

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,

their inputs—the fertilizer and the equipment that they need—will be more expensive.

Tariffs against Canada, in terms of steel and aluminum, is affecting John Deere. John Deere—hundreds of years old, an American company founded in the heartland of this great Nation laying off people.

We have to do better by our farmers. Our farmers have been betrayed time and time again by this Trump administration. They promise big things and come in cutting programs like USAID. They hurt our farmers, their bottom line.

I sat down and met with many farmers who are seventh generation, eighth generation, watching the teenage son of the farmer and they are afraid they are not going to have a farm there anymore. Their products and margins are so tiny, they don't think they are going to make it.

My question to my colleague from New Jersey is what are you hearing from farmers and why do you think this administration is taking so many actions that hurt them and hurt American jobs?

Mr. BOOKER. I love my colleague—I love my colleague—I love how she has been standing up, quite figuratively, time and time again on issues. She really inspired me. I told folks on social media, I have been celebrating, elevating, liking her content. She is truly fierce and is a voice that gives me strength.

Today, she is asking me about one of my favorite subjects. A lot of people are surprised. My staff knows this story well that I am on the Ag Committee. When one of my staffers, a guy sitting over here, Adam Zipkin—who has been with me since 1998—came to me and said you should go on the farm committee—this is going to get me in trouble. I laughed at him. It is one of the committees I love. What is the old saying? First, they laugh at you, then they fight you, then they finally accept it. He told me all the issues I care about intersect with our farm and food system; that our farmers are such vital parts of America, they need more people standing up and fighting for them.

The American farmers are getting screwed. We are losing thousands of farms in this country, family farmers are going belly-up. The math doesn't work for them. And this President, as you have pointed out—oh, gosh. President Trump is causing an unprecedented amount of chaos, instability, and harm for farmers.

Farmers already deal with so much uncertainty from prices, weather, pests, and more. They should not have to deal with uncertainty that our government won't follow through, as you said, on contracts. I had farmers from New Jersey to Texas coming to my office about this President freezing contracts that we approved in a bipartisan manner, putting them in financial crisis.

One of the first things that Trump and Musk did was freeze thousands of

contracts and agreements that have been already made with our farmers, farmers applied to grant programs and were selected on their merit. They made legally binding contracts. Yet starting in late January, farmers found themselves not getting reimbursed, sometimes reading in the news that a particular grant was frozen or sometimes no information at all other than they were not getting their payments processed.

Ms. DUCKWORTH. Would the Senator yield for another question?

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

Ms. DUCKWORTH. Thank you. I think the issue of contracts is especially important because so much of these cuts are claimed to cut waste in government spending. But we have a law on the books that says if we don't make payments according to existing contracts, then we have to pay the interest on those payments that we are late in providing. So if we, for example, cut \$2 billion or freeze funding payment on \$2 billion in contracts as we did with USAID, that means we are going to have to pay, say, 2-percent interest rate, \$16 billion in interest. I don't see where that is a saving for taxpayers. That is a waste of taxpayer dollars.

I think that is something we should be talking about, and I also think that, as you were mentioning, the issue with our farmers, they are important to our national security.

The SNAP program is a good example of it. That program was instituted after World War II. We had the very famous example of Audie Murphy, who was the most highly decorated soldier coming out of World War II. He could not pass initial tests to enlist into the Army during World War II. He didn't weigh enough due to malnutrition post the Great Depression. He created the SNAP program to make sure America's young people were fed, were no longer malnourished, so they could get food in our schools while going to school because it was good for the U.S. military to have a workforce that could enlist in the military and meet the standards. That is the SNAP program, and that has been a program that has sustained our farmers over time. I think that we are losing sight of that.

So my question to the Senator from New Jersey is to hear a little bit more—have you heard about the SNAP program and also the work the farmers in New Jersey have been doing in terms of organic and sustainable farming, which is really where the beginning of the organic and sustainable farming movement has begun in this country?

Mr. BOOKER. I am aware of one of our colleagues.

I just want to say, yes, I am aware of that. The way that Trump—I am just going to summarize—contract freezes, this is one of the ways Trump and Musk are causing havoc. Program cuts. They have eliminated programs that you said support local food systems, in-

cluding those that connect farmers with food banks and schools and promote regenerative practices. It is stunning.

USDA destabilization. Trump and Musk have laid off USDA employees, closed USDA offices, hindering the Agency's ability to provide essential services to foreigners.

Tariff policies. Trump's tariff policies implemented without consultation with or support from farmers will increase farmer costs and consumer food prices.

And, finally, general chaos, which seems to be something you are pointing out that they are very good at. Farmers already deal with so much uncertainty from prices, weather, pests, and more. They should not have to deal with uncertainty from Donald Trump's administration that will undermine everything that they do.

Ms. DUCKWORTH. I have a further question for the Senator from New Jersey.

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

Ms. DUCKWORTH. I would like to ask the Senator from New Jersey a question pertaining to the farm bill. You speak to uncertainty. One of the things I heard from my agricultural sector and my farmers, the Farm Bureau in Illinois, is that desperate need to pass—for this body to pass a farm bill, especially when it comes to the Crop Insurance Program, as well as, again, retaining SNAP benefits.

I do think that crop insurance is something that our farmers care deeply about. It is a tool that they use to make sure that they are able to survive when there are bad crop years, whether that is through disease, whether that is through drought or floods. Our farmers certainly—this is a program for them to sustain themselves and be able to look out for themselves.

So it is a personal responsibility on the part of farmers. It is especially important for young farmers who are just running out. Those margins are just so tiny. And when you take away the commodity program and USAID, when you take away the SNAP program, then you don't provide them with crop insurance, you are going to lose those family farms. What is going to happen? Large agriculture businesses are going to take over.

Mr. BOOKER. Yes.

Ms. DUCKWORTH. They don't have the well-being of the American people at their heart.

What I would love to hear from the Senator from New Jersey is, would you agree that what we should be doing right now is not attacking farmers and cutting commodity programs and cutting and freezing funding for USAID that provides a market for farm product, but we should be working on passing a farm bill?

Mr. BOOKER. I love you. I love you. I love you for bringing these things to point because we—by the way, with Adam Zipkin, we did a farm tour. We

were in southern Illinois, meeting with Republican farmers—this is before the pandemic—and you see them give so much common cause as they are trying desperately to hold on to their farms. So, with the Crop Insurance Program, we need to reimagine it so it is more accessible to independent family farmers and not just big agribusinesses. We need to be visionary about our farm bill. We need to create a food system so that the farmers will want to help them be better stewards of the land—the oversubscribed programs for regenerative farming and cover crops and environmental practices. They want those things to preserve their soil and to reduce their dependence on chemicals. They want those things. They want a farm bill that works for them, and we should be delivering that in a bipartisan way. So you are right on point. But do you hear that from the White House? Not at all. Not at all.

Ms. HASSAN. Would the Senator yield for a question?

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

Ms. HASSAN. Well, Senator BOOKER, I have a question for you about Medicaid and Medicaid expansion, but I want to start with a little bit of background.

Mr. BOOKER. Please.

Ms. HASSAN. As you may recall, when I was Governor of New Hampshire, thanks to the Affordable Care Act, the program Medicaid expansion became an option for my State, and I worked with people of both political parties to make sure that the people of New Hampshire could actually get the benefit of Medicaid expansion.

Expanded Medicaid meant that for the first time, working adults who couldn't earn enough money to actually buy insurance themselves but who were working and single could actually get healthcare coverage. Medicaid expansion meant that people with mental illness who wouldn't be covered by traditional Medicaid actually could get healthcare and could get coverage. People with substance use disorder—with addiction—could finally get Medicaid coverage and get better.

We worked across party lines. It took a few tries, but we got Medicaid expansion done in New Hampshire, and today, Medicaid covers more than 180,000 people in my State, including more than 90,000 children, more than 15,000 people with disabilities, and nearly 10,000 seniors.

Here is another number that people don't always think about: It covers 10,000 people who are getting addiction treatment. My State, as you know, has been very, very hard hit by the fentanyl crisis, and you know, when the President gave his joint address in March, I brought a woman from New Hampshire with me who had been suffering from addiction. Medicaid expansion covered her treatment. She got into recovery. She is now working in the private sector but also offering counseling and peer recovery services

to people who are trying to get their addiction treated through Medicaid expansion, and she is now on private insurance.

I remember talking to another Granite Stater while we were working to pass Medicaid expansion. She had been laid off from her job as part of the great recession, right? She had had an ongoing, chronic stomach condition. As she got laid off, her health insurance went away, too, and she couldn't afford the COBRA fee to keep her health insurance. She couldn't get healthcare, so she got sicker and sicker, and she couldn't go to work. But because she was a single adult, she couldn't get Medicaid coverage. So here is somebody who has been working, who wants to work, who has a chronic illness and can't get to work. We passed Medicaid expansion. She got coverage, she got treatment, and she got back to work.

The other great benefit of Medicaid expansion covering people with addiction in New Hampshire has been that, as people have gotten better and as more and more physicians have learned to integrate addiction care into primary care, we have a lot more people in recovery.

Like many of our States, we also have a workforce shortage. What has been happening now? New Hampshire is a leader in recovery-friendly workplaces so that people who got this Medicaid expansion coverage got their addictions treated, got better, can go to work in the private sector, and get private insurance. That is some of the benefit of Medicaid expansion.

But, of course, what we are hearing about now from the House and Senate Republicans is their desire to make massive cuts to Medicaid, including Medicaid expansion, and they are doing it. They want to rip away healthcare from millions of Americans so that they can pay for big tax breaks for billionaires and corporate special interests.

The Republicans have proposed cutting up to a third of Federal funding for Medicaid. If those cuts go into effect, that could mean 30,000 children in my State will lose their healthcare coverage. That means one in five seniors in New Hampshire could lose their nursing home care. All told, that could mean 60,000 people cut off from Medicaid, including, for instance, a young man whose parents I just met at the airport, actually, who has autism. Medicaid pays for his healthcare, but he could be cut off too.

So if Republicans continue with this plan, I am really, really concerned about what is going to happen to the millions of Americans who currently get their healthcare through Medicaid.

Senator BOOKER, can you address the ways in which Medicaid helps provide healthcare for Americans and the disastrous impact it would have if Republicans proceed with their plan to take coverage away from up to 25 million Americans just so that they can pay for big tax breaks, by the way, for people who are already billionaires?

Mr. BOOKER. Before I answer the Senator's question, I just want anybody who is watching to know that—and I will put it bluntly—this is one of the baddest ass human beings serving here in the Senate. You have been the Governor of a State with all the challenges. You are beloved. I have spent a lot of time in New Hampshire.

Folks, after New Jersey, it is one of my favorite new States. No disrespect to New Mexico over here on my right. But I love your State. I love the people of your State, and they love you.

You were an extraordinary Governor. You were a trailblazer, a glass ceiling breaker, a name-taker. You are a bad ass. And to have served with you as my colleague, you have the kind of leadership in the Senate that it needs more of, that of somebody who stands in the middle and draws people together to common sense and pragmatism.

I started on healthcare—

Ms. HASSAN. Yes.

Mr. BOOKER.—you know, some 16 or so hours ago, and you would be proud of me because she is one of these voices who comes to me and says: Hey, CORY. Let's bring people together.

I know that the Presiding Officer is new here, but he has the same spirit of trying to bring people together. This might be like the third time I have seen him in the chair over the last hours—17 hours.

Thank you, sir.

But you whisper in my ear all the time, like we have got to find a way to do this together. We have got to find a way to put more “indivisible” into “one nation under God.”

So I hope that you would be proud because I told my staff, who prepared for days—they spent days preparing all these sections, from farming to the environment and all the ways that Donald Trump is betraying his promises, betraying America, driving up costs, wrecking our economy, endangering us globally and here at home, and turning his back on a lot of our values, all while disrespecting this document more than any President I have seen.

But I wanted to make sure—I told the instructions to my staff to pull from all the Republicans you can. We want to use the Wall Street Journal. We want to use the Cato Institute. We want to bring this together because why we are standing up here is not to talk about left or right; we are talking about what is right or wrong. I do not want to talk about this being a Democratic moment; it is a moral moment.

You are the perfect Senator to be asking these questions about healthcare to, to me, because of what you stand for. You got elected as Governor—twice, I think. When you get elected to the Senate here, you have to get votes from Democrats, Independents, and Republicans or you can't win in New Hampshire. I have been in your State, and I have met the people. God, you have a very participatory democracy up there.

Ms. HASSAN. Yes, we do.

Mr. BOOKER. People feel like, if you are not going from north to south to house parties, you have to engage directly with the people. They don't care what party you ascribe to; they want to feel you, see you. They don't care how much you know until they know how much you care. That is why I think you are such a bad ass leader.

So you would have been proud of me when I did the healthcare section because I read from Republican Governors and Democratic Governors. Forty States have expanded Medicaid, and all of these Governors and all of these voices said exactly what you are intimating here, which is, do not let Donald Trump cut \$880 billion out of Medicaid. It will crush rural hospitals. It will crush level I trauma care centers. It will crush organizations that deal with beautiful disabled children. It will crush people who are struggling for healthcare. It will crush nursing homes. It will hurt red counties and blue counties. It will hurt America. Republican voices were saying that.

To have a bipartisan Senator who embodies the spirit this place should ascribe to more say these things is affirming the truth.

Why? Why are they rushing to cut \$880 billion, which voice after voice whom I read said that it would do so much damage to people's lives, so much damage to healthcare providers, so much damage to hospitals. Why? The only two things that will result from that are that they will extend the Trump tax cuts, where the disproportionate benefits went to the wealthiest among us, who are doing better than they have ever done in this country—they don't need it. Taking money from struggling folks and giving it to them is not the answer.

The other thing is, to a person who, like me, when we were executives—you were a Governor, and I was a mighty mayor. We had to balance our budgets. But they are not balancing the budget. They are not lowering the deficit. They are increasing it by trillions of dollars. This makes no sense to a pragmatic person who has balanced budgets, who expanded healthcare access, who made her State work, and who has loved and respected votes, frankly, from Democrats and Republicans. You know this makes no sense.

So if you are standing up and colleagues of mine further to the left of me, then why aren't other people standing up? Why did only one Republican in the House vote against it? He told the truth. MASSIE.

I see some of my Republican colleagues here.

He is a fiscal hawk. He told the truth. This budget is going to explode the American national debt, stealing from future generations. I can't vote for this. He was not bullied, like other people in the House, into doing what dear leader Donald Trump says.

So, my colleague, you are on the money. I have internalized your voice as there are only a few people's voices

I have internalized. One of them is my mother's, but you are more my peer. You are one of those voices in America right now who we need who does not slip into a partisan argument but makes the pragmatic argument that what Donald Trump is trying to do, with the aiding and abetting of congressional Republicans, is wrong. It is fiscally wrong. It is morally wrong. It will hurt Americans. It is not for the common welfare. It is not for the common defense. Read the start of the Constitution, please. I beg of you. You all swore to uphold it.

How do our Founders begin?

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.

Trillions of dollars of deficit doesn't secure the blessings of liberty; it endangers our country. The common welfare is this idea that everybody should have access to what makes us free. What makes us free is not having medical debt. What makes us free is not being chained to the uncertainty and insecurity that if someone in my family gets sick, I would not be able to afford it. Still the majority or close to the majority of bankruptcies in the United States of America are of people who can't afford their healthcare bills. We need to find better ways to expand access and not cut more people off.

You know this, former Governor: There are a number of States that have these things called triggers, automatic triggers, in that if the funding for Medicaid reduces to covering 90 percent of the costs, what happens in those States? Boom! Medicaid expansion goes offline. So if you don't even cut it \$880 billion and maybe you say we will just do \$250 billion of an ax, States are going to lose their expansion, and people are going to suffer and get hurt. Why? You said it. You said it. You said it.

You and I are the two people who want to see entrepreneurs make money. You and I want to see small business people thrive. We don't hate rich people. We think that is great. It is often, not always—Donald Trump—it is often a sign of people in America who are using the ingenuity, applying it, and being successful. But you and I both know that the richest people in this country don't need more tax cuts. It is morally wrong. It is fiscally wrong. It is wrong in the Name of God and America. How could we be doing this to ourselves?

Ms. HASSAN. Will the Senator yield for another question?

Mr. BOOKER. I can't call you one of the baddest ass people I have ever worked with and not yield to your question, but I have to read the words: I yield for a question while retaining the floor.

Ms. HASSAN. Well, thank you for yielding the floor for a question while retaining the floor, and thank you for the very nice compliments.

I do have a question for you about Social Security, and then I think another colleague of mine has additional questions.

But, look, as you know, we just talked about my wonderful State, New Hampshire. You also just talked about your mother. And I should just also let you know that my mother always made me memorize the preamble to the U.S. Constitution. So as I listened to you read it, I thought, Mom—

Mr. BOOKER. Shots fired on the Senate floor. Where is the Parliamentarian?

Ms. HASSAN. I hope my mom is watching right now.

Mr. BOOKER. Rule XIX her.

Ms. HASSAN. But here is my question. And just by way of background, as you know, New Hampshire is a small State. It is a very rural State. And, recently, the Trump-Musk forces have announced that they want to close a Social Security office in Littleton, NH.

Now, in Littleton, NH, that Social Security office, which takes applications and provides technical assistance for people who need Social Security or need Medicare or who have questions about their current coverage—it is the northern-most office in New Hampshire.

So they close that office, and now my folks in the North Country—and there are about 334,000 in New Hampshire with Social Security. My people in the North Country will have to drive as far as 100 miles to go to another New Hampshire Social Security office.

And, meanwhile, of course, they are laying off people from Social Security offices, and they are making it harder to get assistance via the telephone, which, as you know, many people who are on Social Security find the telephone the easiest way to make a connection to get technical assistance.

Elon Musk has called Social Security a Ponzi scheme. He says he wants to cut \$700 billion from Social Security and Medicare. So my question to you, as we are looking at an administration that says that it wants to make things more efficient but is actually laying people off, closing offices, making it harder for people to actually connect with a Social Security office—my concerns, of course, are that this is just going to delay claims, delay coverage, make it harder for people to get on Social Security because, actually, Trump and Musk want to cut Social Security. Trump said, of course, that he was going to protect it when it he was running for office, but now he is letting Musk do his cuts.

So, Senator BOOKER, can you speak to the ways in which seniors across the country count on the Social Security benefits that they have paid into?

This is not charity. People pay into the Social Security system. They earn the benefit.

And can you talk about the disastrous impacts if this administration takes benefits—Social Security, Medicare—away from our seniors?

Mr. BOOKER. Last night, I had a whole chapter on Social Security, outlining not just what you said, my colleague, my friend, but stories from seniors. And some of them really got to me. They were hard to read through.

I have to say, I have prepped this by reading a lot of them, but somehow on the floor, when I read about the woman who had Parkinson's, when I read about the person taking care of their elderly parents, a spouse with dementia, children with special needs—and Social Security, it helps a lot of folks. But here is the craziness—the craziness—of the Trump attacks on the Social Security Administration: First, he makes people insecure about it.

My mom lives in this amazing senior home, Las Ventanas, in Las Vegas, NV. Most of the people there—first of all, I love them all for who they are, not their party affiliation. But it is more Republicans than Democrats. And the story my mom tells me about just the worry that they or other people in their family have because of Elon Musk calling it a Ponzi scheme, of Donald Trump talking about utter lies from the highest post in the land, during a joint address, savaging Social Security with lies that everybody, from conservative papers to Democratic papers, to left-leaning papers, have all called that lie, lie, lie, lie, lie—there are not millions of people receiving false payments. They have insinuated so much insecurity that people are writing me letters talking about how they are losing sleep. They have so much anxiety because they only live on their Social Security check.

And Howard Lutnick, whom I know—and I don't know what he was thinking when he said it, a billionaire talking about his mother-in-law—I don't know what you were thinking, Howard. I just don't understand it, how you were saying if she misses a payment, she is OK; but if people complain, they are probably fraudsters. Do you understand how many millions of Americans only have that as their only protection between poverty and destitution; that if they miss a payment, they can't make their rent, they can't buy food?

So they have created so much insecurity, so much fear, and I compared it, Governor—I compared it—to the difference between an FDR and a Donald Trump.

FDR knew people were suffering. He knew people were afraid, and he stood before the American public and didn't lie to them, didn't attack people, didn't demean people, didn't degrade people. He comforted people. He allayed their fears. He inspired them: "You have nothing to fear but fear itself"—what an opposite in leadership.

So, yes, there are a lot of people who, right now, don't know.

But then my colleague from Massachusetts comes in and makes the very clear point—the professor we have in our caucus—she makes a very good point: They have already done benefit cuts because when you close offices in

rural areas, that person who is missing a check or has an issue, now they have to drive—how many miles?

Ms. HASSAN. A hundred miles.

Mr. BOOKER. A hundred miles.

Now, what is that hardship to a senior?

I have heard from people in their nineties. They already are having benefit cuts.

The Wall Street Journal—I told you, I was trying to make you proud. I wanted to get as many sources from anybody that was more center to right, and I read from the Wall Street Journal and said the customer service—the customer service—in Social Security is going from bad to worse. That was the title of the article.

So they are already doing cuts. They are already heaping insecurity on our seniors, heaping inconvenience on our seniors, heaping fear upon our seniors, heaping insecurity, making people lose sleep. This is wrong, wrong, wrong, wrong, wrong. This is not a model of leadership. It is a model of cruelty and mean-spiritedness and hurting people.

When is it enough, America? When is it enough that we say, it may not be my grandmother who depends on that Social Security check, but I love America. And you cannot love Americans, you cannot love America, you cannot call yourself a patriot—please listen to me. You cannot say you love this country and you are a patriot because patriotism is love of country, but you can't love your country unless you love your country men and women.

And love means that if somebody's mother or grandmother is hurting, is afraid, that I am going to stand up and do what I can to comfort them and fight for them because, today, it might be your grandmother; it might be your family with a disabled child.

This is not right or left; it is right or wrong. This is not a partisan moment; it is a moral moment. Where do you stand?

We started this by talking about John Lewis. It is time for good trouble, necessary trouble.

Thank you. Thank you, my friend, even though you made fun of me, before my entire State, for not remembering the very important preamble to the Constitution.

Ms. HASSAN. You did very well.

Mr. BOOKER. Thank you very much. I take your compliments because you don't give them abundantly or overly well. So thank you very much.

Ms. HASSAN. Thank you.

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

Mr. BOOKER. Heck no, not to you. Not to you. Not to you.

Let me tell you, I have something to get off of my chest about you. I woke up yesterday morning, and the first thing I did—now, this shirt is all wrinkled and a little ripe. But the first thing I did is grab a gift from you.

People, don't get upset ethics-wise. We are allowed to give each other gifts.

This looks like—I don't know how much it costs, but you gave me—I was

talking about traveling and how we have to pack bags and go all the time. And you told me: I travel with a steamer.

And I pulled out this little steamer for this shirt that I am wearing right now. You are one of the kindest, sweetest people I know. You are one of my closest friends here in the U.S. Senate. And I want to say something about you because, in this moment, as people are watching, I want people to go there.

We had a conversation. You came to my office. It is always a sign of respect when you come to a Senator's office. And you came to my office, and we were talking about social media. And I was encouraging you. You were a little resistant—if you don't mind me outing you—to open up and get more on the platform. We were talking about ideas and talking about Social Security, talking about Medicare and Medicaid.

You opened up to me. And I hope I am not betraying confidences. I asked you just like, what do you do? You are such an amazing human being. You are one of the kindest people I know. I asked you: What do you do on your weekends? What do you do for fun? Let people see it.

Then you kind of made me pause when you said: Well, my mother is kind of getting old—is getting older. I love her so much.

You said: My siblings and I, we alternate weekends, just spending time with our mother.

It was one of the sweetest things I heard. I said to you: What do you do with your mom?

And then you brightened up. And you choked me up, you jerk, because you said: What I love to do with my mom is to dance with her in the kitchen. When we are in the kitchen making food or something, I just love sometimes to put on a song, and we dance.

I don't know why it struck me as beautiful. And this is what I hope people will do right now. I said: Well, why don't you record that?

I didn't think you would do it, that you would ask her if you could do it. But you then put up one of the most beautiful videos I have ever seen, from one of my colleagues, of you and your mom in the kitchen. I think it is on your Instagram page. And I have looked at that video—I am probably all the views right now—of my colleague, this big U.S. Senator, loving his mother so much. And we are talking about that.

I have talked about this on the floor. Great nations respect their elders. They take care of them.

One of my colleagues, when they asked me a question about Social Security, they reminded me of what it was—the greatest anti-poverty program in the history of America; that Social Security rescued millions of Americans from being in poverty. It virtually ended poverty, although the checks now are becoming meager and meager. As prices are going up, more people are getting lower and lower toward poverty. And people who live on those checks live very austere.

But you are just this amazing guy who turns your own lived experience into greater and greater urgencies to fight for the people of New Mexico.

So I did not want to yield for a question before getting that off my chest. You are my friend. You are my colleague. You are my brother. And more than you know it, you are my inspiration.

So, yes, I yield for a question while retaining the floor now. I feel like I have so much power here to yield to my colleagues. They are often more eloquent. I am like afraid of WHITEHOUSE because he is one of the brainiest people in the Senate. But I now have the control.

But for you, now that I have gotten this off my chest and, hopefully, embarrassed you but maybe added a few more views to my favorite video, I yield for a question while retaining the floor.

Mr. LUJÁN. Senator BOOKER, thank you. I won't be surprised if Mom is watching right now. So you are probably going to get some messages from her.

But I want to thank my friend and colleague from the great State of New Jersey. You have been holding this space for the American people now for well over 17 hours.

While we represent different parts of the country, Senator BOOKER, we have the same values. I learned from you the importance of treating people with respect and dignity. That is what we should all be talking about here today—every day. I have also learned a lot about grace from you.

Now, I come to the floor to ask you a question about farmers. You and I both appreciate the long hours that farmers put in to take care of that soil, their families, the planning that goes into this, sowing the seeds. Sometimes you have to do a little weeding to make sure that we are going to all benefit from the fruits of their labor.

Having fresh food in a grocery store is not something that can be taken for granted. And for a lot of our constituents—I have had these conversations with nominees who have come before us, when they ask me: Well, why is someone just eating potato chips or Doritos from that local store?

I will educate them by saying: That is the only store around.

Mr. BOOKER. Yes.

Mr. LUJÁN. There are food deserts everywhere, but we can do something about that. We have programs in place that recognize the importance of getting someone a meal who needs that meal, supporting our farmers out there to sow those seeds, to help them with their planting.

But what I am seeing right now, Senator BOOKER, is our farmers have been on the receiving end of these Federal funds being taken away from the U.S. Department of Agriculture, these reckless tariffs that are hurting farmers and ranchers just as much as they are hurting anyone in America.

Outbreaks, bird flu—people know what the cost of eggs is in the store right now. Then they look into what is going on now. There is this bird flu that is going around.

My constituents ask: Well, why does the U.S. Department of Agriculture under Donald Trump fire the people, epidemiologists, that are responsible for containing this thing?

It just doesn't make any sense to folks.

I was in the Ag Committee earlier today, Senator BOOKER, and I was asking some questions to USDA, and I learned that on March 7, 2025, under the Trump administration, the U.S. Department of Agriculture terminated the local food in schools program and the Local Food Purchase Assistance Cooperative Agreement. And then they went further, and they also notified grant applicants on March 24 that the fiscal year 2025 competition for the Patrick Leahy Farm to School Grant Program is canceled.

Why does this matter to farmers and ranchers and people back home? These programs allow food banks and schools and others to purchase food from our local farmers.

Now, our local farmers aren't just making a decision on what seeds are going to be planted so they can sell the lettuce next week. They start this a year going back. So when the U.S. Department of Agriculture, a year ago, started talking to these farmers and ranchers about what programs were going to be in place and then these farmers, responsibly, went and found customers to sell their food—food banks, different groups around the country—they planned the rest of the year to be able to get that nutritious food into the bellies of people that need it most. That sounds like respect and dignity.

Mr. BOOKER. Yep.

Mr. LUJÁN. What is not respectful is when the Trump administration gives them a few days' notice and pulls the rug from under them and cancels the program that is going to allow the food bank—their customer—to buy their food.

What do those farmers have to do now across America?

Now, it gets worse and worse. I won't go into all of it, Senator BOOKER, but here is one of the dirty little secrets: All of these programs that are being taken away from the American people, it is to find an extra dollar for this tax policy under Donald Trump that my constituents started calling back in 2017 the "Trump tax scam."

I asked: Well, why are you calling it that?

They said: Well, everyone promised me—I am making less than the median income, making less than \$80,000, which is a lot of money in New Mexico, across America. The median income there is a little lower.

I was told that we were going to get the brunt of this tax cut, recognizing that we are hard-working and how hard

it is to make ends meet, but that is not what happened. Most of this went to families and folks making over \$2.8 million. I don't have anything against those families. I wish them well. I want them to make more—\$10 million—next year. But they don't need a tax cut. That should be going to those hard-working families that were told that they were being prioritized.

But they are the ones that told us—told me, anyway—that this was a Trump tax scam. That is the secret. That is where all this money is going.

So, Senator BOOKER, whether I am in a grocery store and I am chatting with constituents, we are out there looking at egg prices, or whatever it may be, they are concerned about what is going on here. And all they are asking for me to share with my colleagues here is: Just tell them to tell us the truth.

Mr. BOOKER. Yes.

Mr. LUJÁN. If they are going to vote to take these programs away—they have the votes, my Republican colleagues—just be honest. Treat my constituents with respect and dignity so that they can plan, so that a single mom that has a child whose Medicaid may get ripped away but that child has cancer—how are they going to plan for care in 6 months? So that farmer who started planting seeds recently but was planning over a year on what to do, so they can find another customer so that they are not going to lose that farm as well.

Now, before I ask you this question, sir, I want to end with this: Senator BOOKER, you often share a story of Abraham Lincoln's inaugural address, his second, and the man whose review mattered most to the 16th President of the United States.

Mr. BOOKER. One of my favorite stories.

Mr. LUJÁN. When asked his opinion of Lincoln's performance, former slave and abolitionist Frederick Douglass replied:

It was a sacred effort.

Let me be the first to say this is a sacred effort, Senator BOOKER, and I am proud to stand alongside you.

So, Senator BOOKER, the question that my constituents and I have for you is: Can the farmers and ranchers of America afford to pay for another Trump tax scam with all this nonsense that is going on?

It is a question I get when I am at church—I will say not during church but after church is OK—or at the grocery store. But when I visit with folks back home, this is what they are asking me.

Mr. BOOKER. Thank you for the question. You said it with the same words that literally—I didn't write these words. My staff wrote this little paragraph here: Trump is pulling the rug out from under producers that need stability and reliable markets.

You and I are sitting right by each other in the Ag Committee, and we see this connection that you so beautifully say, this idea that we are separate

from each other. These visible lines that divide us in this country are bunk compared to the strong ties that bind us. That farmer-producer in a rural neighborhood is deeply connected to the person in my community, and I live in an inner city—Newark, NJ. There is a powerful spiritual connection.

And if you talk to that farmer, they have got pride that they are feeding America, and they have pride in the ground. You describe it so beautifully. They have pride in their soil, and they want to be stewards of the land, and they want to create a vibrant American food system. And they rely on people that empower them in that process and don't pull the rug out from under them, drag back contracts, cut programming—especially not those programs that help them get fresh fruits and vegetables, healthy foods to food banks.

If you talk to the food banks, they will attest that families—how grateful they are for those fresh fruits and vegetables. You said it right: Parents want the best quality food for their kids. But this food system is killing them.

And when I heard the new Secretary of HHS talk about: Hey, we need to get greater access to fresh, healthy foods; food is medicine—things I have been saying for years—and then what do they do when they get in there? They cut the very programs that help our farmers get fresh fruits and vegetables to kids to deal with chronic diseases.

How could you say out of one side of your mouth—Trump—oh, I am going to let the MAHA people go their way, and then the first thing you do is cut the programs that help kids get healthy, nutritious foods? It makes no sense. It makes no economic sense. It hurts our farmers. It hurts our farmworkers. It hurts our end users.

It is not fair, and I appreciate your question, sir. Thank you.

Mr. WHITEHOUSE. Would the Senator from New Jersey yield for a question?

Mr. BOOKER. Let me think about this for a second.

Mr. WHITEHOUSE. You take your time thinking about it, sir.

Mr. BOOKER. I want to thank Senator WHITEHOUSE. He has been a colleague and friend for a long time, and he stands right there at that desk for very long speeches. I think I am trying to go a long time; you go a consistency of times. And you have talked about the climate crisis. You have talked about the Supreme Court scams.

You have not only educated Members in this body on these issues; you have educated America. You are a YouTube star now, and I learn from you every time I hear you speak.

So I am a little worried right now, but I am going to step out on faith and yield for a question while retaining the floor.

Mr. WHITEHOUSE. So, first question: It has been 17 hours. How are you doing?

Mr. BOOKER. I shall not complain. I shall not complain. But thank you for checking in on me, my friend.

Mr. WHITEHOUSE. Well, thank you for what you are doing.

Second question, if you would yield for a second question.

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

Mr. WHITEHOUSE. One of the ways in which I try to discuss what is going on in this country—when people are horrified, anxious, astonished, whatever—is to describe it as the rule of the looters and the polluters. The looters are the creepy billionaires coming to government, trying to figure out how to get even more for themselves.

It used to be that people thought that there was a thing: too rich to steal. That doesn't seem to be a thing for these creepy billionaires. They are more than happy to wreck Social Security so that they can send in their tech bros and their private equity folks to put right what they have broken. And the looting goes on across the entire face of government—scarred and disfigured by Musk and his little Musk-rats, I like to call them.

And then, of course, you have the polluters, who are doing a similar thing, which is to steal from the public. Only instead of stealing from government, they are stealing by dumping their pollution into our common air, into our common climate future, into our waters, into our lands, and defending, through political influence and clout and power and dark money in this building, their privilege to pollute for free.

And the endpoint of both of those is regular Americans, who are getting—to put it bluntly—pretty hosed, so that people on the other side of that—the creepy billionaires who are behind the climate denial scheme, who are out to wreck the American Government so that it can't regulate their conduct or make them behave like honest bankers and investors or insurers or whatever.

React for a moment, if you would, to that framing of our beautiful country now being subject to the really malevolent whims of the big looters and the big polluters.

Mr. BOOKER. Well, first of all, I will say to you that I meet wealthy people, like a group called the Patriotic Millionaires, who advocate for progressive tax policy and are the first to say and speak out against this tax scam.

Again, to me, what does patriotism mean to you? Patriotism, by definition, means love of country. If you don't love your fellow countrymen and women, how do you love your country?

And so what would you do—I actually know what you would do; I don't even need you to answer this question—if somehow you came into a billion or more dollars? You would not be asking for more.

You would literally say: Wait a minute, Republican Congress. Wait a minute, Donald Trump. What you are trying to do is take away healthcare from expectant mothers, from disabled children, and from seniors in order to give me more tax credit.

I would think that the patriotic thing to do, that the thing in love—in love—you would say: Donald Trump, go screw yourself.

Mr. WHITEHOUSE. If the Senator would yield for another question, while retaining the floor—

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

Mr. WHITEHOUSE.—I would add to your comment and request your response to the observation that not only is this an appalling manifestation of greed by people who already have more money than they are able to spend in their entire lifetimes, but the manner in which they are accomplishing their purpose is pretty loathsome in and of itself because the manner in which they are accomplishing their selfish purposes is to corrupt and degrade this great American democracy that we are all here to defend.

Mr. BOOKER. Yes.

Mr. WHITEHOUSE. And they do it by taking their billions and running it through phony front groups so it pops up as dark money in elections. And of course, the beneficiary of the dark money, the candidate, figures out exactly who is behind the big dark money contribution that ends up in the super PAC that is supporting them.

And of course, the big donor knows that they gave the money, so the deal between the creepy billionaire and the in-hoc-to-them political candidate is made. But because it is dark money, because it is secret, because it goes through front groups and into the super PAC and ultimately into the campaign, courts don't know, the public doesn't know, the voters don't know. Everybody else is left out of the joke.

Mr. BOOKER. Yes.

Mr. WHITEHOUSE. So bad enough that they are here arguing for excess benefits for themselves compared to regular Americans; worse, they are using dark money corruption to get there. So how is that patriotic?

Mr. BOOKER. I want to answer this question so badly, but the crazy thing is that the person best to answer this question is the person who asked it. You have sat here and given this detailed analysis to show how this group of very wealthy billionaires in this country are so perverting our system by creating these front groups that then interfere in our democracy in the most disgusting ways.

Even if you are like me and you can't stand the decision of Citizens United, even in Citizens United, the majority opinion really projected that we should do the DISCLOSE Act, which we have tried to bring to this floor and get passed, that says no more dark money.

How do we have a political system that is so corrupted by billionaires who so, with all of their money, drown out the voices in politics of other Americans?

(Mrs. BRITT assumed the Chair.)

A great example of that is, they are getting so reckless that many billionaires aren't even hiding it anymore; i.e.

Elon Musk. He is like saying, Hey, I am going to roll up into a Supreme Court case up in one of our best Great Lake States. I am just going to dump \$100 million there and then give away, as if to insult our democracy, million-dollar checks as part of my effort to influence an election with my overwhelming flood-the-zone amount of billions of dollars.

And by the way, hey, it is a pretty good investment, right? Donald Trump is his biggest campaign contributor. As soon he gets elected, a lot of my stock goes up—although, Tesla stock isn't doing so great right now.

The reality is, we live in a country right now that we are giving more and more ability for billionaires to use their wealth to rig the system and then get more wealth as a result of that.

It is so corrupt and so corrupting to this. We have been talking about this, as you said, for 18 hours now—these big, unchecked corporate contributions, billionaire dollars, dark money in front organizations that nobody in the Senate has outlined better than you are corrupting our Constitution.

And even the bad case, Citizens United, even they said this shouldn't have happened. You all should write laws in this place that force people to disclose where this money is coming from. But how many years has it been since Citizens United? Many.

And how many times have we failed? 15. Gosh, I don't know—and I am so grateful for this man because all my colleagues who are assembled here know doggedly and determinately you have stood right there with charts and graphs. You have outlined it ad nauseam. They have attacked you because your truth is so threatening to them that more people will know about how Big Money is corrupting democracy.

So how many assaults are we going to have to watch in 71 days when we now have a President that can create a meme coin? Isn't there something here, my great constitutional scholar, a big word called the called emoluments? This President has basically created a meme coin where we now know—hard to trace this—that millions of dollars have been put into his pocket. I have my team reading about it right now; foreign countries, Russian oligarchs, incredible Arab wealth. You want a payoff to Donald Trump because his government is being run like this?

It is not JFK:

Ask not what your country can do for you, but what you do for your country.

You have seen how he has behaved. It is ask not what your country can do for you, ask what you can do for Donald Trump. That is how he does business. How do we know that? Look at the evidence of the last 71 days.

If you are a law firm that comes to him and offers him \$40 million of pro bono work—God how many people I love in Newark had that kind of legal representation, pro bono. He is beating you up, threatening to ruin your business until you come to him and tell him what you are going to do for him.

