

Now, amazingly, the indictment later says that the university accessed data of an unnamed executive branch agency through an unnamed internet company. That unnamed internet company possessed that data because it was a subcontract “in a sensitive relationship between the U.S. government and another company.”

Apparently, taxpayers unwittingly assisted the false-information campaign used against Trump by the Democrats.

I’d like to say that you can’t make this stuff up, but that is exactly what they did. A researcher that worked to falsely connect Trump to Alfa Bank said, “We cannot technically make any claims that would fly public scrutiny.”

They also discussed faking email addresses to try and beef up some bogus false connection between Trump and Alfa Bank. Even the unnamed tech executive essentially said the Alfa Bank data was a “red herring.”

One email in the indictment even says in part:

The only thing that drives us at this point is that we just do not like [Trump]. This will not fly in the eyes of public scrutiny. Folks, I am afraid that we have tunnel vision.

They recognized that what they were doing lacked any factual support, yet Sussmann, the Democrats, and the Clinton campaign proceeded ahead anyway.

Even more than that, Christopher Steele reportedly got his information about Alfa Bank from Sussmann and included it in the Steele dossier. The indictment clearly shows the depth to which the Clinton campaign went to smear Trump—smear—with false evidence and plant it with the liberal media, who then willingly ran with it—and probably smiled as they ran with it. And here we are, years later, with a country that has been almost torn apart because of the Democratic Party’s fake evidence against Trump.

Special Counsel Durham stated on December 9, 2019, in part, relating to the Justice Department inspector general’s report on Crossfire Hurricane, “last month we advised the Inspector General that we do not agree with some of the report’s conclusions as to the predication and how the FBI case was opened.”

Special Counsel Durham has had several years to investigate and bring a case forward. We have seen two instances where folks have been charged with a crime, one already pleading guilty.

One must not forget the Obama-Biden Justice Department’s and the FBI’s blatant misrepresentations to the FISA court during the Crossfire Hurricane and other serious wrongdoing, much of which was uncovered by Congress and the inspector general.

On June 29 of this year, Senator JOHNSON and I asked Attorney General Garland if he agrees with then-Attorney General Barr’s statement that any Durham report be submitted in the form that will permit public dissemina-

tion. On July 13 of this year, Attorney General Garland said that he agrees.

Special Counsel Durham, let’s see what you have got, and we will be able to see it when the report comes out.

PRIVATE DEBT COLLECTION PROGRAM

Mr. President, on one other matter, shorter than I just had, news accounts continue to mention plans to increase IRS enforcement funding and to impose onerous reporting requirements on sensitive banking information to the IRS.

These proposals raise many concerns, particularly in light of questions regarding the ability of the IRS to protect taxpayers’ information. Even this year, we had a whole bunch of stuff go public of private taxpayer information that, by so doing, violated the code to protect the privacy of taxpayers.

However, I want to now discuss an existing IRS program that’s already collecting hundreds of millions of dollars in unpaid taxes and doing it annually. I am referring to the program called the Private Debt Collection Program that uses private contractors pursuing tax debts that the IRS would otherwise not pursue. This program was enacted as part of the infrastructure legislation signed into law 2015.

Each year since then, annual updates on the program’s finances document very well the growing success of this program that is done by private debt collectors. As of the end of the fiscal year 2020, the program had collected nearly \$1 billion in unpaid taxes. After accounting for the program’s cost, it has returned more than \$678 million in net revenue to the Treasury. Of that \$678 million, more than \$458 million was from the fiscal year 2020 alone.

Every year the program is allowed to function, it brings more and more money into the Treasury. At the same time, it generates resources the IRS uses to hire additional tax collection personnel. To date, the program has enabled IRS to hire many new employees.

The recent IRS update for the current fiscal year 2021 continues this trend. Through June, the Private Debt Collection Program has provided more than \$700 million in net revenue to the Treasury. In other words, in the first 9 months of fiscal year 2021, the program has more than doubled the revenue it has returned to the Treasury. The longer this program is allowed to work, the more successful it becomes.

