We all remember this—

between Trump and Zelenskyy. The leaders clashed in front of the press, raising questions about the future of American support for Kyiv.

Alliances and partners around the world are our biggest strength against any U.S. adversary or competitor, from China to Russia to Iran to North Korea. We are the strongest Nation on the planet Earth, but our strength is multiplied and magnified when we stand in alliance with those nations that share our values and are bonded to us and are committed to us.

In fact, the only time article 5 in the United Nations—that article that says that if one person in NATO is attacked, everyone is attacked and they all join together—that one time it happened was 9/11, when our NATO allies stood up with America.

And so look at NATO. It has been the bedrock of the international order for 80 years. It was created in 1949 by 12 countries, including the United States,

to provide collective security and, in many ways, provide collective security against the Soviet Union. Since then, 20 more countries have joined NATO through 10 rounds of enlargement, bringing the total number of NATO countries to 32. The most recent additions were Sweden in 2024 and Finland in 2023, who applied to join NATO in 2022 after Russia invaded Ukraine, because those countries are realizing that the authoritarian dictator that Putin is—who threatens his smaller neighbors—those other nations have realized they should be standing with NATO; that we have a principle of collective defense, as I said, enshrined in article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty. “Collective defense” means an attack on one ally is considered an attack against all allies.

A strong NATO has made America safer and stronger and more prosperous. My colleagues on both sides of the aisle recognize this. I have been in this body for 12 years. I have been told by people who I have learned from about foreign policy when I came here as a mayor and leaned on people like CHRIS COONS and leaned on people like CHRIS MURPHY, leaned on people like John McCain, leaned on people like LINDSEY GRAHAM, leaned on people like Senator Rubio.

We helped pass a law that enshrined congressional action before the President can withdraw from NATO. That law passed with overwhelming bipartisan support—87 Senators voted yes.

Senator Rubio, now Secretary of State, said:

NATO serves as an essential military alliance that protects shared military interests and enhances America's international presence. Any decision to leave the alliance should be rigorously debated and considered by the U.S. Congress with the input of the American people.

Two weeks ago, though, on March 19, 2025, in response to news that the Pentagon may give up the role of supreme allied commander in Europe, a position held by an American general since the NATO alliance was formed in 1949, Republican Senator WICKER and Representative ROGERS signaled their opposition in an extraordinary joint statement warning Donald Trump that that change would “risk undermining American deterrence around the globe.”

I want to read some of the comments of NATO partners about the damage that has been done in just the last 71 days of Trump's leadership in upending the world order that has helped to keep America stronger and safer and more prosperous.

The EU's top diplomat said “the free world needs a new leader.” Think about that. Think about that. The EU's top diplomat has said, in response to Donald Trump, that now the free world needs a new leader.

Every President of my lifetime was seen as the leader of the free world, and now the rest of the free world, its top diplomat, is saying it is time for that to change.

The new German Chancellor said:

My absolute priority will be to strengthen Europe as quickly as possible so that, step by step, we can really achieve independence from the USA.

He went on to say:

I never thought I would have to say something like this on a television program. But after Donald Trump's statements last week at the latest, it is clear that the Americans, at least this part of the Americans, this administration, are largely indifferent to the fate of Europe.

Our ancestors saved Europe. Our ancestors stormed beaches in Normandy, paratrooped into Europe, liberated concentration camps. Our ancestors sacrificed blood and treasure for Europe. It turned Germany from one of history's worst despotic states into a global economic power and a democracy.

We were there at the Berlin airlift. We were there for the Marshall Plan. And now Europe is saying:

It is clear that the Americans, at least this part of the Americans, this administration, are largely indifferent to the fate of Europe.

That is not true. That is not true. And as long as I have breath in my body and blood in my veins, I will join with the other people on both sides of the aisle—God bless you, ROGER WICKER—for standing with the understanding that America is the strongest Nation in the world, but our strength is multiplied and magnified when we stand with our allies, from Germany to Japan, from Australia to Iceland; that when our country stands up, we don't bully our neighbors like Canada. We don't threaten our allies like Iceland, like Greenland. We don't threaten smaller, weaker nations like Panama. We don't upend the world order.

Donald Trump does not speak for me. He does not speak for the traditions of this body. He doesn't speak for the people that are buried—Americans that are buried in fields in Germany and in France and all over Europe.

Here is former Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin's speech to NATO and the Atlantic Council.

On April 4, 1949 . . . 12 democracies came together in the wake of two world wars and at the dawn of a new Cold War. They all remembered, as President Truman put it, “the sickening blow of unprovoked aggression.”

That is what Truman said. They were coming together against the sickening blow of unprovoked aggression.

Do you hear that, Putin?

So they vowed to stand together for their collective defense and to safeguard freedom and democracy across Europe and North America. They made a solemn commitment, declaring that an armed attack against one ally would be considered “an attack against them all.”

Now that commitment was enshrined in Article Five of the North Atlantic Treaty. It was the foundation of NATO. And it still is.

On that bedrock, we have built the strongest and most successful defensive alliance in human history.

And, I will say, one of the most prosperous blocs of democratic countries.

Throughout the Cold War, NATO deterred Soviet aggression against Western Europe—

and prevented a third world war. In the 1990s, NATO used air power to stop ethnic cleansing in Bosnia and Herzegovina and in Kosovo. And the day after September 11, 2001, when al-Qaeda terrorists attacked our country, including slamming a plane into the Pentagon—

Not far from here—

NATO invoked Article Five for the first and only time in its history.

Mr. COONS. Will the Senator yield for a question?

Mr. BOOKER. I yield for a question. While retaining the floor, I yield to one of my best friends in the Senate. I yield to one of the smartest guys I know. I yield to the guy who handed me the chairmanship of the committee that oversaw world public health and Africa and still reminds me that he knows more Swahili than I will ever know.

I yield to the guy who when he speaks up in the Senate, people on both sides of the aisle listen. I yield to my friend who has real friendships, who when I came to him and said: We are seeing the worst famines on the planet Earth; that Joe Biden didn't put enough money into the World Food Programme, he went to another appropriator over there, another friend of ours, LINDSEY GRAHAM, and together we got billions of dollars of more that saved hundreds of thousands of lives.

You are a prince of a man. You are my friend. You are somebody that is a hero, who folks don't know their name and the countries that you have affected with your strength on foreign policy.

Dear God, my friend, I yield the floor for a question, while retaining the floor. Excuse me. I want to say that correctly. I yield for a question while retaining the floor. I do not yield the floor.

Mr. COONS. I ask my friend and colleague from New Jersey if he is familiar with Psalm 30:5.

Mr. BOOKER. Not at this moment.

Mr. COONS. And if not, I offer to repeat it because I think it speaks to this moment.

Weeping may endure for a night, but joy comes in the morning.

Now, this is a holy month. It is the month of Lent. It is the month of Ramadan. It is the period of reflection preceding Passover. And my question to my colleague is rooted in a scripture in the Psalms known to both of us, one widely engaged in, in these days:

Weeping may endure for a night, but joy comes in the morning.

This is a reminder both of the possibility of redemption, of the urgency of hope, and of your nightlong sacrifice on this floor.

Let me ask, if I might, two more questions of my friend and colleague. To my colleague from New Jersey: Are you familiar with a front-page story on the Washington Post entitled “Trump's USAID cuts cripple American response to Myanmar earthquake,” an article running today in the Washington Post?

Mr. BOOKER. I have not read the paper this day.

Mr. COONS. I had suspected that that might be the case, given that my colleague from New Jersey has dedicated his night to standing tall and fighting hard to make sure that the people of the United States know what is going on.

I will share with you, just for a moment, that it hurt my heart to watch the national evening news last night and see a Chinese humanitarian emergency response team celebrated as they pulled survivors out of the earthquake rubble in Myanmar. It did not hurt my heart that there are Chinese nationals providing emergency relief, but it hurt my heart that exactly those people who are the very best in the world at responding to humanitarian crisis, exactly those people had just received termination letters and their work with USAID had just been suspended.

Normally, in every humanitarian crisis I have known in my lifetime, the first in are the men and women of USAID and the U.S. Armed Forces. Whether a tsunami, a tornado, wildfires, or an earthquake, we had world-leading humanitarian response capabilities.

And I think it is a tragedy—and it is reflected in both this article that I have asked my colleague about and in the response of the world—that we have created an enormous opening for the PRC to come in and do what we previously did so well.

Let me ask another question, if I might, of my colleague: Are you familiar with what has just happened to food banks all over our Nation in terms of an announcement about impending deliveries of badly needed surplus food? This, I suspect, will be the focus of your future comments on agriculture, but I mention it as something that has impacted my State and, I suspect, yours as well.

Mr. BOOKER. First of all, I want to say this is when, when you ask me a question—to yield for a question—I want to say I yield for a question while retaining the floor, and I want to say to my colleague, I am familiar with some of this, but I—if as a part of a question to me and not anything resembling a colloquy, I will yield for a question while retaining the floor if you have another question.

(Mr. MORENO assumed the Chair.)

To my colleague, are you familiar with an article “USDA halts millions of dollars worth of deliveries to food banks”?

Mr. BOOKER. I pretty sure I am. I am.

Mr. COONS. I will simply, then, ask my colleague a question.

Mr. BOOKER. Therefore, if you are going to ask me a question, I yield for a question while retaining the floor.

Mr. COONS. To my colleague, I ask the question: Are you familiar with the cuts that have been imposed on the U.S. Department of Agriculture, suspending hundreds of millions of meals to Americans in need and the justification for that being offered?

Mr. BOOKER. I am familiar. I have mentioned it earlier in these last 15 hours, so thank you.

Mr. COONS. Last question.

Mr. BOOKER. I yield for a question while retaining the floor.

Mr. COONS. To my colleague from New Jersey, I ask the question: Are you familiar with when, whether, and why NATO has invoked article 4 and how the service and the sacrifice that followed reinforces exactly the point I believe my colleague was beginning to speak to, which is the common cause and the common purpose shown by all of our NATO allies in America's greatest moment of need in recent decades after the attacks of 9/11?

Mr. BOOKER. I am very familiar with that. It haunts me that when America was in crisis—I live 11 miles from Ground Zero.

Mr. COONS. To my colleague, are you aware which of our European NATO allies lost per capita the highest number of their soldiers in combat serving alongside American servicemembers, a nation I visited, a nation whose servicemembers I visited, a nation that is today aggrieved by comments made recently? Are you familiar with our trusted ally Denmark?

Mr. BOOKER. Yes, I am. That country that has shed more blood than any of our allies, side-by-side, fighting with America is Canada—is Canada.

Mr. COONS. Denmark.

Mr. BOOKER. Oh, it is Denmark.

Mr. COONS. Denmark lost per capita, I believe—excuse me. Let me simply ask of my colleague one more question.

Mr. BOOKER. Thank you very much. I yield for a question while retaining the floor.

Mr. COONS. Is my colleague aware that broadly distributed across our NATO allies is service and sacrifice, including the loss of their troops in combat and that every single loss in combat was a loss of great service and sacrifice by our NATO allies?

Mr. BOOKER. Yes, I am familiar. And I am grateful for your making those points.

As we threaten Greenland, Denmark tried to bully them in a way that—with rhetoric that fashions more after the behavior of Vladimir Putin's threatening before the Ukrainian invasion, as opposed to what allies do who are grateful for shared sacrifice, who are grateful for shared honor, who are grateful for shared prosperity.