We are seeing it. You want a merger? You want a merger? What do you do? Give a million dollars to his inaugural committee and then find ways—find ways to get money to him through his meme coin, kowtow to him in any way possible.

Senator WHITEHOUSE, nobody has outlined this more than I have—more than you have, excuse me. I encourage people—I feel like now I am advertising everybody's social media—to go to his YouTube. I call him the YouTube scholar. I am not joking.

You have on YouTube, I know, just great details and outline about how the corruption of money in politics is getting worse and worse and worse in this era of billionaires like Elon Musk who have no shame anymore.

I am going to say it on the Senate floor: There are so many reports and stories of them threatening elected leaders, threatening to put \$100 million in a primary challenge if they don't kowtow to what the great leader is telling them to do.

You use the word all the time, and I am going to say it over and over: This is corrupting to our democracy and amounts to another assault on our Constitution. How much will we take, America, until we say enough, until we say no more, until we say pass the Disclose Act, bring back the dark money. Put light on it. Shine the light of truth on this web of dark money lies. How long will we endure this?

I hope that you and I are in the Senate when you no longer have to give that speech because we took action on the Senate floor to end this nightmare of billionaires trying to outsize influence on our democracy.

Mrs. MURRAY. Will the Senator yield for a question?

Mr. BOOKER. Not immediately. I want to say to PATTY MURRAY thank you. You were a coconspirator in my life of trying to cause good trouble. You are one of the most powerful people in the U.S. Senate, and you have never lost.

Your compassion and your care for people—you are like somebody else I talked about in the Senate, two of my favorite people who live this ideal that I may be a U.S. Senator, I may be head of Appropriations, I may be President pro tempore of the Senate, but I will never lose my connection to the people I represent and to the convictions that brought me to this place.

You are such an honorable soul; you are such a great American; and you have been such a dear friend to me in this Congress. I savor the times where you let me come to your—a lot more seniority than I—you have got a great hideaway with a view—with a view, one day maybe.

But I just want to say thank you, PATTY MURRAY, for being so kind to me.

Your showing up right now gives me a lot of strength, puts more fuel in my tank. So now—I feel all this power—now, you will outrank me in every

imaginable way here. You are the head of Democratic Appropriations so I am obligated by the State of New Jersey to be very obsequious to you.

I yield for a question while retaining the floor.

Mrs. MURRAY. I thank the Senator from New Jersey. Thank you for your kind words. I would just say the country is so grateful for what you are doing right now because so many people are so frightened, worried, scared, and angry about what is happening to the basic values of this country that so many people have just thought would be there; that their kids would be able to go to school and get an education and not have to worry.

The Department of Education was going to be gone, and there was no watchdog anymore, somebody to help or that the research at NIH was going to be dismantled. Perhaps they had a family member who was in the middle of a—some kind of scientific experiment that is now being dismantled. What happens to them?

I hear from people on so many topics, seniors who are waiting on hold for hours and then getting hung up on because there is nobody to answer the phone anymore. These are basic values that we have as a country that we care for other human beings, and we are there as a country for them.

You are showing that fight today and inspiring so many people. I will ask you a question in a minute, but I wanted to personally thank you for what you are doing today. It is so important. You are the voice of so many people today, and I so appreciate it.

I want to change the dynamic a little bit. I wanted to come today—you have talked about the impact in so many areas of our country. But I wanted to come and ask about something really personal to me. That is the impact of our veterans today.

The Senator may not know this, but when I came to the Senate many years ago, I asked to be on the Veterans' Affairs Committee. I was the first woman ever to ask to be on the Veterans' Affairs Committee.

The reason for me was very personal. As you may know, my dad was a World War II veteran, and my family relied on his VA care when he was diagnosed with multiple sclerosis, but I also—when I was in college during the Vietnam war—many of my friends and colleagues were on the streets demonstrating, and my heart was out to them.

But I was thinking about those men and women my age who were going over to Vietnam and coming back injured in many different ways. So I actually did my college internship—I asked to be at the Seattle VA. I went to the Seattle VA during the Vietnam war and served on what was the psychiatric ward at the time.

I sat and worked with young men and women who were my age, college age, who had been sent there and came back with severe mental health impacts.

Today we call that PTSD, but at the time, we didn't know it.

I was looking at these men and women who volunteered to go over or sometimes their number came up at the time and came home, and it really impacted the rest of their lives.

I learned firsthand what it means when somebody says: I will go for my country to fight for all of you. So the America you have been talking about—here for you when you get home. Our promise to each and every one of them was if you serve your country in the military, we will take care of you when you get home.

That is a promise I hold near and dear to my heart, which is why I asked to be on the Veterans' Affairs Committee when I first came here. I will tell you, I have seen the impact time and time again. I go home, and I would hold townhalls when I was new here, and there would be a lot of veterans who would come and talk to me and tell me what is going on, what needed to be fixed, but always at that time, I share with my colleagues, women never said anything.

There were a few always in the back of the room. It wasn't until the regular meeting was over and they would come up quietly to me and say: I need to tell you what is happening to woman veterans. I need to share with you sexual assault. I need to share with you that there are no facilities. It is a men-only kind of place. There are no OB/GYNs. There is nobody to do mammographies, and I often don't feel comfortable sitting in that waiting room with a whole lot of people after I have had the experiences that I have had, and there is no place for women to go. So we have worked really hard to make sure the VA works for women.

We worked really hard to make sure the VA addresses the issues of today, the PACT Act that we worked so hard to make sure that men and women who were victims of toxic exposure overseas got the services they need. I could speak for 2 hours here about all the things we have done.

But then I see what this administration is doing to those men and women whom we asked as a country to serve overseas or here at home in service of all of us and the promises we have made them. I think: What are they doing? They are undermining the very value all of us are giving to Americans who serve above and beyond.

So when I hear of 2,000 layoffs a few weeks ago, I go: Wow. Where is that coming from? I know because I am getting the phone calls like I am sure you are from a VA researcher who has been taken off the job and fired, unexplained, told he wasn't doing a good enough job somehow, doing research on basic things like prosthetics or doing basic research on PTSD or doing basic research on the kinds of things that our men and women who served overseas are subjected to and need to come home and have specialized services and resources that they need.

Or I hear from veterans who can't get the services that they have asked for. So now when we are hearing this administration is about to cut 80,000—you didn't hear me wrong—80,000 more people from the VA, a vast majority themselves are veterans, I want to ask the Senator: How does that hit you? How do you feel about that?

Mr. BOOKER. I am so grateful you brought this up—and especially all the work we had to do when I was elected 12, 13 years ago. One of the earliest things I did was meet with women veterans in my State and heard these awful stories about how long it took to get gynecological care, the waits that they had to do, the indignities they had to endure. And I am glad we have made so many strides, in part, thanks to your leadership in New Jersey, with special dedicated facilities to our women veterans, with shortening those wait times, with prioritizing them.

But you are now right. Their proposal is to cut 83,000 positions from the VA. And you know this, you said it, just years ago this governing body passed the PACT Act with overwhelming bipartisan support, signed by President Biden in August of 2022, the largest healthcare benefit expansion in VA history. You were one of the leaders, increasing disability compensation and extending eligibility for VA care.

To meet this increased demand, the VA added 61,000 employees in 2023. These new hires were claim processors, physicians, nursing staff, medical support assistants, food service workers, and housekeeping staff.

And now the progress this body made is in jeopardy by this President. We added 61,000 just to keep up with the demands and the needs. And now he is cutting 83,000.

This is an article if you don't want me to yield: "DAV urges Veteran Affairs to be more transparent about vet care amid layoffs and budget cuts."

Veterans Affairs Secretary Doug Collins says veterans' care won't be impacted . . . which saw the largest expansion of VA healthcare benefits in a generation after the passing of the PACT Act.

Collins attended DAV's recent Mid-Winter Conference, where he came from behind the podium, walked into the audience and told attendees that vet care and benefits would not be impacted by the Trump administration's cuts.

In a recent appearance on the CBS Eye on Veterans podcast, DAV Communications Chief and Air Force veteran Dan Clare said the VA has not demonstrated how it will keep that promise.

They have not demonstrated.

DAV also does not have "a lot of information about what's planned," he said.

Can you imagine that? Leaving all these veterans with insecurity and uncertainty.

"Now, we're hearing about 83,000 people losing their jobs, 20,000 or so of those folks might be veterans," said Clare. "We're very concerned about how we're going to be able to cut that many people and maintain care and benefits."

VA has hired thousands of staffers since 2022 in response to the PACT Act, which

brought nearly 800,000 new enrollees into its system. Collins has said cutting the VA workforce by 83,000 would bring it back down to its 2019 level.

Before we did all of those expansions to help women vets.

Clare said he has not heard about specific performance problems with those who have been laid off . . .

Well, you haven't heard about it.

Veterans' needs have not changed and remain great.

"The people who are sick from the burn pits didn't necessarily get better overnight and some of these folks are going to have a long road to hoe when it comes to their health," he said.

DAV is getting calls frequently from veterans who are "scared, angry and don't understand what's going on and how it's going to affect them," added Clare.

Clare was one of the first whistleblowers on burn pits in Iraq, which eventually inspired the fight to pass the PACT Act, [to help] veterans who became sick, or even died, from their toxic exposures.

"When we started talking about dioxin, when Vietnam veterans heard that, they immediately thought of Agent Orange . . . and that's probably what this is, our generation's Agent Orange."

"There's a lot of decisions being made behind closed doors," he continued. "We want to know what the plan is."

We want to know what the plan is.

"We're not against efficiency [of] government. We're not against even removing VA employees who may not be fit performers."

A veteran has a unique understanding of another veteran's needs, Clare [said.] "When you lose those folks out of the VA system, [the veterans,] you lose an institutional capacity to understand veterans."

It is also unclear how the cuts will impact VA research, which Clare also stressed has helped veterans deal with complex issues that are service-connected, such as traumatic brain injuries and post-traumatic stress.

In addition to being concerned about how recent budget cuts and staff reductions will impact veteran care and caregivers, Clare said DAV is also concerned about the impact on veteran-owned small businesses.

DAV is asking veteran business owners whose contracts have been recently cancelled or who have been fired from their VA jobs to reach out here. DAV is actively keeping a list of veterans negatively affected by the Trump administration's cuts and plans on fighting for them in the weeks and months to come.

And those lists that they are keeping are getting longer and longer and longer, the people affected by this.

So to answer your question, it is absurd; it is offensive; it is ready, fire, aim. Tens of thousands of veterans laid off, veterans who do business and work in contracts, contracts ended. Why is this another group that the President of the United States is scaring? Frightened veterans, angry veterans; I am hearing from them in my State. I know you are hearing from them in yours.

What is the plan? What is the plan? They have no answer for us. All they are doing is cutting Social Security staff, undermining the delivery of those services, cutting the VA services. And why, by the way? Is it creating efficiency or effectiveness? No. Is it to create savings? Because we have to create savings to give more of those tax

cuts to billionaires like Elon Musk. It is not fair; it is not right.

When we send people off into the most dangerous environments on the planet Earth and ask them to put their lives on the line for us, the least we can do as a Nation is not penny-pinch on their backs of the service that they deserve.

Mrs. MURRAY. If the Senator would just yield for one additional question.

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

Mrs. MURRAY. The Senator is right. And so many veterans are afraid right now, and I had a veteran tell me that he was one of those people who got the letter, "you haven't performed well." He worked for the National Park Service, actually. And he said: I have been saving lives; I have been cleaning trails; I have been making sure the national parks are safe for all of you.

And then he said to me: I am a veteran. I served in the war, and I served my country there because I wanted to serve my country and my fellow Americans, and I came home and worked for the National Park Service to do the same.

And now as a veteran, my country is not there for me. And I would just say to my colleague and to everyone who is listening, these men and women that we make a promise to, that we say we will be there for you when you come home, that does not mean slamming a door in their face.

It doesn't mean that you have to wait for hours to get the services that you earned. It doesn't mean that you will be mistreated. It means that we will honor you. And I would thank the Senator for his response and just say to him again, do you think we are treating men and women in this country as great Americans by the actions that are being taken by this administration?

Mr. BOOKER. Thank you for the question. No. And I am just going to read another article that is going to make even clearer the point that you just laid that is so strong and so important.

This is from Axios. "How White House firings are hurting veterans."

The Trump administration's big cuts to the federal government are hitting one group particularly hard—the country's veterans.

Why it matters: Many of those who've served in the military derive a sense of purpose and belonging from their government work—viewing it as a way to serve their country and help their peers outside of active duty.

The big picture: It's not yet clear yet how many military vets have been fired, or will be. Last year veterans made up 28 percent of the federal workforce—

That's 28 percent—

per federal data—a far bigger share than the 5% in the private sector.

About 36% of the vets working in civil service, more than 200,000 in total, are disabled or have a serious health condition, per federal data.

So 36 percent of the vets working in civil service are disabled vets.

"This is the largest attack on veteran employment in our lifetime," says William Attig, executive director of the Union Veterans Council, a labor group that represents many of these workers.

Attig, who was deployed in Iraq from 2003 to 2009, has been talking to newly unemployed members, trying to get a tally of everyone who's lost a job.

Zoom in: Some veterans, still holding on to their jobs for now, are waiting for the hammer to drop.

"We're being smeared as leeches, but I just want to serve my country and provide for my family," an employee at the Department of Defense who is a disabled veteran, and requested anonymity because he didn't want to put his job further at risk.

Talk about free speech. "We're being smeared as leeches," says a disabled veteran who stood for us.

He was thrilled to land his job just a few months ago, but is anxiously waiting to see if he'll be one of the more than 5,000 workers the Pentagon said it would fire next week.

Privately—

Privately now—

GOP lawmakers are growing uneasy with [the] cuts that impact veterans—

I know this because I know the heart of so many of my Republican colleagues—

Politico reports, adding that vets have been "disproportionately affected" by the firings.

Since, again, GOP lawmakers are growing uneasy about it.

The White House did not say how many veterans have been fired. At least one department, Interior, has reportedly carved out an exception for them.

"President Trump has consistently stood up for our brave men and women in uniform—delivering crucial reforms that improved VA healthcare, decreased Veteran homelessness, and enhanced education benefits," said White House spokesperson Anna Kelly in an email.

There are a few reasons government work attracts vets. The federal government has a "veterans preference"—put simply, when deciding among a group of qualified candidates, they're first in line.

Put simply when deciding among a group of qualified candidates, they are first in line. I think that is right.

"You'd have to jump through a lot of hoops to not hire a veteran," said a former federal official. . . .

With more veterans working in government, more feel welcomed to work among people who understand them. Others are drawn to the retirement benefits—years of military service counts towards your federal pension.

Plus, many of these folks feel drawn to mission-driven employment. "Most veterans feel like they are putting on another uniform [when they go work in other Federal Agencies]."

These jobs are a crucial piece of the puzzle in post-military life, he says, adding that it's also a key part of suicide prevention for this at-risk group.

"One of the most important things you can do for veterans is to find them a job."

How can we expect to maintain what is, in America, an all-volunteer force if we fail to show those folks willing to serve how we care for our servicemembers when they come home?

Slashing more than 83,000 jobs from the VA alone, it is clear that these cuts are going to have a disproportionate

impact on veterans, veteran contractors, and the services they receive. I am angry about these cuts; but most of all, it should make all Americans feel a sense of sadness.

We ask our veterans to sacrifice so much, and we all know, who know veterans, it is not just the veterans, it is also veteran families that make that sacrifice, that share in that service, that share in that commitment.

And these veterans, some of the more talented dedicated leaders I know. They are not doing it for the money; they are doing it because they are called to serve.

Do you know how many people jumped into service after 9/11? Friends of mine rushed to join the military, to serve in Iraq and Afghanistan. And now they are home. Many of them with invisible wounds. Many of them with visible wounds.

And the services they rely on for their healthcare, the services they rely on as lifelines, the services they rely on often that give them hope and opportunity, not compounding their trauma, this is now being attacked by our President, who is not keeping his promises. He says he values veterans, but the facts are different.

"She Devoted Her Life to Serving the U.S. Then DOGE Targeted Her."

It had been six days since Joy Marver was locked out of her office at the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, five days since she checked herself into a hospital for emergency psychiatric care, and two days since she sent a letter to her supervisors: "Please, I'm so confused. Can you help me understand?"

Now, she followed her wife into the storage room of their house outside Minneapolis, searching for answers no one would give her.

A half-dozen bins held the remnants of 22 years spent in service to the U.S. government—first as a sergeant first class in Iraq, then as a disabled veteran and finally as a V.A. support specialist in logistics.

She had devoted her career to a system that had always made sense to her, but now nobody seemed to know whether she had officially been laid off, or for how long, or why.

"Are you sure you never got an email?" asked her wife, Miki Jo Carlson, 49.

"How would I know?" asked Marver, 45. "They deleted my account."

"Maybe it's because you were still probationary?"

"My boss said I was exempt," Marver said. "I was supposed to be essential."

In the last few months, more than 30,000 people across the country were fired by President Trump's new initiative called the Department of Government Efficiency, a historic reduction of the federal work force that has been all the more disruptive because of its chaotic execution. Entire agency divisions have been cut without explanation or mistakenly fired and then rapidly rehired, resulting in several lawsuits and mass confusion among civil workers. After a court ruled last week that many of the firings were illegal, the government began reinstating workers, even as the Trump administration appealed the decision and promised more layoffs.

The V.A. alone said it planned to cut about 80,000 more jobs this year—including tens of thousands of veterans—and for Marver the shock of losing her job was eclipsed by the disorientation of being repeatedly dismissed

and belittled by the government she served. She had watched on TV as Trump's billionaire adviser Elon Musk took the stage at a political conference wielding a chain saw to the beat of rock music, slicing apart the air with what he called the "chain saw for bureaucracy." She had listened to Trump's aides and allies deride federal employees for being "lazy," "parasitic," "unaccountable" and "essentially wasting" taxpayer money in their "fake jobs."

In Marver's case, that job had meant helping to retrain soldiers for the civilian work force and coordinating veteran burials while earning a salary of \$53,000 a year.

"Here's the note I got a little while after I was hired," Marver told Carlson, pulling a form letter from the government. "You represent the best of who we are as Americans," it read. "You could have chosen to do anything with your talents, but you chose public service."

"Kind of boilerplate, but it is nice," Carlson said.

Mr. BENNET. Senator BOOKER, would you yield for a question?

Mr. BOOKER. Before I yield, I just want to acknowledge my friend in the chair. And she is cracking a tight whip, so I appreciate you following the rules here. I have to read this now. And I am eager to get to your question, because you are one of the few people I knew before I got to the Senate.

Mr. BENNET. That is what I wanted to talk about.

Mr. BOOKER. I didn't yield for a question. I can't say anything, sir. The Parliamentarian will jump all over you. I have the floor.

So much power, it is going to my head.

Mr. BENNET. Sir, will you yield for a question?

Mr. BOOKER. Oh, man. I have known you for like 25 years. I wanted to talk about you, but you are being so insistent, I will reward your insistence and say I yield for a question while retaining the floor.

Mr. BENNET. Let me ask you, Senator BOOKER—can I ask you directly how long a question you would like? I am happy to provide you with a 5-minute question or a 5-hour question. It depends entirely on you.

Mr. BOOKER. I actually believe you would do a 5-hour question to try to help me power through. Senator, we have been at this for—

Mr. BENNET. My wife Susan—

Mr. BOOKER. I love you and your wife Susan, but I love your children more.

Mr. BENNET. That is why I came down here.

Mr. BOOKER. Is this a question? I yield for a question while retaining the floor. Let's make it a 7-minute question.

Mr. BENNET. I say this to the Senator of New Jersey and the Presiding Officer: Thank you very much for being here, for enduring this.

When I started here, I was sitting in the chair all the way to the right of where you are today, Senator BOOKER. I can remember the day you walked in to be sworn in. You came through those doors right there. I had a huge

smile on my face because I knew when you were walking through those doors, when you were walking into this Chamber, you would bring with you the kids that you used to work for in Newark, NJ. The reason I knew that was that when you were working for the kids in Newark, NJ, as the mayor of Newark, NJ, I was working for the kids in Denver as the superintendent of Denver Public Schools.

At that time in our country's history, we were engaged in a pretty profound effort to try to make better the schools in our respective communities—not that everything was perfect, but we were trying to drive achievement for the kids in Newark and the kids in Denver, and we talked about it over many years.

And here you walked into this Chamber, a place where it would be easy to imagine has long had the habit of treating America's kids like they are someone else's kids, not like they are America's kids.

I know that because if the kids in America were represented by the 100 desks that are in this Senate, roughly 9 of them would be graduating with a college degree in our country, 9 of these desks.

If we thought about the rates of literacy, the failure in our country to be able to teach people how to read or do mathematics decade after decade after decade, the proficient students would consume just a few desks in this place and everybody else would not be able to do basic levels of reading and basic levels of math.

But here you were, somebody who understands that, and here you are, somebody who understands that.

One of the very first projects you and I worked on—this is coming to my question—was the child tax credit. This was an effort to turn back 30 or 40 years of trickle-down economics that said that what we are going to do is cut taxes for the richest people in the country and just have it trickle down to everybody else. Some people don't know what that means. Let me, if I could—

Mr. BOOKER. Please, please.

Mr. BENNET. Let me just say what that actually means.

For you to understand that what tax policy is, that tax policy that Donald Trump has pursued now twice—once when he was President before and now again—you have to imagine that there is a mayor in Newark or there is a mayor in Denver or a mayor in San Diego or in Miami who is saying to the people that live in his community: I have an idea. I am going to go out and borrow more money than we have ever borrowed before as a community. I am going to go out and borrow a ton of money.

Your constituents and my constituents would say: Wait a minute, Mayor. Wait a minute. That makes me nervous. What are you borrowing all that money for?

Because I am worried about the fiscal condition of my city and my town.

This conversation would happen in every city and every town in Colorado or New Jersey, whether they are Democratic or Republican mayors. You have to answer the question: What are you spending the money on? What are you going to borrow all this money for? Is it for our parks? No. Is it for our schools? No. Is it to give mental health services to kids who desperately need it? No. Is it for our roads and bridges, our infrastructure? No. Are you going to do something important for our water systems? No.

What is the answer? What are you going to do with that money that you are borrowing, that you are mortgaging our kids' future? What is this important thing you are going to do with it?

The answer is, we are going to give it to the two richest neighborhoods in New Jersey or Newark or Denver, and we are going to expect that it is going to trickle down to everybody else.

That is the theory. That is what trickle-down economics is. That is what the Trump tax plan is. And there is a reason why no mayor in America has ever done it—because you would be run out on a rail because you couldn't explain it.

You are going to borrow money from the kids of our police officers, our firefighters, our teachers in order to cut taxes for the richest people in the community in the hope that they will buy a little bit of an extra—I don't know—luxury, and then that is going to somehow generate economic activity for everybody else. It is demonstrably true that has never worked.

By the way, these tax cuts, I say to the Presiding Officer and everybody else within the sound of my voice, have literally never ever come close to paying for themselves. That is a complete lie. That is why the Congressional Budget Office says this is going to blow a \$4.6 trillion hole in our deficit. And for what? To give tax cuts to the richest people in America when they need them least and when the income inequality is as great as it has been in our country since the 1920s? Which brings me to my question.

My cherished colleague from New Jersey, what was it we were trying to do with the child tax credit? There were a lot of people who believed that we couldn't even get it passed, that we couldn't even get the IRS to administer it. Then we did get it passed during part of the Biden administration, and lo and behold, more than 90 percent of the families in New Jersey got a tax cut. Lo and behold, more than 90 percent of the families in Colorado got a tax cut—not waiting for a trickle down from the wealthiest people, but they got a tax cut directly that did what? Cut in half—cut in half—the childhood poverty rate in America.

In the richest country in the world, for one moment, we said we don't have to accept this level of childhood poverty as a permanent feature of our democracy or a permanent feature of our

economy. We can do something different than that.

Senator BOOKER, that is what you said when you were mayor of Newark. We don't have to accept these generational outcomes of poverty or of poor schools or of lead in water. We can do something different. And that is what you brought to the U.S. Senate as well.

The tragedy, from my perspective, is—there are many tragedies about the election of Donald Trump—by the way, I will say again on this floor that I don't blame him for getting elected President. He ran, and he won. Those of us that were trying to offer a different vision have something to explain about why we were not successful.

But one thing I am certain of is that the kids in Newark and the kids in Denver are completely invisible to our current President, that he is not concerned with their welfare or even loses a minute's sleep over the next generation.

So I wonder if you could talk a little bit about—this isn't a numbers and cents question because I know—even though you don't look tired, I am sure you must be tired after all these hours and hours and hours. But can you talk a little bit, Senator, about how a society should be judged with respect to how we treat the next generation of Americans; how a tax bill should be judged by how we treat the next generation of Americans; how almost nothing else matters except what we do with respect to the next generation of Americans?

I can tell you that my daughters Caroline, Halina, and Anne understand better than most your commitment to them and your commitment to their generation because you have been such an inspiration to them, not just today—not just today but thank you for what you are doing—but for basically their entire lifetime.

Mr. BOOKER. Thank you for the question, my long, longtime friend, one of the folks I have known the longest whom I get to serve with.

What you did for me when I came here—It was you and Sherrod Brown who sat right there by the door. You let Bennet and Brown become Bennet, Brown, Booker—three B's. We joined together with some of the most extraordinary House Members and Brother Warnock to fight for the child tax credit.

It took years, but we found our opening when we called Ron Klain together before the election was even settled and said: Please, the best thing our country can do is to expand the child tax credit and make it fully refundable. Because we knew, as you said, it would give the overwhelming majority—between 80 and 93 percent depending on what State you are—of people in those States a—when you expand the earned income tax credit, it would give them a tax break.

It was arguably one of the greatest tax cuts in the last 50 years. It cut child poverty in America nearly in

half. And child poverty is a moral obscenity. Child poverty is violence against children—violence.

Here is the thing that you and I both know from the research: Every dollar you spend in raising a child above the poverty line, you return to society between \$5 and \$7 in economic growth and activity or in lesser costs because kids above the child poverty line have, for example, less visits to the emergency room.

I just don't understand how we are a nation—again, the wealthiest Nation—that has one of the highest child poverty rates. It makes no sense, zero sense, when we proved once and for all with that 1-year effort—because we couldn't make it permanent; we were short one vote in this body—we proved forever in America that child poverty is a policy choice, not an inevitable reality.

So you asked a great question. Why, in a nation that was founded by men that studied virtue, the ideals of virtue—they were imperfect geniuses. They were imperfect geniuses, but they really struggled with moral philosophy.

We have the power—we have proven it—to cut child poverty in half. What is the argument against it? Wasteful spending? Come on. Come on. Giving trillions of dollars in tax cuts to the wealthiest in America—I am sorry, it is wasteful spending, especially if it ends up blowing a hole. Those tax cuts don't pay for themselves. Trump 1 tax cuts didn't, and renewing them won't. Doing the same thing over and over again and thinking you will get different results is the very definition of “insanity.”

You are one of the most passionate—I remember a spellbinder of a speech you gave in this body. You were so angry.

I love it when Bennet is unchained.

You were so angry when you started talking about the horrible policies of this Nation that have eaten away the inheritance of children to come. You went off on the trillions of dollars spent on stupid foreign wars, where our brave men and women fought for this country, but this country made bad mistakes in these long wars. You talked about the money we spent there. And you talked about the first time in American history—common sacrifice every war before that, not just the men and women who were brave enough to go out and fight—you said the first time in American history that we said: The only people that are going to bear a burden are the people that are going to go. The rest of you get tax cuts.

George Bush—first time ever we went to war and gave tax cuts. From the Civil War, to the Revolutionary War, to World War I, to World War II, it was a common collective effort. My grandmother talked with pride about victory gardens and with pride about war bonds. Everybody pitched in.

Here we are at another crossroads. Is America going to tolerate this idea

that we are going to give extraordinary tax cuts that overwhelmingly, disproportionately will accrue to the wealthiest amongst us? For what?

If I were a mayor, I would have to answer that. So I appreciate your question, but I also appreciate your moral indignation. I really do. I keep saying over and over again, in elevating the voices of Americans on this floor, in elevating the point, I hope, that we can't keep doing things like this as business as usual. These are real issues, not of right or left or of right or wrong. It is a moral moment in America, and you point out a very clear choice we have: When we talk about our tax policy, it should reflect our values.

Thank you, sir.

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

Mr. BOOKER. For JACK REED, I would do just about anything. So I yield for a question while retaining the floor.

Mr. REED. First, thank you for continuing to highlight the harm that is being done by the Trump administration and that it is inflicting on working Americans: flouting the law, withholding Federal funds, illegally shuttering Federal Agencies, ruining longstanding alliances, increasing prices and taxes on American consumers. It goes on and on and on.

Last week, the Department of Health and Human Services announced it would fire 20,000 employees. Those cuts appear to be taking shape right now. Is the Senator aware that there are reports that thousands of HHS staff have been locked out of their offices this morning?

Mr. BOOKER. To answer the Senator's question, I have been on the floor since last night. So I haven't read any news reports. But when you ask if I am aware of thousands and thousands of HHS employees who have been laid off of their jobs, I am not aware of it, but I am not surprised. The question isn't, Is Donald Trump going to lay more people off? The question isn't, Is Donald Trump going to lay, more disproportionately, veterans off? The question is, What are we going to do to stop it when it isn't thoughtful, reasonable cuts?

He talks about the people he is cutting as leaches and demeans and degrades their commitment to service and their noble obligations.

We were told that HHS would be about making America healthy again, and I haven't seen that. I have seen them cut services that give children access to fresh and healthy foods. I have seen them cut regulations on polluters that make our air quality worse, which hurts people with emphysema, with asthma, and with other respiratory diseases. In fact, a lot of the actuarials show that more Americans die when polluters are allowed to go back to polluting more. I can go through the things they are doing that are not making our water healthier or safer, that are not making our air

healthier or safer, not making more access to access healthcare that stops and treats chronic disease, and not giving access to healthy food. We are not making America healthy anymore.

So these cuts don't surprise me, but they hurt me. They hurt me. These are Americans. They are disproportionately veterans. I thank you for speaking up for them today.

Mr. REED. If the Senator would yield for another question.

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

Mr. REED. President Trump and the Secretary of HHS, Secretary Kennedy, are, as I indicated and made you aware, firing a host of people today, but the critical staff functions will be undercut—for example, the Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program and the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health, which focuses on worker safety.

LIHEAP, as you know, provides essential support to literally keep people warm in the winter and cool in the summer in our Southern States. With LIHEAP undercut like that, there will be effects. People will become unhealthy. In fact, they probably could even pass away.

NIOSH, on the other hand, is an Agency that looks after 164 million people in this country so they are safe.

We all know—we all remember back—all of those stories about the Gilded Age, which sometimes, I think, the administration wants to bring back, where children labored in shops, where garment workers were killed in fires because there was no way to get out, as all the exits were sealed. The National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health prevents that.

Work-related injuries and illnesses cost our economy \$250 billion annually. So that will double, triple, quadruple.

We are seeing all sorts of reports about the National Center for Injury Prevention and Control at the CDC. They do critical work, and they are under the gun.

We are seeing reports that the Director of the FDA Center for Tobacco Products has been fired. We can see that President Trump and Secretary Kennedy would rather stand up for Big Tobacco than for young kids who get hooked on it, and it ruins their health.

These are just a few of the cuts, and I know you are aware of them. I know you are focused on these. They are going to destroy years of progress, and, basically, it is being shouldered by working Americans. Nobody who lives in Mar-a-Lago needs LIHEAP heating. Nobody who dines at Mar-a-Lago needs Occupational Safety and Health deployed, but the waiters do, and the grounds people do.

So, Senator, what are your thoughts about it?

Mr. BOOKER. I so appreciate the question from my friend.

I really think that he is a superpower, and you are a Superman in that character because you are thinking about the people affected.

We throw these acronyms down here, and they sound like government programs, but then you meet with people. I remember when I was starting out in my political career in service in Newark, and I had this dear friend named Kim. She was one of these people who worked at trying to sign people up for LIHEAP. The stories would affect her of the people for whom that was a lifeline for them to have a little bit of resources—a little bit of resources—to help them get their energy costs in place where they could afford heat in the winter and some air in the summer. There are stories of elders and the vulnerable.

I don't understand how we can be a nation with so much wealth and abundance, and we haven't figured out a way to design a system where, when you invest in the well-being of people, people thrive, where kids are growing up in quality housing, with great public schools, with clean air, without lead in their water, and above the poverty line.

Do you know what I love about young people in this country? It is their resiliency. I meet these beautiful children with light in their eyes, and all they need is a little fertile ground, and they go beyond our imagination in what they can achieve.

So here we are taking our national treasure. The resources being paid into our taxes are our national treasure. And what do we invest in? What do we do with it? Well, we are running up more debt. We are not going to pay for these tax cuts that are overwhelmingly going to go to the wealthiest, but we are taking all of these things that people rely on from our veterans to our seniors, to our disabled, to our expectant moms. We are just taking as much as we can to defer as much of these gross tax cuts that go disproportionately to the wealthy.

So, again, I return to where I have been for closing in on 19 hours. I go back to: What are we going to do about it? It can't be business as usual. There are too many things we have already covered that show that this is a moral moment in America. Where do we stand?

As John Lewis said and as I keep repeating—he says it is time to get into good trouble, necessary trouble, to redeem the soul of our Nation, and what you are talking about goes directly to the soul, what we stand for. Whom do we stand for? We should stand for each other.

Thank you, sir.

Ms. CANTWELL. Madam President, will the Senator from New Jersey yield for a question?

Mr. BOOKER. To my dear friend, I yield for a question while retaining the floor.

I thank you for being here. I thank you for your leadership. I thank you for what you stand for. I look forward to your question.

Ms. CANTWELL. I so appreciate the Senator from New Jersey trying to articulate the urgency of this moment.

I know you have discussed many things over the last I don't know how many hours it is, but it has been many, many hours. You know we just had a hearing this morning related to the markup of the Social Security nominee, and somebody—we are just trying to find out—who is a whistleblower said he was involved in helping DOGE.

We are here today, trying to bring attention to the American public that people are trying to rearrange essential services and contractual obligations—things like Social Security or Medicaid or even Medicare—by basically saying “Well, we have this efficiency strategy” when in reality they are over there with numbers just trying to carve something out of the budget—billions of dollars out of Social Security efficiency or billions and billions and billions of dollars out of Medicaid, which would really come right out of our hospitals, which are saying they don't even think they can stay open.

But this notion of Social Security—I don't know if you have heard that not only are they closing offices and cutting jobs, but they are asking people to reregister.

Mr. BOOKER. Yes.

Ms. CANTWELL. So my constituent, who they basically said was dead, was not dead. He wanted his Social Security. So not only did they not give him his check in January, they tried to claw back checks from the previous months out of his bank account.

Even though this has gotten national press and attention, you would think that everybody on the other side would be like “No, that is not what we are trying to do” even though the President in the State of the Union said all of these people were getting Social Security checks when my constituent is standing in line with less and less staff, trying to get his Social Security. And guess what. They are still at it. As of last Friday, they were still not giving him his Social Security.

So what are we unleashing on America? What are we unleashing that even—and I don't know whether you addressed these Social Security issues in your statements. I so appreciate you emphasizing the urgency here because this is the dismantling of contractual agreements between the American people and the people's body. We are here to represent them and stand up for it, and people are acting like they don't care.

So you are here in an extraordinary athletic achievement. Thank you. It makes your Stanford days look like nothing, right? You have achieved this great, long effort to bring illumination to the American people that they are getting screwed over the fact that these cuts are not some efficient way to deliver better service. In Social Security, they are undermining Social Security.

So have you heard of these cases, the whistleblower issue and others, and do you believe that is what we should be paying attention to and that before we

get a vote on Mr. Bisignano, we should be finding out what whistleblowers are saying and about his involvement relating to DOGE and making sure that Social Security checks are protected?

Mr. BOOKER. I thank you for the question, my friend and my chairwoman.

I did talk about this, but it is so worth repeating. At some point in the night, we covered Social Security, and we read story after story after story of senior citizens who are frightened and afraid that the President of the United States will stand at the joint address and attack Social Security and make fun of it with lie after lie after lie about millions and millions of people getting fraudulent checks when the people who do the fact-checking and even the Social Security folks themselves say that it is a minuscule number of people getting checks and usually it is an overpayment.

But they didn't stop there. Elon Musk called it a Ponzi scheme. The richest man in the world and the most powerful man in the world—himself a billionaire—are attacking the program that millions and millions of our senior citizens rely on.

I read letters from people who said: Don't forget about the mental or disabled who rely on SSI. They were begging us to remember and speak their names and tell their stories.

There is a lot of fear, a lot of terror, a lot of insecurity.

We spoke about this on the floor, that the benefits are already being cut. What do I mean by that? Well, if you are cutting Social Security offices—as one of our colleagues said from New Hampshire—in a rural area, you are forcing people to have to drive 100 miles if they have a problem. They can't talk on the phone because the wait times on the phone—I read an article in the Wall Street Journal, which is no leftwing mag. It was talking about how the customer service is going downhill because of the cuts they are making, and now you are forcing seniors—we read letters from 85-year-olds, 90-year-olds, 93-year-olds. They are going to drive 100 miles?

I read letters from Social Security workers who now work in inadequate spaces, with inadequate staff, unable to do the job they love. They are not leeches. They are not people who should be demeaned or degraded by the most powerful people in our land. They are public servants who love their jobs and want to serve seniors but now can't do it because they cut, cut, cut before they thought, thought, thought.

Ms. CANTWELL. Will the Senator yield for another question?

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

Ms. CANTWELL. I thank the Senator from New Jersey. The issue that I think is not being illuminated enough is the sheer numbers here.

In my State of Washington, 1.4 million people are on Social Security and 1.8 million people are on Medicaid. So

you are talking about a big Federal relationship.

You know, I actually worked in the private sector. I can tell you one thing about the private sector: The bigger it gets, usually the more inefficient it gets. It just happens. Big organizations can be inefficient.

So just because the Federal Government is the government doesn't mean that Social Security and Medicaid are fraught with fraud. In this case, my constituent is not even getting his check, and no one is responding. You would think that with all this commotion, that Social Security would want to jump right on it and fix it, but they are not.

The question I have for the Senator from New Jersey is, in my State, I have, as I said, nearly 1.8 million people who are on Medicaid, and the same problem is now where our colleagues are trying to say they are going to get \$880 billion out of the Energy and Commerce budget of the House of Representatives when in reality like 90 percent of that money is Medicare or Medicaid. If Medicare is supposedly off the table, then the majority of that is going to come from Medicaid.

So in my State, I am hearing from hospitals that that means they could close. That means essential Medicaid services that are used even in our jails or for fentanyl treatment or Medicaid that is used as an ObamaCare expansion for healthcare that so many literally red Republican States, Republican Governors have said: We want that.

The Governor of Idaho: Yes, we want that.

That is an expansion of Medicaid, and it is successfully working at providing healthcare to millions of Americans.

But now our colleagues are entertaining a notion that they could cut this system. They are not really making it clear, so, again, the illumination of you showing the urgency is like a big flag that we are trying to show to the American people: This is not a drill. This is now. This is happening. The beginnings of it are happening.

Now this debate that is going to ensue is going to be a massive cut into the programs unless the American people wake up.