What is happening right now, to me, is shameful. How we are treating our allies is unacceptable. And the tariffs that will be imposed will indeed hurt Canada and other NATO allies, but they will hurt us in the long run more, not only with the immediacy of the driving up of prices for Americans, but what the President is doing as he turns his back on Republican traditions and Democratic traditions, it is going to hurt us more as a nation in the long run as other countries look to other places for leadership of the free world.

Mr. COONS. Will my colleague yield for another question?

Mr. BOOKER. I yield for a question while retaining the floor.

Mr. COONS. Is my colleague familiar with the testimony of Gen. Jim Mattis, a decorated four-star Marine Corps general who served as Secretary of Defense in the previous Trump administration who testified about what the consequences would be if we were to defund development and diplomacy?

Mr. BOOKER. I hope that the colleague of mine who, again, has been a mentor, a friend on all they things foreign policy, my belief is that he is referring to when General Mattis sat before the United States Senate and said very pointedly: If you cut the foreign aid, if you cut organizations like USAID, if you cut programs in the State Department, then buy me more bullets.

Mr. COONS. Will my colleague yield for a final question?

Mr. BOOKER. I yield for a question while retaining the floor.

Mr. COONS. Does my colleague have an opinion about whether it strengthens or harms America in our national security to have an earned reputation as a nation of compassion, a nation that comes to the aid of those suffering through humanitarian disasters, a nation of compassion that provides healthcare and access for retirement in decency, a nation that cares for the least of these on the margins of the world and that has a just and inclusive society at home? Does my colleague have an opinion about whether it strengthens or weakens our Nation at home and abroad to earn a reputation for compassion and reliability or instead to deserve a reputation for unreliability and cruelty?

Mr. BOOKER. So this is the powerful thing about my friend whom I went with on my first trip to the continent of Africa as a Senator, and I remember flying into Zimbabwe. The leader of that country had passed away, and you always correct me on my pronunciation so I am going to try my best pronunciation—Mnangagwa.

Mr. COONS. Mnangagwa.

Mr. BOOKER. Thank you, sir.

The alligator was his reputation—had taken over as his leadership. And we, this bipartisan merry group of Senators were going there to sit there in a unified, bipartisan way and say to this new leader: You need to honor democratic principles. You need to honor free and fair elections, that we want to be your partner, we want to be your friend, but it is time for a new peaceful democratic Zimbabwe.

And as we landed—I don't know if you remember—he was landing, too, in the airport. And he was coming from China. He was coming from China which has different values than we have.

In fact, you and I both see now all over the continent of Africa a competition. We come with USAID. We come with PEPFAR. We come with a program called AGOA, helping with economic development. We come with scientists that stand in the breach against the worst infectious diseases.

One of the most courageous things I saw CHRIS COONS do in my life was when the Ebola scare was happening 8 years ago and was starting to show up on our shores, you did something that people were afraid to do.

You went to Africa to visit with the people from our country that are there fighting Ebola. You had to come and quarantine when you came back to make sure you didn't have it. It was amazing because you were going there to say to the world, I, CHRIS COONS, Senator from Delaware, is here, but America is here. America knows that an infectious disease anywhere is a threat to public health everywhere. America knows that when it comes to the globe, Martin Luther King was right in his spiritual proclamation in the "Letter from the Birmingham Jail" that we are all caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a common garment of destiny, that injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere.

I have been to where you have been, Kenya to Tanzania, traveling with you to Ouagadougou. You used to make me smile when I used to say the capital of Burkina Faso. Ouagadougou, my friend.

There is a word I learned from a language, the Bantu language. It basically roughly translates into this:

I am because we are. I am because we are.

America has learned the power of soft power. General Mattis knew much cheaper investment, much more success, string of successes we have had in the last 25 years have been with our soft power, not with our 20-year wars in places like Iraq and Afghanistan.

General Mattis knew that. He gave wisdom. He said: Do not cut the State Department. Do not cut USAID. They are making an invaluable contribution to fighting terrorism, to fighting instability, to spreading democracy, to fighting infectious diseases when we go and stand.

But now, we are shrinking. We are retreating. We are pulling back. We are cutting aid. And when crises are happening like we are seeing in Myanmar right now, we don't even have the personnel to be there to help people. But you know who does? China. And they show up, and they leverage influence—you and I know this—to the continent of Africa. Here, take our money, take our money. Be in debt to us now. We have control. By the way, we want a military port here like they have right next to us in Djibouti. The Chinese are playing the long game, and Trump is playing into their hands and weakening our Nation, not just against infectious diseases, not just against the global fight against climate change, not just against the economic opportunities that we are missing out in the Continent of Africa.

Guess what, if you don't know this: By 2050, one out of every four people on the planet Earth will live on the continent of Africa. One of three working-age people on the planet Earth will be

on the continent of Africa. China is playing the long game, not only critical rare earth minerals but the economic power of the most populous continent on the planet.

And what are we doing with Trump? We are doing the Michael Jackson. We are moonwalking away from that continent, saying: China, go ahead.

I love you CHRIS COONS. I am the ranking member of this subcommittee inspired by you, CHRIS COONS, and the work that you and me and LINDSAY GRAHAM and John McCain did over the last 10 years is being swept away as our allies are saying frightening things; that they have to look elsewhere for leadership and not to the people who saved the free world.

It is a shame what we are doing to my grandparents' generation, with my grandmother with her war bonds and her victory garden and my grandfather building bombers at the Willow Run bomber plant in Michigan. All the country came together and sacrificed for the war effort.

We saved Europe. We bled and died on that European Continent. There are—and you have seen them—these fields of crosses and you see some Stars of David and you see some Muslim graves. You see it all.

Our American boys died. And yet we still invested in that continent. We still invested with the Marshall Plan. We still invested with the Berlin Airlift. We still stood up to communism. And a great Republican President—a great Republican President—who stood up in front of a Russian autocratic leader and said: Gorbachev, tear down this wall.

And what is Trump going to be remembered for? I really love Vladimir Putin. Zelenskyy is a dictator. You are my friend.

You and I both visit VA halls, and occasionally, we meet a World War II veteran. In my State, there are some incredible men that still wear their hat. If they can, they stand with pride. They are called the "greatest generation."

And what are we doing to their legacy? What are we doing to their legacy, CHRIS COONS?

I am going to keep talking unless somebody wants to say: Will the Senator yield for a question?

Mr. MARKEY. Will the Senator yield for a question?

Mr. BOOKER. I yield for a question while retaining the floor.

Mr. MARKEY. First of all, thank you so much for what you are doing, Senator BOOKER. You are drawing our Nation's attention to what Donald Trump and Elon Musk and DOGE are seeking to do to our country, especially the most vulnerable in our society.

You, Senator BOOKER, you have been a champion for the poor, for the sick, for the disabled, for those most in need throughout your entire life. That is who you are. You are absolutely a champion for those who need help the most.

So as we look at what Donald Trump is proposing, to destroy the Department of Education, just to level it, knowing that title I money goes to the poorest children in Newark, in Boston, so that they can have as close to an equal footing as is possible so they, too, can compete to ensure they enjoy the American dream.

To dock Medicaid, knowing that there are 338,000 people just in Massachusetts alone who are on disabilities, who need Medicaid in order to deal with those afflictions, which their families need a little bit of help to deal with, to begin a process of saying that Social Security is a Ponzi scheme and knowing that, ultimately, they need the billions of dollars for their tax breaks for millionaires and billionaires, and they have to get it out of education. They have to get it out of Medicaid. They have to get it out of veterans' benefits. They have to get it out of Social Security.

We know what the plot is. The plot is to get \$2 trillion out of programs that affect ordinary people in order to have tax breaks for the wealthiest people in our Nation. And most of it will come out of healthcare. It will come out of Medicaid, ultimately, out of Medicare, out of the Affordable Care Act, out of veterans' benefits—healthcare, healthcare, healthcare, healthcare, healthcare for every family, for the wealthiest in our society who don't need a tax break.

The one thing they don't need right now is a tax break, especially when Elon Musk and Jeff Bezos and Mark Zuckerberg now control more wealth than the bottom 50 percent of our Nation combined. Do they really need a tax break? I mean, I know the President put them right behind him at his inauguration, but oh my God, the Cabinet sits behind billionaires? The Founding Fathers are spinning in their graves thinking about how they have perverted what is supposed to be the way in which our government, our country works.

So I thank you for your incredible leadership. You are putting the spotlight on what is going wrong in this country right now, this oligarchy seeking to take over our Nation.

So I thank the Senator for what he is doing, and he is just so consistent with his whole life, what he stands for. What he stands for on this on the floor of the Senate today is a conscience—a conscience for the Nation.

Can the Senator tell the Senate today—the Nation—what does it mean if we continue down this path of Donald Trump and Elon Musk and DOGE for those families who need help the most in our society?

Mr. BOOKER. I so appreciate the Senator, and I want to tell folks that when I wrote my book, I thought I knew this man here. I did a lot about environmental justice in my book. I did a lot about these toxic chemicals out there that are threatening our people.

I came to the office of the Senate one day so humbled because I told him: I

knew you as my colleague. We both got here around the same time. But I had no idea of the kinds of things you did in the U.S. House of Representatives, how many bills that made a difference in people's lives in Boston, in Newark, in Camden, in Passaic. You are one of the people that, after a few years here, I discovered in 2015, writing my book, how amazing your career is. And now having served in the Senate about the same amount of time, I am so grateful for you.

You have been so consistent in why you came here, not forgetting the people you have been fighting for for your whole career. So your question is right aligned with that point.

It was said earlier about things that humanity's biggest fight, humanity's biggest consistent theme is us versus them or just us. I don't like when you pit one group in this country against another group. It is not us versus the billionaires or us versus the Republicans; it is understanding what is best for "we the people." How can we create a more perfect Union?

I will tell you this right now, we are a Union in trouble. Compared to our global peers, we have higher disease rates, higher diabetes rates, higher cancer rates, higher maternal mortality rates, higher premature birth rates, and higher infant mortality rates.

There are so many things going on in this country that should not go on. But yet we are a nation of utter abundance. We are a nation of incredible wealth and resources, and we have proven in our past to be a nation of incredible vision. That is why I don't understand why we are playing so small, why we have a President that is playing so small. It is not coming here like Presidents of the past and saying "We together," from Reagan, to Clinton, to Obama. There is a big challenge, America, and we together are going to get into the room and do sausage making, Republicans and Democrats, and we are going to find a way to write great legislation.

Whatever you want to say about Joe Biden, he was a big President because he didn't try to do things by Executive fiat or this quote of Donald Trump's I put here, "the primacy of the Executive," ignoring our Constitution.

Do you know how many bipartisan bills were hammered out here? I see another dear friend of mine, MARK WARNER. Do you know how many bipartisan bills MARK WARNER was at the table for, my senior Senator who was chairman of Intelligence? We did a bipartisan infrastructure act when Trump, in his first term, had infrastructure week every other week. We did a Chips and Science bill. He is trying to claw back the money. But we, together—I still remember that classified SCIF where the whole Senate was there and our national security team, and Gina Raimondo put forward the crisis in our country, the vulnerabilities, and we came out of that room, we got into our

rooms, and we hammered out a great Chips and Science bill.

Decades went by in this body with doing nothing on gun violence—decades. Courageous people on the Republican side, friends of mine that surprised me that stood up—like Senator CORNYN—and said: We are going to do something. I have my lines, you have your lines, but let's find space in the middle.

We did programs. If you come to New Jersey, the community violence intervention money is lowering murder rates in places like Newark by over 50 percent and helping to get it done, along with our great law enforcement officers.

The incredible thing about that now is Trump is trying to claw back that money, violating the separation of powers because we decide how we are spending money in America, not the Executive. Read the Constitution.

So you and I both know that a big President would come here and say: Let's do some legislation.

But John McCain—and I read it in the middle of the night—but John McCain—it is really important—John McCain—I won't read it, but I will tell it—voted against the healthcare last time, the taking away of healthcare from millions of Americans, and said that it is because of the dysfunction of this body that we don't come together and do something bigger and bolder to provide better healthcare, to bring the ideas from both sides and expand the opportunities for Americans and replace the imperfections of the Affordable Care Act with smarter and better things.

Not Donald Trump. He is repeating—why?—the mistakes, but not with the ACA, which affects tens of millions of Americans, with Medicaid, which affects 70 to 100 million Americans. Why? You ask why. Well, we know why. There are two things that this will achieve—two things. One, as you said, it is because he wants to not just renew the Trump tax cuts but expand them to have disproportionate benefits to the wealthiest.

I wish the wealthiest in the country, names that we know, people like Elon Musk, would say: I don't want a tax cut. I wish he would say the truth: I don't need a tax cut.

But that is one of the reasons. He wants to renew a program that gave disproportionate money. But that is not the only reason. There is a cruelty in what he is doing. It is so offensive. He seems to have no respect for people with disabilities. He made fun of a journalist with a disability once. He seems to have no respect for people who are working hard and struggling but still can't make ends meet, no respect for people that are afraid of his language, of his threats. They think that what he is doing to Social Security might mean they don't have it.

What he is saying about Medicare and Medicaid are lies. He has more registered lies than any President of my

lifetime. They don't think they can trust this President not to hurt them because he already is.

I was told by my parents that what defines you as a person is not what happens to you but how you choose to respond.

What happens to us as a nation is not what defines us. They can bomb us at Pearl Harbor and attack us on 9/11. The American character was defined by how we responded to those crises. Yes, there have been major political crises before, but we responded by bending the arc of our Nation more towards justice, taking care of more and more people, saying that we belong to each other in America. It is "we the people." It is "we the people."

I see the standing of my friend MARK WARNER. I don't know if he has a question, but I know what I am told to say if he asks me to yield for a question.

Mr. WARNER. Will the Senator yield for a question?

Mr. BOOKER. I yield for a question while retaining the floor.

Mr. WARNER. Mr. President, if I may join my friend and colleague from Massachusetts, one, to celebrate the Senator from New Jersey's endurance, his willingness to continue to make his case in as clear terms as possible.

Not having been here last night at 6:30, I do wonder, when he started this speech-a-thon at 6:30, whether the bob and the weave and the move were quite as strong or was he firmly attached to the podium.

The fact that you are going on more than 12 hours now and you look like you have hours ahead and hours before you sleep and knowing that there are other Members who have a question, including the majority leader, I just want to be brief with mine.

You have talked a lot with great passion about the damage done domestically. As chairman of the Intelligence Committee and now vice chairman, I have been aghast at the sloppiness of this administration time after time after time in terms of their treatment of classified information.

In the first 2 weeks of the administration, strangely, a couple hundred CIA agents' identities were revealed on a nonclassified chain. These probationary employees, these new employees—the American Government had spent a couple hundred thousand dollars on each of them. You have to get a security clearance. You have to get them trained. Unfortunately, these folks can't deploy abroad. They can't deploy undercover because their names were carelessly put on an unsecured channel.

You say, well, that was just a one-off. Well, what about a week or so later? The DOGE boys print a whole list of Federal properties that should be for sale. They quickly take it down a few hours later, realizing they once again have screwed up. But in putting up that list, they put on classified dark sites that the American Government, again, spends millions of dollars to protect.

More recently as well, the DOGE boys, either ignorantly or maliciously, either one—just plain stupid—put out the list of a classified Agency, its budget, total head count—again, all classified information.

Senator, one thing I can tell you, and I know you know this as well, if this had happened to a line intelligence officer or a line military officer, there would be no question—your butt would be fired.

As a matter of fact, we got information yesterday that there had been a DHS employee who had inadvertently—inadvertently—put a journalist on a chatline. Guess what happened. The guy was fired.

So when it came to this incident now called Signalgate or the Signalgate fiasco, where you have the leading members of this administration debating where and how we should bomb the Houthis, including specific information of who will be hit and when, I was—Senator BOOKER, I was down in Hampton Roads this week, and these were the communities that surround the Norfolk Naval Station. The Norfolk Naval Station is where the Truman, the aircraft carrier, has been deployed from. It is the aircraft carrier that the flights that attacked the Houthis flew off of.

I can tell you one thing, Senator BOOKER: These people were pissed off that there had been this level of carelessness about their loved ones, that if it had gotten in the wrong hands, it would have cost American lives.

So, Senator BOOKER, as you put down the litanies of all of the challenges that have been raised by this administration, I will ask you a simple question: Do you agree that this pattern—not a one-off—

Mr. BOOKER. Yes.

Mr. WARNER.—this pattern of sloppiness endangers our national security?

Mr. BOOKER. Yes. Absolutely, yes.

I love that you gave that litany, Senator.

I benefited from your leadership on the Intel Committee. You are one of the people that—when things go down on planet Earth, you are one of the small handful of people with the highest security clearance here. You know before rank-and-file Senators do. We have had so many conversations about threat matrices and what our enemies are doing. You have sent me to the SCIF and said “I can’t talk to you about this; go down to the SCIF and ask for the information” and helped me to fill out my understanding of national security.

But I am stunned by this President. All that I have read in the SCIF about what Russia is doing to this country—I am stunned and angry at this President and what he is doing to us by cozying up to Putin and turning his back on our allies.

But the sloppiness, the unqualified leaders that he has put in place—it has caused us to be more at risk. And Signalgate—you said it. If that had

happened under any other President, Republican or Democrat, whoever controlled the Senate would have hearings. They would want to know: Was this pattern and practice? Did these Signal conversations happen before and we only know about this one because somehow you pulled in a journalist?

Well, that is a violation of the law because their disappearing messages were destroying government documents that the executive branch has a legal obligation to keep. And classified materials—putting it out there saying there was nothing classified about that, lying, then they put up the actual—if there is nothing classified, then release the whole thing.

To the wisdom of people like you—again, more wisdom and experience at intel than me—it is clear that was sensitive, probably classified. But we should be having hearings and accountability.

I keep going back to how this document is being undermined and attacked by this President. And one of the powers and responsibilities that we swore to uphold—every one of us swore to uphold that we are to be a check on the administration.

Before I yield to the next question from Senator SCHUMER, I want to talk about Senator SCHUMER. I want to say something and get it off my chest.

Senator MURPHY, we passed the 15-hour mark. I want to thank Senator MURPHY in particular because he has been with me the whole night. He hasn’t left my side. In some ways, that repaid the 15 hours because we called CHUCK SCHUMER 9 years ago—9 years ago. I remember exactly where we were standing when the three of us were on the phone. We asked CHUCK to help us, for you to take the floor right down there and do a filibuster. We didn’t know how long it was going to last. I committed to you I would be your aide-de-camp. And 15 hours you stood, CHRIS MURPHY, saying this Nation shouldn’t do business as usual for the Postmaster. The leader of the Senate, 9 years ago, said, “I support you guys. Go ahead.”

So one of the first people I called was Senator SCHUMER and talked to about this—actually, it was Murphy. He did full circle for me and has been with me the whole 15 hours. The debt is paid, but I have fuel in the tank, man. The only reason you stopped wasn’t because you couldn’t go on anymore. We got a concession from MITCH MCCONNELL. We got a concession to get two votes on commonsense gun safety that Republicans had put forward, like universal background checks in the past. But we lost that vote. On both occasions, 9 years apart, once when MURPHY was the principal and now here, we had a leader who said: Yes, how can I help?

I want to thank Senator SCHUMER before, I suspect, he might ask and yield for a question, for being a friend, a partner, and one of the first people I turned to with this idea and encouraged me to go for it. “Go for it, CORY.”

Thank you, CHUCK SCHUMER.

Mr. SCHUMER. Would the Senator yield for a question?

Mr. BOOKER. I yield for a question while retaining the floor.

Mr. SCHUMER. I have two questions, frankly, one on Medicaid cuts, which we talked about last night, and one on tariffs.

First, let me say before I get to this question that your strength, your fortitude, your clarity has just been nothing short of amazing. And all of America is paying attention to what you are saying. All of America needs to know there are so many problems because of the disastrous actions of this administration in terms of how they are helping only the billionaires and hurting average families.

You have brought that forth with such clarity. People from one end of America to the other admire you. Our whole caucus is behind you. And we admire your stamina, your strength, your passion, your intelligence. The list of adjectives could go on.

My first question relates to the Medicaid cuts. As we talked about last night, I visited three Republican districts—one in Staten Island, one right on the border of two Republican districts in Long Island—yesterday to talk about Medicaid cuts. I went to nursing homes. It was clear that the Medicaid cuts that are proposed in this proposal—\$880 billion in the House—would be devastating.

On Staten Island, the nursing home we visited—they love it, Silver Lake nursing home—would close. Three hundred people would lose their jobs; hundreds would be thrown out. And most of them said their children can’t take care of them. It is too—their needs are more advanced. Even some who said their children might be able to take care of them didn’t have room in the house, et cetera. So it is affecting Staten Island, middle class, voted for Trump.

But we made a plea to their congresswoman to not vote for any bill that had these Medicaid cuts in the tax breaks for billionaires. A lot of the people there were—it was bipartisan, both parties there. We estimated that about 18,000 people total would lose their jobs with these Medicaid cuts, creating a recession on Staten Island. We estimated the harm that it would cause. So this was devastating.

Same thing on Long Island. Again, Republican areas with Republican Congress people who hold the balance. If those three Congress people alone would say: I am not voting for a bill that cuts Medicaid to give tax breaks for the billionaires, the bill would fail.

I know that you in New Jersey and my colleagues in Massachusetts, Connecticut, and elsewhere are doing the same thing, Congressmen and Senators. I talked to Leader JEFFRIES. He is doing the same with his folks.

So my question to you is very simple. If these people in New Jersey, in New York, across America are kicked out of

nursing homes and assisted living facilities and healthcare facilities, what would they do? How could they—and how does the Senator, with his passion and everything else, feel when the only reason they are doing this is to give tax breaks to the wealthiest of Americans?

Would you please answer my question, sir?

Mr. BOOKER. Yes, I will, Leader SCHUMER. Earlier, or late last night, rather, I read dozens and dozens and dozens of letters from terrified people. The stories were heartbreaking as people rendered their pride and gave us insights into the more painful aspects of their lives.

I got emotional over one about a person talking about being diagnosed with Parkinson's and knowing the disease would be more and more debilitating, like I saw with my father, and demand more and more help. And she was paranoid that the burden on her family, they couldn't afford it.

I had these amazing—this one amazing letter about a person who said they were in a sandwich generation—two 90-something-year-old parents they were taking care of and two adult men—children—with disabilities. For all these people, like you saw in the nursing homes, Medicaid wasn't a plus or some kind of abundance heaped upon their lives. It helps them keep the fragile financial world they were living in stable. And it is not just the \$880 billion cuts, Senator SCHUMER. Half of that or a quarter of that would cut services that would pull apart their whole lives—their ability to care for their loved ones, their ability to still work.