Now, in your State, are you hearing in New Jersey about the Medicaid cuts, the impacts on hospitals, on the delivery system, on essential services?

Mr. BOOKER. I cannot emphasize to you strongly enough, we decided to start this whole thing at 7 p.m. last night with Medicaid. We read story after story after story after story of people who are Medicaid beneficiaries who are terrified, who are afraid. If they cut \$880 billion, if they diminish the cuts in any way to their services—they are holding together their lives in this fragile financial equilibrium, and one little tug of a transportation service, one little tug of a home healthcare giver, and it all crumbles. They are terrified and afraid.

Some Americans are dealing with the greatest challenges—not of their own making. Some of them are working full-time jobs, and getting an injury causes an extraordinary amount of chaos to their lives.

So, yes, I read from the people who are recipients. I read from the people who run hospitals—from rural hospitals, to urban hospitals, to level I trauma centers—who all said that if they cut hundreds of billions of dollars, it will affect them.

I did something really important. I read from Republican Governors and Democratic Governors because I keep saying over and over: America, this is not right or wrong. It is right or wrong. It is not a partisan moment. It is an American moment. It is a moral moment.

I read voices from Republicans specifically, Republican Governors in Medicaid expansion States. They have this trigger—you know this—many States, that when the funding from the Federal Government dips below 90 percent, boom, Medicaid expansion is over and millions of people are in financial crisis, in healthcare crisis.

What is it going to take for us to say no with such a firm voice, such a chorus of conviction, thousands, hundreds of thousands of Americans, red, white, and blue, every State, saying: Do not do this for no good reason but to give the majority of your tax cuts to billionaires like Elon Musk. It makes no sense.

Who are we as a country? These are not normal times. This is not usual. We should be standing up because I read the stories of Republicans who run hospitals, Republicans who are Governors, who all are saying: Don't do this. Don't do this.

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

Mr. BOOKER. Senator PADILLA, I was teasing. I am not yielding yet, Senator PADILLA. I was teasing that man over there named BENNET. He and I have known each other for years, but you and I have known each other for longer. I knew the Senator from Washington before I got here—mutual friends. So these are three people who were friends of mine before we met in this institution. If I had COONS here, I would have all four.

You, though, I knew you longer than BENNET, longer than the great Senator from Washington, and the chairwoman. We met in 1998, 1999, around then. We were both city council people. And a dear friend, the beautiful man who introduced us, told me before we walked into your office that you were a rising star, that you were a man of deep decency; that you were going to do extraordinary things in your career, and he didn't overstate the fact.

You are one of my close friends, and I definitely yield for a question while retaining the floor.

Mr. PADILLA. Let the RECORD reflect that he said the exact same things—probably better things about you, and he was absolutely correct.

But I couldn't help but interject right at the moment where I did because, once again, your passion is coming through.

First of all, I tremendously admire what you have been doing here on the floor of the Senate today, starting with last night. As I have been watching off and on, there have been moments where your empathy and your sympathy and your care and concern are coming through. You can't help it. It is who you are.

There have been other moments, as you have been talking about some of the key issues and dynamics of this current political climate that we are in, where your passion is coming through and, at times, anger.

I know it because I have seen it. I know it because we get calls in my office about this. I know it because if you monitor comments and commentary on social media about what my colleague is doing here on the Senate floor, some people have asked: Why is he so angry?

Well, I would like to say here right now that Senator BOOKER has every right to be angry because of what is going on. I know I am angry with so much of what is going on. And the American people have every right to be angry with what is going on because none of what we are seeing come out of the Trump White House is normal.

But every day, this approach of flooding the zone with more and more extreme actions runs the risk of making people grow numb to these attacks, and we certainly can't surrender to the feeling of just being overwhelmed by their tactics.

So I want to thank the senior Senator from New Jersey for doing what he is doing to shake and awaken the conscience of our country.

As I was listening to my colleague talk about the real dangers of the Trump administration, what it poses for our Nation, I also reflect on what it means for our environment because I know it hits home for many folks but especially in my home State of California.

California—many of you have come to visit time and again—is home to some of the most beautiful parks and natural wonders in the Nation, but if you grow up in Southern California, like I did, you also know there is a flip side to this climate discussion. We are seeing—we live through the real cost of climate inaction.

Growing up, I can tell you not just about the smell of diesel exhaust, which I will never forget, sitting in a schoolbus going to and from school, but the regular days where school would be shut down early and we would all be sent home because of the smog—toxic smog—in the air in the greater Southern California area. These were concrete reminders of the real threats emissions pose to our health.

California also knows the dangers posed by extreme weather. We know the droughts, we know the floods, and, yes, all too often, we have come to

know wildfires, devastating wildfires like the ones we experienced in Los Angeles County at the beginning of this year.

Senator BOOKER was kind enough to come visit a few weeks ago to tour Altadena—the epicenter, if you will, of the Eaton fire that devastated so many. I think we both agreed and anybody who has visited the area to see for themselves would agree you cannot see what happened in and around Altadena and come away unmoved.

I could go on and on with examples and reasons to say to you that this is exactly why California for decades has worked so hard against pollution and against the impacts of climate change, everything from being aggressive on tailpipe emission standards to our ambitious conservation goals.

The 30x30 goal set up by the Biden administration was modeled after the 30x30 goal set up by the State of California. California is also home to the very first Earth Day, which is now celebrated nationally each and every year.

But, today, much of our progress is now at risk because just in the first 2 months of the second Trump administration, we have seen nothing but attacks on this progress of environmental protection.

The Trump administration has sought to reverse the endangerment finding, which is the most basic finding of climate science—that, yes, greenhouse gases harm public health. They have taken the steps of illegally freezing funding that this Congress—this Congress—had previously appropriated. I am talking about the types of investments that keep our kids and our communities healthy.

Earlier this month, the EPA—Trump's EPA—announced that they would be rolling back more than 30 environmental rules. By doing so, they are not just going to make Americans less healthy; they are also going to hurt our economy, and it is going to clear the way for China to become the world leader in green technology. So much for "America First" if they continue down that road.

Even while the Trump administration has refused to fight climate change—it is one thing to not be helpful, but they have actually taken a number of steps that are actually harmful and hurtful, that make it harder, for example, for States to respond to natural disasters.

They have toyed with tying wildfire disaster assistance to political demands. They have proposed eliminating FEMA. They have implemented Federal freezes on things like hazardous fuel removal and the hiring of Federal firefighters—things that we need to do in the winter months to prepare for the hot and dry summer months when the risk is greatest.

They have even brazenly opened up dams and flooded portions of the Central Valley to pretend President Trump was helping with the Los Angeles

wildfires when the fact is, those fires were contained when they released this water—water that is no longer available in the hot, dry summer months. So they are not just refusing to act or to help; they are making matters worse for States like California and many others.

That is what this fight is about. Our fight for the environments is about America's health and safety, it is about American jobs, and it is about America's future.

With all of that being said, my question to Senator BOOKER is this: For the next generation of Americans, for the young people who are tuning in and wondering "Well, what is it that I can do? Do I have a voice? Do I have any power?" what would you say to them? How can they take action?

Mr. BOOKER. I love you for that question, my friend. And I just want to talk about anger because I have been all over the place. I read these letters, and they make me sad. I read these letters, and they make me angry. I read these letters, and they make me embarrassed that we are a country where people have to rent their pride and beg for help because of the little, teeny modicum of support they get from a service like Medicaid.

But I have been saying over and over again—as I have tried to learn from my elders, as I have tried to learn from the heroes I revere—that I learned from my parents anger is not a bad emotion. It is what you do with that emotion that is important.

Does it consume you? Does it drive you to hate other people or do you allow it to fuel you? Because it was ferocious love that had ancestors of all of ours in this country make it through insults—no Irish need apply; the injuries of Japanese internments. It is what do you do with those feelings. You are not defined by what happens to you; you are defined by how you choose to respond.

So I tell people, anger—if you are not angry, if you are not angry—let that fuel you.

Well, what about the heartbreak that I feel? Well, I get emotional sometimes because I read a letter and something in it makes me remember somebody I know or to feel the hurt of constituents begging for help, and it breaks my heart.

But I tell you, if America hasn't broken your heart, you don't love her enough because there is so much heartbreak and fear and pain in a nation where people are seeing their economic hopes and dreams of maybe buying a home or having the money to help their kids with school or to meet their basic needs—where so many Americans are one flat tire, one \$400 hit, and they are suddenly doing payday loans or having to struggle to find a way through. There is so much heartbreak in this country.

Great love means you make yourself vulnerable to having that heartbreak. But the heart is a powerful tool that, even when it is broken, it still beats.

What about people who are afraid? I get afraid sometimes. I think about this legislation: If it goes through, what is going to happen in my State? I know the hospitals. I know the recipients.

But you are telling me: Look at our history. Is there anybody in American history that you revere that didn't face extraordinary fear, because you cannot have great courage without great fear. Fear is a necessary precondition to courage. And so you ask me, my friend, what can people do?

I want to remind people, as I have said before on this floor, to remember the truth that I heard before I came here: that change does not come from Washington; it comes to Washington by the people who demand it.

I said this earlier: Do you think that we got suffrage in this country because a bunch of men on this Senate floor right here put their hands in and said: Hey, fellas, on the count of three, women get the right to vote. Ready? One, two, three, go.

No. That is not how it happened. It happened because of Alice Paul. She was a young, young person from New Jersey. She broke with the course of human events. Alice Paul—one of my greatest heroes—you know what she did? She caused a heck of a lot of good trouble, necessary trouble.

She is the first American ever—young American, in her early twenties—the first American ever to protest in front of the White House. She broke with the older, more mature suffrage organizations and went to the White House and did what she called a silent protest. She held up signs quoting President Woodrow Wilson's own words about freedom and equality saying: Aren't they true for me? Like a great Black woman would later say: Ain't I a woman? Don't I deserve rights?

You don't think she was afraid? Let me tell you how afraid she was. Hundreds came out to jeer her, blocking the street, and then they arrested her for obstructing public passage.

And then what do you do with a strong, powerful woman? You say that she is crazy, and you throw her in an insane asylum, before Gandhi. Sitting in jail before Gandhi, Alice Paul, this young American from New Jersey, goes on a hunger strike.

And they don't honor her hunger strike. They shove tubes down her throat, crack eggs into the tube, force-feeding her.

And thank God for the First Amendment, which is under attack here in America; the freedom of the press, under attack here in America. Look at the dragging of the journalist, Jeffrey Goldberg, right now for doing what? Getting the highest security officials in the land, just showing them the laws that they were breaking.

A journalist covered what Alice Paul did. She gets out of jail because of public outrage. She goes back to protesting in front of the White House,

and Woodrow Wilson, the President of the United States, finally comes out and joins her in supporting suffrage.

You don't think she was afraid, angry, heartbroken? But she did something different. She chose a new and unusual pathway to show that this is not the America I believe in.

The poetry of Langston Hughes:

America never was America to me,
And yet I swear this oath—
America will be!

The poetry of Langston Hughes:

There's a dream in the land
With its back against the wall.
To save the dream for one,
It must be saved for ALL.

It is what you do with those emotions that matters. Does it call you to greater service? Does it call you to greater sacrifice? Does it call you to greater love?

And let me say one more thing. As you were speaking, I just wanted to bring this up. You know I love history. And this is one of my favorite letters, ALEX, my colleague Senator PADILLA.

It is one of my favorite letters in all of American history because an obscure, unknown American—obscure and unknown, would never have been known—writes a letter to a powerful, powerful man. This obscure American woman that nobody knows or would have heard of ever, if somebody didn't hear about her story and write a book—she would be gone, like most of the great heroes in American history that we don't know their names.

It reminded me of the last healthcare debate when Donald Trump tried to take away the ACA and how many amazing, heroic people who I don't remember their names but rose up and said: No, no, no.

They got three of my colleagues—McCain, MURKOWSKI, and COLLINS—to change their vote on this floor and stop healthcare from being stripped away from 20 million Americans.

Well, here is what I mean. It is not the powerful people with titles and celebrity and offices and billions of dollars that have ever shaped this country. What shapes this Nation is hard-working, determined Americans who say: I am going to redeem the dream of America. I am going to heal the soul of this country. I am going to demand that we do better, that we rise higher, that we make change happen.

What can you do, that you ask, if you are a young person?

I love this letter. It is written by Frederick Douglass to an unknown person that would have never been heard of if it wasn't for this book. And he writes to his friend:

I am glad to know that the story of your eventful life has been written by a kind lady, and that the same is soon to be published. You ask for what you do not need—

Frederick Douglass writes—when you call upon me for a word of commendation. I need such words from you far more than you can need them from me—

He says to this unknown woman—especially where your superior labors and devotion to the cause of the lately enslaved of our land are known as I know them.

The difference between us is very marked—

Said the great Frederick Douglass, one of the most known people. He was the most photographed man, period, in the 1800s.

Most that I have done and suffered in the service of our cause has been in public, and I have received much encouragement at every step of the way. You, on the other hand, have labored in a private way. I have wrought in the day—you in the night. I have had the applause of the crowd and the satisfaction that comes of being approved by the multitude, while the most that you have done has been witnessed by a few trembling, scarred, and foot-sore bondmen and women, whom you have led out of the house of bondage, and whose heartfelt, "God bless you," has been your only reward.

The midnight sky and the silent stars have been the witnesses of your devotion to freedom and of your heroism. Excepting John Brown—of sacred memory—I know of no one who has willingly encountered more perils and hardships to serve our enslaved people than you have. Much that you have done would seem improbable to those who do not know you as I know you. It is to me a great pleasure and a great privilege to bear testimony for your character and your works, and to say to those to whom you may come, that I regard you in every way truthful and trustworthy.

He gave his legitimacy to this book project, Frederick Douglass, to then an unknown woman who did the most heroic things. Her name was Harriet Tubman.

How did we get here, America, to this privileged place? Well, we got here because of that incredible infrastructure project that this place didn't fund called the Underground Railroad, where Black Americans and White Americans broke laws, did civil disobedience to stop slavery.

How did we get here? We got here because young 20-somethings got up on a bridge named for a grand wizard of the KKK, named the "Edmund Pettus Bridge." We got here because they marched. We got here because they were beaten. We got here because they bled.

And I may know one or the two of the people on that bridge. I may know one or two of their names. But I am in this body because of them.

How did we get here, America? We got here because of people whose names I don't know who fought at Seneca Falls.

How did we get here? We got here because of people whose names I don't know who stood at Stonewall. We got here because of people's names I don't know who were there at Selma.

This is the answer to your question. This is an American moral moment. This is a question of where do we stand for healthcare? where do we stand for Social Security? where do we stand for VA benefits? where do we stand for our American neighbor when the call and commandment of every faith in our land is to love your neighbor?

What is the quality of our love, America? Now is the time to get angry, but let that anger fuel you. Now is your time to get scared for what is happening to your neighbors, and let that fear bring about your courage.

Now is your time to stare at despair and say: You will not have the last word because I am going to stand up, and at least I can give one person hope in this country. Can I give one person hope in this country?

So what do I want from my fellow Americans? Do better than me. Do better than we, in this body. We are flawed and failed people.

I see people showing up at our town-halls, yelling at us, Democrat and Republican: Do more. How are you letting this happen?

Well, I hate to tell you, we are doing all that I can think of. This is why I am standing here trying to give voice to those people. But what is more needed from now is less people sitting on the sidelines, less people being witnesses of American history and more people determined to make it, to make history, to call to the conscience of this Nation, to say: I will not stand for another American to lose their healthcare for a billionaire. I will not stand for another veteran who is dedicated to stopping the suicide of other veterans to lose their job. I won't stand for the air quality in my community to be made worse because they are letting polluters pollute more. I won't stand for the collective assaults on the Constitution by a man who even the highest Judge in our land, a Republican-appointed Judge, said: Stop threatening and bullying other branches of government.

When is it going to be enough? My voice is inadequate. My efforts today are inadequate to stop what they are trying to do.

But we the people are powerful. We are strong. We have changed history. We have bent the arc of the moral universe, and now is that moral moment again. It is the moral moment again.

God bless America. We need you now. God bless America. If you love her, if you love your neighbor, if you love this country, show your love. Stop them from doing what they are trying to do.

And for almost 20 hours we have laid out what they are trying to do—20 hours. I want to stand more, and I will, but I am begging people: Don't let this be another normal day in America. Please, God—please, God—don't let them take Medicaid away from 10, 20, 30, or 40 million Americans who desperately need it. Don't let them do it.

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

Mr. BOOKER. I will yield to my dear friend whom I owe an apology. The last hours of your birthday, as I was preparing for this, I realize we have a special bond. Before I yield, I want to tell this guy—

Mr. KING. The Senator was discussing—

Mr. BOOKER. Hold on. I yield, but I retain the right to the floor. So I yield, but I retain the right to the floor.

Mr. BOOKER. I yield, but I retain the right to the floor.

Mr. KING. I want to ask you questions about veterans in this country,

but before I do, you talk a lot about courage.

Mr. BOOKER. Yes, sir.

Mr. KING. And how the world has been changed by people of courage, and I look down at my tie that I have on today, which has the signers of the Declaration of Independence, and we think of that as a sacred document, an important document, in our history. But these people had the courage to put their lives on the line for a radical idea that people could govern themselves, that we could be independent of a monarchy, and they were putting their lives on the line.

That is courage, and I am afraid we have people around here, Senator, who won't put their jobs on the line for the idea of America, for our Constitution, for the guarantees that are provided in the Constitution, for the First Amendment, for the structure of the Constitution, for the independence and separation of powers, which is what provides the protection, the essential protection, for our freedoms.

But let me ask a question about veterans. We had a hearing this morning in the Veterans' Affairs Committee. We were hearing nominees, and I commented that here we are, mostly voting on nominees in this extraordinary historic time as if everything is normal.

What I said in the committee this morning was we are playing "Nearer My God" on the deck of the Titanic, and we are talking about all these nominees and all these votes that we are having and not talking about what is happening to our country.

In terms of veterans, here is what is happening. No. 1, every time the guy with the chain saw takes so much pleasure in firing people, if you hear about 1,000 people fired in this government, chances are over 300 of them are veterans. Thirty-percent of the Federal workforce is veterans. In the VA, I suspect it is an even higher number.

So what is happening in the Veterans' Administration? The first thing that happened was a hiring freeze, and the hiring freeze affected everybody in the Veterans' Administration until somebody said: Well, wait a minute, what about doctors and nurses? What about direct care workers? And they said: Oh, wait a minute, we didn't mean for that.

That is sort of symbolic of the way this thing is going because they are not thinking. It is ready, fire, aim, time after time. So you have a hiring freeze. Then they say: Wait a minute, there is this group we want to do, but then they leave the hiring freeze in place for the people that are working behind the scenes.

I think the Senator will agree that if nobody is there to answer the phone when a veteran calls to make a claim or make an appointment, that is a denial of benefits just as if they cut the benefits.

OK. So 2,400 people fired—and by the way, those people being fired are getting emails that say you are being fired

for poor performance. There was no analysis of performance. There was no examination of how they were actually doing or whether these people were contributing. It was random. It was people who were on probation. Do you know why? Because they are easier to fire under our laws.

So we have got people being fired, ostensibly, for poor performance. Think of that as somebody who has put their life on the line for their country because they are a veteran, and then they go to work in public service for the Veterans' Administration, and they are being told poor performance when everybody knows that is a sham.

So the next thing that happens is the Veterans' Administration announces they are going to fire 83,000 people over the next 6 months. Now, they say we are going to return to the size of the Veterans' Administration it was in 2019. No. 1, that is an arbitrary number. Why not 2020 or 2016? You know, it is an arbitrary number. It is not based on any analysis or deep thought.

Here is the problem, Senator. I want you to be ready to respond to this. Here is the problem: There have been seven major pieces of legislation benefiting veterans since 2019, the biggest of which, of course, is the PACT Act, the largest expansion of a veterans' benefit program in probably the last 30 or 40 years, and you need people to administer that program. And instead, they are firing people.

The Secretary of the Veterans' Administration says: Don't worry. It is not going to affect services at all. I don't think that statement passes the straight-face test.

Then we have a statement from the VA that says: We have very proudly—we have canceled 600 contracts, but they won't tell us what they are.

I am on the Veterans' Affairs Committee. We don't know what they are. We don't know what the plan is for those 83,000 people that are going to be fired. I guess my question is: What do you think of an organization that says to a veteran: Thank you for your service, you are fired?

Mr. BOOKER. Well, as we were talking earlier, the firings are adding up. It is now going to be 80,000 people from the VA alone, a disproportionate number of veterans. So that is a rollback in service.

We already know that veterans in all of the government Agencies represent about 24 percent of the government workers we are talking about that are getting fired. And these are veterans—as I read their stories—that just want to keep serving their country from the national parks to serving their fellow veterans and helping them get healthcare.

We are seeing people that get exemplary reviews and then they are fired as probationary workers under the only way they can, according to laws, to say that they are a bad Federal worker.

Then they get insult on top of it when the highest—the most powerful

man in the world and the richest man in the world, Trump and Musk, come together and call the guy making \$45,000 serving other veterans, they call him a leech; they call him a parasite.

And so I hear what you are saying. Like, these are folks that I read their stories. They did things that few Americans would do. They went overseas and served in combat.

We had one of our dear friends here who lost her legs in combat, but she stands taller than most all the people in this body. These are the people that are so ingrained in their bodies and minds and souls to serve America, to love America. This President calls somebody like John McCain a sucker—the guy who dodged the draft.

So I hear what you are saying, and one of the things I heard you saying is it makes no sense. Nobody came to the Veterans' Affairs Committee in the Senate who actually approves the resources, establishes the Agencies, and should have the say—according to this document, this civically sacred text, our Constitution.

So what are you going to say to them if you don't even know what the plan is, you can't even explain to us what is your plan to making the VA system more efficient.

Here is the other thing. We passed in this body some of my favorite Senators like Jon Tester, whom I miss so much—maybe I just miss bumping into the guy because he was the only person in the Senate who let me run hallway all the way and hit him.

I used to joke that it was this test to see what happens when the unstoppable force beats the immovable object. He is a void in this place, but he stood for that PACT Act. He has the most fiery speeches, and finally we got that bill passed. We had to add tens of thousands of jobs because of the increased hundreds of thousands of people that were affected from these burn pits or from other challenges, and now we are cutting back 83,000 employees.

PATTY MURRAY said something that affected me in my first weeks as a Senator when I, in New Jersey, sat down with women veterans, and they told me how long they had to wait for gynecological care. So what is this administration doing in its 83,000 cuts? Are they going to improve services to our female veterans? I don't believe it. I don't believe it. Show me I am wrong because we have an article I duty: oversight; checks and balances. Are we doing that right now?

One of the worst things I have seen happen in national security—and by the way, there are national security screwups on both parties. Nobody has a monopoly on this. Let's not be overly partisan here. But weeks ago, our—who are supposed to be the pros and set the example, our national security leadership was using a commercial app to communicate classified documents, and they had it on disappearing messages so they are violating the law of the land called the Preserving Public Records Act.

Now, I have heard from Republicans and Democrats. This is outrageous. There should be an investigation. We should be asking commonsense questions. Was this a pattern and practice of communication? How many other things that are classified have you been communicating about? There is a lot of really important questions that you should have to answer to, but where are the hearings, folks?

I just wonder why this body is shrinking from the articulated duties that we all raised our hands and said we would defend and preserve this Constitution and what it says we should do, what it says our jobs should do.

But you are Senator. I am a Senator. I can't tell you what the cut in the VA plan is. I can't tell you. They haven't come in here and told us. Are we doing our job? I can't tell you are we preserving and fighting for national security after one of the biggest national security scandals I have seen since I have been here.

They don't have providence in a partisan way, but they should answer for it. Are we doing our constitutional duty?

What about the administration that is ending the Consumer Finance Protection Bureau, ending that Agency, ending the Department of Education? Do they have the right to do that according to this document? No.

Are we saying: Hey, we are going to stand up for the people who preserved this document? No. Thank God for the article III branch of government because they are being dragged into court, and Republican-appointed judges and Democrat-appointed judges are saying you can't do it.

Do you know what Trump is doing? He is ignoring the courts, and then he is demonizing the judges. You know that threats on judges in America, that threats have gone up 400 percent.

You know, I had a Federal judge—God bless her—where somebody thought they were going to her house. They did. She wasn't home, and they murdered her son and shot her husband. And Trump is out there threatening judges, dragging them on Twitter or X or whatever he is calling it now.

This is America. I know people on both sides of the aisle. We believe in common decency. We believe in respect. We believe that the highest office in the land should represent the best of our values not the worst, not a guy we wouldn't even let babysit our kids.

So I don't know what is going on with veterans, but I am not going to sit by and do nothing. That is why I am standing here. That is why I read the voices of so many veterans. Let's elevate the voices of the Americans who are being hurt and harmed. Let's talk for them if they can't talk for themselves. Let's tell them that we see you, we love you, and that all of us, we are going to fight for you.

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

Mr. BOOKER. From you, my friend, who doubled the number of vegans in the Senate, I yield for a question while retaining the floor. Thank you for being here.

Mr. SCHIFF. I thank you for being here, Senator BOOKER. I always knew you were a towering intellect and a phenomenal and passionate speaker and advocate, but I did not know your stamina until today, and I am delighted to join you on the floor and have this opportunity to engage in a dialogue with you.

Mr. BOOKER. You can't engage in a dialogue. The Parliamentarian is going to stare me down. You can ask me questions.

Mr. SCHIFF. I stand corrected. I am happy not to engage in a dialogue with you but to ask you a question.

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

Mr. SCHIFF. Let me ask the question this way. I was in the airport yesterday when someone handed me a note that said: "Please save our country."

"Please save our country."

And I think the genesis of the note was her profound concern over the direction of this country, over the increasingly authoritarian direction of this country and what is happening to the rule of law in America.

We look at institution after institution, and we see the guardrails of our democracy coming down. We see an assault on the rule of law unlike anything we have seen in modern history, maybe in the entire history of the United States of America—each and every institution, and why? Because they can, because they feel they can. So they are going after the colleges and universities.

Mr. BOOKER. Right.

Mr. SCHIFF. They are going after the institutions of higher learning. This was an attack that was presaged by JD VANCE years ago in his speech where he talked about "the professors are the enemy." They have to go after "the seat of learning."

So they are going after the universities, and they are using enormous cudgel: We will cut off your funds. We will cut off hundreds of millions in your funds if you do things, if you say things that we in the administration don't like. If you irritate the personal predilection of the President, you will have your funding cut. It is unlawful; it is illegal; and yet they are doing it because they can.

Mr. BOOKER. Yes.

Mr. SCHIFF. They are going after major American law firms because these law firms had the audacity, the unmitigated temerity to hire lawyers or have lawyers who would take on causes inimical to the President's personal interests.

So they are going after these firms, and they are threatening the livelihood of these firms. We will close the courthouse doors. We will cut your clients off from contracts unless you kiss the ring.

And, of course, it is not just the firms or what they represent. It is everyone who is in need of a lawyer who now needs to know that, if they run afoul of the policy preference of the administration, they may never get a lawyer.

And why are they doing this at law firms? Because they can.

And they are going after judges. They are calling for the impeachment of judges. The latest is Judge Boasberg, in a case involving the administration grabbing a bunch of people, designating them as part of a Venezuelan gang, and without any due process, without any process at all, taking them to some maximum security prison in El Salvador, and, in fact, it would appear, doing so even against the court order, when the judge said: Turn those planes around.

Now, why are they encouraging the impeachment of a judge?

Well, I impeached a judge here. I was a lead manager before there was an impeachment of Donald Trump—or two of them. I led an impeachment of a corrupt judge. It is the same standard of high crimes and misdemeanors. It is not a high crime or misdemeanor to disagree in a case brought before a Federal district court, to disagree with the flawed reasoning of the government.

Why are they doing this to judges? Because they can. Because they can.

They are going after the press. They are going after the press and saying: If you don't call the Gulf of Mexico the Gulf of America, we are going to prevent you from attending press events at the White House or on Air Force One. And why are they doing this, this party that claims to be against censorship?

Why are they doing this to the press? Because they can. And they will continue to do so as long as they believe that they can until we—and not just we in this body, but we in this country—stand up to them and tell them: No, you can't. No, you can't.

If the slogan years ago was “Yes, we can,” today it has to be “No, you can't.”

No, you can't trample the rights of the American people. No, you can't censor our speech. No, you can't bring the weight of the Justice Department down on the American people. No, you can't because we are going to stand together.

We universities are not going to let you pick one of us off. We are going to band together.

No, we are not going to let you go after the law firms. We are going to band together.

No, we are not going to let you go after the press organizations. We are going to demand free speech.

Until we come together, until we mobilize in a massive way together to say, “No, you can't; no, you can't,” they will continue to believe that, yes, they can violate the law with impunity.

So my question, Senator BOOKER, is how do we tell them: No, you can't—not with our country. No, you can't

violate the law, violate our values, violate our interests. No, you can't.

How do we tell the administration no?

Mr. BOOKER. My friend and colleague, I am hoping that we can figure out thousands of ignition points where Americans can stand up and do that call to their fellow Americans to do more. I am not upset at the folks that have been saying to Democratic Senators and House Members, and to me, challenging me—I have talked to so many of my constituents who said: You have got to do more.

And all of us have to interrogate ourselves because, like I said at the very beginning of this—at 7 p.m. on Monday night, I said: We have to say to history where we stood—where we stood when they were coming after our constitutional principles, where we stood when they were threatening judges to impeach them for making just decisions, where we stood when they were taking law firms and threatening their business unless they came and kowtowed to the great leader, where we stood when they were disappearing people from America without due process that even Antonin Scalia said they should have. Where were you when they came after the healthcare of the disabled, the healthcare of the children, the healthcare of the expectant mothers, the healthcare of the seniors? Where were you when they attacked veterans, laying them off for no justifiable reason and attacking the VA services that they rely on?

Where were you when we turned our back on Ukraine? Where were you when we turned our back on our alliances?

Where were you when they took the economy down with tariffs, when they took the economy down by threatening it so consumer confidence drops? Where were you?

How many things are going on before we answer the question, as it says in Hebrew, Hineini. Hineini. Behold, Lord, here I am.

And so I confess that I have been imperfect. I confess that I have been inadequate to the moment. I confess that the Democratic Party has made terrible mistakes, that it gave a lane to this demagogue.

I confess we all must look in the mirror and say we will do better. And it is not just fighting ourselves on what we are against. We, the next generation, as the baby boomers are leaving the stage—the last baby boomer President—we have to say that we are going to redeem the dream. We are going to dream America anew.

We are going to start talking about bold things that don't divide people, that unite people—bold things that excite the moral imagination of a country to do better, to go higher, to call us together. This is the time when new leaders in our country must emerge.

I am not talking about Senators. I am talking about citizens. This time of despair and darkness doesn't demand

more darkness. We don't need to demean and degrade people who disagree with us. This is a time for us to do something bigger than that.

Do you think Martin Luther King in Birmingham hated Bull Connor or said: I am going to defeat this guy by bringing bigger dogs and bigger firehoses.

No. But he did say: We are going to be so creative that we are going to inspire the moral imagination of the Nation. We are going to call to the conscience of the country. We are going to excite them about who we could be.

When he went to the March on Washington he didn't stand there and complain about the demagogues. Listen to his speech. He didn't stand there and demean and degrade the Governor of Alabama. He didn't stand there and talk down to Bull Connor.

No, he stood before the American people and said:

It is not what you are against; it is what you are for.

I have a dream.

And now it is our generation. We have to redeem the dream. We have to excite people again.

He, in the highest office of our land, wants to divide us against ourselves, wants to make us afraid, wants to make us fear so much that we are willing to violate people's fundamental rights, we are willing to go after the speech on college campuses, to go after law firms, to go after freedom of the press. Don't let him do that.

Don't become like him. Be an American that says: I look to the future, and I am excited. Yes, things are tough right now. They are hard. They are scary. They are hurting. But we can overcome this.

Our American history, if it is nothing else—American history, if it is nothing else—it is a perpetual testimony to the achievement of impossible things against impossible odds. We are a nation that is great, not because of the people that are trying to whitewash our history, to remove great people, Native Americans, Black people, and women from our military websites.

I don't want a Disney vacation of our history. I don't want to whitewash history. I don't want to homogenize history. Tell me the wretched truth about America because that speaks to our greatness.

And so what do I want the people to do? It starts with us, man, and you are doing it. I see the courage of my colleagues. We are doing it, but we have to do more. And I am sorry. I am not going to be a politician that is going to say: We are going to do more for you.

I am going to be a politician, I am going to be a leader that demands more from America.

Mr. SCHIFF. Will the Senator yield for one last question?

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

Mr. SCHIFF. Well, this gets to exactly, Senator BOOKER, your point. I am optimistic about this country, notwithstanding this deep, difficult, dark

period we are in. I am optimistic about this country, and I am optimistic because of something that Alexis de Tocqueville might have said. There is some dispute about whether he actually said this.

Mr. BOOKER. The mere fact that you can quote Alexis de Tocqueville—you have got me. You have me.

Mr. SCHIFF. I would like to believe he said this:

America is a great country because America is a good country.

If he didn't say it, he should have said it, because it is true. This country is what makes me an optimist. There are wonderful, beautiful, patriotic people in every State of the Union, and they will see us through this. But it does, I think, require all of us to be reminded, every now and then, of the better angels of our nature.

Now, I remember standing in that well during the first impeachment of Donald Trump.

Mr. BOOKER. I remember being right here in this seat watching you.

Mr. SCHIFF. And I will tell you, I approached that case as a prosecutor would approach a case—that I just needed to prove the President guilty of what he was charged with. But it became apparent very quickly that that was not enough, that notwithstanding the abundant evidence of his guilt, I needed to show something more. I needed to show that it was dangerous to keep him in office.

Now, tragically, events since have proven my point. But I made a different argument at that point of the trial, which I think gets us to the present moment, which is that truth should matter to us, what is right should matter to us. And even if it doesn't matter to the President, it should matter to us that we are decent as Americans. We are decent. We are good and decent people, as Americans. That is who we are.

We don't believe that when someone is needing medical help that they should be turned away. We don't believe that we should turn our back on our neighbor. We believe in extending our hand. We believe we should be able to disagree with each other without it becoming a personal hatred or antagonism. We are Americans. This is who we are.

I do think sometimes we forget, and we have to remind ourselves that, as Elijah Cummings used to say, "We are better than this."

Mr. BOOKER. Yes.

Mr. SCHIFF. We are better than this.

Mr. BOOKER. Yes, I miss Elijah.

Mr. SCHIFF. And you remind us of this all the time, Senator BOOKER. You really do. You also remind us that we are not defined by what we are against. We are defined by what we are for. And I am fully on the same page with you that we haven't lived up to our responsibility as a party and what we are for.

I think our democracy is in trouble because our economy has been in trouble. And I think our economy has been

in trouble because it is not like after the Depression or during the Depression, or the great recession, when people were out of work. The problem today is not that people are out of work. The problem today is that people are working. They are working, and they still can't get by.

And you have too many millions of Americans who see their quality of life, and they look at what their parents had and see it as better, and they look at the future for their kids and see it as worse.

And amidst that economic difficulty, they are ready to embrace anyone who offers something different, any demagogue who comes along and promises them they can fix it.

And while this demagogue is not going to fix it and, indeed, has made their lot much worse, it is not going to fix itself. It falls on us to come up with those big ideas.

Mr. BOOKER. Yes.

Mr. SCHIFF. Now, some of those big ideas are not new. Medicare for all, which I support, is a big idea. That would expand healthcare access for millions of people and make sure people, parents can go to work and understand if they get sick or their kid gets sick that they will have access to healthcare.

We haven't kept pace with changes in the nature of work, changes that are going to accelerate with artificial intelligence, changes which have meant that, over the last several decades, as the country has become more productive, that productivity and prosperity has simply not been shared with the people who made it possible.

And I think this economic anxiety, which is felt all over the world with these global changes in the marketplace, have put great stress on the whole democratic experiment.

(Mr. BANKS assumed the Chair.)

If democracy is not working for people, they will flirt with other models, like authoritarianism. But we are here to tell folks that is not the direction we want to go in. But it is still incumbent on us to offer bold ideas for how we can make the economy work for people again.

But I do think that what has led people into such bitter antagonisms with each other has been a lot of this uncertainty, the feeling that they are only a car payment or a health problem away from failure. It is up to us to address that. So I join you, Senator BOOKER, and your optimism about the American people. I join you in the call on all of us, really, in both parties.

But if they are not going to do it, it falls on us to put forward the big bold economic plans that will ensure that we can answer the central question of our time, which is, if you are working hard in America, can you still earn a good living?

We need to be able to answer that question, "Yes, you can."

Right now, what we are seeing with this tax cut for billionaires and large

corporations is just going to make the problem so much worse.

But I want to thank you, Senator BOOKER, for your irrepressible optimism about the country, which I share. I want to thank you for seizing the helm today and every day to put forward that positive vision for our Country.

And my question is, Where do you find the energy, my friend?

Mr. BOOKER. I don't know. I am finding it from my colleagues right now. I am finding it from my friends. I am finding it from their heart and their commitment, and I am finding it from the people whose names and stories we are reading. You know I appreciate your friendship. I am so happy you are my colleague now.

And I believe that our future, our tomorrows—as bad as things seem, I still believe our tomorrows are better than our yesterdays. I know you share it.

Mr. SCHIFF. Amen.

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

Mr. BOOKER. Before I yield to you, I just want you to know, I love you, my friend. Thanks for doing some good things recently, you and I, trying to solve some big problems. I appreciate that.

I yield for a question while retaining the floor.

Mr. BLUMENTHAL. Thank you, Senator. Unlike Senator SCHIFF who said that he didn't know of your stamina before now, I knew well the stamina of CORY BOOKER. I have always admired it—not just physical stamina, but moral stamina, the courage of conviction, the stamina to stand up and speak truth to power, which has become now one of the most common phrases that is used in public life.

But CORY BOOKER has epitomized it throughout his career, not only in this body, but as mayor of Newark and as a leader in sports when he was an all-American athlete at Stanford. That physical stamina was matched by a moralism that is invaluable today because Americans have come to prize, above all, integrity, authenticity, genuineness, which CORY BOOKER epitomizes.

It is not just his eloquence today on the floor and the soaring rhetoric that we have heard from him; it is his understanding and his sense of real-life impacts of what we do here on everyday Americans, and what everyday Americans are doing right now as we speak here on the floor.

Everyday Americans are in the grocery stores where they are seeing higher and higher prices. Everyday Americans are at the VA hospital where their doctors and nurses and clinicians and schedulers and counselors may be out of a job because they may be among the tens of thousands targeted for dismissal. Everyday Americans are in schools, K through 12 and higher education, where the resources available for their teachers in the classrooms right now in realtime are going to be

cut. In fact, the workforce at the Department of Education will be cut by one half as we speak and funds will be no longer available to teach everyday Americans.

And, of course, everyday Americans right now are in hospitals and clinics. They are undergoing treatment for life-threatening diseases. Right now, they are lying on a hospital bed with a needle in their arm, receiving other kinds of treatment that have been made available—lifesaving treatments—by the research at NIH that will be crippled because of the cuts that we are seeing.