One person just said the transportation we get through Medicaid for my disabled child is the link that holds it all together. And callously and cruelly, they are talking about this, not in any kind of insightful way, not in any kind of "here is how we can make it more efficient and help keep it." There is none of that thought or logic, bringing in experts because we read page after page after page from rural hospital leaders, of urban hospital leaders and more and more.

Your question is clearly that it is this crazy scheme right now to expand the Trump tax cuts that overwhelmingly disproportionately go to the wealthiest of us in America who need not our help; that would still yet expand the deficit by trillions of dollars, which means your children—and I know how proud a grandfather you are—your grandchildren would have to pay for that debt. They are stealing from your grandchildren so that the wealthiest amongst us could get bigger tax cuts and, at the same time, taking away medical coverage from the most vulnerable.

What is that? It is not who we are. It is not who we are, America.

And as much as people—thousands depended on us to save the ACA—Medicaid affects millions and millions of

more people. Wake up. They are coming after a vital program for American expectant mothers, for American children, for American disabled, for seniors like the ones you visited.

I have one more thing to get off my chest, sir. This is a little lighter. You heaped so many kind things on me, I don't know if you realize that never before in the history of America has a man from Brooklyn said so many complimentary things about a man from Newark.

Mr. SCHUMER. I would remind my colleague that we are both New York Giants fans.

Mr. BOOKER. Who play where? In New Jersey. This is not a colloquy. I hold the floor. I do not yield. Brooklyn stole the Nets—it is an injustice—from Newark. They stole the Nets. I do not yield the floor for a rebuttal. And the Giants and the Jets play in New Jersey. There is only one football team in New York, and that is the Bills.

I do not yield, but I do love and respect you. When I have the floor, I don't have to yield. The one time in my life I get the last word with my much more senior, much wiser friend and Senator.

Mr. SCHUMER. My colleague, I do have another question on an unrelated subject.

Mr. BOOKER. OK, unrelated. As long as you give me that commitment, I yield for a question while retaining the floor.

Mr. SCHUMER. First, let me say before I ask my question, Go Bills. Second, given the 15 hours which you have shown such amazing strength of an all-American athlete who could probably, given what you have shown tonight, be a star on our Giants—so I will not even try to rebut where the Giants are.

Mr. BOOKER. Thank you.

Mr. SCHUMER. I will ask this question. Going back—before I get to tariffs—one of the leading hospitals in New York told me if there were only a 20-percent cut of Medicaid, less steep than they show, that they would close. They are the only cancer care place in the Bronx, 1.3 million people, and they give great care. They are the only ones. They would close.

So the devastation of these cuts, the American people should realize, is just enormous from one end of the country to the other—middle-class communities and upper middle-class communities like Long Island, middle-class like Staten Island, and poor communities like the Bronx.

On tariffs, let me ask a question. So here we are, right on the edge of April 2. Today is April Fool's Day, but the tariffs the President is proposing, unfortunately, are not part of an April Fool's trick. They are real, and they are devastating. My question to my colleague is: With these tariffs, which is estimated would cost the American families \$6,000 more on average, would raise costs on everything across the board, and would throw devastation into our economy—look at the stock

market. It goes down when Trump is serious about tariffs, then goes up when he says maybe he is not so serious. And with the chaos that it has caused so businesses which love certainty—small businesses, medium-sized businesses, large businesses need certainty.

So my questions are these. Does the great Senator and great Giants' fan from Newark agree that prices could go way up, all the way up to as much as \$6,000? And does he agree that the chaos from Trump's tariffs is discombobulating the economy in very serious ways? And, again, does he agree that the reason they seem to be doing this, they count the revenues. This guy Navarro seems to have no sense of reality, yet he seems to be in charge. And they count the revenues to help them get more tax cuts for the wealthy.

Almost everything they do, including tariffs, it seems to me, is aimed at getting those tax cuts for the wealthy. God bless the wealthy, as I heard you say last night when we spoke. We are not against people who make a lot of money. God bless them, but they don't need a tax break.

Mr. BOOKER. No, they don't.

Mr. SCHUMER. They should realize the beauty of America helped them become or stay billionaires. The money we invested in education and roads and schools and helping kids get food makes a better workforce.

So my question to my colleague on these tariffs, A, does he agree that it could raise the price on an average family thousands of dollars—it is estimated \$6,000. Does he agree that the chaos caused by Trump's on-again, off-again, this-country, that-country, this-much, that-much, this-product, that-product is hurting the economy and hurting business people doing their jobs? And does he agree that it seems the motivation is tax breaks for the wealthiest people?

Will you please answer my question?

I yield back to the Senator from New Jersey.

Mr. BOOKER. I will.

So you and I both know that in 72 days now—it is the next day—that of the 72 days that Trump has been in office, he has caused havoc on the American economy, especially given the economy he inherited. Inflation is up. Prices are up. Consumer confidence is down. The stock market and people's 401(k)s—their retirement plans—are down. He continues to do things to rattle confidence, to raise prices, and to hurt not the billionaires—the people who can afford these things—but to hurt average Americans, who find housing prices too high and difficult to make ends meet.

Every time—and I have looked at the tariffs throughout history. In fact, one of my friends sent me this really funny clip I hope somebody will put up for me from, I think it was "Ferris Bueller's Day Off" where he was talking about tariffs and was like "Bueller! Bueller!"—or maybe it was another

movie. I am mixing it up. It shows my—

Mr. SCHUMER. You are entitled.

Mr. BOOKER. What is that?

Mr. SCHUMER. You are entitled.

Mr. BOOKER. Thank you.

But the tariffs haven't worked out for Republican Presidents who tried them during the Depression. The evidence is here. Learn from our history.

Mr. SCHUMER. Sorry. Does my colleague remember the names of Smoot and Hawley?

Mr. BOOKER. Smoot and Hawley. Yes, sir, I definitely remember those names from high school history.

God bless you, Mr. Al Gore and Mr. Perot.

So, yes, what he is going to do tomorrow is going to rattle the markets. What he is going to do tomorrow is raise prices for Americans. What he is going to do tomorrow is lie to folks and say this is something that China will pay or whoever will pay when actually it is the American consumers who will pay with higher prices and more economic insecurity.

This man—I will tell you this quote that Frederick Douglass once said. This I do remember.

He said:

The limits of tyranny are prescribed by the endurance of those whom they oppress.

How much more will we take of this? How much more will we as America say "Cut our Medicaid to give tax cuts to the billionaires. Take the Affordable Care Act, and take away tax credits. Take away enrollment support. Hey, come after Social Security. Cut thousands of people. Make customer service get worse," as said the Wall Street Journal? How much more of these indignities will we take as he turns our back on our allies? How much more will we take—how much more?—of a person who is doing tyrannical things as he takes our Constitution and continues to trash it as he is running into judge after judge after judge who is trying to stop him? But we have already seen that he wants to ignore judges or if he gets rulings he doesn't like, he trashes the judges, and even the Chief Justice, appointed by a Republican, says: No, no.

This is not right. This is not who we are. This is not how we do things in America.

How much more can we endure before we in the collective chorus of conviction in our country say: Enough is enough. Enough is enough. You are not going to get away with this.

Mr. SCHUMER. I thank the Senator for his fortitude, his strength, and the crystalline brilliance by which he has shown the American people the huge dangers that face them with this Trump-DOGE-Musk administration.

I yield the floor back to my colleague from New Jersey.

Mr. BOOKER. Thank you. Thank you.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Massachusetts, but I think you have to ask him to yield for a question.

Ms. WARREN. Mr. President, will the Senator yield for a question?

Mr. BOOKER. I yield for a question while retaining the floor.

Ms. WARREN. I am very grateful to the Senator from New Jersey for coming to the floor for such an extended period of time to give voice to all of those around this country whose voices evidently are not heard by the Republicans in the U.S. Congress.

I wanted to ask a question for the 73 million people who are beneficiaries of the Social Security System and for their families—for the people whose grandmas are getting Social Security, for the people whose cousins or whose dads died who were getting Social Security benefits, about what is happening right now between Donald Trump and Elon Musk, our current co-Presidents, and what they are trying to do to the Social Security System.

So I start this question with just a basic observation. Social Security is not charity. It is not something we give away to those who are less fortunate and we do this out of the goodness of our hearts. Social Security is a contract that people who work in America pay into; it is the system for all of their working lives. When the time comes that they retire or something happens to them and they are not able to do that work, they can count on the Social Security System and the payments they are legally entitled to. I want to underscore here "legally."

Now, if America wanted to change that contract, the place they have to go is right here, to Congress.

Mr. BOOKER. Yes.

Ms. WARREN. They have to come to the U.S. Senate or they have to go to the U.S. House of Representatives, and they have to say: We actually want to change benefits for Social Security recipients.

By the way, that has happened dozens and dozens of times in our history, up through the late 1980s, when we made adjustments in the Social Security benefits—for example, for the fact that people lived longer, for the fact that people worked longer, and so we made minor adjustments in the system. We also made adjustments to make sure that there were cost-of-living changes in how much Social Security would pay out.

So anyone who wants to change the benefits that people are legally entitled to has to come here to Congress and make that happen.

But it appears that Elon Musk and Donald Trump have tried to figure out an end run, and the end run is to say: OK. We can't directly change benefits, but what we can do is we can effectively cut off benefits.

Now, how can they do that? Well, one way is to fire all the people who help people get their Social Security benefits. Think of it this way: There is someone who wants to collect Social Security. Let's just say, at age 66, they decide, "I am ready. It is time for me to retire. I can't do this anymore. I

want to collect my Social Security benefits," and they try to fill out the form. It turns out it gets rejected. There is a number off somewhere in the system. Somebody has gotten confusion on what the name is or where somebody worked or an employer from decades back failed to fill out the right form, so now there is a problem in the system.

So what does a person do? Well, first, they might try calling, but if you fired the people who answer the phones, that is not going to work. OK. So what is the next thing you do? You go to your local Social Security office. Oh, but if they close the Social Security office near you, that is not going to work. So what do you do? You go to the Social Security office that you can find that is 2 hours away, 3 hours away, 4 hours away. You finally get through to that Social Security office, and when you get there, if they have fired most of the people, you may encounter what? Two people working the desk to help straighten out problems and a line that is 50 people long.

By the way, these come from real stories. People are telling us what is happening out there.

So by the time the day is over, our example here hasn't even made it to the front of the line. So he doesn't get the question answered. He doesn't get the problem resolved. He has to go back home again and has to find somebody who can maybe take him to the Social Security office that is hours away and start this process over and over and over.

If this person—let's just say for example it takes 3 months to get this problem ultimately resolved by the Social Security Administration. They don't get the money. That money is lost. It just simply is gone. They do not get the money they are legally entitled to, and they have no right to go back and collect it, even pointing out that it was Social Security's error.

So the failure to correct these errors or to give people an opportunity to correct these errors is effectively the same as having cut their benefits. When you do that for 1 percent of the people, you drive up your error rate. When you do that for 5 percent of the people or when you do that for 10 percent of the folks who are getting Social Security—and, man, those cuts really start to add up—they really start to add up for the people whose benefits are cut. They really start to add up for Donald Trump and for Elon Musk.

Let's look at another possibility here, and that is just simply delay. Checks don't go out on time. When checks don't go out on time, then the promise that people relied on that that check would come on the 3rd of the month is what they count on for rent. That is what they count on to put groceries on the table. That is what they count on to support themselves. It is gone.

So maybe he will get the check next month. Another billionaire Republican,

Howard Lutnick, said: Don't worry about it. His mother-in-law would simply count on the fact that they would straighten the problem out, and maybe next month, she would get her payment. I suppose if your son-in-law is a billionaire, you can count on the fact that somebody will make sure your rent gets covered and groceries are on the table, but for the 70 million Americans who rely on that check coming in every month, it is not so clear what you are going to do.

So what do you do? Do you borrow money to make rent? Do you call on relatives if you have them? Whom do you go to to be able to make it to the end of this month and, if the problem persists, to the next month and the next month? Where do you go?

That is, in my view, as much a benefit cut as Congress's having voted to say: We are just going to give a 10-percent across-the-board cut to everyone who receives Social Security benefits.

There are a lot of ways to cut benefits, and breaking your promise to 73 million Americans is a benefit cut. It is not a legal benefit cut, but it is an effective benefit cut.

I admire the Senator from New Jersey for being here today to speak out for those Americans who face these kinds of cuts and have no recourse. I admire him for standing up and saying to the Republicans who won't go do townhalls and who won't go out and meet with these people and listen to them: Listen to their concerns. Listen to their fears. Listen to their stories about what happens as thousands and thousands more Social Security employees are fired. Correcting problems and straightening out your benefits gets harder and more out of reach for more and more Americans. That is what we face right now.

So the question that I want to pose to the Senator from New Jersey is this: At a time when Donald Trump and Elon Musk are looking for an indirect way to cut Social Security benefits—and let's just pause here, if I can, to say, Why?

Mr. BOOKER. Yes.

Ms. WARREN. Why go out of your way to cut Social Security benefits?

Come on now. There are 73 million Americans who rely on this. This has been the backbone of America's promise to its own people that you did the work, you put in the money, and now you are entitled to the benefit on the other side.

Why are they doing this? Because they want to reduce the amount of money that is available for Social Security and instead take that money over so that they can advance tax cuts for billionaires and billionaire corporations. They are just trying to grease the skids here for the billionaires to get even richer and ask the 73 million Americans who rely on Social Security to pay for it out of their own hides.

So the question I have for the Senator from New Jersey is, When Elon Musk and Donald Trump are deter-

mined to try to use a backdoor way to cut Social Security benefits, A, are they acting legally, and B, how do we put a stop to this?

(Mr. SHEEHY assumed the Chair.)

Mr. BOOKER. Amen. Amen.

You know, Reverend WARNOCK was here earlier and was preaching and quoting Scripture, but you are preaching the gospel of truth, my friend, from a civic gospel that speaks to the cares and the concerns of American hope and of the American dream and of the American Constitution, because you and I both know the answer to the question.

I have to say, for the folks who are watching, she is the great Senator from Massachusetts, but she used to be a professor in New Jersey.

Ms. WARREN. That is true.

Mr. BOOKER. She was a Rutgers professor. I was listening to her way before I got to the Senate when she was fighting for the CFPB, when she was fighting so people would not be taken advantage of. She established the first-ever Agency whose sole purpose was to stand up to the Big Bs—to big banks, to big corporate powers—and defend people. It is an institution that got billions and billions of dollars back into the pockets of the American consumers.

What did Donald Trump and DOGE do to an institution that we set up in Congress in a bipartisan way? They did something that is against the Constitution. They went after it to hack it to pieces so that it is no more.

But to add insult to injury, down here, we just had a vote on overdraft fees that was stunning to me because there is just no defense of it. It was a clear thing.

Some of the big banks said: Do you know what? We don't need those usury fees. It is actually wrong. Those are the big banks that stood up and did the right thing. But a handful of others were still taking advantage of people, and this Senate got to vote on which side are we on. And we failed.

So your question is right. You detail what is right about how people are getting hurt already, how the benefits of Social Security are already being affected, how rural Social Security offices are being closed already. And the question is why, under the guise of efficiency, but you are hurting our elders who deserve dignity in their retirement.

It is stunning to me, Senator WARREN—stunning to me—that we are actually even having this discussion and having this debate when there has been not one congressional hearing about what Elon Musk is doing.

The letters I read earlier about Social Security were painful because people wanted to know what was being done with their most confidential and private information.

I want to continue because we were working through national security. And given the time, I want to rush to just read some stories of voices. I want-

ed to come to the floor and read people's voices, elevate voices.

So here is a voice, a statement from Julia Hurley from Bergen County, N.J.

Thank you, Julia. I see you.

My family's roots are deep in New Jersey, all the way back to my great-grandparents, with my mom's side from Bogota, Fair Lawn, and Upper Saddle River and my dad's side from Spring Lake and Wall Township. I have north and south roots.

My grandfather started a manufacturing company that my cousin still runs, and my other grandfather ran a trucking company based in New Jersey. I was born and raised in Park Ridge and learned from a very young age about the importance of serving and community.

Both of my grandfathers served in World War II.

What a family.

My family was always involved in charity and our churches. And ever since I can remember, I wanted to help people, doing my first fundraiser for homeless people in Bergen County, when I was maybe 8 or 9.

The passion for service took an international bend after I went abroad for the first time during an exchange trip to Germany with Park Ridge Junior-Senior High School in 2001 and fell in love with travel.

Shortly after that, September 11 happened. Seven people from my little town were killed in the towers, and we could see the smoke from Ground Zero from a hill the next town over.

For those of you who don't know, Park Ridge is very close to where I grew up, and my childhood best friend died in the Towers.

This was when I learned how my little suburban bubble could be impacted by things worlds away. I became obsessed with trying to help and wanting to drive a career that would be in service to my country and people elsewhere so that those people would be more inclined to work with us than against us.

I went on to study diplomacy and international relations at Seton Hall University, graduating magna cum laude and determined to work for the State Department at some point.

My 15-year winding career path after that took me into the advocacy space and onto humanitarian and peace-building work in Gaza with the U.N., as well as in Tunisia and Egypt.

In 2022, after years as a policy advisor with the International Committee of the Red Cross, I was recruited to join USAID. And I couldn't have been more excited. This was a dream job, an opportunity to serve my country and impact policy in a real way, sharing what I had learned from working abroad and at home to shape U.S. foreign policy and efforts to advance development and humanitarian assistance on the ground.

I was eventually promoted to a senior policy advisor role in USAID's Office of Policy, where I was developing policy that was shaping the way USAID worked, trying to break down silos across the Agency, to be more effective and efficient in our response to some of the toughest crises in the world.

I got the opportunity to not only prepare talking points for high-level events and for our leadership but even brief the administrator a couple of times.

That all came crashing down around January 28, as my colleagues began being terminated and furloughed.

I went into the Trump administration like any other bureaucrat, ready to engage and help because I want every administration—I

want every administration—to succeed and lean on us as experts to help advance American policy. I worked with our team, and I briefed our political appointee director, who started on Inauguration Day, and hoped to see what I could do to continue building on the reform work I had been doing for a year at that point.

Instead, everything quickly unraveled. Elon Musk called USAID a criminal organization that should die, he said. And the President of the United States deemed us radical left lunatics. I was terrified, afraid of what people might do when two of the most powerful men in the world were saying things like that.

Our jobs were then in question, and the USAID offices were quickly closed, with our belongings still in them. We were left not knowing what our fate would be for weeks.

As DOJ dismantled USAID, I watched in horror as the program shut down. The people we served suffered, and friends and colleagues from the Agency, and our partner organizations lost their livelihoods and their mission-driven careers.

On March 14, I was finally terminated. I have been heartbroken since, shifting between deep depression and rage.

Because of the sledgehammer approach that DOGE took, the entire foreign assistance architecture was broken. Organizations I would have gone on to work for are going bankrupt, cutting staff, and definitely not hiring.

I spent 15 years building up this career that I loved beyond words. Every time I would leave my late father while he was dying in a hospital in 2012, he would tell me to go save the world. This wasn't just a career; it was a calling to serve.

I have no idea what I will do next. In some ways, I feel lucky, because I got married last May—

God bless you—

and I am on my husband's health insurance.

Thank God.

But he also works for the government, and he could be RIFed within a moment's notice. I also have supportive family who will help me if it really gets bad.

But the uncertainty has probably been one of the most painful parts of all of this, not knowing what will come next and just fearing it will be worse than the day before. All we wanted to do was serve.

I want to say thank you to Julia Hurley from Bergen County—my home county—New Jersey. Thank you for your voice. Thank you for making your pain plain and your anger, making it real in my heart, as I know it is in yours. I stand for you today.

A personal statement from Catherine Baker from Neptune, NJ:

I have been furloughed from my job at my USAID implementing partner since February 14, 2025. I have 13 years' experience supporting USAID contractors and business development and recruitment efforts, mostly in conflict and post-conflict settings.

The following is how I got here today: I was born in Neptune and raised there until I went to college. My father is a lifelong Neptune resident whose Jersey roots date all the way back to early 1700s—

Wow—

when my Scottish ancestors came here in search of religious freedom and economic opportunity to help build much of what is Gloucester and Mercer Counties.

My mother is an immigrant born in Coro, Venezuela, to refugees escaping fascism bombs and economic ruin in Spain and Sic-

ily. Every summer, my mom and I traveled to Venezuela to see her mother, my aunts, and uncles, and countless cousins. Coro, the capital of Venezuela State, responsible for most of oil refining, sits on the Caribbean coast and is about a 15-minute plane ride from Aruba, surrounded by sand dunes.

Our family friends lived in homes with dirt floors, corrugated aluminum roofs, and a hose out back you would use to shower while fending off the chickens that roamed freely.

Coro is a city in constant drought. We would get water every other day, and you would use a trash bin filled with water and a ladle to shower on your nonwater days. Coro, as you could imagine, couldn't be more different from Neptune, NJ.

I went to St. James Elementary and Red Bank Catholic High School in Red Bank from kindergarten through 12th grade. If 13 years of Catholic school teaches you anything, it is the importance of taking care of one another, especially those that are suffering from poverty, famine, and disease.

I remember being given small cartons where we were tasked with filling with spare change so we could ship them off to some faraway place, where we were told stories of children just like us who were facing unimaginable hardships. I was so moved by the notion that a child, not so different from myself, didn't have enough to eat or had lost their parents in a conflict, I couldn't begin to understand.

My senior year at RBC, I took a class called Globalization and Social Justice. The class was taught by a longtime family friend, Marianne Logan, herself a former nun. Ms. Logan taught us about the Rwandan genocide and had us watch "Hotel Rwanda" as a class. She made sure we knew the reasons why this happened, understood how dehumanization and hatred can lead to mass torture and executions and critique the international response to the genocide that led to nearly 1 million deaths in 100 days.

That year, Ms. Logan took us to King University to see Nick Kristof speak about Darfur and made sure we knew the signs of genocide when we saw it. How can we let this happen again, we asked her. I wore my "Save Darfur" green rubber bracelet and T-shirt everywhere I went.

What could I, a kid living at the Jersey Shore, do to help? During this period of enlightenment, led by Ms. Logan, the Maryknoll missionaries-funded school in Kibera, Kenya, that we were supporting was threatened by electoral violence in December of 2007. We received letters from the nuns there, who were Ms. Logan's personal friends, about how the fires nearly reached the school and the children, who were already living in Africa's largest slums, stood poised to lose the little they had, including their lives.

Upon returning from Christmas break, Maryknoll Affiliate's club sprang into action. We raised awareness and funds and proudly sent money from bake sales and doorknocking to our friends in Kenya. We received media attention from WCBS in New York, and our story got picked up by other channels and newspapers.