And, of course, everyday Americans are receiving Social Security checks, and Social Security will be cut by this administration—Medicaid that provides for those everyday Americans who are in doctors' offices right now in America, even as we engage in this kind of soaring rhetoric.

Everyday Americans are contending with the real-life problems of living in America. We live in a country that has never been so unequal in terms of wealth and pay. If we look back to our own history, we see that inequality is a danger to us all. The stock market crash and depression occurred after the gilded age, when inequality became so drastic that the middle class was in danger.

And, of course, everyday Americans who, right now in the military, are experiencing anger, disgust, fear because the secrets about what they are doing, even as they engage in operations around the world—like those pilots who were going to bomb the Houthis, engaged in that Top Secret mission have learned that the details of that mission—the time of their launch, the targets, the timing of their strikes, the weather, the identity of their targets—all were being discussed over a non-secure channel by a careless, reckless Secretary of Defense. I don't need to go into the details of what was discussed, except to say our allies are reacting with that same disgust, anger, and fear and they are having doubts about sharing intelligence with us. The Israelis are outraged by what they have seen. The intel communities of other countries are aghast and appalled.

And we have yet to explore fully all of the potential ramifications, like what other conversations may have been on that unsecured kind of platform. Who else knew about them, what the motives were? There needs to be a criminal investigation. I have called for it. And everyday Americans have a right to be fearful and angry, just as those pilots should be and our allies and intelligence communities all around the world. We need not only an investigation, we need action to hold accountable the individuals—beginning with the Secretary of Defense, who should resign; the National Security Advisor, who should resign—but a criminal investigation launched by the FBI National Security Division, to hold accountable anyone responsible

for this breakdown of security, to meet the standard of public service that Senator BOOKER has outlined as what we should demand of ourselves, and the responsibility that the American people have a right to deserve.

So my question, really, is about the standard of public service that we should expect of our leaders and whether there is something we can do.

I am asked so often, Senator BOOKER, as I go back to Connecticut, and I am sure you are in New Jersey: What can we do?

What can we do?

You are meeting us on the floor of the Senate by showing what we should be doing—fighting back, sounding the alarm for everyday Americans who are in the grocery store, in their schools, at the VA clinics, Social Security offices. What can we do?

Mr. BOOKER. I am going to answer your question. I want to say thank you. There have been so many Congress people coming on to the floor from the House of Representatives. It reminds me of some other times when big things were happening and people would come to the floor. But this is a lot more, and I just want to express thank you for your kindness.

I also called the chairwoman of the CBC last night, texted her, and the force of the CBC, which has been giving me spirit and strength for a long time, is really one of the best parts of my time here as a U.S. Senator. The fact they have come through constantly means a lot to me.

I am grateful that my cousin Pam has been here the entire time—just like CHRIS MURPHY—the entire time in the Gallery. I love her and I am grateful for her. She is sitting next to my brother. I am thankful for that.

I want to answer your question. I get it all the time, and I am not sure how to answer it all the time. I read letters that got me emotional in the middle of the night where somebody would detail all their challenges. They would render personal information to me in letters about their struggles with healthcare, about their conditions, about their pain, about their hurt—just sending it out to their government official that they never probably met, hoping that they might just listen to you and be activated by your voice. Then many of them ended the letter with that question: I am here to help you in any way. It really moves me because I believe in the decency of our country.

And so I just want to try to answer that question more with me trying to think creatively about more that I could do as a leader because, as I said before, I think we as Democratic leaders have to start thinking more creatively. Obviously, we don't control the Senate, we don't control the House; but we have positions that were given to us in trust by the people we represent. In moments like this, they require us to be more creative or more imaginable or more persistent and dogged and determined.

I say that in front of some of my colleagues on the floor I know personally, like you, and some of my CBC colleagues sitting over here to my right who have been my rock for almost 13 years.

I just know, before I turn to my left to the woman who represents the most important person in my 55 years, my mom—I just want to say that the answer to that question has to be something that I will do, something more than I am doing now because the cause is so great, the challenges are so real.

I will do something that I have not done before to try to help my neighbor at a time of moral crisis in our country, and that I may be afraid, my voice may shake, but I am going to speak up more. I may be demoralized by what is happening, but I am going to find a way to get out of bed and breathe and know that I can make myself feel a little bit better by helping another person.

I don't know what it is, but we have to help each other now through this and know—I am a person of faith, and it was said to me by a colleague that though we would be willing to work through the night, but joy will come.

I am going to turn to my left because I always say that she is a Senator, but she has had one of the hardest jobs in all of America, which is to be the President of a shule. I met her and I realized she could probably do anything.

Mr. BLUMENTHAL. I know about that.

Mr. BOOKER. Yes, I am not Jewish, but my name is Booker, so I always say I am meshuga Booker.

There is a formal way I have to do this. I see you, I love you, and I am wondering if you have something to ask me.

Ms. ROSEN. Will the Senator yield for a question?

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

Ms. ROSEN. Well, Booker, you are a people of the book—people of the book.

Mr. BOOKER. That is powerful.

Ms. ROSEN. It is very powerful—the book you believe in, the books you believe in, what you read. We heard everyone quote the Bible, philosophers, great thinkers, and leaders and you are one of them. It has been my privilege to sit here next to you on this desk for the last 6 years I have been here, the best seat in the Senate.

Mr. BOOKER. You and I.

Ms. ROSEN. And take care of your mother who is my constituent—my constituent.

Mr. BOOKER. Yes.

Ms. ROSEN. I have your precious mother in our hands.

Mr. BOOKER. Whom I suspect, like my cousin and my brother in the Galleries, that my mom is watching—

Ms. ROSEN. Yes. Well—

Mr. BOOKER.—from Las Vegas.

Ms. ROSEN. And we appreciate what a good mother she was and how she raised you to be strong and to be smart and to be kind, and boy, oh, boy, did

she give you some damned stamina. I will just tell you that, sir. We are in awe.

But my question is, thank you, Mr. BOOKER. Thank you for what you are doing. Thank you for using your voice to stand up against the Trump administration's reckless and extreme policies. We have a lot to talk about here, so I am going to bring it back to Nevada because we have a lot of families in my State, and just like you, those letters are overwhelming and they bring me to tears. They stop me in the grocery store, in the airport, in the shopping mall, and in the gas station over and over again. People are worried. They are worried, and they want us to help. They are wondering about this.

People have talked to me about how high costs at the grocery store are squeezing their budgets. They are concerned that the Trump tariffs—well, what are they going to do? Prices ain't going down. They are going to make prices go up instead of going down. President Trump declared tomorrow is liberation day—liberation day. This is when he plans to impose the latest round of across-the-board tariffs for goods on several nations—tariffs that amount to a national sales tax on every single person who goes through a grocery store in Nevada and in New Jersey.

I see my esteemed colleague Senator DUCKWORTH of Illinois.

In every State in this Nation, there will be tariffs that will amount to being a national sales tax.

Now, Nevada's economy relies heavily on tourism. I don't have to tell anyone that. These tariffs don't target tourism specifically, but make no mistake, they will have a profound impact on a city like Las Vegas—the entertainment capital of the world—because when prices go up across the board, what happens? Families' budgets at the kitchen table—those kitchen table budgets are squeezed. It means the number of visitors coming to Las Vegas and the neighbors who fuel our economy go down. It means the price for every single person at every single hotel and for every single service we have goes up because of those tariffs. So it is going to have a devastating impact on Nevada—on our local economy, on our small businesses. Ninety-nine percent of businesses in Nevada are small businesses—small businesses. It is going to have a devastating impact on them and the good-paying jobs they support.

We see the impact. International travel is down in the United States—down. Now, that is a whole other discussion. Someone will be asking that question too. It is driving down our visitor numbers. It hurts our economy in Nevada. It hurts our economy all across this great Nation. In fact, looking for flights to Canada? They are already down by 70 percent compared to last year. Canada—our great neighbor, partner, and ally to the north—is down 70 percent.

The most troubling part is that a recent report estimates that up to 14,000 jobs—hospitality jobs—could be at risk due to decreased international travel as a result of these horrible, misguided tariffs.

I just want to tell you that I am looking at all of my colleagues, and I am looking at you, and you have given us the inspiration to stand here, to use our voice, to use our power to show that we are not without a say in this country. We are not without a say, and we cannot go quietly ever without that fight.

So, Senator BOOKER, I want to ask you what you think these tariffs are going to do not just to the place where your mom lives in Las Vegas but where families live all across this country and with every price at the market and every price at the gas station, the mall—wherever you go, wherever you go—and where people depend, like my Nevadans, on their livelihood for tourism.

So I will repeat what Senator BLUMENTHAL said: Senator BOOKER, what can we do? That is the question we are asked: What can we do?

Mr. BOOKER. I want to answer your question, but first I want to just say what you already know. You represent my mom. You represent one of her best friends, Lou. You represent my Aunt Shirley. You represent my Uncle Butch. You represent my Aunt Marilyn. You represent so much of my family.

This is the place where my father died, and when Harry Reid came to his bedside when he was sick and I was still running for this office and he showed me the extraordinary kindness of Senators from Nevada—that tradition has continued. I am so grateful for you. My family is grateful for you. I am grateful that we were founders of the Black Jewish Caucus, and, in fact, I am going to—

Ms. ROSEN. Our Juneteenth seder is coming up.

Mr. BOOKER. Our Juneteenth seder is coming up. I am going to put this on as you have it on.

I think about Edan Alexander and all those who are suffering. I am just so grateful for our friendship and what we have done against anti-Semitism, about what we have done for the Abraham Accords. You and I are those who find a lot of ways to work with people.

The best thing I saw in you was on January 6. Sitting in this row were me, you, and MARK KELLY, and I always say that often in the most difficult of circumstances, you see the best of people. I don't know if you remember this, but staffers started coming in. They rushed in. Usually, you have to have special identification. Then some of them stood behind us. They were crying, they were upset, and they were frightened. I just watched you go from Senator to mother, and I watched you comforting people in their times of fear—when they thought they were going to be killed, literally—and you

were this voice of comfort, this voice of calm. I saw you in one of our country's worst crises. I saw your light. I saw your love. I saw the Jewish mom, and I benefited from that.

I just feel that Trump mocks us. What does his liberation day mean to the people who are shackled to debt? They are shackled with medical debt and they are shackled with student debt so that they can't afford the rising costs of groceries.

What does his liberation mean to people who are chained by fear, who are right now waiting with bated breath to see if the Medicaid Programs they rely on are going to be cut?

What does his liberation mean to people who are literally in jails right now because they were disappeared from our streets?

What does his liberation mean to people who can't afford homes because of his tariffs or to people who dreamed of a new car but that is going to go up as well?

I don't know what he means by "liberation." I honestly don't. I wish he could explain it to the American people.

Who is liberated? In these financial times, who is liberated? I don't think the law firms feel liberated. They are so threatened by you that they felt the only way they could get out from under the threat of you is to come to you and beg and offer and say "We will do this" and say "We will give you millions of dollars of pro bono work." I don't think they feel liberated.

What about the people who are banned from the press corps because they won't call it the Gulf of America? The idea of the freedom of the press—do they feel his liberty? What does his liberty mean?

What does Donald Trump's liberty day tomorrow mean in a nation where I read in letter after letter of people who feel like their liberty is gone, that they are losing sleep at night, worried about Social Security?

What does liberty mean to the veteran who was laid off who fought for my liberty?

What does Donald Trump's liberty mean? What is he talking about?

What does his liberty mean to Canada, who fought next to us, who died next to Americans who were fighting for our own causes? What does his liberty mean to them?

I don't understand Donald Trump. I really don't. There are going to be Ph.D. students writing about him for generations. He will love that in Heaven. He will look down and say: I am so happy that people are talking about me.

But I will tell you this: I love great Presidents. I love that Lincoln said:

With malice toward none, with charity [toward] all.

But I hear Donald Trump say with malice toward everybody who does not tell him how great he is, and charity—I don't know if he understands that, what it means to have sympathy and

compassion and empathy and to help people whether they like you or not.

I love great Presidents. I love FDR: "You have nothing to fear but fear itself." But in letter after letter after letter was the word "fear" and the word "terror." I was reading from voices from my State and across the country. It says: If Donald Trump is saying be afraid, be afraid of me, the big man with the power. Be afraid. Be afraid. Be afraid.

There was another President who said, "Mr. Gorbachev, tear down this wall." Yet Ukrainian-Americans are watching their President go not "Mr. Gorbachev, tear down this wall"; they are saying "Hey, Mr. Putin, come in and take the Donbas. I am going to start the negotiations—not with Zelenskyy at the table. I am going to call him a dictator. I am going to start the negotiations from a position of giving Putin what he wants—Ukrainian sovereign land—and that is where we will start the negotiation."

I love John F. Kennedy. Quoting a poet: "Ask not what your country can do for you—ask what you can do for your country." With Donald Trump, it is not "Ask not what your country can do for you"; it is "Ask what can you do for Donald Trump because I will threaten you until you kowtow. I will threaten to run primaries against you if you don't fall in line and vote for things you know are wrong. I will terrorize your law firm unless you come to me and kiss my ring. I will make political your applications for your merger. I will drop cases against you. I will pardon you if," as he said in a recent pardon—he was a pro-Trump guy.

I don't understand this. I really don't. I don't understand why he tries to divide Americans.

I got on a plane once. I am on a plane, and I am juggling to put my carryon up. I get lots of reactions in airports, I have to say on the whole part, good, but occasionally—I think my colleagues next month, next May, should send me a Mother's Day card because occasionally I get called "you mother" with something following it.

So here I am putting up my overhead baggage, and I sit down next to two people—the Presiding Officer before this, my friend from Alabama—two Alabamians, one 80 years old and one 60 years old, mother and a daughter.

They saw people paying attention to me, and they said: Who are you? Are you a professional athlete?

As a middle-age, overweight, Black guy, my ego wasn't insulted. I wanted to say: Well, I could be, but I chose to serve the people.

But no. I go: No, ma'am, I am not.

Well, who are you then?

Well, I am a Senator.

And we are so conditioned in America. If we meet a Congress person out and about, the first thing we want to know is, whose team are you on—my team or their team? It is us versus them. We have a horrible dynamic of tribalism in our country.

I took a deep breath, and I looked at these two great American women and said: Ma'am, I am a Democrat.

The woman next to me looks at me, suddenly sour, and she said: I should have brought my Trump hat.

And she wheeled away from me.

Immediately, I said: Do you know what, I am not going to dance to this tune. I am going to scratch this record. I am going to scratch this record.

I looked at her, and I go: Oh, my gosh. Donald Trump signed two of the biggest bills I wrote in Congress into law—the FIRST STEP Act, which we passed in this body with 87 votes. We would have gotten 88 if one of my dear friends and colleagues was not off trying to do whatever in the world and he wasn't here to vote on it. I talked about opportunity zones and working with TIM SCOTT to get billions of dollars invested into some of our country's poorest rural and urban areas.

Now they were confused, but by the end of that flight, Donald Trump didn't divide us, though. By the end of that flight, I was talking to them like fellow Americans, and we found so many points of connection, so much common humanity, and so much common cause.

These outrage machines—TV and these devices—I want to say to America that their financial interest is to keep your eyes on the screen as much as you possibly can. Do you know what sells? Division. Divide. Moral indignation.

I will tell you this: I have this great friend who is part of the bald club—Van Jones. He told me this story that he was on "Crossfire" on CNN. Van Jones got on with Newt Gingrich.

Van Jones—the green activist guy I met in law school—is an extraordinary man. He speaks like a poet to me. He worked in the Obama White House. Then Newt Gingrich is a very known Republican.

The two of them sit down. But Brene Brown writes something extraordinary. She writes: It is hard to hate up close, so pull people in.

So they get on this show called "Crossfire," and they found out that with all the differences they have, they also have commonality, things they agree on, and they actually kind of like each other.

So they go to the producers, and they say: Hey, could you let us do a final segment called "Cease-Fire"? Can you let us do a final segment called "Cease-Fire"?

The producer said: Yes. Go ahead. Go ahead.

So they do this last segment talking about the areas where they agreed, but the producer comes running in after a few segments, saying: Stop them. Can't do it.

Why? Ratings are going down.

There are a lot of legitimate differences in places where I am going to stand my ground and fight for people's healthcare, for people's Social Security. I am going to fight. But I am never going to get in a position where

anybody in this country can make me hate another American because this is the age where we have to figure out how to live up to those words up there, "e pluribus unum." That is the call of our ancestors, to put more "indivisible" into this "one nation under God." That is the challenge.

There are enough things that we agree on in America, especially when we stop and talk about things—like the child tax credit. Most Americans are for that.

Ms. DUCKWORTH. Will the Senator yield for a question?

Mr. BOOKER. Oh, gosh, I have been waiting for you. For crying out loud, why didn't you stop me earlier?

Ms. DUCKWORTH. You were on a roll. You were on a roll.

Mr. BOOKER. Oh, come on. Come on, Senator.

Ms. DUCKWORTH. Will you yield for a question?

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

Ms. DUCKWORTH. I don't know what kind of food you eat on that vegan diet of yours, but I need to figure out more of that vegan diet.

One place where we can and do care that unites us as a nation is the role of our Nation's veterans, the heroes who have sacrificed for us—although, with this President, I guess he doesn't hold veterans in the same esteem. As someone who has bled for this Nation, I guess I join the ranks of the suckers and losers who have bled and died for this Nation, in the President's estimation.

But I just wanted to start off by saying thank you, again, Senator BOOKER, for all that you are doing as you hold the floor today but also every other day to underline the pain and damage that Donald Trump and Elon Musk are doing not just to our country but to middle-class Americans throughout our country.

Tragically, that harm even extends to our Nation's veterans, who have sacrificed so much to protect this country and keep Americans safe, who should be shielded from this needless chaos and uncertainty.

Senator BOOKER, I know you are well aware that this administration is firing more veterans than any other administration in modern history. It has been reported that this administration, in its first few months in office, has fired approximately 6,000 veterans from Federal service across this country.

This list of firings, especially at the VA, has resulted in operations for our veterans being canceled. We have seen reports of the caregivers hotline—a hotline that was set up to support the caregivers who provide medical care given to their loved ones who served and sacrificed and are now disabled—there are delays in that hotline being answered because Donald Trump fired all of these veterans.

There are people who support the crisis hotline who were also fired. I know this because some of them were my

constituents and asked for help. I had one individual who served in the military for over two decades and did such a good job on the crisis hotline as a frontline person answering the phone, trying to prevent their brothers and sisters from the idea of suicide—they did such a good job that they were promoted to be a trainer, they were promoted to be a supervisor, which then made them probationary, and they were fired.

We were able to get some of these people their jobs back. Some of them are still out there without their jobs.

This is what Donald Trump and Elon Musk have already done. This does not help our Nation's veterans. This does not help our Nation's heroes. If anything, it is a betrayal to them. It is a betrayal, a cruel betrayal, to the men and women who bravely answered the call to serve our country in uniform—a call that this President dodged five different times when he had the opportunity to serve.

Men and women in uniform came home from serving, and many of them chose to continue their service to our country as Federal employees. How are Elon and Trump thanking these brave, selfless Americans? They are doing it by showing them the door and leaving them wondering how they will be able to afford next week's groceries or next month's rent, forcing them to look for new jobs.

The Senator from New Jersey and I are both working together to help our heroes get their jobs back, which is why I have introduced the Protect Veterans Jobs Act to reinstate all veterans who were wrongly fired from their Federal jobs by Trump and Musk. It is a critical bill to help those who have already been fired.

But according to recent reports, Trump and Musk are just getting started. From everything that we have seen, they are planning on firing another 80,000 VA employees, almost a third of whom are veterans themselves. So that is going to be another 25 veterans on the chopping block on top of the 6,000 who have already been fired. It is a complete betrayal from Trump and from Musk.

Firing these VA employees will even harm veterans who Trump is not firing because it is going to force them to wait longer to see their healthcare providers. It is going to make them wait longer to have their disability claims adjudicated. It is going to make them wait longer to have someone pick up their calls at the Veterans Crisis Line. It is going to make them wait even longer and their loved ones wait even longer to have their burial and funeral expense reimbursement requests processed and so much more, all while the VA's backlog for unprocessed claims continues to grow.

I have another question for you, but first, for the Senator from New Jersey, I was wondering if you could tell us if you have heard from your veterans who have been fired, if you have heard from

your veterans who have seen their services delayed in New Jersey and around the country?

Mr. BOOKER. Yes. Yes. Yes. Yes. Yes. Yes. Yes.

This is my veterans book. This is what I was reading from earlier. And everything you are saying is right, and it is such an insult.

I read stories from our veterans. It is such an insult to the highest calling of our country, to stand and serve, as you did—as you did—injured veterans, disabled veterans.

I read an article about thousands of disabled veterans who want to serve their country, love this Nation so much that they want to serve in humble jobs doing noble things. And how do we treat them? I will say 83,000 people being laid off. A quarter of them are our veterans from the VA itself, including veterans who do things for the Park Service in our national parks, veterans who do things for us in the Defense Department, veterans who do things for us across this country.

I find in my State that some of the greatest leaders I have met in my State are veterans who are still serving veterans. And then veteran entrepreneurs—you know the data—they are incredibly successful. They add to our economy.

The government is cutting not just veteran jobs; they are cutting contracts with veteran-owned businesses.

I don't understand how you can say out of one side of your mouth that you honor and respect our veterans, which is not what our President has always said—dear God, what he said about John McCain.

I still remember John McCain was in a townhall with Barack Obama, fighting fiercely to be the President of the United States, and somebody gets up and says that Barack Obama—as if it is an insult; it is not—is a Muslim or something, and he grabs the mike back and corrects her. One of his voters—he corrects her on national TV: This is wrong. He is a guy who loves his wife, a Christian, loves his family.

I mean, that is character and honor. Can you ever see that from our President now?

And this is how wrong I was. I want to admit I have made mistakes. I have been wrong.

I remember where I was when he said in his campaign that he is no hero, that people who are captured are not heroes. I said to the people who were with me: There goes his 15 minutes of fame. I thought that was the end of Trump. But somehow you can become President of the United States when you insult the veterans who serve.

I know you have another question, but can I read you—John Lewis and John McCain—the two Johns—are coming up a lot so far in my 20 hours. But I want to read you this. I want to read this when you are here.

This is John McCain writing:

Let me [all] tell you what I think about our Pledge of Allegiance, our flag, and our

country. I want to tell you a story about when I was a prisoner of war. I spent 5 . . . years at the Hanoi Hilton. In the early years of our imprisonment, the North Vietnamese kept us in solitary confinement or two or three to a cell.

In 1971 the [North Vietnamese] moved us from these conditions of isolation into large rooms with as many as 30 or 40 men to a room.

This was, as you can imagine, a wonderful change and was a direct result of the efforts of millions of Americans [led by people like Nancy and Ronald Reagan] on behalf of a few hundred POWs, 10,000 miles from home.

One of the men who moved into my cell was Mike Christian. Mike came from a small town [near] Selma, Alabama. [He] didn't wear a pair of shoes until he was 13 years old. At 17, he enlisted in the US Navy. He later earned a commission. . . . [He] became a Naval Flight Officer, and was shot down and captured in 1967. Mike had a keen and deep appreciation of the opportunities this country and our military provide for people who want to work and want to succeed.

The uniforms we wore in prison consisted of a blue, short-sleeve shirt, trousers that looked like pajama trousers, and rubber sandals that were made out of automobile tires. I recommend them highly. My pair lasted my entire stay.

As a part of the change in treatment, the Vietnamese allowed some prisoners to receive packages from home, and some of these packages were handkerchiefs, scarfs, and other items of clothing. Mike got himself a piece of white cloth and a piece of red cloth and fashioned himself a bamboo needle. Over a period of a couple of months, he sewed the American flag on the inside of his shirt.

Every afternoon, before we had a bowl of soup, we would hang Mike's shirt on the wall of our cell, and say the Pledge of Allegiance. I know that saying the Pledge of Allegiance may not seem the most important or meaningful part of our day now—

Our day in the Senate—

but I can assure you that for those men in that stark prison cell, it was indeed the most important and meaningful event of our day.

One day, the Vietnamese searched our cell and discovered Mike's shirt with the flag sewn inside, and removed it. That evening they returned, opened the door of the cell, called for Mike Christian to come out, closed the door of the cell, and for the benefit of all of us, beat Mike Christian severely for the next couple of hours. Then they opened the door of the cell and threw him back inside. He was not in good shape. We tried to comfort and take care of him as well as we could. The cell in which we lived had a concrete slab in the middle on which we slept. Four naked light bulbs hung in each corner of the room.

After things quieted down, I went to lie down to go to sleep. As I did, I happened to look in the corner of the room. Sitting there beneath that dim light bulb, with a piece of white cloth, a piece of red cloth, another shirt and his bamboo needle, was my friend Mike Christian, sitting there, with his eyes almost shut from his beating, making another American flag. He was not making that flag because it made Mike Christian feel better. He was making that flag because he knew how important it was for us to be able to pledge our allegiance to our flag and our country.

Duty, honor, country—we must never forget those thousands of Americans who, with their courage, with their sacrifice, with their lives, made those words alive for all of us. That is our veterans.

That is you. That is you, my friend.

And Trump is coming after them. DOGE is coming after them. They are firing them right now. And are we silent, America? Are we silent when the bravest amongst us, the most honorable amongst us, the most noble amongst us are losing their jobs? Did you speak up when they came for American veterans? When they fired them for no good reason, what did you do? What did you say? I say no.

Ms. DUCKWORTH. Will the Senator yield for a question?

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

Ms. DUCKWORTH. Thank you for what you have said.

John McCain was a true hero. He said the same thing to me when I first met him.

I do have a question for you, which will come later, but I thought I would tell you the story of how I met John McCain.

I was recently wounded. Within weeks of being able to finally sit up for the first time, I was in physical therapy, and Senator McCain came and visited us. The nurses and occupational therapists and physical therapists came running in and said "Senator McCain, this Captain Duckworth. She is a hero, just like you" and said to me, "You are a hero, like Senator McCain. You were both shot down."

Senator McCain looked at me and said in that voice of his: Didn't take no hero to fly into a missile. The good pilots don't get shot down.

And I knew then and there that I really liked him because he was right: The real heroes were the buddies that carried me out of that field in Iraq. The real hero is the sergeant in the rescue bird that carried me out and has to live with the post-traumatic stress. The real heroes are all the men and women who survived and came home and need the care that they have rightfully earned, the care that we are providing for them with the PACT Act, a bill that you supported, a bill that you spoke up for, even while Members, our colleagues across the aisle, many of them, said it was too expensive.

And at a time when we should be expanding the PACT Act, when we should be recognizing more of the illnesses and injuries that came out of service around burn pits and toxic substances, you have a President who is cutting the VA, who wants to cut those jobs, who wants to go after our veterans' benefits, who, just like Elon Musk has said, sees veterans as people with their hands out.

We don't have our hands out. We are simply asking for what this country promised us.

Where were you, Mr. President; where were you, Elon, when this country asked for someone to serve? When this country asked: Who among you will leave your family, leave your friends, leave your neighbors, and put on her colors and defend her—not for your mom, not for your dad, not for

your family members, but for strangers who will never know your name, who will never know your sacrifice? Who among you will do that?

Thank God that from Lexington and Concord, from Iwo Jima, from Ia Drang Valley, from Kandahar, from Fallujah there were Americans who stood up and said: I will. I will defend this great Nation. I will wear her colors with pride.

And all we have to do as a nation is live up to one tiny little percentage of that sacrifice that they made, let them have the benefits that they have earned, and yet Donald Trump and Elon Musk are cutting those benefits.

The biggest predictor—the biggest predictor—of veterans' homelessness is not post-traumatic stress disorder. It is not a health condition. The biggest predictor of veterans' homelessness is lack of employment, not having a job. That begins the spiral downward for veterans that ends up with them becoming homeless.

And I will tell everyone in these Chambers and in this Nation: We are all dishonored when a veteran must lay their head down on the very same street that he or she defended, to sleep that night. We are all dishonored.

The VA has done tremendous work—tremendous work—to fight veterans' homelessness, and that has been a bipartisan effort. And these cuts—these cuts that are costing veterans their jobs—are going to set some of those veterans, unfortunately, on that path to homelessness. These cuts are going to mean that those veterans homelessness programs that would prevent others from becoming unhoused—those programs will not be able to take care of all the veterans, the demand.

I am already seeing it. I spent this past weekend in Missouri, at the Cochran VA Medical Center, hearing about the challenges that they are facing. They need to expand. They don't need to shrink. They said there are going to be another 25,000 veterans moving into the area. They actually have to expand their services.

And yet Elon Musk, enabled by Donald Trump, is cutting veterans' jobs, veterans' benefits because, according to them, veterans aren't heroes; we are suckers and losers.

Well, I beg to differ. I beg to differ. I am sure that my colleague from New Jersey knows that firing 80,000 employees from the Department of Veterans Affairs wouldn't just cause longer delays for veterans. It will doom our VA's ability to process claims and the influx of claims under the PACT Act, a law that is helping to ensure veterans who were exposed to toxins while serving can get the care that they have earned, with more than 1 million claims already approved in the short time since it has become law.

I can't think of a single good reason to hurt so many veterans, and I will just ask the Senator from New Jersey: Can you think of any reasons?

Mr. BOOKER. Oh, God, I am very moved by your comments. I want to

say that, from DAVID MCCORMICK to JACK REED, the Senate has a good number of people who served this Nation, who answered the call. They should all get our honor and respect. Senator BLUMENTHAL served, and he has a son, a Navy SEAL.

We should have a reverence for those people because a lot of them didn't make it back. A lot of people didn't make it back. And a lot of people who came home came home with horrible wounds, visible and invisible.

We should all be ashamed of the veterans that are committing suicide. We should all be ashamed of veteran homelessness. We have the capacity—we are a great enough nation—to help them.

But the ones that didn't come back, they watch over us. They look down upon this Nation.

I want to read you one more thing because I have—I was raised by parents who could not—they seemed really worried, raising me in an affluent town in a beautiful home, that I would not recognize how extraordinarily privileged I was.

My dad used to say to me: Boy, don't walk around this house like you hit a triple. You were born on third base.

My dad used to say things to me like: Boy, don't sit at this table and not realize that you drink deeply from wells of freedom and liberty that you did not dig. You eat from banquet tables of blessings prepared for you by your ancestors. You must metabolize those blessings, not so that you can pay your ancestors back but so you can pay it forward.

My dad, when I got degrees from Stanford, Oxford, and Yale, said: Boy, you got more degrees than the month of July, but you ain't hot. Life ain't about the degrees you get; it is about the service you give.

So MCCORMICK and REED and TAMMY—I am here because of people that died for this country, that stormed beaches in Normandy for this country, they were at Iwo Jima for this country, they liberated Nazi concentration camps for this country. They are buried—I have seen their burials in Thailand, in fields full of American soldiers who never made it home. And every time I see one of those, I get overcome with emotion. I can't think about—when I look at their ages: 18, 19, 20, 21.

So let me read this. And I am going to compose myself because you got me all emotional, TAMMY. I thought you were my friend.

This is a poem written by Billy Rose. You know it, probably. It is called "The Unknown Soldier." And just listen to the words, and let them echo and see if we are living up to them, if our President lives up to them. The most powerful person in the world or the richest man in the world, are they respecting?

There's a graveyard near the White House
Where the Unknown Soldier lies,
And the flowers there are sprinkled
With the tears from mother's eyes.

I stood there not so long ago
 With roses for the brave,
 And suddenly I heard a voice
 Speak from out the grave:
 "I am the Unknown Soldier,
 The spirit voice began
 "And I think I have the right
 To ask some questions man to man.
 "Are my buddies taken care of?
 Was their victory so sweet?
 Is that big reward you offered
 Selling pencils on the street?
 "Did they really win the freedom
 They battled to achieve?
 Do you still respect that Croix de Guerre
 Above that empty sleeve?
 "Does a gold star in the window
 Now mean anything at all?
 I wonder how my old girl feels
 When she hears a bugle call.
 "And that baby who sang
 'Hello, Central, give me no man's land'
 Can they replace her daddy
 With a military band?
 "I wonder if the profiteers
 Have satisfied their greed?
 I wonder if a soldier's mother
 Ever is in need?
 "I wonder if the kings, who planned it all
 Are really satisfied?
 They played their game of checkers
 And eleven million died.
 "I am the Unknown Soldier
 And maybe I died in vain,
 But if I were alive and my country called,
 I'd do it all over again.

Thank you, Senator. Every time I see you, I have such reverence and gratitude that I get to serve alongside of you. I didn't serve in the military alongside of you like those courageous soldiers, like those people who carried you, at risk to themselves, the people who saved your life, the people who helped you in rehab, the people that empowered you to get back on your feet and run for one of the highest offices in the land. And then you serve here with distinction because you don't forget who helped you get here.

Ms. DUCKWORTH. Just take care of my buddies.

Mr. BOOKER. Exactly. And my dad, who is in heaven with a lot of the other good folks from American history, I don't know what he would think of his son, but I know he would be proud of you.

All right. Let's talk about the economy.

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

Mr. BOOKER. Oh, CHRISTOPHER COONS.

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

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

Mr. COONS. Is the Senator familiar with Rory Badger of Delaware? Is the Senator familiar with my guest to the speech to a joint session of Congress delivered by President Trump just a few weeks ago?

Mr. BOOKER. So every time you ask me the question, we have to go through the same thing. I am slightly familiar, yes, because you talked about it, but I would be really happy if you ask me another question and you filled in some gaps.

Mr. COONS. If I might, I simply want to ask my colleague—

Mr. BOOKER. Then I yield for a question. If you want to ask me a question, I yield for a question while retaining the floor, with the recognition that I have to do it because I am standing between two Delawareans, and I am a little nervous. A New Jerseyan never wants to be between two Delawareans.

Mr. COONS. To my colleague and friend from the great State of New Jersey, I simply am asking the question: Are you familiar with a marine from Seaford, DE? His name is Rory Badger. He is not a man of politics. He is not a partisan. And he only came to my attention when he called my office for assistance.

Rory Badger volunteered to serve our Nation, was deployed to Afghanistan, and is a decorated combat veteran of the U.S. Marine Corps. Working through the impact of his service, he has returned to the United States and was engaged by Fish and Wildlife in Delaware and doing great work to promote conservation.

With a young wife and a young son, Marine Badger reached for what was his dream job: to work for the U.S. Department of Agriculture Natural Resources Conservation Service. All Rory wanted to do, he conveyed to me in a letter and then in person when he came to visit here—all he wanted to do—was to help farmers on the Delmarva Peninsula conserve their land, create wildlife habitat, protect the environment, and be in places both beautiful and still.

As you, my friend and colleague, have documented in long discussion and debate in the last hour, he is one of thousands of veterans who woke to receive an unjust and unwarranted termination email that said it was for cause, without citing any cause, and that threw him into the chaos and hurt of having been summarily fired by the American Government.

He has ultimately been rehired, thankfully, but that period of chaos and of loss made him question our Nation and its commitment to our veterans.

I also—I will share with my colleague—had the opportunity to visit with our friend Senator McCain the prison where he was imprisoned for 5½ years, tortured repeatedly, and lived through the experiences you have just shared of fellow veterans risking their lives to do the most simple thing that we take for granted at the beginning of every day here: to pledge allegiance to our flag.

I had a chance, on visiting the "Hanoi Hilton" with our friend and former colleague Senator McCain, to ask him a simple question, which was at the end of his describing the period when friends were beaten horribly, when some were killed, and when his Vietnamese captors told him: We found out who your father is, a four-star admiral, and so we will release you any day.

I simply asked him: Knowing that you could at any moment, on any day,

raise your hand and say, "I will accept your offer," and go home, how did you endure another 5 years of torture and imprisonment?

His answer simply: To do so would not have been honorable.

My question to you, my friend and colleague: Was the firing of Rory Badger honorable? Is the leadership of our current administration and its treatment of our veterans honorable? Are the values shown by the decisions being made by Elon Musk and his team at DOGE honorable?

Are we putting at risk the very honor of our Nation in the mistreatment of the veterans of this country? This question I put to my friend and colleague.

Mr. BOOKER. I thank you, Senator COONS, by your strength of voice, by your tone, by the colleague and citizen that you invoke. You are saying the answer with strength, my friend.

How do we judge our Nation? What measure do we judge America? Is it by how tall our buildings are? Well, those are great marvels, but other countries have taller buildings. God, maybe Ezra Klein has got me so focused now on making our Nation do bold and build great things.

But does the speed of our rails, as an Amtrak guy, speak to the greatness of our Nation? No. Other nations have faster rail.

Does the wealth of our people—we have more billionaires than any other country—does that speak to the greatness of our Nation? No.

I think the things that speak to the greatness of a nation is: How do we take care of each other? How do we take care of our elders who deserve our respect and our reverence and gratitude for building America, for sustaining America, for doing the hard jobs to raise families to set the next generation on their way.

I think we should be judged by how we treat our children. They are the only true hope we have of seeing tomorrows that we will never live through. I think we should be judged by how we treat the sick. Whether it is people with the disease of alcoholism or mental health or crippling cancers or chronic diseases, what do we do?

I think we should be judged by how we nurture our families. God, we put American families under crazy stress. Affordable childcare, paid family leave, other nations—our competitors—have these things.

I think we should judge the greatness of our Nation by how we treat our veterans, these honorable men and women, some of them who gave their last measure—last measure of their devotion on fields across the world from Thailand to Gettysburg and gave their lives.

Those who came home—those who came home, how they—the America they experienced will speak to the truth of who we are. So I am in this place like you are in this place. We have been friends for a long time. I am

blaming you a little bit because you are one of those people I called and said: Hey, I am thinking about running for Governor. I am thinking about running for Senator.

You told me to come here, man. I am joking. I love you for it. I am honored and blessed that New Jerseyans sent me here.

I know that you and I are working to—and let's talk like we talk when we are not on the floor of the Senate. We both are deeply devoted Christians. You told me one of my favorite stories in the Senate, which I won't tell right now. I have been asking you to tell that story. I hope you will tell it, but it is just about your parents.

James Baldwin said: Children are never good at listening to their elders, but they never fail to imitate them.

You are a great reflection of the stories of your parents you told me, and you and I grapple with this faith of ours, which demands the most radical love—radical love. What does the Bible say about immigrants? I mean, come on. What does the Bible say about the poor? What does the Bible say about the hated, the prostitute, the leper, the people who are looked down upon?

What is the story of the Prodigal Son? What does Matthew 25 say about how we should live? "Even as the least of these you did unto me."

How many times does the Bible mention poverty. How many?

Mr. COONS. Two thousand.

Mr. BOOKER. I am abiding by it. I will not yield to you. But I knew you would know it. Two thousand times it mentions poverty. Does it say we should scorn the poor? Does it say we should ignore the poor? No. It calls us to love our neighbor. No exceptions to that.

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

Mr. BOOKER. Thank you, man. I have been waiting for that question. The prayers of the righteous and vails. You are a righteous man. I have a lot of work to do.

I yield for a question, but I am retaining the floor.

I tried to instigate you, CHRIS. I tried to throw out Jesus bait.

Mr. COONS. You have, sir.

Mr. BOOKER. Good. Thank God. I yield for a question about whatever you want to ask me for, but I am retaining the floor.