I was amazed that my efforts in Monmouth County were having such meaningful and real impact on a crisis happening thousands of miles away. I was passionate about this work. I was seemingly good at it, or as good as an 18-year-old could be. Could I actually turn this into a career? Could I help even more people across the world?

I'd like to think I did that. I'd like to think I did that. And I am crying as I write this because I wonder if I ever will do it again.

The past 10 years, I focused on conflict prevention, stabilization, preventing countering

violent extremism, and citizen insecurity, conflict, or post-conflict areas. Not only did I conduct desk research and analyzed problem sets from behind a desk, but I got to travel to those countries and meet with local governments, civil society organizations, and advocacy groups to hear from them about the issues and discuss solutions.

I spoke to survivors of the devastating 2004 tsunami in Sri Lanka and Tamil. Fathers and brothers disappeared during the civil war and are likely burned in unmarked graves somewhere on the island.

I worked closely with a woman my age whose families fled Kosovo to the United States during the war when we were about 9 years old and returned as soon as she could to her home country to promote continued peace between Albanians and Serbs.

My recent trips to Kosovo were so illuminating not because of the pain or struggle of these people but because of the respect and admiration and gratitude they had toward the United States of America.

Anyone who has been to Pristina knows of the Bill Clinton and Bob Dole statues—

I didn't know about that—

as well as the Hillary Boutique.

A few years ago when I was negotiating an employment offer with a Ghanaian candidate for a USAID-funded preventing violent extremism program, I couldn't meet his salary expectations. He said to me, "That is OK. I will take whatever you can give me. If the United States will make sacrifices for the people of Ghana in support of this program, I am willing to make a sacrifice too with a pay cut."

He proudly accepted the offer. The recognition that these funds could be spent elsewhere was not lost on him.

Generosity and kindness are always more greatly appreciated by those who have less. All but one of my company's USAID contracts, which totaled nearly \$400 million, were terminated almost overnight by DOGE. Over 80 percent of our Virginia-based office was laid off or furloughed.

I bought my first condo last year—a milestone we all strive for but too few people my age are able to achieve. I applied to 60 jobs in 1 month, all of which I am qualified for, before I received two interview requests—this after being a sought-after professional in my industry with a strong network cultivated through years of hard work. This has ruined me.

My mortgage payment isn't what makes me cry, though; it is our local staff and partners that come to mind every night as I say my prayers. My colleague, a Sudanese refugee living in Kampala, working on a terminated USAID peace-building program from Sudan, texts me every week to ask how I am doing. He called me to make me smile because he knew I was crying. He now calls me "sad eyes" and has made it his mission to never see tears fall from these lashes again. I obviously lie to him and say "mission accomplished," but it will never be true.

Not only is the United States not stronger, not safer, not more prosperous, but the beacon of our democracy grows dim across the globe. Without leadership, other countries hostile to the United States will step in, and innocent people will continue dying.

When I close my eyes, the specter of very real people from my travels and projects appear, and I hear the echoes of suffering they shared with me, suffering they were sure to know was alleviated, however temporarily, by the United States of America through USAID.

And wherever they could, they would thank me. Whenever they could, they would thank me and America. They would thank me and America for it.

Thank you, Catherine Baker from Neptune, NJ. And Catherine, I see you.

I see you, Catherine. I hear you. I stand for you. But I want to share something with you.

One of the most extraordinary trips I have had as a U.S. Senator was to Chad, to go up to the border of Chad and Sudan and see the horrors—I have been to refugee camps all around the globe, but to see the horrors of what was happening again in Sudan.

You wore that “Save Darfur” T-shirt in your earlier days, but the ethnic cleansing is going on right now. I have never seen so many malnourished babies, barely able to hold up their heads, people fleeing tyranny. And they fled across the border to meet Americans because we were there. With less than 1 percent of the American budget, we were there, standing for our values, our highest ideals, our faith traditions—the understanding that when we are out there making the world safer, responding to crises, not only were people seeing the help they need, but they saw the light and the beacon of this democracy.

And it pains me that CHRIS COONS comes down here and shares the headlines from today’s newspaper that in Myanmar, in this horrific earthquake, the Agency that used to respond to that tragedy, that human tragedy, doesn’t have the resources. America is not there. It is a void.

And then CHRIS COONS says, in the article I am surely to read today or tomorrow, whenever I can’t stand anymore—he says: Who fills that vacuum? Who showed up but the PRC. China showed up.

Less than 1 percent of our budget. Less than 1 percent of our budget, and people like the folks I read from—whose whole life all they wanted to do was to be the light of the American torch of freedom and hope to the world—had the rug pulled out from under them.

But here is what is worse, because we have had, CHRIS MURPHY, meetings with some of the people behind the scenes that they are savagely cutting, and the stories are horrible: people in dangerous places that we sent there having their emails cut, having their phones turned off; pregnant women who don’t know how they are going to get out of those areas.

And James Mattis, as we discussed, said: If you cut these kind of programs, buy me more bullets because there will be more instability; there will be more political democracies being overthrown; there will be more terrorism; there will be more violence.

And we are old enough as a nation at 250 years to know that if we don’t meet these terrorists abroad, they will visit us at home. As CHUCK SCHUMER said, I was there watching the towers come down. And in the Sahel before, in Africa, that is the threat—in Togo, in Ghana, in Benin. In northern parts of the country, they are fighting terrorism.

Mr. MURPHY. Will the Senator yield for a question?

Mr. BOOKER. Oh, God, yes, I will. I yield for a question while retaining the floor, CHRIS MURPHY.

Mr. MURPHY. We have a few more colleagues who are going to join us before the top of the hour, but I just wanted you to round this out and ask you the question this way.

Often, when we talk about the withdrawal of USAID from the world, the withdrawal of the United States from international bodies like the WHO, the beneficiary is China. But I think you were hinting, as you talked about the African continent, that the threat is much broader than that because USAID is not just doing counter-China programming; it is also doing counter-extremism programming. In Lebanon, for instance, it is doing the primary work to push back against Hezbollah’s political influence there. It is doing work to counter Russian influence around its periphery.

And so isn’t it the case, Senator BOOKER, that as USAID is pulled off the playing field, for reasons we still don’t understand, that it is all of our adversaries—state adversaries and nonstate adversaries—who are, tragically, celebrating at this opening that we have given them to gain additional influence?

Mr. BOOKER. Senator MURPHY, that is correct. You have been one of the most articulate voices for this decision—I shouldn’t even call it a decision—this reckless trashing of USAID, this vilification of the proud men and women that stand in Ebola outbreaks, that stand in terrorism, that stand against hardships and ethnic cleansing, that stand against malnutrition.

You are so good at pointing out that those are American interests and that not to do that makes this a more dangerous and unsafe world, a world where countries like ours want to lob missiles into Yemen, post-facto of crises.

So I hear you, CHRIS MURPHY, and I answer your question with a simple understanding that what you are saying is right. And I am going to tell you that I have got so many others to read, but we are way behind schedule of where we wanted to be at this point. We are way behind at about 16 hours and 24 minutes.

And so, to obey my staff, as Senators are told to do, I want to move quickly to just the housing issues. So I want to move quickly to housing and start, really, with the theme of affordable housing.

Again, we keep returning to the economy and how the Trump administration is making things worse in every area, especially for people struggling. And so let me be clear that, for decades, under Democrat and Republican Presidents, it has become increasingly difficult for working-class Americans to afford a home.

In recent years, this nationwide housing affordability crisis for so many Americans has nearly reached a breaking point. The crisis now impacts nearly all Americans, shared across all de-

mographics. Regardless of partisan identification, race, age, gender, education, or whether you own or rent your home, we in America are in a housing crisis.

According to the Center for American Progress, 80 percent of Americans living in rural communities believe housing affordability is getting worse, while 72 percent of residents in urban areas feel the same way. In October 2024, the Center for American Progress found, no matter your ZIP Code, the goal of homeownership in America is drifting further out of reach all across the country.

Over the past two decades, housing costs have dramatically outpaced income growth in the United States, increasing the rent burden, heightening barriers for homeownership. The Housing Price Index, a gauge of how selling prices for single-family homes have changed over time, was more than 50 percent higher in July 2024 than it was in July 2019.

According to the Brookings Institution, the U.S. housing market was short 4.9 million housing units in 2023 relative to the mid-2000s. Decades of policy at the Federal, State, and local levels have all contributed to this reality. Let’s not blame some rank partisanship; it has been decades in the making.

There are far too few homes in the United States, and there are far too few homes being built in the United States. The cost of housing keeps rising. Rents continue to skyrocket. Median home prices are on the rise, which makes it harder and harder for families to make ends meet.

The vast majority of young Americans are hard-pressed to save for the chance of one day having enough for a downpayment to buy a home. Almost half of all renters in America struggle to pay their rent. Almost half of all renters are struggling to pay the rent, devoting more than one-third of their income to housing costs.

Since the pandemic, rents have jumped more than 12 percent year over year. Hidden rental fees and other expenses on already cost-burdened tenants continue to mount as landlords assume more and more power and leverage, leaving tenants and prospective home buyers with nowhere to turn.

Last year, NPR methodically walked through the supply shortage that is impacting our country.

But before I read this article, I see that my colleague, my friend, the extraordinary leader from Maryland, is here, and I think he has a question for me first.

Mr. VAN HOLLEN. Will the Senator yield for a question?

Mr. BOOKER. I will yield for a question while retaining the floor.

Mr. VAN HOLLEN. I want to thank my friend, and I want to start by thanking the Senator from New Jersey, the senior Senator from New Jersey, for shining a spotlight on what is happening in our country at this moment

and specifically what is going to be happening here in the U.S. Senate later this week or next.

And I have a question for the Senator, but I want to take some of the threads of what you have been saying as I put this to you because you are shining a light on the great betrayal. And that is, Candidate Trump went all over the country saying that he was going to be a President for the forgotten Americans, that he was going to be a President that looked out for working people, and he said he was going to focus on bringing costs down and prices down in the United States of America.

And yet, ever since he was sworn in, he has done just the opposite. Prices are going up—including, as the Senator was talking about, housing prices. Affordable housing is a crisis in this country, and yet we see Elon Musk and his DOGE cronies cutting deeply into affordable housing programs over at the Department of Housing and Urban Development.

We see also—and tomorrow, he calls it Liberation Day; it is actually going to be Sales Tax Increase Day—there was testimony that we got in the Banking and Housing Committee that when you increase these tariffs on Canada, as he has proposed to do—not in a targeted way but in an across-the-board way—according to the National Association of Home Builders, that will increase housing prices for Americans up to 10 percent more at a time when we are already facing an affordable housing crisis.

And, of course, the folks who benefit the most are those billionaires who are part of his Cabinet and others in the hedge fund industry who are going out and buying up a lot of houses, not because they need the house for their family but because they want to flip it at a big profit, making it even less affordable to the American people.

So the housing crisis is one part of what is getting even worse because of the actions of Donald Trump and Elon Musk. And it is part of this greater theme of the great betrayal.

Later this week, Republicans here in the Senate say they are planning to bring to the floor what we call a budget resolution, which is a framework that will be providing for very big tax cuts for the ultra-rich Americans, tax cuts for big corporations, some of which are offshoring all of their profits.