Mr. COONS. To my good friend and colleague, as we transition to comments about the economy, are you familiar with the very first time that Jesus stood in his home synagogue in Nazareth to preach?

He read from the scroll a passage from, I believe, Isaiah 61:1–2. This is recorded in Luke Chapter 4. And it is a well-known passage. I rely upon it to understand what was the ministry of Jesus centrally about.

He says:

This is fulfilled in your hearing today, the spirit of the Lord is upon me. He has anointed me to preach good news to the poor.

I don't think it is possible to read the Gospels and to read the Torah and to understand righteousness without hearing over and over and over in the course of the Old and New Testaments a call to respect those at the margins of life, a call to be generous and open-hearted and kind to those who suffer and struggle, to be attentive to and present to those who are imprisoned, who are widows, who are orphans, to allow the gleaning of a field, which means to make sure that out of an abundance of our productivity on our farms, we make sure we feed those who hunger here at home and abroad.

You cannot miss the central message, which is, as you have said: kindness to those on the margins, attentiveness to those in need, good news to the poor.

So in this season of Lent, I ask my friend and colleague whether he is aware of our President's intention to impose significant tariffs sometime today or tomorrow that may raise the costs for working families in our Nation, that may make harder the lives of those who struggle to pay for their children's food and medicines and schooling, that instead of meeting his promise to make America affordable again, we will almost certainly make America less affordable for those who are exactly those to whom we are called to give attention kindness and service?

I ask my colleague and my friend: Are you aware of President Trump's so-called "liberation day" that will impose, in fact, thousands of dollars of additional costs on the working families of America who struggle so hard to make ends meet in a direct violation of a call to care for those in need?

Mr. BOOKER. Yes, I am aware. I said it earlier that he calls it Liberation Day, and I am not sure what he means by that because Americans will not, by this move, be liberated from high prices. They won't be liberated from watching their 401(k)s dwindle in value as the stock market goes down. They won't be liberated from the high cost of groceries. They won't be liberated from the high cost and hard availability of housing.

He calls it Liberation Day, but Americans won't be liberated from crushing debt, from medical debt, from student loan debt, parents who are struggling to take care of their parents and their children who rely on Medicaid because a parent has Alzheimer's and a child has a disability and they are trying to make it all work. But yet they are shackled in fear because they see that recommended to a House Committee on Energy and Commerce was to find \$880 billion of cuts to the programs that they are relying on as a lifeline to keep their family together.

Who is liberated? Who is liberated by the tariffs that he is going to come and bring onto a country where half this Nation is dealing with a tough, tough economic reality, where half of the renters in this country—you and I were

both local leaders. We know it is technically the definition of housing insecurity if you are paying more than a third of your income on rent.

CHRIS COONS, you love people. You know people. You traveled Delaware. It is a much smaller State. I do say that with some little bit of twisted non-Christian arrogance from New Jersey looking down, but you know people in your State. I have been with you in your State. You are connected to your communities.

So you know people that are struggling just to make ends meet. You know people that are one emergency away like a car accident or a sickness that forces them to miss a week of work and a paycheck, that that will throw their lives in financial ruin.

Is this President doing his promises to make their lives better? President Trump is calling his tariffs Liberation Day. Do you think Canada feels liberated from the bully neighbor that is Donald Trump? You think Greenland feels liberated from the bullying nature? Do you think Panama feels liberated?

What about universities that are cutting NIH funding, that are cutting the scientific research that will cure the diseases in the future and will alleviate suffering? They now are not allowing postdocs to come to their school. They are not hiring. They are slashing the number of engineering students that they are allowing in because they are terrified this President is menacing indirect costs. Is that liberation?

Seventy-one days in—now 72 days. I ask you: Are you better off than you were 72 days ago economically? I ask that question. Ask it to your friends. Are they better off economically? Well, I don't see how they could be because prices are up. The stock market is down. The risk of recession is climbing. Consumer confidence is in the gutter. And 401(k) plans are losing value.

Are you better off than you were 72 days ago under this President's leadership on the verge of his so-called Liberation Day that is going to drive prices up even more?

He is doubling down on tax cuts for the rich. He wants an economy that works for him, his billionaire donors, his powerful special interests, and it is coming at the expense of working people who are struggling to get by and a lot of programs that they rely on like for their healthcare, like for their Social Security.

He wants an economy where the richest people get the biggest tax cuts with the largest corporations. Heck, they may get to skip out on taxes altogether and where hard-working Americans are getting crushed by rising food prices and rising rents.

This idea that that might trickle down, but we know it doesn't work. He is continuing the same reckless economic approach he used in his first term: massive tax cuts that inure mostly to the wealthy, unchecked spending, rapacious spending, big, big,

big holes in our national debt, trillions of dollars in more debt, and no serious plan on how to pay for any of the things that he is doing, from Social Security to public health to the education that supports children with disabilities and scientific research, the safety nets that millions of people depend upon.

Here is a New York Times: “Trump’s policies have shaken a once-solid economic outlook.” This is from March 7.

President Trump inherited an economy that was, by most conventional measures, firing on all cylinders. Wages, consumer spending and corporate profits were rising. Unemployment was low. The inflation rate, though higher than normal, was falling.

Just weeks into Mr. Trump’s term, the outlook is gloomier. Measures of business and consumer confidence have plunged. The stock market has been on a roller-coaster ride. Layoffs are picking up.

And by the way, this is March 7. We just finished March, the worst performing quarter in years in the stock market.

Back to the article:

Layoffs are picking up, according to some data. And forecasters are cutting their estimates for economic growth this year, with some even predicting that the U.S. gross domestic product could shrink in the first quarter.

Some commentators have gone further, arguing that the economy could be headed for a recession, a sharp rebound in inflation or even the dreaded combination of the two, “stagflation.” Most economists consider that unlikely, saying growth is more likely to slow than to give way to a decline.

Still, the sudden deterioration in the outlook is striking, especially because it is almost entirely a result of Mr. Trump’s policies and the resulting uncertainty. Tariffs, and the inevitable retaliation from trading partners, will increase prices and slow down growth. Federal job cuts will push up unemployment, and could lead government employees and contractors to pull back on spending while they wait to learn their fate. Deportations could drive up costs for industries like construction and hospitality—

And the agricultural sector—that depend on immigrant labor.

“If the economy was starting out in quite good shape, it’s probably in less good shape after what we’ve seen the last few weeks,” said Donald Rissmiller, chief economist at Strategas, a research firm.

The U.S. economy has repeatedly shown its resilience in recent years, and there are parts of Mr. Trump’s agenda that could foster growth. Business groups have responded enthusiastically to Republican plans to cut taxes and reduce regulation. A streamlined government could, in theory, make the overall economy more productive.

So far, however, the Trump administration’s approach to economic policy has been characterized more by chaos—tariffs that are announced and then delayed, government workers who are fired and rehired—than by careful planning.

Michael R. Strain, an economist at the conservative American Enterprise Institute—

I know AEI well—

said Mr. Trump’s policies on trade and immigration, and his slash-and-burn approach to federal job cuts, would have a damaging effect.

This is a conservative think tank.

“What President Trump has proposed will not cause a recession,” he continued. “But it will slow economic growth. It will take money out of people’s pockets. It will increase the unemployment rate. It will cost people jobs. It will make American businesses less competitive.”

That is AEI, folks.

It is certainly possible for Mr. Trump’s policies to come together in a way that causes a recession. His tariffs alone could shave a full percentage point off growth in gross domestic product this year, according to some economic models—enough to cut in half the 2 percent growth rate that economists expected going into this year.

Many economists contend that deporting millions of immigrants—as Mr. Trump promised to do on the campaign trail last year—could be even more harmful than tariffs, given the U.S. economy’s need for workers, particularly in industries like construction and health care.

And the administration’s push to shrink the federal government, an effort led by Elon Musk, could leave hundreds of thousands of federal workers and government contractors looking for jobs when hiring has slowed. That could set off a chain reaction: Workers who lose jobs, or worry they might, would pull back on spending, which would force businesses to cut costs, leading to more layoffs and further reductions in spending.

Ordinarily, that would prompt the Federal Reserve to cut interest rates and shore up the economy. But that could be difficult if tariffs are also pushing up prices, making policymakers nervous that cutting interest rates could spur inflation.

“It’s a death by a thousand paper cuts,” said Jay Bryson, chief economist for Wells Fargo. “All these things individually aren’t enough to cause a recession, but if you layer them on top of one another, it might be.”

Most economists think such an outcome is relatively unlikely, however. Mr. Trump has repeatedly delayed full enforcement of his promised tariffs. For example, on Thursday—

This article is from March 7—

he suspended tariffs on most imports from Mexico and Canada until April.

What month are we in? April.

His deportation efforts have likewise gotten off to a slow start. And some of the cuts to the federal workforce have been tied up in court.

As they should be.

Such delays and reversals will help blunt the impact of Mr. Trump’s policies, and could make a recession less likely, at least in the short term. But the prolonged uncertainty could have its own costs, leading businesses to delay investment and hiring decisions.

“If we don’t get clarity by the back half of this year, economic uncertainty can be like a deer in the headlights,” said Nancy Lazar, chief global economist at the investment bank Piper Sandler. “Things just stop. Business confidence is muted, employment is muted, and capital spending is put on hold.”

Even if Mr. Trump’s policies don’t cause a recession, they could do long-term damage. Lower immigration will leave the country with a smaller labor force as the native-born population is aging. Trade barriers will be a relatively modest drag on growth while in place—a chronic condition, rather than an acute one.

“It’s less like the economy is in a car wreck, and it’s more like the economy has decided to start smoking a pack a day,” said Michael Madowitz, an economist at the Roosevelt Institute, a progressive group.

In certain places and for certain groups, the consequences could be harder to ignore. Veterans, who make up a disproportionate share of federal workers, could be particularly hard-hit by government layoffs. So could parts of the country that depend heavily on federal jobs: Already, there are signs that home prices in the Washington metropolitan area are falling.

“It’s going to be substantial for certain communities.”

“When you look at the aggregate,” it is going to be challenging.

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

Mr. BOOKER. I talked or texted with this person who asked me to yield the floor. I have been letting this power go to my head. I have never in the Senate had the ability to hold the floor and leave the person in a little bit of limbo.

I just want to say that TIM KAINE is one of the friends. Honestly, he is more like a pastor to me. He is one of the more honorable men I have met in my life and struggles, like me, about faith and public service.

I read your book. I really hope more people read your book. I didn’t think it was going to be as beautiful as it was. I laughed, I wept. When you were attacked by spiders and things like that, I am sorry, I was laughing at your misfortune, sir.

It is a book about you going through your whole State by walking the Appalachian Trail, canoeing. Every story you told moved me. It is a great book. I have read a lot of my colleagues’ books, this one really touched me. You have a beautiful view of America, and I want people to read your book, I really want people to read your book. So if I should yield, I will yield only if you will tell people the name of your book and maybe tell something about it. This is extortion on the Senate floor. I am going to hold on to the floor unless you agree to that. Shake your head up and down if you agree.

All right. Then, of course, to my dear friend and somebody that I probably wouldn’t be standing here, we had some discussions about procedural opportunities and things like that, he had to make some concessions to me, I won’t give details, but he is an honorable man, and in the crux before I came here, he really helped to clear the pathway for me to stand here now. I owe you a lot of my 12 years. You are like a big brother to me.

And I yield for a question while retaining the floor.

Mr. KAINE. Well, thank you to my friend, Senator BOOKER, and to all who are gathered to watch this very, very important vigil. And the question that I am going to ask in slow motion to give you a chance to think of a response—

Mr. BOOKER. God bless you.

Mr. KAINE.—is a question that was inspired by your colloquy with Senator COONS.

Mr. BOOKER. Not a colloquy. That is not allowed. It was a question.

Mr. KAINE. Your discussion, where you were doing some Bible quoting

back and forth. And as, you know, I am a big Bible reader. And the thing I thought about, and actually I thought about it during your talk since last night, is this part of the Gospel of Matthew where he is challenging people he thinks are hypocrites.

And he says to them: You can discern the faces of the sky, but you can't discern the signs of the times.

That is Matthew 16:2 and 3. You can discern the faces of the sky, but you cannot discern the signs of the time.

The way I viewed this vigil that you have been powerfully engaged upon is you are attempting to discern and explain the signs of the times to your colleagues and to our country, and that is very important that we do.

And I would like to ask you one question about the signs of the times economically to follow the discussion of what we are seeing, but then I want to ask you a question about the signs of the times more in the nature of our democracy.

So to begin, on the economy, you walked through how strong the economy was on the day this President was inaugurated, and 2 months later, the challenges of a volatile stock market, the challenges of rising prices, the challenges of declining consumer confidence, the challenges of predictions that there might be slow growth or even a recession.

We will have a vote on the Senate floor tomorrow about Canadian tariffs based on a resolution that I have introduced that we will have a vote on.

You talked at length about those tariffs and the effects that they have on Americans and others. As I have traveled around my Commonwealth, my farmers, my small businesses, they have seen it before. They saw it in Trump term one. They know how dangerous it will be. They don't want to pay more for groceries. They don't want to pay more for building supplies. Farmers don't want to pay more for fertilizers. My shipyards don't want to pay more for aluminum and steel. They were promised that they would pay less, not pay more.

They don't want to be part of a campaign to demonize a nation that has been a friend of the United States and stood side by side with us in every war since the War of 1812. They don't want to be part of a juvenile assertion by this President that that sovereign nation is the 51st State. They don't want to be part of a name-calling effort to call the prime minister of a sovereign nation Governor. They are trying to read the signs of the times.

Why is this administration that came in with such a strong economic hand doing so much so quickly to both hurt us economically, but also to tarnish a relationship that has stood the test of time with an ally?

The President often says that his goal is "America First." We would all agree as Members of this body in "America First," but we would all passionately disagree with "America Alone."

What is "America Alone" going to get us? What will we turn to, who will we turn to when the allies that we have spent decades building relationships with now feel pushed aside? Yesterday, China announced that they were going to be working with Japan and Korea on a free trade zone, possibly to respond to U.S. tariffs.

Mr. BOOKER. Wow.

Mr. KAINE. Other nations are having to engage in hedging behaviors because they thought we were friends and now they doubt that reality anymore.

And so as you look at the signs of these economic times—and then I will get to a second question about the signs of the times in our democracy—how are we to understand this? And more importantly, how are we best to rectify it?

How can we stand up for our families and reduce their burdens, not increase them? How can we stand shoulder to shoulder with linked arms with our allies to face off against adversaries? Reflect on the signs of the times and point us in the right direction, please?

Mr. BOOKER. I appreciate that. I am going to try to keep it short, but I want to reminisce with you about something that—do you remember in Trump's first term that he used a national security waiver to put tariffs on Canada then?

Mr. KAINE. Yes. Yes. And my citizens really remember because they suffered.

Mr. BOOKER. Yes. But do you remember we had a Foreign Relations Committee meeting, and a leader—I don't want to embarrass the leader, but a leader from Canada came, it was a woman, and she sat there. It was a bipartisan group together. You do remember this?

Mr. KAINE. Yes, I do.

Mr. BOOKER. So she sat there, and she started very slowly going back to the War of 1812, and marched through Canadian-American history. I confess I have a degree in history, but I didn't know all this history. But amazing stories of Canadian sacrifice to stand next to Americans, to die next to Americans, to fight for America, to join our artists, our cultural communities, our agricultural communities, all the things we have done hand in hand to make both of our Nations stronger and more prosperous. And then she looked at us and said: And then your President, in a sense, called us a national security threat.

Mr. KAINE. Yep.

Mr. BOOKER. And you all put tariffs on us.

And I remember the quiet, the silence around that committee table. I felt like, whoa, this is such an ally, such a friend, such a consistent ally of us throughout the hardest difficult times in history, never left our side. Her litany was so admirable, and then she looks at us, a national security waiver, hardships on our economy, national security waiver to put tariffs on. And they hurt Americans, and they

hurt—embarrassingly hurt our northern neighbor. But I thought that was bad enough.

And now, what kind of bully are you? What kind of mean spirit do you look at your northern neighbor and say: I am going to call you Governor, not with the title you earned by the people that put you in that office. It is the worst kind of behavior. And nobody calls him out, of our Republican colleagues—not enough of them called it out, I should say.

So we are in, as I read in that article, in an economic crisis.

I question: How long will we wait until more of us join in a chorus to say enough is enough?

I don't know the answers. I don't know how we can stop him. But I know we did in the first term. We pushed back on him successfully and on his attempts to try to take healthcare away from tens of millions of Americans, and we can do it again.

But more people have to do things differently. They have to do like we have been talking about all day—and I will turn to my colleague again—as John Lewis called us: Get in good trouble, necessary trouble. Heal the soul of America.

We have to do more and follow the examples of our forefathers and foremothers who never gave up, with conviction and determination, with indefatigable spirit and unyielding grace that continues, time and time again, pushing back and bending the arc.

It is our turn. What are we going to do? We have to answer that question. We have to do more.

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

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

Mr. KAINE. This is a question about the signs of the times in our democracy. We will celebrate 250 years of American democracy in 2026. And I want it to be a celebration, not a coronation, not a requiem, not a wake, but a celebration.

A week ago Sunday, 250 years ago, Patrick Henry stood on the floor of Henrico Parish, now known as St. John's Episcopal Church, on Church Hill in Richmond, at a moment of decision where people were challenged to understand the signs of the times, at a moment of tyranny. And he asked the immortal question.

And I almost view your vigil as asking the same question about where we would stand in such a moment, and there were different forks in the road—a phrase that has attained some meaning recently. And Patrick Henry said: "As for me, give me liberty or give me death."

You are giving a liberty speech, my colleague. You are giving a liberty speech as the Nation begins to think about 250 years of democracy.

The opposite of liberty, that which Henry was fighting against, was tyranny. It was tyranny. I am one that believes that we should mark anniversaries. We shouldn't just act steady

state, like this country was ordained and will just go on forever regardless. We are coming up on 250 years of American democracy, and there is a live question about its continued existence that this generation is grappling with.

Henry gave that speech at St. John's Church, and a few months later, on July 4, 1776, the United States declared its independence from England, and our history in this new chapter began. And at various points along the way—during the 1850s, say, or during the 1950s—generation shifts like ours have had to grapple with the question of whether the experiment will continue or not.

Some of our national symbols have some unusual aspects to them that point to this experiment. We have a national anthem that ends with a question—not an assertion, not a declaration, but whether the flag will still stand over the home of the free and land of the brave, question mark.

The State flag that Virginia adopted on July 5, 1776, is a most unusual flag. It has a woman representing Roman virtue, standing astride a deposed tyrant whose crown is knocked off, who is holding a broken chain in his hand, and he is lying on the ground. It is one of only six State flags with a woman on it. It is the only State flag that features toplessness, which occasionally creates some racism in schools as students ask about it.

But it is also the flag with the most unique State motto of any State. All States have mottos. Forty-nine States' mottos are positive. "Hope," "Eureka," "Excelsior," "Onward and Upward," "Ad astra per aspera." Michigan has the most unusual positive motto in Latin, "If you seek a pleasant peninsula, look around you."

I wasn't looking for a peninsula, but I would rather it be pleasant than not.

Virginia's is the only flag and the only State with a motto that is not positive. It is a rebuke: "Sic semper tyrannis." Thus be it always—thus be it ever—to tyrants. George Wythe, Thomas Jefferson's teacher, was in charge of designing the flag and chose that as the motto.

Think about the verb tense, right? It is the only one that is a rebuke, and it has stayed on our State seal and State flag since July 5, 1776. Many State flags have been changed in the last 20 years. Utah changed, Minnesota changed, Mississippi changed, and Georgia changed. Virginia has essentially not changed since 1776.

Neither the figure of virtue standing astride a deposed monarch or the motto, "Sic semper tyrannis"—again, the verb tense, "semper"—always, ever. It is not in the current tense. No tyrants are down with tyrants. It is in the future tense: Thus be it always to tyrants. Thus be it ever to tyrants.

The Virginia flag that we pass by in Virginia every day without thinking about it—it is in every school, and we pass it by. It asks us two questions, 250 years later: Do we retain the ability to recognize tyranny? Do we retain the

virtue to defeat it? Can we recognize tyranny? Can we retain the virtue to defeat it?

My friend, you are standing on the floor in the tradition of Patrick Henry, 250 years later. You are raising a question about liberty and our fidelity to it.

So my question to you would be, what gives you hope that the answer we will give to these questions, as Americans—as those commemorating a quarter millennium of American democracy—what gives you confidence that we will answer these questions in a way that will honor those who came before us?

Mr. BOOKER. I want to answer that question.

I want to, at first, say HAKEEM JEFFRIES is here. Now I am worried because two Brooklynites are shaking hands. I confess, when I had the floor and Schumer was here, it was the only time in my life I could deny him the right to speak on the Senate floor.

I confess to my friend who is part of the X generation—the hip-hop generation—my brother who is part of that transition in American history from the "greatest generation" to baby boomers, that the baby boomers are now seeing leaders emerge that are X generation and millennials. He represents the best of the future.

This question is so good—because you didn't honor your commitment to me and talk about your book.

I want to say I insulted Brooklyn for stealing my Nets. I told the leader—I abused my power to retain the floor, and I told the leader there is only one football team in New York, the Buffalo Bills. The other two are in New Jersey.

I should have reminded the leader that the "Chairman of the Board," who sings "New York, New York" is actually from New Jersey.

I can go on with this litany.

I do want to get back to your very serious question about tyranny. I think many of us have read books like "On Tyranny." We are reading articles, and people are talking about the fears that they have, fears that they have about this document.

You and I have had serious conversations over the last 72 days of Donald Trump's Presidency. How much of the encroachment—I would say "encroachment" is a gentle word—of the separation of powers is happening? We are watching Justices, judges—from Republican appointees to Democratic appointees—trying to stop him from doing things. Which one of our great Bill of Rights amendments, from the freedom of the press—he is doing things to the press that, in my opinion, are bullying them, breaking with traditions that Presidents have done in the past; trying to create a press corps like Putin or Erdogan have, who will only let people in the room who will give obsequious supplications often for the dear leader.

What about the freedom of speech? You and I both know reprehensible

speech is protected. Disappearing people for what they said—Scalia talked very clearly about having rights, even when you are in the country. One of the most conservative Justices said: You have rights.

We are seeing him invoke emergencies.

You have been the leader in our caucus, talking about the absurdities of these emergencies he is doing. He tried to rally this body saying: Don't let this happen.

You talked to me about all of these things.

So what is the limit of tyranny? You and I—and we talked about this with your book. I am trying to get back there.

I told you once, when Skip Gates did my history, that he traced my history back to Virginia. I tried to show you that I have more Virginia legitimacy because my roots go back to 1640 in your State. The Stampers came over, and following down, down, down, then Henrietta Stamper, who my mom still talks about as a relative. John Stamper—and with the chart that Skip Gates gave me, the only thing you could say about John Stamper is that the mother of Henrietta Stamper was "slave woman." Born Henrietta Stamper, they called her on her documents "mulatto" and Stamper fought for her ownership because it would later come out that was his child. These are the traditions in my family.

It is really amazing what Skip Gates did and showed me that I am a direct descendent of slaves and slave owners. I am a direct descendent of a Confederate soldier that was captured in retreat. I am the direct descendent of Native Americans and people who fought in the Creek war to kill Native Americans.

And these traditions in our country, I draw upon all of them. I am proud of all of them. They speak us to. They speak to the complicated history of America.

But perhaps one of the best things I got about this complicated history was a visit to my office by—I don't know if I told the leader this—I am sorry. I am going to return to his question.

I know how busy the leader is. If the leader asks me a question—if he asks—I will yield for a question.

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

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

Mr. SCHUMER. Before I ask my question, what a tour de force—you are amazing. It is not only the amount of time that you have spent here on the floor—what strength—but the brilliance of our indictment of this awful administration that is so destroying our democracy; that is taking so much away from working people and the middle class, and at the same time all for tax cuts for the billionaires.

You are amazing. We salute you. America salutes you. All eyes are on you. You are incredible.

Here is my question that is related to what our Republican friends are trying to do to all the things that you have so opposed. So are you aware that while we were here on the floor today, Senate Republicans are declaring that using the current policy baseline is up to LINDSEY GRAHAM, not the Parliamentarian? I believe that this is going nuclear, and it shows how hell-bent they are on giving tax breaks to the rich, even if it goes nuclear, even if it violates all the norms that they have had, even if it breaks all the promises they have made.

Do you agree with me that this is just a move that is so, so against what the traditions of the Senate have been about—but not just the traditions of the Senate—fairness, decency, ability to debate issues fairly? They are afraid to debate them. They are afraid to defend tax cuts for billionaires. They are afraid to admit they are taking away Medicaid from so many Americans. And so they come up with this nuclear option, showing that they don't care anymore about norms, about rules, and even about going nuclear, which the leader—the Republican leader—and all of them said: Oh, no, they are not going to do that. Now they say they are going to do it.

What does the Senator think? Does he agree with me that it is going nuclear? Does he agree with me that is a nasty, vicious, and self-seeking for the billionaires—which is what they are doing—way of proceeding?

Mr. BOOKER. Chuck, I am not 100 percent right now, and you just hit me with stunning news that I can't even think about how to respond right now. I am stunned by that. I wish—if you want to ask me a question, ask me a question. I wish you would explain a little bit more because what you are basically saying to me is that we are not going to go through the Parliamentarian. This is a gimmick that is going to be done to try to break, really, what the Byrd rule requirements of reconciliation are. I am using Senate speak, and I don't think we should use that.

So what they are going to try to say is obscure the impact of reconciliation. They are going to obscure this—the incredible tax cuts, the cost of trillions of dollars to our economy—blowing up our debt. So-called fiscal hawks are going to blow it up. I am stunned by this news.

Mr. SCHUMER. So I am asking the Senator, the great Senator BOOKER, a question.

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

Mr. SCHUMER. Does he agree that this isn't just a blow to the people of America, and it shows that the folks—the people—on the other side are only interested not in playing decent, not in playing fair, not in being honest with the American people, but in taking money from the pockets of working people and the middle class and putting it in the hands of billionaires? Is that

something that this country should just countenance in because it does so much harm to the country? And does it not show what our colleagues are really like and what they are after?

Mr. BOOKER. Yes. The answer to the question is yes.

I just want to say that anything further is a breaking of the Senate. In a severe way, it is the breaking of the Senate. Every time you break the Senate like that to do another big nuclear option thing, the next time around, when the pendulum swings—I have been here for 12 years, and I have watched it swing back and forth. There is no going back now.

Mr. SCHUMER. Will the Senator yield for another question?

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

Mr. SCHUMER. Does the Senator remember that, when this was done in the past, McConnell said they would regret it, and they will regret it sooner than they think? Does the Senator agree that that applies to the Republicans in that they will regret it, and they will regret it sooner than they think?

Mr. BOOKER. I hate to answer the question this way, but America will regret this day. The American people will regret this day. All of us will regret this. All of us will.

Mr. SCHUMER. I hate to bring the Senator bad news, but I am asking him a question, and I needed his answer given how eloquent he has been about what America should be and what America should not be.

So I yield the floor to the Senator.

Mr. BOOKER. You cannot yield the floor because I have the floor, sir. I maintain the floor. This is one of the few times I will be able to get to tell CHUCK SCHUMER what the rules are here.

But I just want to get back to you, and maybe this is a way to get back to you by sharing a story I don't think I have ever told you.

(Mr. CURTIS assumed the Chair.)

It was a few years ago with one of Biden's last State of the Union speeches, and I—we all had to vote on the floor about an hour before the speech, and then we would come back here and assemble to do this extraordinary walk through history.

So, days before that, I was with the leader, HAKEEM, and I was with some other people in the Oval Office with the President.

The President put his arm around me as we finished the meeting, and he said: Hey, CORY.

And I am like: Yes, Mr. President.

I have got a big speech coming up.

I know, Mr. President.

I am going to go to Camp David to work on it.

And I said: OK, Mr. President.

He goes: Can I call you if I need some help?

And I said: Yes. Right, Mr. President. Sure.

And that was it. Over the weekend, he didn't call me for help with his

speech, and we came here and did that vote an hour before, and then—I like walking out that door. Many people know this. If I can, I go straight out the next doors and onto the steps. I love those steps—maybe because I watched “Schoolhouse Rock” as a kid, and that is where there was “Mr. Bill, I am just a bill.” So I pause sometimes there and just feel the sense of gratitude and the Supreme Court right in front of me and the Library of Congress, and if you stand in the right place, you can see the gold dome behind you.

As I am standing there in that moment an hour before we have to hustle back here, my phone rings. I answer my phone, and it begins with what I think is one of the top stupidest questions in America. You have gotten this question. I think you would agree with me. You are not the kind of guy who uses words like, “Hey, this is stupid,” but this is stupid. The thing I heard—the stupid question—was this: This is the White House operator. Will you hold for the President of the United States?

Who says no to that question as one does when they get a call from the President of the United States?

So I say: Yeah. I will hold. Hold it a minute. I am washing my hair.

I say: Yes, of course.

The next thing you know, it is Joe Biden, and he goes: CORY.

And I go: Mr. President.

He goes: I am struggling with my speech.

And at that point—I know you weren't this kind of student in college, but all of my guilt from my college days of waiting until the last minute to finish a paper was gone. The President of the United States was waiting until the last minute to finish his speech. Heck, I feel good.

And so he goes: CORY, can I read you a section of this speech?

So he read to me a section of the speech where I have a lot of policy depth, and I couldn't believe it. The President of the United States, an hour before his speech, is rehearsing a part of the speech, and then he asks me that immortal question.

You are a married man. You have to give me good advice on how to answer this question. When your spouse looks at you and says, “How do I look?” you are torn between two things—right?—maybe to tell the truth or to tell your spouse what they want to hear.

Tell me what you answer with, but you can't do it now because I have the floor.

And so I take a moment. Am I going to tell the President what I really think of this section or am I going to just say: “Yes, Mr. Leader”?

So I decided that he called me up an hour before his speech. So he really must want my advice. And I gave some hard input. Turn this dial down more. Turn this one to whatever.

And he said: OK, CORY.

And abruptly he is gone.

I go back to the office, and I tell them: I just got a call from the President of the United States, and he asked

for help on his speech. What a crazy life moment while I stood on the steps, like the bill—"I'm just a bill."

Anyway, we get back here, and it is a wonderful moment in the Senate. I don't know if anybody has the privilege of seeing what we do. We all gaggle around those doors. We talk to each other. People think we always fight and yell. That is not the case. Democrats and Republicans merge into this ball of senatorial humanity. Then, when those doors open, I love it because, when you walk out, you walk past THUNE's office—what used to be the Library of Congress.

You walk past the Old Senate Chamber, where there were some of the greatest debates in American history and violence on that Senate floor with the caning of Sumner.

You walk through the dome and the statue of Lincoln by an 18-year-old woman named Ream, the suffrage leaders, Martin Luther King, Presidents—extraordinary Presidents.

Then you walk past where the old House used to be. And you love this, and I love this—those little gold plates on the floor where Presidents had their desks, exactly where the Presidents had their desks. Most people go in right under the Junipero Serra, California's statue. Under that cross is Lincoln's gold plate—people who were in the House and served as the President. That is not my favorite one, though. It is John Quincy Adams. Why? You know this. He was the only person in American history ever—and it will probably never happen again—where somebody went to the Presidency and came back to the House. He ran for a House seat. He worked at that spot where that desk was until he collapsed and was carried off the floor. He would soon later die. Amazing. Maybe a future President will. Maybe Obama is going to think, you know: I have got to run for the House.

Then you get into that old Chamber, and we sit down; we find our seats. Then, at that great moment—I don't care if you are Republican or Democrat. When that person walks in and says, "The President of the United States of America," I still get that feeling.

Joe Biden comes in, and I think he sets a record for the longest it would take to get from those doors all the way down. Everybody he is talking to. "MARJORIE TAYLOR GREENE, what's up?" He is just touching everybody. He gets up there, and he gives his speech. Now, you know that this is an aerobic event. You stand up. You sit down. You stand up. You sit down. You have got to get your squats in when you are doing it. Well, the part of the speech he called me on is—and I am sitting down, and I hear my input in the speech.

I don't know if you all noticed, my colleagues, but I was the first person to stand up for that section, and I was looking at SCHATZ: Get up, man. This is the best speech ever given.

It was amazing. I go home. I am kind of buzzing about the whole experience,

and I am lying in bed. Unfortunately, I have my phone on my nightstand, and it goes off. I see a number I don't recognize, but I open it up, and it says:

Senator Booker, this is John Meacham—

The great historian.

Thank you for helping the President of the United States with his speech. You made more of a difference than you will ever know.

And my first thought was, How do I print this out? How do you print out a text? So he gave me his cell phone number, and now, I am going to troll him until this historian comes to my office and finally relents.

He comes, and now, he steps into your domain, my brilliant friend of history. I expressed worry, fear, concern, demagoguery in our land, the rising of tribalism. I dump on him. I am normally a prisoner of hope. I am normally a purveyor of finding your joy even in the toughest of times. And he listens for a while, and then—and then—and then he looks at me and says:

Cory, there is nothing about this time that is unprecedented. It is all preceded. You want to talk about demagoguery?

And he goes through every generation of Americans having extraordinary demagogues. I read Margaret Chase Smith's incredible speech on this floor against a demagogue and the demagoguery even within her own party. He talked about the No. 1 radio show in all of America that the majority of Americans listen to and its anti-Semitic screeds.

Mr. Kaine. Father Coughlin.

Mr. Booker. Father Coughlin.

He went through them all, and he said: Do you want a big worry?

He said that there was an American general in the Depression. He said his name, but I am forgetting it now. I am not at my best. He said that this guy was calling for a military takeover of our democracy. Do you want to talk about authoritarianism? He talked about a Senator here on the left, Huey Long, who was calling for the people to storm the Capitol.

He went through this all, and he said: Every single time, Nazis were in Manhattan at Madison Square Garden. I couldn't believe it. It was unbelievable. I wish people were there listening to this guy as he went through of all these times when America was at a crossroads, when we came upon a moral moment, and he said: What happened as to how we chose the right path? When people were trashing this document or treading on it or undermining it, when demagogues rose to the highest points of popularity in our land, how did we stop it?

Well, he looked at me with some sympathy and said: Not you guys. Not a Senator.

It was that the better majority of American people said: Enough. They chose to define the soul of our country. He gave that phraseology to our President, and he said the soul of America is not the people in office; it is the every-

day citizens who choose the better angels of their nature, who choose right over wrong, who recognize a moral moment and know that they have to stand up and bend the arc of the moral universe or, more importantly, steer the ship of our state out of the troubled waters into the clear, open sea.

I rose here—and I have gotten into lots of questions with my colleagues. But I rose, hoping to have reborn more of the stories of as many Americans as I could, and during the night, my friend CHRIS MURPHY and I read a lot of them.

You know me well, my friend. You know the truth of all of us in this place. You know the truth of everybody. We are all mountain ranges. We all have peaks, and we all have valleys. You, my friend, have seen my valley. You have seen me at my worst. I have failed as a leader at times or at least have come up short for my own personal expectations. You have seen me at some of my better moments.

I know we have obligations. I know people are right to be upset or be demanding of us right now. Please help us. What are you doing in the face of people who might make it so that we might not have elections or might make it so that we do break things in this government that can never be fixed?

One of the speakers who came into our caucus was one of the people who wrote the book "How Democracies Die." Great nations, great civilizations that forget democracy don't necessarily die from external threats. They die from internal corruption. Think of the Roman Empire. Think of the Soviet Empire. It crumbled from its own corrupted failure to live up to its promises and ideals.

We are at this moment. I am here to tell you, America, and to tell my friends and colleagues and anybody who cares to listen to a Senator from New Jersey that we are at that moment. We are past that moment. Every day, things are happening. In the 72 days of this administration, God, if there is not enough to upset you, to ignite you, to realize that maybe you and your family are not getting hurt but other Americans are. Our veterans are. Our seniors are. We have told their stories here. Over these last 21 hours, 22 hours, we have told their stories.

People are getting hurt. People are afraid. People are worried. People I don't even agree with are getting disappeared. Law firms that I have known for my entire career—for my entire career—are being forced to kowtow to this President. Universities that should be the bastions of free speech, free thought, free enterprise, intellectual research, academic research, scientific research are getting torn up by cutting indirect costs. I have read stories of Ph.D. programs that are virtually being canceled, and from the best scientific minds not being able to build the state-of-the-art labs.

The country that has led humanity in scientific invention is taking a blow.

And Fareed Zakaria—I have read his article here, and he is saying that China is doubling down in investments in the universities as this President is cutting them—unless, of course, you come to the leader and make all of these commitments and meet all of these demands. There should be enough already. It should be enough already.

So this is that moment John Meacham told me about. I want to try in the Senate—I know my colleagues—I see TAMMY BALDWIN; I see CHRIS MURPHY; I see ANGELA ALSOBROOKS. I love you guys. I served side by side with you. I know your passion. I have heard your anger. I heard your fear. I heard how you want to fight for this country, but we are not enough.

We can do demonstrations, we can do demands, we can try to do things differently. In fact, we must.

Ms. BALDWIN. Will the Senator yield—

Mr. BOOKER. I will definitely yield to TAMMY BALDWIN, my friend and my colleague.

Ms. BALDWIN.—for another question?

Mr. BOOKER. Thank you very much. I don't have that much gas in the tank, but hold on, let me say it right.

I yield for a question while retaining the floor.

Ms. BALDWIN. So noted.

Senator, since you have taken the floor, which I suppose is nearly a full day now, there have been new breaking news of mass firings. Perhaps others have come to the floor to talk about it. But you were just talking about how great democracies are shredded, sometimes from within.

Look, one of the pieces of breaking news today was the mass firing of our Nation's public health Agency within it. Today, it was reported that the Health and Human Services Department began firing up to 10,000 more people—more than the previous firings—including researchers, scientists, support staff, and senior leaders.

These are people who are doing work to keep our children safe from preventable illnesses and researchers who are searching for cures and treatments for diseases that plague our families, like cancer and diabetes and Alzheimer's.

Look, we can all agree that government could be and should be more efficient. But here is where I disagree with the unelected Elon Musk and people like our President. People stopping the spread of measles—

Mr. BOOKER. Yes.

Ms. BALDWIN.—researchers finding cures for Alzheimer's disease are not waste, fraud, or abuse.

The slash-and-burn that is being led by Elon Musk's DOGE will make Americans less healthy, less safe. And Elon Musk's DOGE and Donald Trump are callously ripping away treatments, cures from millions of Americans suffering from Alzheimer's disease, cancer, ALS, and other devastating diseases.

Behind these cures are, of course, workers, and they are some of our Nation's brightest and best and most devoted. They keep our Nation healthy and our economies running. But this administration is not respecting their work, their mission.

And I have to point out the why. What is the why to all of their actions today, where it was announced that they are starting that slashing of 10,000 workers within the Department of Health and Human Services—by the way, with more in store because last week, they announced a reorganization that would result in 20,000 people losing their jobs. But what is the why?

Ripping the rug out from under cancer and Alzheimer's disease and ALS patients is all in service of finding the money that Elon Musk and Donald Trump need to cut taxes for themselves and billionaires like them, and, yes, big corporate tax breaks. They are cutting cancer cures for corporate tax breaks.

Senator BOOKER, these cuts to Health and Human Services are going to crush families in Wisconsin, whether it be people not having hope for a cure, for a disease, or to the workers who are doing this groundbreaking research all across the United States who are going to be fired.

In New Jersey, what will these firings mean for the people who you represent?

Mr. BOOKER. I am so grateful for the question because that is what we said we are here about. We are here to try to elevate the voices of people affected by what they are doing to our government. And, frankly, as they cut the Department of Education completely or the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau, they are getting rid of Agencies that were created by Congress, and many people are right to believe they can't be eliminated without congressional action.

We were talking before with people here that the biggest plurality of people being laid off from all of these Departments are our veterans.

Again, I am going to be back in New Jersey this weekend. I am going to try to be at a rally, a townhall. I know everywhere I go in my State, I am going to hear from people who are rightfully angry, who are rightfully afraid, who are affected by this, who are fearful of what is to come. These are such important human emotions.

But the question, then, is going to be for all of us, and I know people will be questioning me: What are we going to do? What can I do? What are you going to do, Senator?

So I don't have a brilliant response. I don't have some prescient idea that we are going to be able to change the course of this. But I know we are going to fight.

I want to be honest with you. I wasn't sure we could stop Donald Trump when he tried to take down the ACA. I just wasn't sure. I really wasn't. I did not know how that was going to

end. People gasped—do you remember that—in this room.

Ms. BALDWIN. I remember that.

Mr. BOOKER. People gasped. We did not know. This room usually has very predictable actions. That is why I am still standing here, because I didn't want the predictable. I didn't want business as usual to happen. It is rare that we have unpredictability on this floor. It is usually finely orchestrated. You know and I both know this.

But that day, no one expected that or at least wasn't sure. It was drama. It was a moment. And we won.

I want to tell you this. I said this earlier, when I say "we won," I don't think there is one Senator here or the 99 others who convinced John McCain of his vote. I know who did, though, Arizonans who stood up, who spoke up, and demanded more from their leadership not to hurt people, not to hurt folks who needed that healthcare, not to hurt folks with preexisting conditions, not to hurt children.

So I am one of these people who wants to learn from our history. I want to stand here today and tell you I am going to do everything I can. I am willing to go to some lengths. But I am inadequate. You are inadequate. We are Senators with all of this power, but in this democracy, the power of the people is greater than the people in power. This is a moral moment that more Americans need to stand up and say: Enough is enough.

I am sorry, the civil rights movement wasn't won because of just a few Black folks who stood up and were really articulate. No. They called to the consciences of this country, and the country responded. It was a Rainbow Coalition that said this ain't who we are in America.

I know New Jerseyans are hurting. I know. I have been to your State. I love your State. We had some fun in your State together.

Ms. BALDWIN. We sure did.

Mr. BOOKER. We saw young artists, business people. You are this person who says these words over and over again, more than any Republican or Democrat: "Buy American, buy American"; and created so many jobs in your State.

We were in some packed restaurant. People packed not to see me as a special guest but to listen to your story. You are a trailblazer, too, in the Senate. You are doing things that our Founders did not expect, and you know that.

And you want to stand up. I heard you in our caucus, I heard you in SCHUMER's leadership meeting stand up for people who are most marginalized, most looked down on, most talked about. I hear you, TAMMY.

Ms. BALDWIN. Will the Senator respond to another question?

Mr. BOOKER. I won't respond to a question. I am going to read this for the 75th time.

I will yield for a question while retaining the floor.

Ms. BALDWIN. Thank you, Senator BOOKER.

You just talked about your visit to Wisconsin. You have had many. But there was one that you are talking about that I remember really well and really fondly.

I had the privilege of hosting you and showing you what our State had to offer.

Mr. BOOKER. Yes.

Ms. BALDWIN. Something that I likely bragged about then, like I often do, is that the Badger State is known for making things.

While I know you don't indulge in all of the things that we do make because, of course, we have our iconic products, like beer and brats and cheese, but we also build motorcycles and big industrial ships and engines that power our Navy, and so much more.

Mr. BOOKER. People give a ship.

Ms. BALDWIN. That is right. Make one, too, build them.

Mr. BOOKER. Make them, too, yes.

Ms. BALDWIN. And, of course, behind it all is our workers, as you were just talking about. And whether they are in a marsh harvesting cranberries—we are No. 1 in cranberry production.

Mr. BOOKER. We are in the top 5 in New Jersey.

Ms. BALDWIN. I know, but we are No. 1—not that I am competitive here.

Or whether we are on a foundry floor or whether that worker is on an assembly line, workers are what make our economy go round. And so, naturally, they are the ones we should be prioritizing in all of our policy. But that is not what this administration is doing. They are going to get a slap across the face when the administration slaps across-the-board tariffs and gets us into a trade war.

Mr. BOOKER. Yes.

Ms. BALDWIN. And it is going to be these workers who pay the price.

Wisconsinites are really worried about what we are going to see this week. They are worried about their businesses. You met so many of them when I hosted you. Their livelihoods, their communities, they worried because we have all been here before.

Wisconsin was one of the hardest hit States by retaliatory tariffs last time Donald Trump started a trade war. During Donald Trump's last trade war, American farmers lost \$27 billion in export sales. And according to further records, Wisconsin's agricultural economy exported more than \$3 billion worth of product sales. And our manufacturing economy in Wisconsin, well, it exported about \$26 billion in manufactured products.

And do you know what? The exports that Wisconsin manufacturers make is supported by more than 460,000 jobs, and our agricultural economy is supported by 350,000 jobs. So a trade war would be devastating to the workers of Wisconsin.

Then the prices—people have been struggling with the high price of things in grocery stores, gas stations. A num-

ber of our business leaders have spoken out about the impending tariffs. AriensCo in Brillion, WI, that makes outdoor equipment like snow blowers, told Reuters news that policy whiplash in this arena is making it difficult to plan, especially as price hikes are likely in the works.

And Roden Echo Valley in West Bend told one of our media outlets, WTMJ4:

I don't like this tariff business. It is going to be on the backs of farmers because we have to depend on the world to export our commodities.

He highlighted the dependency of the dairy industry on global trade, noting that 15 to 20 percent of dairy products are exported. I quote again:

And if we lose 15 percent of our markets for dairy, it is going to be absolutely devastating.

We have seen this before, again, in service to a big tax break for billionaires and corporations.

But to my esteemed colleague from New Jersey, thank you for visiting the State of Wisconsin. I want to ask what the impact would be in New Jersey? What would President Trump's tariffs mean for the workers of the Garden State?

Mr. BOOKER. I love that you focused it there because that is who President Trump made promises to, in my State, that things are bad with this economy because it is not serving people who are working every day. He promised that he would make things better.

I will make grocery prices go down—he said that. So people were expecting that is where he would focus. They didn't think he would focus on Greenland. They didn't think he would focus on the Gulf of Mexico. They didn't think he would focus on bullying Canada. They didn't think he would focus on turning his back on Ukraine. They didn't think he would focus on gutting the Department of Education and ending it.

This is not the reason why people voted for him. They did something that Reverend WARNOCK calls—that vote is a sort of prayer. He says it is like a civic prayer: that I am putting a prayer out there that you will be who I hope you can be; you will be a blessing to my life and not a burden.

But you are talking about the burdens that he is bringing. This economy, under 72 days, has not gotten better for working Americans. And they don't even see the President trying to make it better; they see what he is doing to make it worse. And one of the things is going to be these tariffs, which are going to raise costs on working Americans.

Then we—what CHUCK SCHUMER said to me is sounding like, it is going to just sail through—a plan that is going to blow trillions of dollars of holes to our budget, give trillions of dollars of tax cuts to the wealthiest, and gut your Medicaid and gut your services for your grandparents in nursing homes.

People believe. People put their trust. I don't blame them. They are my

fellow Americans. They wanted for their families—they wanted an America that was more affordable. They wanted America to be first, prioritized. They wanted a safer America, a stronger America, a more prosperous America. I heard that.

So when I am back home this weekend, I know that I am going to encounter a lot of folks who are workers in my State who are getting hurt. They want better. They want better from their government.

So the burden upon us and each other is: What are we going to do? Are we going to do the same old thing over and over again or are we going to try to do things differently? Are we going to be willing to, again, get in good trouble, necessary trouble to try to save the soul of this Nation?

I think my colleague, my dear sister, my prayer partner, my soul lifter—I thought I heard you say something?

Ms. ALSOBROOKS. Yes. Will the Senator yield for a question?

Mr. BOOKER. Ah, yes, I yield for a question while retaining the floor.

Ms. ALSOBROOKS. I, first of all, want to thank you so much again, Senator BOOKER, on your spiritual obedience. And I think it is necessary for me to say as well today to you, on behalf of so many of us who are watching right now, how extraordinarily proud we are of you.

I would dare say that you are in so many ways our ancestors' dream and how powerful it is for all of us who are watching to recognize that, in this very Chamber where you are standing today, 67 years after this podium was used, for the 24 hours—you have used the podium that was used to block the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1957.

Today, you have taken over the podium, sacrificed your own comforts. You have suffered over 22 hours to stand here today to talk instead about the greatness of America and to speak about it in such a way that reveals the love you feel for our country, and we thank you for that.

This country needs right now bravery. It needs leaders who are unafraid to stand up and speak truth to power, to not hold back from calling out these callous and inhumane acts that are perpetrated by this President against the American people.

When I talk about the American people, we know who we are talking about: against our veterans, against our seniors, against our children, from every corner of our country. I want to talk specifically today about our children.

Mahatma Gandhi noted that the true measure of any society can be found in how it treats its most vulnerable members. This President is failing America's children, and he is doing so by harming our education system.

We remember as well very fondly when Nelson Mandela said:

Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world.

I think many of us recognize that is exactly why we are seeing all of the attacks we have seen on this system, because we recognize that education allows us to change the world.

Last Friday, Secretary McMahon shut yet another critical lifeline off to our States and our schools, canceling extensions that the Department had previously granted to States to draw down their COVID relief money.

States like Maryland originally got extensions to finish spending the remainder of these critical dollars on long-term projects like teacher recruitment, tutoring, and other services for students. We know in particular Anne Arundel Public Schools bought Chromebooks for students with their funds. But Maryland still has a remaining escrow balance of nearly \$150 million—\$150 million. That is on top of the millions that have already been clawed back, frozen, or withheld from the State by this administration. These are funds that districts like ours from all across the country were using for school construction projects and mental health support for students.

This administration is refusing to acknowledge the lasting effects of the pandemic on our Nation's students, cruelly stripping educational opportunities from our students and leaving our States and our districts on the hook. So let me be clear that these are dollars that Congress authorized, dollars that have already been allocated, dollars that have already been earmarked by Maryland and our local districts for projects that will help all of our students.

Our schools planned and committed these funds in good faith—in good faith. Our States have acted in good faith, and this administration is acting in bad faith, pulling the rug out from underneath them, blowing a hole in their education budgets.

Our Governor had this to say:

The clawback of these previously committed funds would place an undue burden on our school systems and undermine our collective efforts to strengthen education across the state.

This is only the latest attack on public education by this administration, the latest attack on our schools and our students, the latest attack on our teachers.

We saw this administration attack HBCUs by freezing funds for the 1890 Scholars Program, which provides tuition for students at our land grant institutions.

We saw this administration and Secretary McMahon slash teacher training grants, which help prepare our educators to serve our communities.

We saw this administration proposing to move the student loan program to the Small Business Administration, threatening students' access to aid and the promise of higher education.

We saw this Secretary and this administration lay off half of the staff at the Department of Education several weeks ago, firing over 1,300 staffers.

I want to talk for a minute about who the Department fired. By the way, these are people who were not incompetent. These are people who are not DEI. These are professionals, well educated. The administration fired civil servants at the Department's Office for Civil Rights and shuttered Office for Civil Rights regional offices, including the regional office that handles discrimination cases.

I want to make really clear—and I want the American people to hear this—what decimating the Department of Education and the Office for Civil Rights means. OCR attorneys intervene when schools ignore complaints from students who are repeatedly called racial slurs or who are subjected to hateful speech or imagery, like swastikas, on campus. It provides the technical assistance that schools need to train staff on anti-harassment practices, combat harmful behaviors, and build welcoming environments. And it holds K through 12 schools and colleges that fail to keep students safe accountable.

It ensures that families have recourse if their child with a disability is not being served appropriately by their district; that if a child is not getting the speech therapy or other services outlined in their individualized education program, that they will have an advocate to help them.

At the time that this administration took over, there were over 270 open Office for Civil Rights cases, impacting 1.3 million students in my State alone. Without enough OCR staff to do the job, investigators' caseloads will grow to an untenable level.

So we spoke to some of the lawyers that work in the division that serves Maryland schools, and all of these patriotic civil servants—all they want to do is do their jobs. They want to combat discrimination in our schools. They want to ensure that every child has the opportunity to learn in a safe environment. And these civil servants don't know that that mission is possible, as they and so many of their colleagues are ruthlessly fired by this administration.

These cuts are catastrophic. I dare say that they, like so many other decisions by this administration, are wicked.

So, Senator BOOKER, here is my question: What are you hearing from families in the State of New Jersey as this administration dismantles the Department of Education and slashes opportunities for students and families?

Mr. BOOKER. I am so grateful for the question from my friend—and that is the centering that we have been trying to do—which is, What are families around New Jersey and America thinking?

As you said, the Department of Education—we read that earlier today—it doesn't dictate educational policy of the States, but it does do a lot to provide funding for special needs kids in the States. So I am already hearing

from parents of kids with special needs regarding the impact it will have if those resources are cut, everything from programs that help young people afford college, to programs that I have worked with people that help schools afford advanced scientific equipment so the bright minds, the geniuses of our State and the country, can have the equipment they need.

This administration is cutting things that are hurting families, and we are hearing from them. We are hearing from veterans. We are hearing from the elderly.

We are hearing from people who are taking care of the elderly. We are hearing from people who run our hospitals.

We are hearing from people who run our universities and who talk about the science funding and the cutting of Ph.D.s.

We are hearing from people who rely on Medicare and Medicaid, who rely on Social Security.

We are hearing from people that are appalled that their Nation bullies smaller nations like Canada or Greenland.

We are hearing from people that are shocked at what they are doing to the most vulnerable people who come to our Nation, who have American children or an American spouse, who are being disappeared off of our streets, who have no criminal record.

We are hearing from people that don't think it is right that a President should have a meme coin that allows him to enrich himself, to hawk his power and position for even greater wealth.

So I have done everything I can, and I am going to do more—I still have a little gas in the tank—to elevate those voices, to elevate those voices.

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

Mr. BOOKER. Before I yield, because I just keep wanting to exercise this power that I might have for a little while longer and exercise it over a man that I have a real chip on my shoulder for—the Senator from Arizona. Yeah, he has been a military fighter pilot. He has been an astronaut. He has been out of this world.

But what ticks me off, sir—I have said nice things about everybody else, but I am not saying them about you, sir, because when I go home through New Jersey and I walk through my airport—I was the Newark mayor—I see your big bald head up and a big, big picture of you saying “New Jersey Hall of Fame, MARK KELLY.”

Who the heck am I? You are the Senator from Arizona, but yeah, yeah—you are right, OK—he was a great, celebrated military veteran and astronaut who grew up in New Jersey, who went to high school in West Orange, whose parents were cops. So you have the accolades in my State, and I am proud of that. I am proud I get to serve with you.

I still have the floor. Stop trying to speak. There are rules in this place.

Don't make me sic the Parliamentarian or the Presiding Officer—thank you, sir. Thank you, sir.

Mr. KELLY. Senator, my apologies.

Mr. BOOKER. Well, with that kind of deference, I now will yield for a question while retaining the floor.

Mr. KELLY. My apologies for my giant mug at your airport.

Mr. BOOKER. Where you overshadow me, literally.

Mr. KELLY. As Senator BOOKER knows, I did grow up in the State of New Jersey, and growing up in New Jersey, I came from a very working-class family. My family didn't have a lot of money. My dad was a cop. He was a union member. From my earliest days of remembering my mom going to work, she started out as a waitress. And I remember those days, after working these night shifts at these banquets, how tired she was. She would work some long hours.

Then she became a secretary, but she also would work as a waitress at the same time. This was just to make ends meet.

Eventually, my mother decided that she wanted to become a police officer like my dad, but this was New Jersey in the 1970s, and for a woman to become a cop, it was really, really hard. It was practically unprecedented. My mom had to take a written test and then a physical fitness test.

The physical fitness test, it was designed for men. Part of this test required that my mom climb over this 7-foot 2-inch wall. Now, my mother was all of about 4 feet 13 inches tall. To help my mom out in passing this test, my dad built a replica of this wall made out of a door between two pine trees in our backyard.

He didn't tell her he made it an inch higher at 7 feet 3 inches, and I would watch my mom go out there after dinner every night and try to get over this thing. Initially, she couldn't reach to the top, and when she finally could, she would usually just fall off into the dirt.

But my mom, she wasn't one to give up. Eventually, she was able to get over this thing, but it took her a long time. She practiced for months.

And when she finally took this test, instead of getting over in the required 9 seconds, she got over in 4½, much faster than almost all the men. My mom became one of the first female police officers in Northern New Jersey.

She kept that job for a long time until eventually she was injured. And by the way, it was the union that protected her rights after being injured on the job. But I remember how this job changed our lives economically.

Both of my parents having good-paying union jobs, it meant more money coming in the door, more money for our family, more money to play sports. It was part of what allowed my brother and me to chase our American dream, to serve in the U.S. Navy and, eventually, both of us as astronauts in NASA.

We were able to do that because our parents worked hard, and they sac-

rificed for us. Because of the support we had, including some really good public schools—that is harder today for a lot of families, including the school part, by the way.

I hear from so many folks in Arizona who feel like they are working harder and harder, and they just are not getting ahead. The cost of groceries and gas and housing—especially housing—makes these folks feel like they are just running in place. It shouldn't be that way.

Elon Musk and Donald Trump, they are making it worse. Trump's tariffs are going to jack up prices on nearly everything that families rely on: Groceries; rent; cars; housing.

They are even trying to do away with the Department of Education. Now, how is that going to help kids get a good education? If they are successful, their plan to gut Medicaid in order to pay for a giant tax cut for rich people, it is going to be even tougher for hard-working Americans, hard-working New Jerseyans and Arizonans to get ahead and achieve their American dream.

So as a fellow kid from New Jersey, and I never expected—never expected—that tax cuts for rich people would potentially kill the American dream of kids all over this country, but it could.

And as a kid—you, Senator BOOKER, growing up in New Jersey—I am interested to hear what was your American dream and why—why—would these giant tax cuts make that kind of dream harder?

Mr. BOOKER. I appreciate a New Jersey Hall of Fame member, the only one in the U.S. Senate—I appreciate his question.

I appreciate the service of his parents, out there every day putting their heart and soul into serving the community in a dangerous job where you often see people at their worst.

I said this earlier, James Baldwin said:

Children are never good at listening to their elders, but they . . . never fail to imitate them.

You are living up to the example your parents set in so many ways.

Then you go and pull something off that really makes me jealous is you are one of the guys in the Senate that probably most married up.

We are both are Jersey boys. We both grew up there in grade schools and high schools. We both know those teachers that did so much for us, that coached sports. They taught us. I am going back for a funeral for a great man in New Jersey, Ed Koehler, this weekend, who was one of the greater influences in my life in high school, and you know how much people invested themselves.

I remember learning Little League from a guy that would come back from working at a gas station, a parent of another kid. I still remember his big thick hands teaching us how to hold a bat. This guy is working a job at a gas station and rushes home to teach his kid Little League and treated me—the only Black kid—like one of his own kids.

Special communities, special heritage, special culture that we share—this is the Jersey culture. We got a chip on our shoulders. We are tough. We are strong. We are proud.

And a lot of New Jersey is watching. Thousands of letters and emails and phone calls from all over New Jersey. ANDY KIM and I are hearing from so many people, and they are afraid. They are angry. They are worried. They don't understand why they are going after our Social Security programs, cutting benefits by cutting so many employees and cutting the service people get.

They don't understand why they are seeing veterans being laid off from their government jobs. They don't understand why Social Security is being called a Ponzi scheme. The President of the United States is making up lies.

They don't understand why veterans and Medicaid and Medicare—there are so many things that are making people worry. I am hearing their letters, and they are praying we stop some of these things like \$880 billion dollars' worth—and the question is, Why? Why are we doing this?

We are doing this—and they are saying it is to extend or make permanent the Trump tax cuts, the overwhelming disproportionate benefit that went to the wealthiest amongst us, the wealthy corporations.

So Trump's economy in the first 72 days is pretty bad because of his reckless chaotic behavior: Prices are up. Inflation is up. The stock market had its worst quarter in 2, 3 years.

Consumer confidence is down. And now we are going to see tariffs tomorrow, which are going to further drive up prices, create more chaos.

Trump squandered the progress we were making on the economy. He tanked the market, jacked the prices. Is it any surprise that Americans are feeling more pessimistic, as I said, with consumer confidence going down? And what is his first major legislative push? This is what we are talking about, my colleague, my friend, my fellow New Jerseyan: His first big legislative push in this body is not to help families.

No plan to lower costs. That is what he said he would do. Is his first legislation coming here while lowering costs? No. Is it any relief for seniors? Is it some big idea like we did to lower prescription drug costs? No, that is not what he is doing.

Is his first priority helping our veterans? What is his first priority? As I said, it is extending the 2017 Trump tax cuts, a multitrillion dollar giveaway that slashed corporate taxes and overwhelmingly benefited the wealthy and left the middle class with crumbs, relative crumbs.

He and his allies promised that the benefits would trickle down to workers. That is what we heard. It would "pay for itself," he said.

But in 2022, the Fed and the Joint Committee on Taxation confirmed the truth: 90 percent of workers—90 percent of folks in our States saw no benefit. Now Trump and his GOP allies

want to double down with even bigger tax cuts that will increase the deficit by over \$4.5 trillion, a majority of which would go to the wealthiest people.

Let me read what the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities—how they described the plan.

Here is a quote:

Following a presidential campaign in which Donald Trump promised to improve the economic circumstances of working families, House Republicans are instead pushing to extend all expiring provisions of the costly 2017 tax law—which are heavily skewed to people with high incomes—and add new tax cuts on top. The Republican-controlled House passed a budget resolution on February 25 authorizing \$4.5 trillion in tax cuts through 2034 and calling on committees to partially offset the cost with \$2 trillion in cuts; these cuts will inevitably hit programs such as Medicaid and SNAP, which help millions of families afford essential needs.

Are they cuts to the wealthiest? No.

These cuts will inevitably hit programs such as Medicaid and SNAP, which help millions of families afford essential needs.

Extending the expiring tax cuts for individuals and large estates would double down on the flaws in the 2017 law by:

Giving the biggest benefits to the wealthy. Households with incomes in the top 5 percent, who have incomes over around \$320,000, would receive roughly half of the benefits.

So billionaires above that, altogether, they would receive roughly half of the benefits.

Ballooning the deficit. Along with the 2001 and 2003 tax cuts enacted under President Bush, the 2017 law has severely eroded our nation's revenue base. The House budget would compound the damage, adding hundreds of billions of dollars to deficits each year. Extending the 2017 tax cuts would cost \$3.6 trillion through 2034.

Failing to significantly boost economic growth, workers' earnings, or other benefits for workers [would not be seen.] The trickle-down benefits that proponents claimed the 2017 law would produce never materialized, and the law hasn't come close to paying for itself.

As I heard on the Senate floor from my colleagues, they said: Oh, this is going to pay for itself; oh, this is going to pay for itself.

Yet the House budget claims that extending the tax cuts would generate trillions in revenue—far more than any independent estimate.

As in 2017, an alternative path is available. Congress should work toward creating a fairer federal tax system that raises more revenues from wealthy people and corporations and supports high-value investments that expand opportunity and promote shared prosperity.

During the 2017 debate, Trump Administration officials and prominent proponents claimed the tax law would yield broadly shared benefits by boosting economic growth. President Trump's Council of Economic Advisers claimed the centerpiece corporate tax rate cut would “very conservatively” lead to a \$4,000 boost in household income.

What a lie.

But research to date has failed to find evidence that the gains from the corporate rate cut trickled down to most workers.

Surprise, surprise, surprise.

A study by economists from the Joint Committee on Taxation and the Federal Re-

serve Board found that workers below the 90th percentile of their firm's income scale—a group whose incomes were below roughly \$114,000 in 2016—saw no change in earnings from the rate cut.

Proponents' claims that the tax cuts would pay for themselves haven't panned out either. In fact, a study by economists from Harvard, Princeton, the University of Chicago, and the Treasury Department estimates that the law's total corporate tax cuts—the rate cut as well as full expensing for capital investments and international tax changes—reduced revenue by roughly 98 cents for every dollar of tax cuts, even after accounting for increases in economic activity due to those cuts.

Similarly, proponents argued the law's 20 percent deduction for pass-through businesses (partnerships, S corporations, and sole proprietorships) would boost investment and create jobs. Then-Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin, for example, argued the deduction would “be good for the economy; good for growth.” But researchers have found no evidence that it provided any significant boost in economic activity and little evidence that it increased investment or broadly benefited workers, other than the owners themselves.

Despite this underwhelming performance, the House Republican budget resolution assumes that enacting \$4.5 trillion in new or extended tax cuts will produce enough additional economic growth to generate an extra \$2.6 trillion in revenue through 2035.

They think it is going to offset the tax cuts.

The Committee for a Responsible Federal Budget has derided this claim as “fantasy math,” noting that it is many times greater than even the most optimistic independent estimate.

They lied to us, or at least just put out really expansive hope in the past, and none of it came true. Fool me once, shame on you. Fool the American people twice, well, we should not let it happen.

This idea in this country that if you make the wealthiest more wealthy by giving them more tax cuts and deny services to our veterans, deny healthcare to our seniors, cut Social Security benefits, cut scientific research, cut programs that protect people's safety and security, that that is going to somehow help our Nation to prosper as a whole, you are kidding yourselves. We have the evidence. We have the analysis.

And this is the crazy thing, as I heard from CHUCK SCHUMER, the Republicans are now trying to hide the true cost of their billionaire tax cuts with accounting gimmicks.

The New York Times interviewed budget experts from across the political spectrum to shed light on the Republicans' trickery. And this is the article I want to read. I know some people have questions, but I want to read this article because SCHUMER shook me. Shook me.

So here is the New York Times. The title of the article is “The Budget Trick the G.O.P Might Use to Make \$4 Trillion Tax Cuts Look Free.”

How much does a tax cut cost? It depends on what you compare it to.

Republicans in Congress trying to advance a giant bill that includes \$4 trillion in tax

cut extensions are considering a novel strategy that would make the extension appear to be free money. The trick: Budgeting with the assumption that current policies extend indefinitely into the future—even those with an expiration date, like the 2017 tax cuts set to end next year. It's the difference between making the extension appear to cost \$4 trillion.

Which is the true cost, or hiding it and saying it costs nothing.

Using this “current policy baseline” wouldn't change the bill's real effect on deficits or debt. But it would make it easier to actually make the tax cuts lasting by sidestepping a rule governing budget reconciliation, the process Republicans are using to pass the bill.

Yes, this sounds technical! That's why we've enlisted some of Washington's top budget veterans to explain this maneuver using a metaphor. Across the ideological spectrum, nearly all of the more than 20 experts we heard from disliked changing the baseline.

And CHUCK SCHUMER just came in here and said the Republicans have already decided they are going to do it. This is outrageous.

But here the New York Times interviewed across the ideological spectrum, whole bunch of experts from the center, from the right, from the left, and let's hear what they are saying about this gimmick.

“If budget reconciliation is like taking the express lanes on a highway (there's extra rules and tolls, limited stops, but it gets you to where you want to go faster), using a current policy baseline for taxes is like slapping a fake license plate on your car.” Zach Moller, Director of the economic program at Third Way, which describes itself as a “center-left” research group.

They don't like this gimmick. They think it is fakery.

Here is another person using an analogy:

“It's like taking an expensive week-long vacation and then assuming you can spend an extra \$1,000 per day forever since you are no longer staying at the Plaza.” Marc Goldwein, Senior vice president and senior policy director for the Committee for a Responsible Federal Budget, a nonpartisan group that tends to be hawkish on deficits.

Here is another person, Jessica Reidl, senior fellow at the Manhattan Institute—I have worked with them in the past—a conservative research group, and the chief economist for the former Republican Senator Ron Portman of Ohio.

“Last year, despite being deeply in debt, I bought a \$100,000 sports car. So next year, buying another \$100,000 car is not irresponsible because I am merely spending the same amount of money as the year before. And if I purchase “only” a \$70,000 car, then I should be congratulated for reducing my annual spending by \$30,000.”

A conservative think tank is basically calling this a hoax and a lie. Lying to yourself, that if I keep spending, spending, spending the same amount I kept spending, spending, spending to drive up the costs, then I am just doing the same thing I have done before, so it is not adding.

Well, it is adding. There is no way to not call what the Republicans are trying to do a gimmick that is trying to

hide the truth that they are going to add trillions of dollars to the deficits that we, that our children, that our children's children are going to have to pay for.

The debt payments alone to service the debt are going to be bigger than any of the programs we think we should be investing in like science research or education or affordable childcare, or lowering prescription drug costs, or expanding the child tax credit. Things that we know if we invest in, we will get some returns.

But, no, what they are investing in is bigger tax cuts for the wealthiest. Conservatives, independents, left-leaning folks all come to the same conclusion.

Pretending \$4 trillion in tax cuts will cost nothing may not be easy. Many Republican lawmakers who are concerned about the deficit are well-aware that the bill will increase the deficit by a lot.

Here is the integrity call. One Republican in the House showed his integrity. One budget hawk named MASSIE said: I can't vote for this stuff. I am a budget hawk. I do not want to see increased deficits. He called it what it was. I saw him in an interview say, hey, hey, wait a minute, by your own numbers, Republican colleagues, you are driving up the deficit by trillions of dollars, and you are making the rich richer, and you are leaving future generations more bankrupt.

So this article assumes that this was all going to be decided by the Senate Parliamentarian "who advises legislators on Chamber rules." The Parliamentarian, I thought, "could rule that the current policy baseline isn't allowed."

Forcing the Republicans to have to make a choice, overruling or replacing my friend the Parliamentarian, somebody that on both sides of the aisle we respect, it is very rarely done.

I have been here for 13 years. We have had the same Parliamentarian. But that doesn't mean Republicans won't try, this article assumes. And I guess they did try.

They found a way around the Parliamentarian. They found a way around the rules of the Senate. They found a way around the ideals of reconciliation and the Byrd Rule. They are deciding the way we are going to do this is break the Senate and make up our own rules.

This is how they are going to get a bill through that gives trillion dollars of tax cuts to the wealthiest in our country who are doing very well. It is not hate on other Americans. I celebrate success, God bless you. But you don't need tax cuts, especially not that are going to be given to you on the backs of the poor, on the backs of our elders, on the backs of our children, on the backs of expectant mothers, on the backs of my mom's, your mom's Social Security.

What does it say about our values and our priorities to allow that to happen? Who are we, America, if you don't think this is a moral moment where

the character of our country is being tested?

I tell you, the Senate has stopped crazy gimmicks like this before, but the persuasive power of Democratic Senators probably won't be enough. We, as a country, like these economists that are Republicans, that are Democrats, that are nonpartisan, who called out this budget gimmickry for what it is—when is it enough?

When they came after journalists? When they came after colleges and universities, research and science? When they came after law firms who had the audacity to defend clients or to represent clients that were suing the President, who, God bless America, lost in civil courts, lost in criminal courts?

When do you cross your line? We can't let this happen. It is not a right or left moment. It is a right or wrong moment. It is a moral moment in America. I have read Republican after Republican from Republican Governors to Republican mayor groups, from the Cato Institute to the Manhattan Institute to AEL, calling out this budget gimmickry for what it is, and the result will be the same, blowing up our Federal deficit to stratospheric, almost unimaginable levels.

This is wrong every way you look at it. And if your values aren't fiscal conservatism, then vote with your integrity and vote against that. If your values are fiscal hawk and you hate deficit, then vote against the bill because it violates you.

Don't make up some fantasy that this is going to pay for itself. The 2017 tax cuts didn't, and you are going to extend them and say, well, it is going to happen this time. Oh, don't worry about it. It is going to happen this time. No, it is not.

Here is an article. "Donald Trump Built a National Debt So Big That It'll Weigh Down the Economy For Years."

One of President Donald Trump's lesser known but profoundly damaging legacies will be the explosive rise in the national debt that occurred on his watch. The financial burden that he's inflicted on our government will wreak havoc for decades, saddling our kids and grandkids with debt.

The national debt has risen by almost \$7.8 trillion during Trump's time in office. That's nearly twice as much as what Americans owe on student loans, car loans, credit cards and every other type of debt, other than mortgages, combined, according to data from the Federal Reserve Bank of New York. It amounts to about \$23,500 in new federal debt for every person in the country.

Every person, \$23,500.

The growth in the annual deficit under Trump ranks as the third-biggest increase, relative to the size of the economy, of any U.S. presidential administration, according to a calculation by a leading Washington budget maven, Eugene Steuerle, co-founder of the Urban-Brookings Tax Policy Center. And unlike George W. Bush and Abraham Lincoln, who oversaw the larger relative increases in deficits, Trump did not launch two foreign conflicts or have to pay for a civil war.

In peacetimes, he is No. 3—not the reason you want to be like Lincoln.

Economists agree that we needed massive deficit spending during the COVID-19 crisis to ward off an economic cataclysm, but federal finances under Trump had become dire even before the pandemic. That happened even though the economy was booming and unemployment was at historically low levels. By the Trump administration's own description, the pre-pandemic national debt level was already a "crisis" and a "grave threat."

To our Nation.

The combination of Trump's 2017 tax cut and the lack of any serious spending restraint helped both the deficit and the debt soar. So when the once-in-a-lifetime viral disaster slammed our country and we threw more than \$3 trillion into COVID-19-related stimulus, there was no longer any margin for error.

Our national debt has reached immense levels relative to our economy, nearly as high as it was at the end of World War II. But unlike 75 years ago, the massive financial overhang from Medicare and Social Security will make it dramatically more difficult to dig ourselves out of the debt ditch.

Falling deeper into the red is the opposite of what Trump, the self-styled "King of Debt," said would happen if he became president. In a March 31, 2016, interview with Bob Woodward and Robert Costa of The Washington Post, Trump said he could pay down the national debt, then about \$19 trillion, "over a period of eight years" by renegotiating trade deals and spurring economic growth.

God, this man breaks his promises over and over. After he took office, Trump predicted that economic growth created by [his] 2017 tax cut, combined with the proceeds from the tariffs he imposed in 2017 on a wide range of goods from numerous countries, would help eliminate the budget deficit and let the U.S. begin to pay down its debt. On July 17, 2018, he told Sean Hannity of FOX News: "We have \$21 trillion in debt. When this [the 2017 tax cut] really kicks in, we'll start paying off the debt like it's water."

That is Trump on FOX News lying.

Nine days later, he tweeted, "Because of Tariffs we will be able to start paying down large amounts of \$21 trillion in debt that has been accumulated much by the Obama Administration."

The guy can't help blaming Obama.

That is not how it played out.

Nothing he said came true.

When Trump took office in January 2017, the nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office was projecting that the Federal deficit would be 2% to 3% of our gross domestic product during Trump's term. Instead, the deficit reached nearly 4% of gross domestic product in 2018 and 4.6% in 2019.

There were multiple culprits. Trump's tax cuts, especially the sharp reduction in the corporate tax rate to 21% from 35%—

Again, what is here—a lot of my colleagues were here. The big business groups were coming in and asking for 25 percent from 35 percent, and Trump said: No, you are asking me for 25. I am going to give you 21 percent, cut your taxes even more.

It took a big bite out of Federal revenue.

The CBO estimated in 2018 that the tax cut would increase deficits by about \$1.9 trillion over 11 years.

Meanwhile, Trump's claim—

I wish the author wrote "Trump's lie." But he says:

Trump's claim that increased revenue from the tariffs would help eliminate (or at least reduce) our national debt hasn't panned out.

Surprise, surprise.

In 2018, Trump's administration began hiking tariffs on aluminum, steel, and many other products, launching what became a global trade war with China, the European Union, and other countries.

The tariffs did bring in additional revenue. In fiscal year 2019, they netted about \$71 billion, up about \$36 billion from president Barack Obama's last year in office. But although \$36 billion is a lot of money, it is less than 1/750th of the national debt. That \$36 billion could have covered a bit more than three weeks of the interest on the national debt—that is, had the Trump administration not unilaterally decided to send a chunk of the tariff revenue to farmers affected by his [horrible] trade wars. Businesses that struggled as a result of the tariffs also paid fewer taxes, offsetting some of the increased tariff revenue.

By early 2019, the national debt had climbed to \$22 trillion. Trump's budget proposal for 2020 called it a "grave threat to our economic and societal prosperity"—

He called his own damage that.

—and asserted that the U.S. was experiencing a "national debt crisis." However, that same budget proposal included substantial growth in the national debt.

By the end of 2019, the debt had risen in our country to \$23.2 trillion and more federal officials were sounding the alarm. "Not since World War II has the country seen deficits during times of low unemployment that are as large as those that we project—nor, in the past century, has it experienced large deficits for as long as we project" [said the CBO].

Weeks later, COVID-19 erupted and made the financial situation far worse. As of Dec. 31, 2020—

About a month left, 3 weeks left in his term.

—the national debt had jumped to \$27.75 trillion, up 39% from the \$19.95 trillion when Trump was sworn in.

He increased our deficit by 39 percent.

The government ended its 2020 fiscal year with the portion of the national debt owed to investors, the metric favored by the CBO, at around 100% of GDP. The CBO had predicted less than a year earlier that it would take until 2030 to reach that approximate level of a debt.

But not under Donald Trump.

Including the trillions owed to various governmental trust funds. . . .

Under his leadership, the total debt grew and grew and grew. It is now at about 130 percent of GDP. Where are the fiscal hawks?

Normally, this is where we'd give Trump's versions of events. But we couldn't get anyone to give us Trump's side. Judd Deere, a White House spokesman, referred us to the Office of Management and Budget, which is a branch of the White House.

OMB didn't respond to our questions. Treasury directed us to comments made by OMB director Russell Vought in October, in which he predicted that as the pandemic eases and economic growth rebounds, the "fiscal picture" will improve. The OMB blamed legislators for deficits when Trump submitted his proposed 2021 budget: "Unfor-

tunately, the Congress continues to reject any efforts to restrain spending."

It ain't me, he is saying, it is them.

"Instead, they have greatly continued to the continued ballooning of the Federal debts and deficits, putting the Nation's fiscal future at risk."

Still, the deficit growth under Trump has been historic. . . . [The Tax Policy Center . . . has done a comparison of every American president using a metric called the "primary deficit."]

They are saying Trump had the third biggest primary deficit growth, 5.2 percent of GDP. He is our biggest debt man. Deficits have ballooned under this President because of his tax scam, of his lies about his tax bill in 2017, none of which came true. It didn't pay for itself. It didn't close the deficits. It blew up our deficits. The benefits didn't go to working people. The benefits, as it says—over 90 percent would go to wealthy Americans and corporations.