Senator WYDEN and I were on the floor, just last week, talking about how Pfizer has half of its sales revenues here in the United States but books none of its profits here, and, therefore, by this scheme called round-tripping where you sort of push your money around the world, they lower their taxes, which means the American people get shortchanged.

So all of this is part of a scheme to provide tax cuts for the very wealthy at everybody else's expense.

The Senator from New Jersey has been shining a light on what it means when we say this will come at the ex-

pense of other Americans, that this tax cut for the very rich and big corporations will come at the expense of the rest of America. I want to amplify that as I do a windup to the Senator.

No. 1, it is Elon Musk and the DOGE operation. Let me be very clear that this is part of the most corrupt bargain we have seen in American history. Elon Musk spent \$280 million to help elect Donald Trump President, and Donald Trump has turned the keys to the Federal Government over to Elon Musk, not for efficiency but to rig the government in favor of people like Elon Musk.

That is why they want to get rid of the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau. This is a Bureau that has returned billions of dollars to Americans who were cheated by scam artists, and they are coming in to dismantle the CFPB because they want to be on the side of the scam artists and deny American consumers the benefit of getting their dollars back when they have been cheated.

So this has nothing to do with government efficiency. It has to do both with rigging the government for people like Elon Musk and trying to lay the groundwork claiming lots of cuts that they will then use to pay for, they say, tax cuts for the very rich.

So who is being cut by Elon Musk?

I don't know, Senator, if you saw the other day in the sort of spin room at the White House—did you catch that, where Elon Musk and some of his folks were explaining the work they did?

They said: We are really doing this with a scalpel.

Well, the reason that is especially interesting is it was just weeks earlier when Elon Musk brandished a chain saw, right?

Mr. BOOKER. Yes. Yes.

Mr. VAN HOLLEN. At CPAC, which is actually—they met over here in my State of Maryland.

That is what they are doing. They are taking a chain saw, and they are taking a chain saw to Departments that help our veterans. These are people who care for our veterans, and our veterans are being especially hard-hit, including when they did these firings—arbitrary firings, right?—of probationary employees, and veterans were saying: Why are we being hit so hard?

The White House spokesperson said:

Perhaps they are not fit to have a job at the moment.

That was the response from one of the White House spokespersons, as if the individuals who served our country in the military were not fit to serve our government as civilians. That is the kind of attitude we have got.

We just learned today that the RIFs—the reduction-in-force letters—were received by the folks in the Department of Health and Human Services.

So these are people who help with the public health of all Americans. And they do important work at FDA, or the Food and Drug Administration. They

make sure that the foods we eat and the medicines we take are safe and that they do what they say they are going to do in the case of medicines.

They do work at NIH, the National Institutes of Health, to develop cures and treatments for diseases that hit every American family, and they are cutting there.

They are cutting in these places not for government efficiency but to create what they believe is the space for tax cuts for the very rich. We talked about what they are doing over at the Department of Health, at the Department of Housing and Urban Development.

At the Social Security Administration—which, by the way, has its headquarters in my State of Maryland—we have thousands of workers who were there to deliver hard-earned benefits to the American people. And the reality is that the Social Security Administration operates incredibly efficiently.

You know the former Commissioner for Social Security, Martin O'Malley, reminds us that Allstate Insurance Company operates at an 11-percent overhead. Liberty Mutual operates at a 23-percent overhead. The Social Security Administration: .5 percent overhead.

The Social Security Administration workforce is now at a very low level in terms of personnel, compared to what it was years ago. And yet they are serving a record number of Americans—73 million Americans—and they have never missed a payment. They have never missed a payment.

So this talk about going after Social Security and that they are going to somehow make it more efficient—and, of course, Elon Musk called it a Ponzi scheme, when the Senator and I know it is not a Ponzi scheme. It is a promise to the American people.

So, first, they discontinue telephone service, as if all the seniors could, somehow, just connect, you know, by Wi-Fi, or whatever it may be. A lot of people, of course, rely on telephones. So they cut that. They said: Well, if you have trouble, go to one of the local regional Social Security offices. Well, they are cutting regional Social Security offices—lots of them.

And then, when you go there and you don't find many people there—you know, whoops, we just cut 7,000 people from Social Security. So a benefit is meaningless if you can't actually access the benefit. And what they are doing is making it harder for Americans to get those benefits.

So when we hear about the Musk-DOGE operation, make no mistake, it is not about efficiency. It is about trying to put together some kind of savings that they then want to use to at least just partially pay for tax cuts for the very rich.

Another way they are doing that—we have heard a lot about that; the Senator spoke about it—is cutting Medicaid and food nutrition programs. In fact, I think we recall, a number of weeks ago, that we had a couple of

amendments here on the floor of the Senate, saying: OK, if you are going to do these tax cuts, at least don't cut Medicaid or Medicare or food and nutrition programs.

Every Republican Senator voted against those amendments—in other words, not to protect those programs—meaning they are fair game for big cuts to pay for tax cuts for the very wealthy.

So that is another area where they are very focused, which is cutting important programs that benefit millions and millions of Americans.

There is another way they are doing it—and to the Senator from New Jersey, again, thank you for shining a light on all this; he has talked about it—which is these across-the-board tariffs.

So I think all of us know that strategically targeted tariffs can be useful, at certain points in time, to protect strategic American industries. I am for those. But across-the-board tariffs and across-the-board tariffs on a friend and ally like Canada or Mexico—all that is, is a tax increase on the American people. Let's be clear.

So these are the areas where Donald Trump, having said that he was going to be there for working people, is doing the opposite, right? These across-the-board tariffs are going to increase costs and prices for the American people. Cutting Medicaid and food nutrition programs is going to hurt the very people that Donald Trump on the campaign trail said he was fighting for.

And the DOGE-Musk operation is taking a chain saw to important services and important consumer protections that benefit all Americans in order to claim that they are providing some savings for tax cuts for the rich.

So it wasn't that long ago that, just down the hall here, Donald Trump was sworn in as President. And I remember what he said. He said:

This is going to be a golden age for America.

And who was sitting right behind him? Elon Musk, the richest person in the world, and other billionaires in the Trump Cabinet, including one who just said, not that long ago, that Americans on Social Security wouldn't miss one of their Social Security checks; only the fraudsters would notice that.

Say that to the 73 million people who get Social Security. But that is the attitude of the billionaires in this Trump Cabinet, the people he is really looking out for.

So when he says "a golden age for America," that is who he means. He means Elon Musk and the billionaires—Elon Musk, who is rigging the government for the billionaires and all the others in the Cabinet who don't think Americans would miss a Social Security payment that they earned.

So my question to you—and I want to, again, thank the Senator from New Jersey. I know it has been a long day's journey into the night, but it is important that we address these issues in the

courts—and the courts are upholding the rule of law—that we address these issues and then fight them in Congress, and that we do so in communities across the country, and people need to understand what is happening.

So the core issue here, is it not, my friend, that Donald Trump really is betraying the people he said he was going to fight for, and, at the end of the day—and we will see that later this week in the Senate—the goal is to provide these big tax breaks to wealthy people at the expense of everybody else in America. That is the big betrayal.

So if you could just zero in, once again, on the central narrative that we are seeing play out in the Trump administration.

Mr. BOOKER. You are putting it right. Donald Trump made commitments to America. We have quotes of him at rally after rally. He said: "Grocery," that is a really great word, he said. I am going to bring down grocery prices.

Well, grocery prices are up dramatically. The American dream, many of us see that as owning a home. Well, you said it: Home prices are already up, but with these tariffs, they can go upward of 10 percent or more. You can be sure that the Canadian lumber coming down here is going to be expensive.

You can see Donald Trump making it more difficult to access healthcare, and this massive reconciliation is going to be a direct attack on working-class healthcare, on healthcare of expectant mothers, on healthcare of Americans with disabilities, on healthcare of the majority of seniors in nursing homes.

I am about to go to my next chapter. It is all going to be about how Trump is rolling back commonsense protections for clean air and water. ELIZABETH WARREN said it very powerfully: He is reducing services, which is a service cut to people with Social Security. In so many ways, Americans should see these crises looming—these attacks—but ask yourself one economic question: With the stock market, which just had its worst quarter in years, and people's retirement savings, if they have it in 401(k)'s, is going down—ask yourself this question. I ask Americans, please, ask yourself this financial question: Am I better off than I was 71 days ago? Am I better off or worse off?

And this is before he has even gotten going, because we see what is about to happen with this whole sham reconciliation process. They are already trying to change the rules to obscure what they are doing.

This is what they are doing. Three things you should take home:

Are we going to let them again—like they did with the ACA, with the Affordable Care Act—come after healthcare for 70-plus million Americans by doing their proposed \$880 billion cuts?

Are we going to allow them to blow a hole so big, in the trillions of dollars? They are going to push it out over 10 years. They are going to create such a

deficit in our country that our children's children—they are stealing from our children's children and putting on a deficit that they are going to have to pay for.

No. 3, are they going to let them do all of that to renew tax cuts that the Congressional Budget Office, a very independent Agency, says very clearly would give trillions of dollars of tax cuts that go disproportionately to the wealthiest in our Nation.

That is the addition. That is what we know. And it doesn't account for the things he is doing to our allies. It doesn't account for how he is turning his back on NATO. It doesn't account for how he is praising Putin and calling Zelenskyy a dictator. It doesn't account for how he is giving advantage to China around the world, from the region in Southeast Asia all the way to Africa. It doesn't account for how he has already made it harder to enroll in the Affordable Care Act. It doesn't account for all the other things he is doing that we wake up and hear every day, not to mention trying to threaten Greenland, trying to threaten Panama, trying to change the name of the Gulf of Mexico.

All these things he didn't tell us he was going to do, didn't promise. He promised to lower your grocery prices; they are higher. He promised to be a better steward of the economy; it is worse than what he inherited it. Over and over, he is breaking promises and doing outrageous things, like disappearing people off of American streets, violating fundamental principles of this document, invoking the Alien Enemies Act from the 1700s that was last used to put Japanese-Americans in internment camps.

Do we see what is happening? How much is enough? We have to stand and do something different not just in this body but in America because—you know this—how we stopped him in his last term was the American people rose up, spoke up, stood up, rose up in the most extraordinary, nonviolent demonstrations and demands.

So thank you.

Mr. VAN HOLLEN. Will the Senator yield for another question?

Mr. BOOKER. Yes, I will yield for a question while retaining the floor.

Mr. VAN HOLLEN. And I see my friend and colleague Senator ALSOBROOKS from the great State of Maryland is on the floor, so I am going to be very brief with this question.

I want to thank you for reminding us, of course, of the other great betrayal that has been going on over the last 70-plus days. There is the betrayal against the American people and working people here at home, but there has been a betrayal of our allies, like the Ukrainians, whom Donald Trump is throwing under the bus as we speak, and other close partners and allies around the world.

I have to depart here for a moment because we have a hearing in the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, and

I am privileged to serve on that committee with the gentleman from New Jersey. One of the people before the committee is their nominee to be our Ambassador to Turkey.

Now, of course, Erdogan just locked up his major opponent, the popular mayor of Istanbul. We have not heard a peep from the Trump administration about the question of how this undermines democracy.

But I want to close on the point that you just raised. It is kind of hard for Donald Trump to complain about Erdogan disappearing people when right here in the United States of America, you had a Turkish student at Tufts disappeared by people who showed up without any identification, some with hoods on, and sent her apparently to Louisiana because she spoke out on an important issue of national concern.