Even some Republicans have been calling out hypocrisy. One of our colleagues, RAND PAUL, in 2018: "I can't in all honesty," RAND PAUL says, "in all good faith just look the other way because my party is now complicit in these deficits."

The other thing is there is a huge hypocrisy factor. Republicans lambasted President Obama to no end for trillion-dollar deficits, and now they have to put forward a multitrillion-dollar deficit.

Mick Mulvaney, Trump's former Chief of Staff, said in 2020:

My party is very interested in deficits when there is a Democrat in the White House. The worst thing in the whole world is deficits when Barack Obama was the president. Then Donald Trump became president, and we're a lot less interested [in deficits] as a party.

We don't care at this point.

Here is a guy I mentioned numerous times. THOMAS MASSIE, a Republican Member of the House, said earlier this year about Republicans:

We have no plan whatsoever to balance the budget other than growth, but what they're proposing is [going] to make the deficit worse.

This is what our President is trying to do, with the complicity of a lot of people who call themselves deficit hawks, who call themselves fiscal conservatives. They are going to try to blow it through here, gaming the system, creating some kind of scam to obscure the real cost of this.

We—all them on the Republican side, us on the Democratic side—we all know the truth about these tax increases and what they are going to do, how much they are going to cost, but we are going to play a game, it looks like, here unless more Americans speak up.

Republican and Democrat, people who know numbers, who know what we are doing to future generations in this country, this is wrong. And I say again that this is not right or left; it is right or wrong. This is a moral moment in America. What are we going to do?

I am so glad my friend the Senator from Hawaii is here. I try to keep M&M's in my desk in case she wants to partake in New Jersey's State product. The M&M was invented in Newark. True. I give great trivia here.

I am waiting for the Senator from Hawaii, my dear friend, to ask me a question. I have the floor.

Ms. HIRONO. Will the Senator yield for a question?

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

Ms. HIRONO. I am glad you mentioned M&M's. Both of us are lawyers. I remember I got through the study for the bar exam by eating mounds and mounds of M&M's. I thank the Senator from New Jersey for continuing to provide me with M&M's.

I want to thank you, Senator BOOKER, for standing here for hours on end to push back, to fight against this administration's lawlessness. In fact, a reporter asked me today: Do you think this is a good use by Senator BOOKER of his time to be on the floor to do this?

I said: Anytime any of us gets up and uses our voices to counter the fight against the lawlessness of this station, it is a good use of our time.

So, thank you, Senator BOOKER for yielding to me and for standing up for the American people. Is it making a difference? Millions of people are watching you, Senator BOOKER. Millions have watched and are watching you. It is making a difference.

I want to ask you a question about the lawlessness of this administration. As you yourself said last night, "These are not normal times in our Nation." In fact, these are the very words that I often use when I meet with anybody who comes to see me from Hawaii—individuals, organizations. I say, "These are not normal times."

So Donald Trump has made no secret of the fact that he fancies himself a King with total disregard for the rule of law. From day one, he and his administration have taken one illegal action after another.

On his first day in office, Donald Trump issued an Executive order purporting to end birthright citizenship, a right protected in our Constitution for more than a century—birthright citizenship.

He tried to unilaterally freeze Federal funding—funding for everything from cancer research to disaster aid, funding that had already been appropriated by Congress, and the executive branch is required by law to spend it. It is not as though it is up to the President to decide what programs he is going to release money for; Congress already made that determination. By law, he is supposed to expend these funds. But, again, he thinks he is the King and he can do whatever he wants. So he put a freeze on these funds.

He has enabled Elon Musk, an unelected billionaire—the richest person in the world, whose only qualification is the more than \$200 million he spent to get Trump elected—to run roughshod through our government.

Together, they have attempted to shutter USAID and the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau, just for two examples. The Consumer Financial Protection Bureau has returned more than \$21 billion to consumers through its enforcement actions—\$21 billion going to our consumers. Apparently, King Trump can't stand that, and neither can Elon Musk. These are Agencies that do critical work at home and abroad. They represent just a miniscule part of the Federal budget.

But this doesn't stop either Trump or Musk from going after these programs. And Musk's so-called DOGE team has gained access to sensitive databases and payment systems across our government, containing the personal information of millions of Americans. So he has access to the Treasury Department database—all our Social Security numbers, our tax payments, all of that. He was running roughshod, until stopped by a court, on these databases.

They have done all this without any transparency or accountability whatsoever, meaning we still don't know the full extent of where DOGE has been or what they have done.

Trump has launched an all-out assault on our Federal workforce. He attempted to fire tens of thousands—he actually fired them—who are on probationary status overnight, only for courts to order them—these thousands and thousands of Federal employees on probationary status—to be reinstated weeks later. Talk about chaos. Talk about sowing fear.

So now he is attempting to reclassify whole swaths of Federal employees to strip them of civil service protections and in some cases eliminate their ability to bargain collectively.

He fired Department of Justice and FBI officers for seemingly no other reason than their involvement in January 6 cases—cases they were assigned to as rank-and-file officials.

It is not as though the people all at the DOJ and the FBI had a choice in the kind of cases they were going to be assigned. They were assigned January 6 cases, and the names of these people—there are some 6,000 FBI and DOJ employees who worked on January 6 cases, and there is a fear that those names will be disclosed.

He is going after schools, from kindergartners to universities, as part of his war on diversity, equity, and inclusion. There are many examples of the kind of government overreach that they are exercising through their effort to ferret out what they call diversity, equity, and inclusion, which, actually, that is a positive. Do we want to be inclusive? So I want to give you just one example.

There was a teacher in Idaho who had a poster in her classroom that said "Everyone is welcome here," and there were handprints of different colors—white, black, yellow handprints. She was told she had to take this poster down. She was told that if the handprints were all white handprints, she

could have kept the poster up, but she was told she had to take down this poster in her classroom that says "Everyone is welcome here."

She took it down at first, but she felt so bad about it that she put it back up. Then she was told by the powers that be at her school that she had a certain amount of time to take this poster down. Otherwise, there will be disciplinary action. That is the kind of government overreach that is a hallmark of this administration.

To date, the Trump administration has withheld millions of dollars from handpicked colleges and universities, conditioning the funding on unreasonable demands meant to bring these colleges to their knees. So he is starting with Harvard and Columbia. There is probably a whole long list of colleges that he has threatened to withdraw hundreds of millions of dollars from.

They have slashed funding and staffing of the Department of Education. In fact, they would like to dismantle the Department of Education, which is responsible for administering billions in funding for low-income students, students with disabilities, and something as critical as school lunch for kids. Every single State in our country relies on the funding they receive from the U.S. Department of Education. In Hawaii, we are talking about some \$300 million in funding for our schools to help our kids with disabilities and to provide school lunches through the U.S. Department of Agriculture—the things that I mentioned.

As Senator BOOKER knows well, the list goes on and on.

This administration continues to abuse its power, acting with total disregard for the rule of law, so we have turned to the courts to stop these illegal acts. Now Republicans are calling to impeach these judges who are applying the law, who are doing what they are supposed to be doing and not just giving Trump whatever results he wants, but these judges are now deemed open to impeachment.

It is clear Trump and his cronies will keep on doing whatever they want regardless of the Constitution or the law. They are crippling government and sowing total chaos across our country while doing nothing to address the actual issues people care about.

I know my colleague from New Jersey is just as concerned about lawlessness as I am. We both sit on the Judiciary Committee. We know how important adherence to the rule of law is. In fact, I have said many times that it is the rule of law that separates a democracy from all other forms of government, and we now have a President who does not think that the rule of law applies to him. WTF comes to mind.

So, Senator BOOKER, my question to you is, What are the consequences of this total lawlessness on our government, our country, and the American people?

Mr. BOOKER. Thank you, Senator HIRONO.

I think I need somebody to say what WTF? To come from you is pretty giving and precious, and I am grateful.

This rule of law is really important. It is part of this whole moment in American history that I keep calling the more moment—something beyond the normal, where we shouldn't respond in a normal fashion. This is a moment where judges rule in his favor, and he praises them. If you don't rule for him, he drags them and threatens them, so much so that the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court has to tell him to back up.

If elected officials speak up, many of them fear as to what the consequences would be for them or their reelections if they speak against him.

Lawyers decline, possibly, to represent people because they are worried that this President has already shown that if you represent the wrong people or represent, God forbid, people against him, he is going to try to shut down your law firm in ways that are against the rule of law that this country believes in.

If journalists and media organizations don't report in a way that he likes or confirm his arbitrary name changes for the Gulf of Mexico, there is a punishment that he tries to dish out to try to make them come to submission.

State and local governments literally can get extorted for their funding if they don't carry out his demands. Schools and universities that are starving for dollars and trying to invest them in research and science that will propel humanity to new heights—well, they could get targeted by this President if they don't do what he says.

It feels like his ultimate goal is to create a country where you cannot trust the outcome of elections that he loses because he is going to tell you that if he lost that election, it is the Big Lie. It is wrong. I won. I won. I won. I won. I don't care what judge after judge, court after court says—I won. And if you don't believe me, if you don't say, "The election I won," well, there will be consequences for that too.

This is a President who, even as we have read people on both sides of the aisle, isn't respecting the Constitution and the separation of powers. He isn't respecting the rights that we hold precious. He isn't honoring what we call the rule of law. I want to go a little bit into this for a second.

Let's talk about the separation of powers. There are many, many different cases right now, but we know that James Madison—the Founding Father who devised the basic framework for our Constitution—devoted some of the Federalist Papers to the ways the Constitution addresses the danger of concentrating too much power in one person or in one branch of government. Written in 1788, Madison's words still have resonance today.

This is what he wrote in Federalist 487:

The cumulation of all powers—legislative, executive and judiciary—in the same hands whether of one, a few, or many and whether hereditary, self-appointed or elective—may justly be pronounced the very definition of “tyranny.”

So what is this President trying to do? He is trying to jam this court decision that is not in his favor. Either the judge is corrupt and should be impeached or he is just going to deny the ruling or not follow it.

Madison explained that the Constitution set up the executive, legislative, and judiciary branches to be separate and distinct and equal and bound together by checks and balances.

It is agreed on all sides that the powers properly belonging to one of the branches ought not to be directly and completely administered by either of the other branches. It is equally evident that none of them ought to possess directly or indirectly an overruling influence over the others in the administration of their executive respective powers.

That is Federalist 48.

I am nerdy enough to have a favorite Federalist Paper. I am going to read from my favorite one, Federalist 51:

In order to lay a due foundation for the separate and distinct exercise of the different powers of government essential to the preservation of liberty, it is evident that each department should have a will of its own, so constituted that each should have as little agency as possible in the appointment of the members of the others. But the great security against a gradual concentration of the several powers in the same department consist in giving to those who administer each department the necessary constitutional means to resist the encroachments of the others.

“[T]o resist the encroachments of the others.” We are not doing that in the Senate or in the House.

Federalist 51 continues:

It may be a reflection on human nature that such devices should be necessary to control the abuses of government.

Here is the quote, folks. Here is the quote from our Founders:

If men were angels, no government would be necessary.

If angels were to govern men, neither external nor internal controls on government would be necessary.

But our President is no angel.

This is Federalist 51 continuing:

In framing a government which is to be administered by men over men, the great difficulty lies in this: You must first enable the government to control—

The government—

and in the next place, oblige it to control itself.

They are talking about at great length our Founders and the separation of powers and the checks and balances of these institutions. Yet, for 72 days of this administration, has the Congress—article I, the people’s House; the Senate, the deliberative body—have we once held this President to account?

The most powerful man in the world and the richest man in the world have taken a battle ax to the Veterans’ Administration, a battle ax to the Department of Education, a battle ax to the

only Agency solely focused on protecting consumers against big banks and other factors that might abuse them, bringing it down.

Congress established the Department of Education. Congress established the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau. Congress. But the President doesn’t care. He is going to push as hard as he can against the principles of our Founders. And what will we do in this body? What will we do in the House of Representatives? Right now, the answer is nothing.

Has Elon Musk—the unelected, un-Senate-confirmed billionaire and No. 1 campaign contributor of Donald Trump’s, who has admitted he has made mistakes—on his website, he keeps taking down the mistakes. He keeps getting called out for them. He fires people from the FAA and then begs them to come back. He fires the people who protect us from nuclear accidents. “Oh, wait, come back.”

Have we ever in the Senate or in the House called him in for one oversight hearing to account for what he is doing to address the fears of a nation? No.

Separation of powers.

Hey, we have hearings here all the time but not with Elon Musk. Do you know why? Do you know why I think why? Tell me I am a conspiracy theorist. Because what Elon Musk is doing to some of my colleagues on the other side of the aisle is threatening them. He is threatening to run primaries with what, to me, would be a quarter but to him is \$100 million.

I am going to drop \$100 million against you in a primary if you step out of line or if you dare to say Hegseth is not qualified to be the Secretary of Defense. We are going to drag you through X. We are going to awaken the mob to threaten you.

Our Founders spoke so eloquently to protect against that kind of corruption, to protect against that kind of egregious tyrannical power that says: Only I can save this country. Give me all power. Let me be the strongman.

We know who he respects on the global stage. I was stunned. I thought it was a joke during the election when he said his favorite leader is Viktor Orban, who has rolled back democratic principles, who has concentrated power. I see.

Who does he choose to call a dictator—the man who was trying desperately to lead his country in defense against the authoritarian dictator and preserve his democracy or does he call the dictator a dictator? No. A simple test. Most high school students would simply pass it but no. He calls a hero a dictator.

Do we have any conversations about that in the formal capacity, to talk about the Ukrainian war, which I know people on both sides of the aisle—MAZIE HIRONO brings up the separation of powers. Why is history’s lesson so relevant today? Why do we study history? Did I learn that in high school that you study history so you don’t re-

peat the mistakes of the past? You study history to gain inspiration and insight and courage against tough times. You study history to be inspired by heroes who stood up against despots, who sacrificed themselves.

What is the lesson in history? How is it relevant to us today? Because the separation of powers between the branches of government has allowed our democracy to thrive for nearly 250 years. And now we have a person in power who is barely being checked. And if the courts check him, what he does to the courts—

In the 9 weeks or 10 weeks since Donald Trump was inaugurated, there have been more than 140 Federal lawsuits filed challenging his actions. I don’t know if another President, in my lifetime, ever has had 140 Federal lawsuits in about 9 weeks. It is a staggering figure. We should consider it a staggering figure. He must be the most sued President in U.S. history. Somebody should fact check that. But at least in my lifetime, I don’t remember Reagan; I don’t remember Bush; I don’t remember Obama or Clinton or Biden being dragged into court in the first 9 weeks so many times and losing case after case.

He may have a record for the most lawsuits filed by a President himself because he is a guy who says he loves to sue folks. In support of the big lie, he did so many lawsuits and lost them all.

The lawsuits against Trump and his administration are not frivolous. Federal judges, appointed by Republican Presidents and Democratic Presidents alike, have found Trump’s Executive actions illegal, temporarily pausing many of them too.

Trump’s Executive actions and the outcomes of these lawsuits have a direct effect on Americans. These lawsuits challenge Trump.

Here are some of the examples, folks—and I am wondering where the American people stand on these lawsuits. It is not the people who are blindly loyal to him because they believe the lies that he so artfully, creatively, and convincingly tells, but just tell me where do you stand on these issues?

Attacks on veterans who have served our country in the military and civil services—well, there are lawsuits challenging his right to attack our veterans.

There are lawsuits challenging Trump on his attacks on government Agencies that protect your grandmother from online scams. I don’t know where you stand—with the grandmas getting scammed, to defend them, or the President?

Lawsuits against Trump because of his attacks on lawful American citizens born in this country and guarantee their citizenship under the U.S. Constitution. There are lawsuits against the President for withholding National Institutes of Health funds to support studies of horrific diseases like

Alzheimer's and disrupting lifesaving medical research and ongoing clinical trials.

Now, if you are a student of history, this is the problem, often, with lawsuits. *Brown v. Board Education*, we celebrate it as the wonderful case it was. But was it obeyed? No, it wasn't.

I have a picture of Ruby Bridges in my office because it wasn't obeyed. The court didn't declare this and, suddenly, everybody said: Hey, let Black folks go to school with White folks. No. The President had to call in the National Guard to escort a little girl into a class.

That is the problem with lawsuits. If you have a defiant executive leadership, they will defy them.

These, where you stand? Do you stand with veterans? Do you stand with your grandmother against online scams? Do you stand with American citizens born in this country? Do you stand with withholding National Institutes of Health funding? It was clearly that. We know the majority of Americans are with that. But people are having to bring them to court to fight on these issues.

So many cases being done. So many cases I have here before me. So many cases. I can read them all, but you all know many of them. They are stunning the press as he pushes, as Elon Musk pushes. They push the bounds of the authorities of the Constitution of the United States, and people are bringing lawsuits. But that is not enough.

Martin Luther King didn't step down because of Thurgood Marshall's legal work. John Lewis didn't step down. Ella Baker didn't stop. Abraham Joshua Heschel didn't stop. The great Rabbi Joachim Prinz didn't stop. The people of the United States of America, more powerful than courts; the people of the United States of America, more powerful than the Constitution—I just said something controversial, so let me defend myself.

I believe in the people. I believe in the words of the great Learned Hand. He said the like of what I just said, so let me read somebody far greater, far more vaunted than this Senator from New Jersey.

Learned Hand served as a Federal judge from 1909 to 1951. He was nicknamed the 10th Justice of the Supreme Court for his many influential decisions. He wrote this speech about our Constitution, about our liberties, about the tyrants in every generation who have tried to subvert our democracy—some of them from this body, like the Red Scare that had so many Americans being unjustly fired, unjustly deported, unjustly jailed, that infringed on freedom of speech, freedom of expression. I am sorry. Every generation of Americans have seen demagogues rise to try to undermine what America stands for, and Learned Hand knew that. He had so much wisdom about our Constitution.

We have gathered here to affirm a faith, a faith in a common purpose, a common con-

viction, a common devotion. Some of us have chosen America as the land of our adoption; the rest have come from those who did the same. For this reason we have some right to consider ourselves a picked group, a group of those who had the courage to break from the past and brave the dangers and the loneliness of a strange land. What was the object that nerved us, or those who went before us, to this choice? We sought liberty; freedoms from oppression, freedom from want, freedom to be ourselves. This we then sought; this we now believe that we are by way of winning. What do we mean when we say that first of all we seek liberty? I often wonder whether we do not rest our hopes too much upon constitutions, upon laws and upon courts. These are false hopes; believe me, these are false hopes. Liberty lies in the hearts of men and women; when it dies there, no constitution, no law, no court can even do much to help it. While it lies [in our hearts] there it needs no constitution, no law, no court. And what is this liberty which must lie in the hearts of men and women?

Please, please, please, listen to what he writes next:

What is this liberty which must lie in the hearts of us Americans? This is what he says next:

It is not the ruthless, the unbridled will; it is not freedom to do as one likes. That is the denial of liberty, and leads straight to its overthrow. A society in which men recognize no check upon their freedom soon becomes a society where freedom is the possession of only a savage few; as we have learned [in our country] to our sorrow.

What then is the spirit of liberty? I cannot define it; I can only tell you my own faith. The spirit of liberty is the spirit which is not too sure that it is right; the spirit of liberty is the spirit which seeks to understand the mind of other men and women; the spirit of liberty is the spirit which weighs their interests alongside its own without bias; the spirit of liberty remembers that not even a sparrow falls to earth unheeded; the spirit of liberty is the spirit of Him who, near two thousand years ago, taught mankind that lesson it has never learned but [has] never quite [yet] forgotten; that there may be a kingdom where the least shall be heard and considered side by side with the greatest. . . . And now in that spirit of that America for which our young men are at this moment fighting and dying; in that spirit of liberty and . . . America I ask you to rise and [say] with me [the] pledge of our faith in the glorious destiny of our beloved country.

I now ask you to raise your hands and repeat after me this pledge.

And he says the Pledge of Allegiance. He believed that the Constitution dies if the spirit of it dies in the hearts of men and women.

I would tell you, this Constitution has saved my life. It made my life because people marched to make real on the promise of our democracy. People bled to make real on this democracy.

When some people told us that this Constitution didn't apply to us, this body—this body, Republicans in America—stood up and said: No, President Johnson, we are going to do amendments.

We saw the Thirteenth Amendment, the Fourteenth Amendment, the Fifteenth Amendment would guarantee my ancestors finally full citizenship in the United States of America and the protections of the Constitution.

I am here in this body because of past generations that fought to uphold the

Constitution, not because the Constitution was real to them but because they brought reality and hope and love and promise to the Constitution. They were Americans who said, like Langston Hughes: America never was America to me, but I swear this oath, America will be.

They loved this country so much even when it didn't love them back. I am here because of that. I am the fourth Black person popularly elected to this body because of generations that believed so much in this document that they were going to make it real, if live in them.

I quoted earlier today—it is worth quoting here again—the great Margaret Chase Smith, a U.S. Senator from Maine, a Republican in her famous "Declaration of Consciences" speech delivered on June 1, 1950.

Thank you. Thank you, my good Senator friend WHITEHOUSE because, Lord knows, I would have slipped and fallen on my tuchus and have ended this long filibuster because I fell to the floor. That is what you mean when your brother has your back.

What did this Republican say in the time of tyranny in her times, in the time when the Constitution stopped living in people's hearts, where people believed that whipped up fears of others by demagogues, where people believed the fear that they heard again and again on the radio that we should fear other Americans, when people believed their fear justified them, inhibiting the greatness of the Constitution? What is that old saying from one of our great leaders of the past? If you are willing to give up your liberty in order to ensure your security, you will lose them both.

So here was this courageous Republican, who, in a time that demagogues were whipping up fear, where First Amendment rights were being trampled, where people were being intimidated into silence, where people were afraid to go up against the big and the powerful and the rich, where people were being deported from our country, where Jews were being deported and accused of being communists as justification to take them out of the country because they didn't have permanent legal status—yes, that is our history. What did she stand up and say in the Senate, this Republican, putting her own career at risk to call out Senator McCarthy?

She said:

I don't believe the Republican Party is in any sense a party of fear. I do believe that the Republican Party has made an alliance, though, with the four horsemen of fear—the fear of communists, the fear of labor unions, the fear of the future, and the fear of progress.

There are people fearmongering now. There are people trying to tell Americans to hate Americans. You are either with the great "Dear Leader" or you are endangering an enemy. And it is not just Democrats who are being dragged, there are other Republicans. I

saw it happen. I saw it happen to one of our Vice President's daughters, a Congresswoman. I saw it happen to colleagues of mine like Jeff Flake, like John McCain, and like Corker, who stood up in this body and told the truth about dear leader, and they saw the consequences politically.

You want to talk about where the Constitution lives and defending the Constitution? First make it real in your heart, like those women did before the amendment that granted them the right to vote, who loved this country so much.

You want to know where the Constitution lives in your heart? I just met with extraordinary men and women who are Native Americans to this country, who were here before any of us. They love this country so much even with the sins against them.

You want to know where the Constitution lives? Let it live in the hearts of all Americans now, and ask yourself: Is the leader of our country living the Constitution in his heart? Because, as Learned Hand said, it is not braggadocios; it is not mean; it is loving; it is kind; it is expansive.

We are Americans. Our creed above the Presiding Officer says it all—"E Pluribus Unum"—trying to remind our country that despite racial difference, gender, besides Republican or Democrat, ethnics—you know all the lines that divide us are not nearly as strong as the ties that bind us. That is what "e pluribus unum" means.

What about the pledge that Learned Hand read? Listen to the words. It says things. It says things in that pledge. It says that we are one nation under God, that we are indivisible and we pledge ourselves to liberty and justice not just to the people who agree with the President but for all.

God bless my courageous colleagues who have spoken out in the past and suffered the consequences. Liberty and the Constitution live in their hearts. They put patriotism over politics.

We are in this moral moment now. We are in this moral moment now. This is not right or left. Don't let them say this is a partisan shift; it is not. It is not left or right; it is right or wrong.

America, this is a moral moment. Does the Constitution live in your heart?

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

Mr. BOOKER. Before I yield—I love this power trip. It is the only time in 13 years I have really felt this power. I don't have to let my colleagues speak. And I, first amongst us all, really love to speak.

I just want to say thank you to CHRIS MURPHY. I repeated this 10, 15 hours ago, but I just want to tell the story, and then I will let you go, CHRIS.

Nine years ago on this floor, after the Pulse shooting, we called CHUCK SCHUMER, CHRIS and I. I saw a moment and he saw a moment that we couldn't do business as usual. We just said: How can you have this mass shooting, yet

another mass shooting, and this body just go on as business as usual? It is why I am standing here right now. And we agreed, with CHUCK SCHUMER's help, that we would get control of the Senate.

CHRIS MURPHY went down to that desk, and I promised him: I will be with you. I will stand with you. I won't sit down. We will go as long as we possibly can.

And he began a filibuster 9 years ago, and it lasted 15 hours. And he still had fuel in the tank; I know he did. I was a hurting guy. I told you my back was hurting, my feet were hurting. But we had a direct end when MITCH MCCONNELL agreed to give us a vote on commonsense gun safety, which I think every American and most gun owners agree on—just universal background checks. It failed to get 60 votes in the Senate, but you stood and I stood with you.

He said to me days ago: If you are going to do this, Brother, I will be your aide-de-camp this time. And you have been with me. You have been with me far past 15 hours. You have been with me for 23 hours 49 minutes.

(Applause.)

Although my cousin Pam in the Gallery—she has been here the same amount of time.

All right. So I am going to yield my power. It is not going to go to my head. This is why we need separation of powers—checks on men. Men are not angels.

I yield for a question while retaining the floor.

Mr. MURPHY. Senator BOOKER, it has been a wonder to be with you on the floor these last 24 hours. You indeed did something extraordinary and performed a sympathy filibuster with me 9 years ago where, as I stood at that desk for 15 hours, you stood on the Senate floor. You didn't need to but you did in solidarity.

I have been with you for the last 24 hours, but I have sat for most of this. You have done the hard work.

You are an extraordinary Senator. You are an extraordinary American. And I think I can say, on behalf of everyone in this Chamber and many people in the Gallery, you are an extraordinary friend. So I think all of us feel privileged to be here with you at this moment—this moment of peril, this moment of danger, this moment of opportunity for the Nation, but also this moment of history.

On August 28, 1957, at about 8:45 p.m., Strom Thurmond took this floor, and he took the floor with the intent of trying to block the 1957 civil rights bill. This was the most significant—really, the only—civil rights bill that had been before the U.S. Senate in 90 years. Most famously, about 10 years before, when he was running for President as a Dixiecrat, he had said:

There are not enough troops in the Army to force the Southern people to break down segregation and admit the Negro race into our theaters, into our swimming pools, into our homes and into our churches.

He sat on this floor for just over 24 hours, and he made the case for why this Nation should continue to segregate Black and White. He started, in fact, by reading every single State's voting rights laws. Every single State's laws he read into the RECORD, apparently as proof that every State adequately protected all of its voters and that no additional laws were necessary.

He had friends in his cause to preserve segregation that came down to the floor and asked him long questions to give him breathers.

At the end of that 24 hours, at around 9 p.m. the following night, he could go no longer. His final words in his 24-hour, recordbreaking filibuster were:

I expect to vote against the bill.

But within hours, the bill passed. It became law. It established the Office of Civil Rights at the Department of Justice. It was not nearly enough, but it broke 90 years of inaction.

What you have done here today, Senator BOOKER, couldn't be more different than what occurred on this floor in 1957. Strom Thurmond was standing in the way of inevitable progress toward equal political and economic rights for Black Americans. It was inevitable only because the people of this Nation were standing up at that moment—the beginning of the civil rights movement—to make clear that progress was inevitable.

I say that that moment is so different from this moment because today you are standing in the way not of progress but of retreat. You are standing in the way of retreat from the rule of law, retreat from our commitment to provide care to the most vulnerable, retreat from our common cause—at least what used to be a common cause—that we would have zero tolerance for corruption at the highest levels of government.

You have recognized, rightly, that this multifaceted retreat from everything that makes this country so special and the speed of that retreat over the last 71 days—it is an exceptional moment. You have said that word over and over again. It is not normal, what this administration has been doing to rob from us the values that used to unite left and right in this Nation.

So you made this bold decision to engage in an exceptional tactic, to declare 24 hours ago that you were going to stand on this floor for as long as you could to try to raise the specter of failure in our fight against this retreat for our colleagues and for the American public.

The exceptional nature we have heard so eloquently from you over the course of the last 24 hours—the massive transfer of wealth in this reconciliation bill from the poor and the middle class to the wealthy; the industrial-scale harassment of journalists, of universities, of law firms; the destruction of the independence of the Department of Justice; the destruction of the American knowledge economy and the research economy; the use of the White

House in violation of the Constitution to make those in power richer—you have laid out the case.

It is funny—I remember this from 9 years ago—when you are sitting in your spot—you haven't moved in 24 hours—you have no idea what is happening outside of this building. You don't actually know how many people in this country have engaged in the conversation that you started 24 hours ago.

On one social media platform alone, there have been 150 million clicks on your live stream. This is a country of 300 million Americans. You have been able to pique a conversation here amongst our colleagues—who we need to stand with us eventually against this retreat—and across this country. And I think we are here, as we reach a pivotal hour, to just say thank you for having the courage, the audacity, to bring us on this journey.

So my question is pretty simple. I think you will find when you finally leave this Chamber that you have done something extraordinary, that you didn't solve the problem, that we are still a long way from being able to successfully beat back this retreat, but that you have accomplished something extraordinary.

So I guess that is just my question. When you set out with this idea, when this was starting to germinate in your mind, my question for you, Senator BOOKER, is, What did you hope to accomplish?

Mr. BOOKER. I thank my colleague and my friend again. He and I talked about this, that I was challenged by my own constituents to do something different, challenged by my own constituents to do something, challenged by my own constituents to take risks.

My staff here should get a lot of credit for making it thus far. I am not sitting down, but I am mindful of what you said about Strom Thurmond. I am mindful of that right now as I watch that clock tick for another 20 minutes.

I am grateful for my staff. I am grateful for the Parliamentarians, the clerks. I am grateful for the Republican Presiding Officers.

I don't know if I want to out CURTIS on the note that he—I am sorry—the good Senator, the Presiding Officer—forgive me—on the note he sent me, but this is the kind of specialness in this place that I love.

I want to tell a few connecting stories. I think some of my colleagues know a few of these, but I want to explain why I started this whole 24 hours talking about John Lewis and good trouble.

Sixty years ago, when he was on the Edmund Pettus Bridge, he shook New Jersey as he shook the Nation. When Bloody Sunday happened, there was a White guy on the couch in New Jersey who was watching TV and was so shaken, this lawyer said: I have to go to Alabama. He realized he couldn't afford a plane ticket, so this man slumped back down on his couch.

Then he said: At a moral moment in America, I am not going to let my inability to do everything undermine my determination to do something, to do something different.

He got up and said: OK—it was a meager calculation, but it was different—I can afford 1 hour a month of pro bono work.

He called around, and he found this woman named Lee Porter who was heading up an organization called the Fair Housing Council and said: Could you use a lawyer?

She was like: Hallelujah. Thank you, Jesus. Yes, we need some help.

They worked together and they designed a sting operation where they would send Black families in areas of New Jersey that would not sell homes to Black people, where usually the best public schools were. If they were told the house was sold, they would send a White couple behind them to expose that the house was still for sale and expose all of this.

Well, they had a lot of success getting things written about the severe housing discrimination in my State.

He said that after about 5 years, 4 years: I got this case file of a Black family trying to move to New Jersey, and they were frustrated because every time they would look at homes in the places with the best public schools, which happened to be White communities, they said they couldn't find a home.

So they did the sting operation. They sent the Black couple in. They were told this incredible house was not for sale. They loved the house. So that when the White couple went, they threw in a bid to see if it would be accepted. The bid was accepted. Papers were drawn up.

On the day of the closing, the White couple did not show up. The Black man did—lawyer, Marty Friedman marched in, confronted the real estate agent.

You would think 1969, a year after the Fair Housing Act, that he would capitulate, but he didn't. This real estate agent gets up so angry. He punches the lawyer in the face and sics a Doberman pinscher on the Black guy.

They get out of there, shaken up, and they start writing letters back and forth. The good owners of the home found out what was going on. They were so aghast. They said: Let us sell the house directly to the Black family.

The Black family moved in, and 43 years later, the baby from that family became the fourth popularly elected Black Senator in our country—me.

I tell that story because I started with John Lewis 24 hours ago, and it was John Lewis and a bunch of marchers on the bridge that influenced the destiny of my life and my family's life.

We are all interconnected. As King says:

We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny.

But I want to tell you the second time John Lewis shook up my life.

I was mayor of the city of Newark. I got called to be on a TV show. I got called by a guy named Skip Gates, who I love, admire. He calls me and he jazzes me up. He fills my ego. He just flatters me: Hey, I got this show called Finding Your Roots, CORY BOOKER. You are a rising star. You are this hotshot. We should feature you in this.

I am like: Oh, great. Oh, don't say that, Skip, but OK. Yeah, of course. And then I said: OK. Who are you going to pair me with?

I thought it was going to be another young, hotshot, up-and-coming politician in America.

No. He goes: I am going to pair you with John Lewis, and my heart sank a little bit—actually maybe it was my ego that sank. My heart got excited. Because I know how these shows start. They start with biographies.

So imagine the show starting: John Lewis; hero of the Civil Rights Movement, literally bled the southern soil red for freedom and justice.

And then he goes to my biography: CORY BOOKER; riding his big-wheel in suburban New Jersey. The show was unbelievable; a mountain and boy.

But I got to meet John Lewis. I got to tell him that story that he changed my life, and I didn't even know it—on a bridge in Alabama, changed the course of events in New Jersey that led to me.

Third take on John Lewis, my colleagues know I got here in a special election in 2013. What all of my colleagues might not know is I came here with a broken heart. My mom and I came here with a broken heart because I was elected in October, sworn in in October, but also in October my dad died of Parkinson's. That is why I got choked up reading these letters of people with Parkinson's.

So when we came down here, we were grieving. My dad was not with us. My mom lost her husband of nearly 50 years, and I am going to get sworn in. It is a big event, but my parents and my campaign decided: You know what we should do? Right before you get sworn in or brought over here to be escorted to the President and Vice President, that you should go and sit with John Lewis.

So we went to John Lewis' office and a lot of my colleagues from the CBC, a lot of my colleagues from the House, a lot of my colleagues, like here, came over from the House, know his office.

You walk into his office, and it looks like a civil rights museum except he is in all the pictures. And this is John Lewis—we who knew him—this was him, mountain of a man. He had already prepared eggs and grits, a good southern breakfast, and wouldn't let my mom and I get up.

He serves us all, and he humbly is saying: This is why I marched. This is why I sacrificed for historic historymaking days like this. He told us how special this was for him.

He told me he would be right here where my friends are sitting, watching

me get sworn in and how proud he was going to be. In a sense, he stood in for my dad on this floor, and then, boom, I am Senator.

I find colleagues and friends here. I find a lot of colleagues and friends in the CBC. At that point, I was the only African American in our caucus and found so many friends, so many heroes that are gone from the Senate now, who looked at me, adopted me, helped me.

DICK DURBIN, you were amazing in those early months.

And this is the next time I meet John Lewis for a moment that changed my life. CHRIS MURPHY, BRIAN SCHATZ, remember this moment. It was during the 2017 healthcare debate, when I didn't know how we were going to stop that bill from passing and taking away healthcare from 20 million Americans.

But John Lewis: Hey, CORY, let's do something different. What you got in mind?

I said: Well, John Lewis, I got this phone. It is very powerful. Let's do a Facebook live. So I open up Facebook live, we meet in between in the Capitol.

He says: Where can we go to sit down for a place?

My favorite place to sit, I watched Schoolhouse Rock so much, it is right on the steps of the Capitol. Let's just sit there and talk; CHRIS MURPHY, BRIAN SCHATZ the first people out to sit with us.

The time lapse—the time lapse is amazing. First two, three people. Then 10 people. Then 50 people. Then hundreds of people. I have it all coming because of the moral magnetism of this man, John Lewis.

And he talked to people that night who were looking for, what can I do? I am just one person.

And this guy in his 20s who is just one person and caused a heck of lot of good trouble, he told him: Don't lose faith, don't lose hope. Get angry, but let it fuel you. Be afraid, but know that is a necessary precondition to courage. He was amazing that night. I know my colleagues remember that.

And then there was a next time. Oh, Brother WARNOCK, you are gonna love this one.

The next time I was with John Lewis, Jimmy Carter had gotten a little sick, but then he got better, and he went back to teaching Sunday school. And I thought: This man is in his 90s. I need to go to Sunday school. So who do I know—there is a waiting line. It is like people sneak out all night. I might have been a little selfish. How do I know I can get in?

I call John Lewis. I said: Hey, I got this great idea. Why don't we go to Jimmy Carter and watch him teach Sunday school? So I have the singular greatest road trip. I fly into Atlanta. We get into a car, and we drive all those hours to Plains, GA.

Indeed, people were waiting outside, but it is John Lewis—come on in. We sit in the front row; I must be in the front row. We sit down, and then this

marvelous incredible moment comes. Somebody comes and says: Congressman Lewis, Senator BOOKER, the President and First Lady would love to see you beforehand.

This is my first time meeting President Jimmy Carter. But I walk in, I am sort of on the sidelines. These two men are hugging each other; me and the first lady.

The two of them whisper for a second, and Jimmy Carter walks over to me and says: I hear you are thinking of running for President of the United States.

He did something incredible. He says: I think you should run—and he pokes my heart—only if you run from here.

The last time—of the powerful moments I have had in my life with that man, that so many of us have had those powerful moments, the last time happened because of a man named MICHAEL COLLINS. I know people—there are people in this room that got the same phone call that I got, that: It won't be long now, that John Lewis is going to pass very soon. He can't speak, but I know he would want you to have your moment to say goodbye to him.

And what do I do? What do I do? Say goodbye to a man that is a legend in my life, a legend in our Nation? What do you do to say goodbye to him? I wasn't prepared. I can't say I said anything eloquent.

MICHAEL COLLINS, God bless you, man. You put the phone by his ear and you just gave me my time to have a conversation with the man that would soon die, a man that changed my life, that helped my family get into a neighborhood that loved me and cherished me. God love Harrington Park.

The man that stood in for my father when heaven brought him home, the man that showed me on the steps of this Capitol how powerful the people are. It wasn't about him. It was about them.

The man that brought me to see a President, flattered every Senator's ego telling them what they want to hear: Run for President.

And so I said everything I could, but the last thing I said I remember very well. I said: I love you—I said: I love you, and I said: John, I know you are going to be in Heaven looking down on us, and I promise you—I promise you, John Lewis—that I will do everything possible, that we will do everything possible to make you proud.

The Civil Rights generation is starting to be called home. The leaders are leaving us. We in the CBC have lost a lot of greats. I can't remember the—forget the promise I made to John Lewis with all that he gave me, with all that he gave his country, that I said we would make him proud.

So this is one of those moments that John Lewis—he would not be sitting still. He would be calling me up and say: You still got that Facebook thing? I go: No, I don't really use Facebook anymore.

But there is a thing called TikTok or—I don't know what John Lewis would say right now. I know what he said in 2017.

But I will be honest with you. I don't know what he would say, but John Lewis would say something. He would do something. He wouldn't treat this moral moment like it was normal. John Lewis new what King said, that what we have to repent for, all of us here, we will have to repent for, is not just the vitriolic words and violent actions of so-called bad people.

What we have to repent for in our day and age is the appalling silence and the inaction of good people. This is our moral moment. This is when the most precious ideas of our country are being tested, where the Constitution and the question is being called: Where does the Constitution live, on paper or in our hearts? This is the moment. Generations get them. We are on a crossroads here, folks.

Healthcare is on the balance. Veterans are on the balance. Priorities are on the balance. Where is our priorities, America? More tax cuts disproportionately going to the wealthy. Greater budget deficits in the trillions and trillions of dollars. Or are we going to do something different like John Lewis would call us to do?

He would call us to get into good trouble, necessary trouble, save the soul of America. But you all know John: Don't hate each other. Don't let anybody pull you so low as to hate them.

I said this about the presiding elder, different parties, but he showed me an act of kindness during this speech. He and I talked about energy policy. He has amazing ideas. I want to partner with him.

Don't hate anybody. Did the folks in Birmingham—did Martin Luther King, Fred Shuttlesworth, Dorothy Cotton, James Bevel, did they bring bigger dogs and bigger fire hoses to match the sheriff's—Bull Connor—thank you. I have been standing here a long time.

They didn't do that. They were creative artists of activism. They called to the conscious of a country. They challenged our moral imagination, not to focus on hate but focus on what is possible in America if we redeem the dream, if we dream America anew.

That generation in their 20s and their 30s, that is what they demanded. Martin Luther King didn't go to the March on Washington with a list of grievances against the racists in our country. He went there and called to the conscious of the country. He said he "had a dream." That is what we need in our generation, a vision to redeem the dream to call our country together.

Yes, there is a man in the White House who is the most powerful man in the land, and his partner is the richest man in the world. But as long as this is a democracy that we can still protect, the power of the people is greater than the people in power, if they use their powers.

There is a great African American woman author once said: The most common way people give up their power is not realizing they have it in the first place.

I have been calling out names, folks, to tell them they have power.

I read the stories of DeAnna, of Wendy and Cassie, of Tonya, of Cameron, of Jeanne, of Susan, of Edna, Randi, of Dylan, of Theresa, of Pamela, of Sally and Mike, of Carole, Rosemari, Danielle, of Judith, of Elizabeth, of Sandra, Alicia, Maggie, Nybil, Laura, Michael, Robin, Mary, Allyson, Ash, Roseann, Kerry, Samantha P., Raphael, Will, Anthony, Sean, and so many more. I read their stories here because while we were elected, they are the power of our country.

I have made mistakes. We all have. Both parties have a lot of mistakes to account for. The ballast of this country, what will anchor us to our ideals, what will call us to new heights, lift our heads, lift our hopes, what will call us to rise is each other.

We need each other. We need a greater love in this country. We need a greater fight in this country. We need a greater determination. We can't act as if these are normal times.

These people's stories that I read were calling out for help: Senator, help me. Someone, help me. I am in danger of losing my healthcare. Someone help me. I am a veteran. Look what happened to me. It is not fair. I fought for this country. Help me. Help me. I am worried about my Social Security, and the rural office I go to is being closed. Help, people calling out for help. And what do Americans do when people are calling out for help?

They built an infrastructure. The greatest project ever, called the Underground Railroad, where Quakers, White folks joined with Black folks to shuttle people to freedom. What did they do when people were worried and fearful? They called people together from across their country. Let's have a conference. Let's go to Seneca Falls.

What did they do when they faced violence? Oh, look at the people at Stonewall who stood up, who pushed back, who organized, who won.

What do they do when the dogs are unleashed on us, when the firehose is unleashed on us? Look at what they did in Selma.

I am getting close to a record, folks, but—

(Applause.)

There is a room here in the Senate named after Strom Thurmond. To hate him is wrong, and maybe my ego got too caught up, that if I stood here maybe, maybe, just maybe I could break this record of the man who tried to stop the rights upon which I stand. I am not here though because of a speech. I am here despite his speech.

I am here because as powerful as he was, the people were more powerful.

(Applause.)

I will remind you all these people that believe like me that we have got

to redeem the dream, turn again to John Lewis because you all know the story, my colleagues, of when the man that beat him savagely, drew blood, cracked bones, decades later, when he was a Congressman, that man brought his grandson with him to ask for forgiveness from John Lewis.

I heard about this story when I was in the car in Georgia with him.

What did you do, John, this man who had so viciously beat you, wounded you, bruised you, battered you, what did you do when he came to ask you for forgiveness? What did you do?

And the good Christian man, the man of faith, simply said: Every one of us needs mercy. Every one of us needs redemption. I forgave him. I hugged him. We wept. And I looked at the boy, this Nation needs you too.

John—

Mr. SCHUMER. Would the Senator yield for a question?

Mr. BOOKER. CHUCK SCHUMER, it is the only time in my life I could tell you no.

Mr. SCHUMER. I just want to tell you, question, do you know you have just broken the record? Do you know how proud this caucus is of you? Do you know how proud America is of you?

(Applause, Senators rising.)

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Ladies and gentlemen, order, order. The Chair does not wish to take away from this moment, but I think the best way to honor this great accomplishment to our guests in the Gallery is to make a rare exception and let you stand to show your appreciation. I will not constrain my fellow Senators.

Mr. BOOKER. CHUCK SCHUMER, I have yielded for a question, and you asked me did I know. I know now.

(Applause.)

I want to not quite wrap this up yet. I don't want to wrap this up yet. My mom's Senator—my mom has been watching. I know CATHERINE CORTEZ MASTO has a podium in front of her. She could give me a rest. I would like to go a little further if we can, just a little further.

I love, again, I know people are trying to train each other, in all of our media operations they give the worst images of the people of the other party, but I want to tell you one of the funny tweets my staff gave me is something TED CRUZ said around 1920 hours. He said: Maybe I should pull a fire alarm, he is going to break my record.

I am going to pause in a moment, if she has a question for me, to CATHERINE CORTEZ MASTO, because she is my mother. But I do want to just say again, two points, make if I can, one is how grateful I am to my staff. When we decided to do this many days ago—

(Applause.)

When we decided to do this days ago, they were like, we have to do this, and we started preparing and working on this, and they did an extraordinary job. They were with me late nights, writing, writing, writing.

I just feel guilty because they wrote about 10 books, and we didn't use all of them. There were really some stuff pulling from Republicans and Democrats, a critique of this moment. Pulling from Democrats and Republicans, Republican Governors that were saying: Do not cut Medicaid. States that know, as my colleagues do, that have a trigger; that if the Medicaid funding goes below 90 percent, that they stop the Medicaid expansion.

My staff really worked hard to not make this just Democratic voices, to make it people in our country that Republicans and Democrats—you heard me mention in the speech, the Cato Institute, the Manhattan Institute, all people who are honest arbiters and were saying that what Trump is doing is wrong; that a budget like this that blows massive holes in our deficit, it will be something our children are trying to pay for. And what are they ultimately paying for that caused this big deficit? It is trillions of dollars of tax cuts that people like DOGE, multimillionaire, multibillionaire Musk will benefit from, but children won't.

They did such a good job bringing together authorities on both sides of the aisle, I just want to thank them. I want to thank my cousin Pam and my family. Cousin Pam, like CHRIS MURPHY, was here for the whole time.

I want to thank CHRIS MURPHY again. (Applause.)

He never stopped telling me: We can do this, we can do this, we can do this, and said, I will stay with you. He has been with me on the floor. I hope you don't look as tired as I look because you look beat, man. Do I look that bad?

All right. I want to go a little bit past this, and then I am going to deal with some of the biological urgencies.

But I am going to wait here because I have the power, I have the floor, somebody has to ask me, perhaps from my mom's State, the way that is supposed to work.

Ms. CORTEZ MASTO. So will the good Senator from New Jersey yield for a question?

Mr. BOOKER. My mom would be so upset with me, my Aunt Marilyn, Butch, my Aunt Shirley, all the people that are your constituents and not mine, they would be upset with me if I didn't yield to you for a question while retaining the floor.

Ms. CORTEZ MASTO. Well, first of all, Senator BOOKER, I have to say, we in Nevada are so proud of you. We are proud you are Nevada Strong. You are one of us. You are definitely New Jersey-Nevada Strong. And I am so proud of what you have accomplished so far and being willing to stay here as long as it takes to help you get your message across. And I think that is the important moment here. We are all here right now.

So I want to pose a question to you, actually a couple questions, but I want to start off and set the stage here because you have been here, now, what,

for over 24 hours. You are missing some of the national news, things that are happening out there. But one of the things I want to point to that has happened that you may not be aware of, and you touched on it a little earlier today, is this notion that we have now a President who is actually focused on billionaires and tax cuts for billionaires at the expense of the American public. And one of the things we have watched him do is cut funding for medical research.

Now, what you may not know is just today, just today, I found out that HHS laid off the entire Healthy Aging Branch of the CDC, just today.

This office administers Alzheimer's disease programs, and it oversees the funding from the BOLD Infrastructure for Alzheimer's Act, and it is a piece of legislation that I was so proud to partner with SUSAN COLLINS on, and she has fought for, and we have fought for funding for it, to support caregivers and their families.

And Congress just reauthorized this funding. And now we have a President that has stopped the critical work that scientists are doing to try and cure Alzheimer's. And I bring this to your attention, Senator, because like you, and I think like all of us, there are personal moments in the work that we do.

My personal moment is my grandmother, whom I am named after, died from Alzheimer's. And she died at a time in Las Vegas when there was not enough research, when there was not enough healthcare, when there was really not enough providers to understand what was going on.

And so for many of us this fight, not only is it personal, but we recognize the impact that it has outside the beltway in so many families and lives across the country, and that is what this is about.

In Nevada, as of 2023, there are 49,000 people, 65 and older, living with Alzheimer's, and that is projected to reach 65,000 this year.

Not only did we hear that HHS laid off the entire Healthy Aging Branch of the CDC, but Donald Trump also recently terminated a \$14,000 NIH research grant that had been supporting Alzheimer's research at the University of Nevada—Las Vegas.

He has continued, continued to cut the grant for essential research for so many reasons.

We have seen these funding cuts; we have seen mass layoffs; and the impoundment of grants that have already been approved by Congress. This is a violation of the rule of law, and you have been talking about that for the last couple of hours.

President Trump is forgetting that this is personal. It is happening to so many families.

So my question, Senator BOOKER, to you is what you think families and caregivers of those impacted by Alzheimer's, how they are feeling about what is happening right now?

Mr. BOOKER. So this bothers me for two reasons, and the first you have al-

ready mentioned, is this is the point of the bipartisan work that we do. I talked about CHRIS MURPHY and the bipartisan gun bill that lots of people here worked on with Senator CORNYN and others and how upset my State is that some of that community violence intervention money that I worked so hard to get in that bill is being clawed back by a President.

There are people in this room, I know so many of you, and I know on the other side that have done such great work to work with our colleagues, to find common ground, and get really important programs passed that bring resources to families, and it is being clawed back by our President—not with consultation, not with a hearing, not with a discussion of even why you would target Alzheimer's research. That is a violation of the separation of powers, and I wish my Republican colleagues would hold more hearings about that. These are programs they like.

I saw them with USAID. I worked with Marco Rubio on some of those programs and those investments that have now been cut and clawed back.

So it is a separation of powers issues. It is an offense to the common goals we share in this community of leaders.

But the second reason it bothers me is an article I read hours ago by Fareed Zakaria. He talked about what is happening to a nation that cuts so dramatically what is one of the best taxpayer investment dollars in biomedical sciences. If you are an investor and I told you there is an investment that for every dollar you invest, you would get \$5 back for your economy, folks would be invested in that vehicle.

Well, that is NIH funding. Every dollar you invest—who would cut a profit center? It is not just a profit center though. The outcomes and discoveries could change the lives of people who are suffering in your Nation and around the world. But he is attacking them.

I read about all these universities from around the country. That shows you how magnanimous I am trying to be. I even read stories from USC—I am sorry, a rival. And all of these universities are cutting their post-docs, cutting their Ph.D.s, because they don't know. As Donald Trump threatens the direct costs, they are stopping.

And Fareed Zakaria said: So painfully to all Americans with American pride, as we are doing that, China, when they had the Cultural Revolution, they first went after their universities. Now in modern China, their government is doing the opposite. They are trying to out-America us. They are massively increasing their investment in scientific research because they know if they get ahead of us on quantum computing, all of our subs can be located and God knows what could happen. Any kind of cryptology they could break. They know, if they could get ahead of us on scientific research, the power and advantage that will give them. They are doubling down.

What are we doing in America? We are tolerating a President that is cutting the funding that will predict who defines the future and what values will define those futures. Will they be democratic values or values of the country competing with us to beat us? And right now we are giving them a head start.

The final reason that question bothers me is because my father died of Parkinson's, and he had Parkinson's-related dementia. I know what that is like. I know the pain families are enduring.

I remember the time my dad and my mom were in the movie theater, and my mother just shook my world. It was in Georgia. And so many people here in this room have had the same experience. We are in a movie theater, and my mom leans over to me and said: You need to take your dad to the bathroom.

I never imagined—in my years of my dad, as a 2-year-old and 3-year-old, taking me to the bathroom—that one day I would have to take him, in this Atlanta movie theater in the middle of a movie—which I was like, OK, it is time for me to do this ritual that so many families know.

I pick my dad up, and he is shuffling with his Parkinson's. I am not seeing any light in his eyes. I am letting him hold me, and he is shuffling to the bathroom. We get to the bathroom, and his hands are shaking. He is standing in front of the urinal, and I realize I have to unbuckle this man's pants.

So many families know this. And my ego—I am sorry. I was leaning over saying: Wait a minute. I am in a public bathroom leaning over. I am unbuckling another man's pants. Please God, don't let someone come in.

As if God heard my call, someone walked in. I heard the person walking, and I am like, please keep walking. I heard the feet walk past me and stop, and the man turns around and says: "Oh, my God, CORY BOOKER."

And then I look up at my dad, and I see the clarity in his eyes. He is 100 percent there, and he is grinning and loving my mortified embarrassment.

Alzheimer's is devastating to so many American families watching the loved one of their lives diminish, and we are cutting funding. Donald Trump is cutting funding democratically, bipartisanly approved?

So forget the separation of powers. It is important—so important. If that doesn't get you, then maybe think about the competition with China. If that doesn't get you—if those two don't get you, America, think about the millions of Americans struggling with Alzheimer's, the struggles of those families.

This is a moral moment, America. This is going to define the character of our country for years and years to come.

Has the Senate called a hearing on your bipartisan funding, Senator? No. Have we done our oversight responsibility? Have we checked, as I read from

the Federalist Papers, as our Founders wanted us to do—it is to check the executive, to be the check of the executive. That balances our governmental powers. No, we are not checking the executive.

With Signalgate, I have heard from Republicans that serve in Congress—535 with us—I know other colleagues have heard. They are mortified.

You talked about that. They are mortified about that. And, again, it is not partisan. The Biden administration made foreign policy mistakes. Obama made foreign policy mistakes. Reagan, when I was growing up, I was hearing about the Iran-Contra scandal.

I am not going to be one of those people that says we are pristine, perfect Democrats. We made mistakes. We made failings. We let them down. We have reckoning in our own party that we are dealing with right now.

That doesn't say that you should be one of these people that says: Well, Biden did it.

No. You should be a leader of character that says there is something wrong here. In fact, you could point to real problems in the national security of our country and the laws that we established.

One of those law is very simple. You are supposed to preserve records. How can a Signal chain that disappears not be a violation of the law of this land? Is there a hearing on that—the head of the Intel Committee? Not a hearing at all.

Where are the checks and balances spelled out in the Constitution? We are derelicting our duties here in the Senate. We really are. And the consequence of that is the very national security of our country. How many times do you think—do you think this was the first time they created a Signal chat or is this a pattern of practice? You are a really rational man.

I keep looking at you, Mark. You are my leader on these issues, or JACK REED.

No. This indicates a real problem, and the Senate—the U.S. Senate—should get to the bottom of it.

(Applause.)

This is a moral moment. I keep saying it is a moral moment. Who are we going to be? What is going to define us? It is time not for the typical tribalism—time for leaders to start standing up and say: You know what? We can go a different way. We can imagine a different country.

That is why I pointed out the new leader of the Democratic Party of the House side. We are a different generation. There is a rising generation of people. I talked about my friend who wrote this great book, "Abundance." There are a whole bunch of new ideas out there about the future, the possibilities, about the hope, about the greatness of America—not greatness that is braggadocious, not the greatness that says "I am better than you," not the greatness that says "Only I can fix things." It is not the America we want.

We want an America that says "We the people," an America that says "E pluribus unum," an America that says that history shows that rugged individualism and self-reliance are important values. But rugged individualism didn't beat the Nazis. It didn't take us to the Moon. We did that together, America. We need bigger visions that can unite us beyond our narrow partisan desires to get a real mandate.

You know what a real mandate should be? It should be government efficiency. It really should be. God, I heard from so many of my colleagues on this side of the aisle that said if they formed a commission of former executives in this body—I see you, MAGGIE HASSAN. It was hard, but I had to cut 24 percent of my budget, one out of four employees. It was really hard. It would cause a lot of pain. But we had to reduce my government.

There are a lot of people—executives, on both sides of the aisle: Pick me. Pick me.

Let's form the most exciting team possible, because JACK REED knows that the military of the United States of America can do things more efficiently. There is a little bit of waste over there because they haven't passed an audit.

Where is MARIA CANTWELL, of the Commerce Committee? There so many ideas about how to create profit centers in the American Government. You have talked to me about them. You are brilliant on some of these ideas.

I look around here, but I can look to the other side of the aisle. The man, the farmer sitting over there, the guy who has been so good to me, CHUCK GRASSLEY—I forced that man to hug me when we passed.

I forced you to hug me, sir. I have pictures. You can't deny it. I don't know how you will get reelected now. You hugged this Black dude from New Jersey. You are so sweet to me still.

We passed a big bipartisan bill because of people like him, like the Presiding Officer. I met with you. You still have big ideas. You still have big ideas that aren't partisan.

If President Trump, from his inaugural address to his first speech before the joint session of Congress, had said: Enough. There are big ideas in this country. I want the best. I want people to come together. I am tired of us talking down at each other. It is time for us to come together and imagine ways to create real abundance in America for all Americans. I trust the genius of America, the kindness and the decency.

But this President doesn't do that. He violates all of our common senses of decency.

Don't say it doesn't happen, folks. Don't say that. I listen to him. I listen to how he talks about people. We have a government now, as I said earlier, that isn't: Ask not what your country can do for you, but what you can do for your country. We have a country now where a President says: Ask not what your country can do for you; ask what you can do for Donald Trump.

You are seeing who gets the special treatment. Some law firms are really threatened right now with being bankrupted by Donald Trump targeting them. Others have decided a different path. I am hating them because they said: We are going to go to Trump and offer him what he wants. We are going to give him tens of millions of dollars of free pro bono work.

I wish they would bring that free pro bono work to Newark. A lot of people need lawyers—folks in my city.

What are the standards here of our government? Do you want a merger? Well, maybe you should put a lot of money in Donald Trump's meme coin. I read the document. There is something called emoluments. And we sit by and act like it is no big deal.

He made millions and millions of dollars—from whom, we don't know. We haven't held one hearing of oversight to know who is giving him millions of dollars for that meme coin. Is it the Turks, the Saudis? Is it the Chinese? Is it the Russian oligarchs? Do we know? Should we know?

Yes, America. Stop falling into tribal lanes and closing your eyes to things that should not be normalized. Why are we normalizing these things? They are wrong. They are patently, on the face of it, wrong.

If you use Signal to discuss a military attack, the time of the attack, the weapons that are going to be used, and you do it on a commercial app and decide to include a reporter, there should be accountability. Am I crazy?

(Applause. Senators rising.)

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Ladies and gentlemen, let me just remind you, expressions of approval and disapproval are not permitted by the Gallery. Thank you.

Mr. BOOKER. He was forced to say that.

Look at you defying.

The Senate and the House should be checks and balances on the President of the United States. The Senate and the House should not allow business as usual in this moment. When the President is insisting that no one has the power to check and balance him, when a judge does it, when a judge decides on the soundness of his legal observations to have a ruling and then the President of the United States doesn't appeal the ruling, like most people kind of do, but starts to drag and insult and threaten that judge with impeachment—and some people, astonishing to me, in our government, said: Oh, that is right. We should impeach this guy.

That is not a question of left or right. That is a question of right or wrong. We are normalizing this behavior. We are letting him do things that Republicans and Democrats should say together are wrong.

So I want to say—I am going to stop soon.

Mrs. SHAHEEN. Will the Senator yield for a question?

Mr. BOOKER. God bless you.

I will yield for a question while retaining the floor.

Mrs. SHAHEEN. I want to start, before I get to my question, by just saying how proud I am of you and how proud we all are of you. I think I am old enough to remember Strom Thurmond's filibuster. I can remember being in high school and seeing the news every night and the reporters coming from the steps of the Capitol because they were filibustering the civil rights bill. What I am proud of is that your focus on democracy and the opportunities that democracy opens up for all of our rights, in my mind, cancels out what Strom Thurmond did to prevent African Americans and others from getting the rights they deserve in this country. So I am proud of that.

(Applause.)

You talked earlier this afternoon about the rule of law and the overreach of this administration. As part of that, you went through a litany of Agencies that Congress had established that this President is trying to take away. I just want to point out that—and you mentioned this earlier—one of those Agencies that Congress established is the U.S. Agency for International Development, and earlier today, we had a shadow hearing roundtable—the Democrats on the Foreign Relations Committee. It was on the dangerous consequences of funding cuts to U.S. global health programs. I know that, as ranking member on the Subcommittee on Africa and Global Health Policy, you would have really been interested in this. I am glad you were here on the floor, but I wish you could have heard what we heard from the people who testified.

We heard from Atul Gawande, who used to be the Assistant Administrator of USAID—of their global health program. We heard from Dan Schwarz, the Vice President of Management Sciences for Health. That is a contractor who works on global health programs. And we heard from Nick Enrich, who is the former Assistant Administrator for Global Health at USAID.

They started out by talking about what global health has accomplished through USAID. PEPFAR has saved more than 26 million lives. It has reversed the spread of HIV/AIDS. They have done malaria prevention and control for over a half a billion people. They have eradicated smallpox and eliminated most of polio. They have reduced infant mortality by more than 59 percent since 1990. They have supported cholera, measles, and Ebola outbreak response.

One of the things Dr. Gawande pointed out was that they took the response to the Ebola outbreak from 2 weeks—many of us remember that during the Obama administration when Ebola was coming to the United States. They took that response from 2 weeks down to 24 to 48 hours to be in there in responding to the Ebola epidemic.

And what has this President done? What have Elon Musk and DOGE done? They have gone into USAID. They have cut the global health workforce from

over 800 to about 60. They have taken the system that was designed to make programs more efficient, and they have dismantled it. When the inspector general, Paul Martin, reported on food rotting in ports, he was fired.

USAID has been the largest civilian ground force to address global goals. As Dr. Gawande said, what we learn from USAID is that prevention is a whole lot more efficient and a lot cheaper than emergency treatment. He said that what we spend on global health through USAID has been \$9 a household in America in a year—\$9. Think about what we have done with that \$9.

As they were going through the litany of programs that have been cut, the one that caught my eye was that 75 percent of the pandemic threat comes from diseases jumping from animals to humans. That program has been terminated—75 percent of the threat of future pandemics.

So, as we think about the rule of law and the overreach of this President, would you agree with me that there has been no consultation with Congress about any effort to move USAID into the Department of State and that, because Congress created this Agency, Congress has got to be involved in reauthorizing whatever comes next and that this President and his DOGE boys need to understand that before they take any more steps at USAID?

Mr. BOOKER. Yes. Yes. Yes.

You and I both know, in a bipartisan way, we created some of these programs principally to keep America safe. Many of us remember that dramatic hearing when Trump's Secretary of Defense, James Mattis, sat before the American people, and they were discussing the budgets for USAID and the State Department. James Mattis knew the power of those programs to keep us safe.

You mentioned infectious diseases. We live in a world where infectious disease anywhere is a threat to public health everywhere. So pulling our scientists out of the fight against Ebola and pulling our scientists out of the drug-resistant tuberculosis fight makes no sense.

Then, in terms of our safety, he just simply said: If you cut these programs, buy me more bullets because our fights are to spread democracy. There are nations in Africa, for example, where the Chinese are trying to influence a different way of life. That is why so many African countries now won't criticize China for things that the rest of the world says are bad. It is because they owe them so much debt that they are so engaged, and they are so overplaying the fact.

CHRIS COONS said something. I think it was CHRIS COONS who said something painful earlier about Myanmar—this horrific thing. America is the most generous country on the planet. When there is a crisis, we lead the rest. I have sat in meetings in a bipartisan way with Ambassadors from other countries, where we had the moral au-

thority to tell them: You are not doing enough.

In the Myanmar crisis right now, as CHRIS COONS said, Who is standing there? Not Americans. We don't have the capacity anymore to help with a crisis like that, but the Chinese Government is there.

Again, it is what defines us. I keep saying this is not a left-right moment; this is a moral moment, and we tell our truth with what we do with our resources. Here is the thing: When you poll people and ask them how much money we spend on USAID, they say: Oh, it must be 10 percent of the American budget or it must be 5 percent of the American budget.

It is around 1 percent or less. A penny of what tax dollars you send down to Washington goes to help us to make sure that around the globe we are countering the hard power of some countries with the power of our light and our soft power. We have been the envy of the world, where people see and know how special America is because we live with the value of every major religion. We are going to love our neighbors. We are going to be there for you in your times of need.

We all know, with a terrorist group far away and through the most horrific attack, that in a lot of these countries terrorist groups are trying to counter the democratic governments there. Look at the Sahil region. Look what is happening. When I was in Niger, I was shocked to hear what they were talking about—of instabilities in the north, threats of terrorism in the north.

I am going to go for 7 more minutes and stop, but I want to use these last 7 minutes to return one more time to the people of my State and, actually, other States who demand that we do things differently and who ask for help.

Before I do, I just want to thank MIKE LEE today. He is my partner in antitrust—a specialty of my friend AMY KLOBUCHAR.

I don't know if you got my text—you got it?—where I said to you: Uh, I am kind of going to the floor to hold it for as long as I can, and I may not make our first subcommittee together on antitrust where we have a lot of common ground. So I am sorry I missed it today, but I know my friend will fill me in. So thank you.

I want to close back where we started about us and about why I am here.

I believe that there is an urgent crisis in our country that we are not talking about. It is not a left-right crisis; it is a right-wrong crisis. It is a moral moment again in America that is going to define our character about who we are and what we stand for. There is a threat to the bedrock commitments we have made to each other as a country.

People are threatening that bedrock commitment of Social Security. They are calling it a Ponzi scheme. They are making up absolute lies about it. I read American after American who said that that is their lifeline. They told stories that they don't get their Social

Security payments or they get caught up because nobody is answering their calls. Of the rural Social Security office, I read States red and blue where they are closing Social Security offices. If I now have to drive 100 miles or 150 miles at 93 years old, it doesn't make sense. One of my colleagues stood up here and said it is already cutting benefits if you can't access the folks.

I stood here because it is a threat to these bedrock commitments—the bedrock commitment we have made in healthcare in this country.

We won the defense of the Affordable Care Act, but my colleagues know, when you start talking about Medicaid, that is not 20-plus million Americans. It is 70, 80, 90 million Americans. It is our elders in nursing homes. It is our children with disabilities. It is our moms giving birth who are still giving birth in the country with the highest maternal mortality rates in the industrial world.

It is a moral moment. Who do we stand for?

Senator SCHUMER shocked me when they said they were going to use some kind of budget gimmick to push this through.

You shocked me, CHUCK.

I thought this was going to come down to the Parliamentarian, but it doesn't sound like it now. It is just going to get dumped with the math that I read. The Manhattan Institute criticized it on the right. AI criticized it on the right. So what are you doing? What are you doing, America? You are going to rack up trillions and trillions of dollars in debt that our children and our children's children are going to have to pay for in passing the bucks that will grow.

Are you doing that to help people get more access to healthcare and more access to retirement security and more access to the things we believe in? I think of ideas like universal childcare and paid family leave. No. We are doing that in order to renew the tax cuts that I read of conservative budget folks, moderate budget folks—all across the spectrum—who said it will blow up our deficit, and the benefits of those tax cuts—not all. Let's not use hyperbole. But most will go—most will go to the richest people in our country, who I promise you—I celebrate people who brought their ingenuity and their expertise and their grit and their tireless work who have built wealth in this country. It should not be us versus them, but I am telling you that those folks do not need another tax cut.

The corporations that came here, and you all remember, that said: We would like a 25-percent rate. The people I read said that when we kicked it to 21—not even what they were asking for, which was for 25—it exploded. It is one of the main reasons it exploded our debt.

We read from conservative groups who just said that all of these promises that we would grow our way out of our deficit didn't materialize. All of the

promises that were made, Trump, for those who don't remember and weren't here when I read it, was going around, telling folks: Oh, my tariffs—this is 2017. The money that I get will be what we will use to pay down the debt. The math that they did would account for about 1/750th of the debt at that time, but he used that money to try and compensate the farmers who he was hurting with his tariffs.

This is a moral moment and people are getting hurt and people are afraid because of the threats to Medicaid cuts. There are people writing in who said \$880 billion would devastate me, but even small cuts to services—my whole family's fragile architecture of our finances—if you just pull out the transportation money that my disabled child uses, that will crumble my financial world.

So, when you talk about the bigger cuts, we know the math. Many States that expanded Medicaid have a trigger, that if it goes below 90 percent, all the Medicaid Expansion goes off in that State, and millions of Americans will be hurt. That is not right, guys. That is not right. So these are the choices before us—our veterans and the VA.

I am mad at you now as you made me get very emotional with your story.

We read John McCain's story. We read the stories of the poems of the unknown soldier looking over us and saying: What are you doing to the Gold Star families? What are you doing to the veterans? Are you living up to your promises that you made? Well, right now, there are cuts of tens of thousands. There are 80,000 veterans who work for the VA, but there are even more because about 20 percent or so who are Federal workers are also veterans.

We read stories from veterans in America who are shaken by what is happening, who are losing their jobs. Yet all they want to do is serve. They are not what they are being called. They are not leeches. They are not criminals. They shouldn't be degraded for wanting to serve their Nation.

This is what we are talking about: Our veterans, our seniors, our healthcare, our financial security going forward.

I asked the question to all those people who voted for Donald Trump who believed in him that he would lower your grocery prices. I ask you: Look at your financial self. Are you better off than you were 72 days ago financially?

The answer, for most people who believe in him, is no, because he didn't set out to do anything to lower prices. He set out to rename the Gulf of Mexico, to threaten Canada, to say I am going to take over Greenland. He has done a lot of things—140 Executive orders. Many of them actually drive up your costs, make it more expensive to enroll in the ACA, reduce a lot of the tax credits there.

He has increased your costs. He has taxed your bedrock services. The stock market tumbles. Your 401(k) accounts

are less. Inflation is up. Consumer confidence is down. These are the voices we brought into this Chamber, the voices of all of our constituents—red States, blue States—the voices of Democrats, Republicans, Republican Governors, Democratic Governors. We brought all of the people who are saying no, this is a moral moment, not left or right, right or wrong.

So I have tried over the last 25 hours and 1 minute to center the conversation back on what will we do in good consciences.

People who are saying, I served this country, I risked my life, shouldn't I be able to keep my job?

People are saying this country once made itself the envy of the world because we invested in high-quality education for every child. I don't like what is going on, the end of the Department of Education.

People are saying I worked harder than I ever have, but the prices on everything in my life are getting higher.

People who are saying that the America I learned about in school, the one where people's rights are protected, the people are saying why are we yet again going through another healthcare battle, threatening millions of people.

People are saying that I am worried about the financial security and the future of my country. The voices of folks.

So I end by saying simply this: Where I started was John Lewis. I don't know how to solve this. I don't know how to stop us from going down this road.

CHUCK SCHUMER has now told me that they are greasing the skids to do these things. I am sorry, but I know who does have the power—the people of the United States of America. The power of the people is greater than the people in power.

It is time to heed the words of the man I began this whole thing with, John Lewis. I begged folks to take the example of his early days, where he made himself determined to show his love for his country at a time when the country didn't love him, to love this country so much, to be such a patriot that he endured beatings savagely on the Edmund Pettus Bridge, at lunch counters, on Freedom Rides.

He said he had to do something. He would not normalize a moment like this. He would not just go along with business as usual. He wouldn't know how to solve it.

But there is one thing that he would do that I hope we all can do, that I think I did a little bit of tonight. He said for us to go out and cause some good trouble, necessary trouble, to redeem the sole of our Nation.

I want you to redeem the dream. Let's be bold in America, not demean and degrade Americans, not divide us against each other. Let's be bolder in America, for the vision that inspires with hope, that starts with the people of the United States of America.

That is how this country started, we the people. Let's get back to the ideals

that others are threatening. Let's get back to our Founding document that those imperfect geniuses had some very special words at the end of the Declaration of Independence. It was one of the greatest in all of humanity, the Declaration of Interdependence, when our Founders said we must mutually pledge, pledge to each other, our lives, our fortunes, and our sacred honor. We need that now from all Americans.

This is a moral moment. It is not left or right, it is right or wrong. Let's get in good trouble.

(Ms. LUMMIS assumed the Chair.)

My friend, Madam President, I yield the floor.

(Applause, Senators rising.)

Madam President, thank you to the pages. Thank you to the Parliamentary staffs. Thank you to the clerks. Thank you to the doorkeepers. There were so many people who make this place special. I kept you up all night. I kept you up 24 hours. I just want to say thank you. Thank you, everybody.

(Applause.)

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Idaho.

Mr. RISCH. Madam President, is the next regular order of business the confirmation of Mr. Matthew Whitaker?

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Order in the Senate, please. Order in the Galleries.

Mr. RISCH. Madam President, is the next regular order of business the confirmation of Mr. Matthew Whitaker to be NATO? Is that next order of business up?

The PRESIDING OFFICER. It is.

Mr. RISCH. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that myself and the Senator from Iowa be permitted to speak each 3 minutes, and immediately upon conclusion of that, we proceed to the vote on the confirmation.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. RISCH. I yield the floor to the Senator from Iowa.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. There will be order in the Senate. Senators and visitors will take their conversations off of the Chamber.

The Senator from Iowa.

NOMINATION OF MATTHEW WHITAKER

Ms. ERNST. Madam President, today, I rise in support of the confirmation of Matt Whitaker to serve as the next U.S. Ambassador to NATO.

Matt is not only a proud Iowan, he is a dedicated public servant, an accomplished leader, a loving father, and a very, very, dear friend.

Matt has honorably served our State and our country as the U.S. attorney for the Southern District of Iowa in private practice and most recently as the former Acting Attorney General of the United States.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Will the Senator yield?

Ms. ERNST. Yes, I will, Madam President.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senate will be in order.

Please, Senators, take your conversations off the floor.

The Senator from Iowa may proceed.

Ms. ERNST. Matt and I first crossed paths during the 2014 U.S. Senate primary in Iowa. What began as opponents in a race turned into a mutual respect and, ultimately, a strong friendship.

Since 2014, Matt has supported me in countless ways, offering wise counsel and keen insight on the issues facing our State, Nation, and our world today.

While some may just brush it off as "Iowa nice," I believe this is a clear demonstration of Matt's character. He is willing to put differences aside, strengthen relationships, and put our country over politics.

Over the last few years, during exchanges with NATO allies, a consistent theme emerged—the need for American leadership, a willingness to speak hard truths and encourage our partners to step up.

Matt's experience has prepared him for this aspect of the job. With decades of law enforcement experience and having served as Acting Attorney General, Matt has successfully collaborated across many organizations and jurisdictions.

He understands the evolving threats our Nation and our allies face from terrorism to cyber warfare to transnational crime.

His experiences navigating complex security challenges will make him an asset to NATO and a force for strengthening our alliances.

Matt Whitaker is a principled leader with a proven track record. Under President Trump's peace-through-strength approach, I have no doubt that Matt will be an effective advocate for America's interests and a champion of our national strategy.

I urge my colleagues to support his nomination. He is the right leader at the right time for this critical role.

I yield to the gentleman from Idaho.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Idaho.

Mr. RISCH. Madam President, I rise today in support of President Trump's nominee to be Ambassador to NATO, Mr. Matthew Whitaker.

First, the good news. NATO remains more than ever relevant to the security of the United States and to Europe. NATO is stronger today than it has ever, ever been.

Putin made a horrible mistake when he attacked Ukraine thinking he would split NATO. He did not split NATO. He made it stronger. Indeed, we added two additional nations to NATO, and Putin has picked up another 800 miles of border with NATO.

Now the concern: Unfortunately, some NATO members have taken the alliance and America's support of it for granted. Our European allies have let the heavy financial lifting to us, and by many of their own admissions, have not pulled their weight in defense spending.

Dramatic investment from NATO members in our collective defense is absolutely necessary.

Mr. Whitaker, as our next Ambassador to NATO, will help President Trump preserve the fidelity, commitment, and integrity of NATO. He will encourage our allies to rise to meet the challenges of an increasingly dangerous world, and he will help our allies understand that this must be a true partnership. It is a tough job.

I urge my colleagues to support Mr. Whitaker as he takes on this challenge as our next U.S. Ambassador to NATO.

Madam President, I ask the Senate execute the order of March 27 with respect to the Whitaker nomination.

EXECUTIVE CALENDAR

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will report the nomination.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read the nomination of Matthew Whitaker, of Iowa, to be United States Permanent Representative on the Council of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, with the rank and status of Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary.

NOMINATION OF MATTHEW WHITAKER

Mr. GRASSLEY. Madam President, the Senate will soon vote to confirm my good friend and fellow Iowan Matt Whitaker to be the U.S. Ambassador to NATO.

I support his nomination and urge all my colleagues to vote for his confirmation. Matt is someone who is well known back in Iowa, and he has earned the respect of many here in Washington, too.

He has a long record of service to our country, from his time as Acting Attorney General in the first Trump administration to his work as chief of staff at the Department of Justice.

He has traveled around the world, meeting with leaders on important issues, including dealing with the fentanyl crisis and negotiating with Chinese officials.

During the George W. Bush administration, Matt served our State as U.S. attorney for the Southern District from 2004 to 2009, where he worked hard to keep our communities safe.

In Iowa, he is known not just for his work, but for his deep pride in his home State. He never lets you forget that he is a proud graduate of the University of Iowa, where he earned his undergraduate degree, MBA, and law degree.

In fact, he even played football for the Hawkeyes, including going to the Rose Bowl, which speaks to his work ethic and commitment to teamwork.

Matt carries that same commitment and drive in every role he takes on—whether it is on the football field, as a U.S. attorney, or in his leadership in national law enforcement. This dedication is exactly what he will bring to his work with NATO.

I am proud to support a true friend and fellow Iowan who has always shown the highest standards of service to our country. I ask my colleagues to support Matt Whitaker's confirmation.