The First Amendment is pretty clear that you can engage in controversial speech that someone may like or dislike, but you are protected. That includes everybody here in America because that is an important value to us. Apparently, it is not an important value to Donald Trump, who, like Erdogan, essentially wants to whisk away anybody who disagrees with him.

I again thank the Senator from New Jersey and just ask him, you know, to elaborate on that. But I also see my friend and colleague the Senator from Maryland.

Mr. BOOKER. I will give a short answer to your question, then, which is the irony—the irony that this President is remaining quiet about folks that are violating international law in many ways.

So I think it is absurd, and you are right. It is another betrayal.

Ms. ALSOBROOKS. Will the Senator yield for a question?

Mr. BOOKER. I yield for a question while retaining the floor.

Ms. ALSOBROOKS. First, I would like to commend my colleague. I want to thank you first of all for your spiritual obedience. I want to thank you so much as well for your commitment and your dedication. I want to thank you as well for your courageous leadership.

I want to thank you also, Senator BOOKER, for your recognition of the times that we are living in. These are times that we will recount and our children will recount, and I think all of those of good conscience who watch during this time and say nothing will also be held to account.

As the Senator has eloquently remarked, these are not normal times. We are watching an administration that is drunk with vengeance, hatred, and surrounded by incompetent people who are taking callous actions, who are inhumane, and, because of their incompetence, are making costly mistakes that will harm the American people and denigrate the hard-working people of this country by proposing tax cuts.

These tax cuts are not designed to help the average American person;

they are designed to help billionaires. They are doing so by firing thousands of middle-class workers and more.

What we are seeing before our eyes is not only unconscionable; we know as well that it is deeply immoral, that it is inhumane, it is wicked.

We are seeing—with glee—the actions of people who are so happy to tear down, but I am watching and waiting to see what it is they intend to build in this country.

In your remarks over these hours, you have made that plain for the American people to see. You have uplifted the stories of everyday people. And what we recognize as we hear about the firings and we hear about the devastation and chaos is that we are not talking about numbers, we are talking about humans, about people. These are our friends. These are our family members. These are our neighbors. These are our church friends. These are our colleagues this administration has harmed.

So my question today centers around the topic of housing. We have a housing crisis in this country. That is no secret. In fact, we recognize that, through the actions of this administration, what is harmful will be exacerbated.

Maryland is nearly 100,000 housing units short, and as you know, it is both about affordability and a supply problem. We need to make home ownership, which is part of the American dream and how the average American builds wealth in this country, accessible to more Americans.

I think about my parents, Mr. Senator, who married at 21 and 22 years old. At the time that they married, although my father was a car salesman and selling newspapers and my mother was a receptionist, 5 years into their marriage, they could afford to buy a home.

This is no longer the expectation of the average American family. My own 19-year-old daughter doesn't have the realistic hope that she can follow even her grandparents. This problem affects red States, and it affects blue States, which is the theme that you have hit on in all of these hours of speaking.

When this President acts against the interests of the middle class, we recognize that he is not just harming Democrats, as he intends, but unfortunately his actions harm everyday Americans. It affects those who voted for him, it affects those who didn't vote for him, and it affects those who did not vote at all. He is harming Republicans too. He is harming Americans.

This administration is slashing funding and personnel at the very Agencies that are tasked with addressing this crisis. He is illegally firing HUD employees. This administration has stalled millions of dollars in previously allocated funding intended to help those who need affordable housing. Again, his actions are so indiscriminate, so immoral, so callous, so heartless that he is impacting the very peo-

ple who supported him as well as those who didn't.

This administration has effectively ended enforcement of the Fair Housing Act, one of the most important American civil rights laws. This administration is considering privatizing the Federal Housing Finance Agency, which guarantees over half of the U.S. mortgage market. To make matters worse, this administration is proposing sweeping tariffs on our allies, driving up the cost of home construction.

Let's be clear. Absolutely none of this will help to build homes. None of this will make home ownership more accessible to Marylanders or Americans. In fact, we understand that it is not the intention of this administration to do so; it is for the billionaires, to be able to afford their tax cuts.

(Mr. CURTIS assumed the Chair.)

So I have heard from people all across my State—blue areas, red areas, purple areas, every area—who are concerned about this.

So I have a question for you, and I want to thank you as I ask the question, for sacrificing your own body today to bring attention to this. What are you seeing in the State of New Jersey about how this administration's unconscionable actions are making housing less affordable and home ownership less accessible?

Mr. BOOKER. I want to thank the Senator for the question. I want to thank her for being my colleague. But more important than even being my friend, she is a spiritual sister of mine and was very kind to me when I was telling her that I was going to do this and gave me so much encouragement and prayer.

And I just love you, and I am grateful.

You read a litany of things. I had a whole section, a whole binder that my staff told me to skip to go to this one about all the things, going in deep, in-depth to all the things the Trump administration is doing to make housing more unaffordable, more inaccessible, more expensive, more discrimination in housing, which we know is still a problem, more challenges, more pain heaped upon rural areas, and more complications and problems for building affordable housing in all areas.

It is so frustrating to me that this is a problem. We cannot lay the crisis of housing at one administration in the United States. We need to have bold visions and ideas to address this. I am so excited about this next generation of Americans that are rising up with bold visions.

I want to give a shout-out to Ezra Klein. His book is a must read—"Abundance." This is a vision of doing great things again, of building housing, of redeeming the American dream.

But to have a President that is dead set on, for the next 4 years, doing the kinds of things that you made a litany of and now, tomorrow, is going to bring tariffs that are going to raise the price even more on housing is outrageous.

Where are his promises to make this country more affordable and more accessible?

You heard the data that I read about how we have so many millions of Americans—close to the majority of renters now spend more than a third of their income on rent, which is the very definition that our government has of housing insecurity.

So it should anger people in this country. Even if you own your home, have paid off your mortgage, you should be angry about what they are doing to the American dream and that there are no bold ideas coming from this administration to help. In fact, they are hurting it. They are hurting it.

So thank you very much to my colleague. Thank you for giving me strength, as you did, and prayer. I thank you for the question that should anger people, that should inspire people, that should activate people, that should engage people, that should demand from us that we take our country away from those who want to do so much harm.

I want to start by reading until someone—I know the prayer. I am going to keep going. I want to talk about environmental protections and how this country is becoming less safe for people with emphysema or with asthma because Donald Trump is rolling back commonsense environmental protections, threatening our children's future, and hurting our Nation's economy.

Energy costs in America are continuing to rise, making it harder and harder for working families to pay their bills. At a time when we should be investing in clean energy, this administration is canceling projects that would create more jobs for Americans and lower energy prices. He claims he supports an "all of the above" strategy, but that is clearly not what we are seeing, and there is too much silence about it.

All Americans, regardless of where you are born, deserve safe drinking water, clean air, and equal opportunity for a healthy and fulfilling life.

President Trump promised America the cleanest air and the cleanest water, but on entering office, he immediately instructed the EPA—the Environmental Protection Agency—to cut a long list of commonsense environmental protections. This administration is rolling back efforts to reduce emissions from powerplants. He is letting polluters pollute our air more. That affects the health of Americans. It drives up the aggravating of the rates of asthma and emphysema, weakening rules that keep our rivers and water systems clean as well.

PRAYER

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Pursuant to the order of February 29, 1960, the hour of 12 noon having arrived, the Senate having been in continuous ses-

sion since yesterday, the Senate will suspend for a prayer by the Senate Chaplain.

The Chaplain, Dr. Barry C. Black, offered the following prayer:

Let us pray.

Lord of Hosts, you have done great things for us, filling our hearts with determination to do Your will. You protect us from unseen dangers, supply us with wisdom, and direct our steps.

Today, we are grateful for the efforts of the floor staff, the Capitol Police, the stenographers, the pages, and all those who have worked through the night. We pray You give them the strength they need for this day.

Today, give our Senators the assurance of Your presence, inspire them with a calm faith, a steady peace, and a firm resolve to do Your will. Let no weapon formed against them prosper.

We pray in Your omnipotent Name. Amen.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from New Jersey is recognized.

EXECUTIVE CALENDAR

TRUMP ADMINISTRATION

Mr. BOOKER. I am going to continue until one of my colleagues asks me a question.

Ms. DUCKWORTH. Will the Senator yield for a question?

Mr. BOOKER. One of my heroes in the Senate—a living legend, my partner on some bills that I am so passionate about, expanding IVF—someone that is just freaking awesome, I yield for a question while retaining the floor.

Ms. DUCKWORTH. Thank you, Senator BOOKER, for taking this important stand and for doing so much to make it clear how much pain Donald Trump and Elon Musk are inflicting on the American people in every sector of our society.

I am going to be asking you a question about what you heard from agriculture businesses in your State about the damage this administration is doing and the jobs that either have been or will be lost as a result. I thought I would give you some background on what I am hearing as well.

I want to focus this body's attention on our Nation's farmers and ranchers who seem to be getting punched day after day, week after week by the Trump-Musk oligarchy. Whether it is their harmful tariffs that hurt our soy and corn farmers, canceling and freezing more than \$1 billion in funding for schools and food banks that purchase food from local farmers, or halting reimbursement and contract payments that our farmers already owed.

The Senator from New Jersey and I are both working together to undo some of the most harmful impacts of these disastrous decisions, including joining forces to push his Honor Farmers Contract forward. We are starting to hear reports by farmers how damaging the Musk-Trump dismantling of USAID is to jobs and businesses right here in America.

For example, I don't know if the Senator has heard, but in North Carolina, they had \$2.2 billion in USAID awards, including for 27 large-scale farmers who were fulfilling orders to humanitarian food assistance and four universities who were receiving agriculture research funding. More than 300 North Carolina workers have lost their jobs as a result of this freeze.

In Georgia, they had over \$389 million in USAID awards, including nine large-scale farmers fulfilling orders for humanitarian food assistance and six universities receiving agriculture research funding.

Arkansas had over \$210 million in USAID awards, including purchases of rice, grain, and beans from our farmers.

Florida has lost \$91 million in USAID awards, including \$38 million for the University of Florida to improve livestock productivity and food security in developing countries.

Texas lost over \$48 million in USAID awards, including nine large-scale farmers fulfilling orders for humanitarian food assistance and eight universities receiving agriculture research funding. The list goes on and on.

My neighbors in Iowa, over time now, have lost over \$4 million in USDA food commodity sales. They have gained—they had a total of over \$149 million in purchases through USDA and other programs for USAID. Illinois has lost \$245 million in aid that—in farm income, that would go toward USAID and aid programs.

I think that our farmers have been hit with body blow after body blow from this administration, an administration that in their first term and even in the second term promised they would look out for America.

I have to say to my friend from New Jersey, I don't think that this administration has lived up to their promises to farmers. Remember that a Nation that cannot feed itself—if we lose those family farms, if we lose our ag sector—we cannot lead the free world if we cannot feed ourselves. And, frankly, farmers have been hit over and over again.

These incoming tariffs are going to be a disaster for our farmers. I was in south central and southern Illinois across the river from Missouri talking to our farmers in St. Clair County, IL. They tell me the tariffs are going to affect their products being sold overseas. Our top products in Illinois: corn, soybean, pork.

We are also the largest grower of pumpkins. If you get the Libby can of pumpkin at Halloween time and Christmastime, Thanksgiving, that is thanks to Illinois. If you ever want to come, I will take you out to the pumpkin fields. They are the best pumpkins in the country.

But frankly, they are being hurt over and over again. So they are going to see the prices on their commodities affected. They can't sell their products overseas to the top countries that purchase their product. At the same time,