The proposals being put forward by my colleagues across the aisle are based on the premise that by spending more money, the IRS will collect more money. The Private Debt Collection Program brings in money without spending taxpayers’ money.

Despite the obvious benefits of this program, I am very concerned that the IRS has suspended providing additional cases to the program until the end of September. Commissioner Rettig assured me in responses to written questions that the additional cases would be provided on September 27.

I am going to hold Commissioner Rettig to that statement and, in the

upcoming days, expect to see him keep his word to me.

All the handwringing over spending more money to increase IRS enforcement and information reporting shows the serious issues involved in those proposals.

The IRS Private Debt Collection Program is proven to collect taxes already owed, allows the IRS to hire more personnel, and costs nothing up front. Anyone serious about closing the tax gap should support and encourage the full use of this program, the Private Debt Collection Program.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Vermont.

Mr. SANDERS. I would ask unanimous consent that, at the end of my remarks, the scheduled vote take place.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

GOVERNMENT FUNDING

Mr. SANDERS. Mr. President, as chairman of the Senate Budget Committee, I want to say a few words about some of the important budgetary issues that Congress is now facing. I want to focus on the \$3.5 trillion reconciliation bill, but before I do that, I want to comment on the looming debt crisis that we face.

The Republican leader, MITCH MCCONNELL, this morning once again reiterated that the Republican Party will not vote to lift the debt ceiling; and in an extraordinarily irresponsible manner, Republicans have indicated that they will not pay the debts incurred under the Trump administration.

In his statement, as he has done time and time again, Senator MCCONNELL implies that this debt ceiling has something to do with future spending. It does not.

In his statement, as he has done time and time again, Senator MCCONNELL implies that this debt ceiling has something to do with future spending. It does not. Like anyone who owns a credit card, the payments that are made are for past spending—in this case, spending incurred under the Trump administration.

Let us be clear. If the United States, the largest economy in the world, defaults on its debt, it will plunge not only our country but the entire global economy into what could become a severe economic depression. That means massive unemployment, higher interest rates, severe reduction in government services, and possible cuts in such programs as Social Security and Medicare.

The irresponsibility of the Republican leadership is not just something that I worry about. According to press reports, former Republican Secretaries of Treasury Hank Paulson, who worked under George W. Bush, and Steven Mnuchin, who worked under Donald Trump—Republican Secretaries of the Treasury—both of them visited with Senator MCCONNELL to make the case about the need to extend the debt ceiling. They understand, as I think all of

us do, how important it is that the United States of America does not default on its debt, and it is about time that my Republican colleagues listen to them.

Now, let me say a word about the \$3½ trillion reconciliation bill. There has been a lot of talk lately about the need to compromise. Well, let me be clear. To a very significant degree, that has already taken place. Of the 11 Democratic members of the Senate Budget Committee, 9 understood the need for a \$6 trillion bill, which would finally address the unmet needs—the long-ignored needs—of the working families of our country, as well as begin the process of tackling the existential threat of climate change. My guess is that at least 40 out of the 50 Members of the Democratic caucus supported the \$6 trillion proposal. We compromised big time. We cut that proposal—agreed to cut that proposal—almost in half, down to \$3½ trillion. That, to my mind, is a major, major compromise.

As we go forward in this debate, let me be as clear as I can be as to why every penny of that \$3½ trillion is absolutely needed, and let me also make clear that this bill, despite some of the rhetoric coming from my Republican colleagues, will not add—should not add and will not add one nickel to the deficit.

It will be paid for. It will be paid for by finally demanding that some of the wealthiest people in this country, who in any given year—we are talking about multibillionaires who in a given year do not pay a nickel in Federal income tax or dozens of large, profitable corporations that in a given year do not pay a nickel in Federal income tax. Well, we are going to demand that these people start paying their fair share of taxes, and that is more than enough money to cover the \$3½ trillion that is in this proposal. So anyone who suggests to you that this bill is not going to be paid for and that it is going to add to the deficit is simply not telling the truth. It should and will be fully paid for.

Now, the media is very worried about process. When are we going to do this? What about that person? What about that Senator? But they have forgotten to a large degree to talk about what is in the bill. I am not quite sure that the average American is staying up nights, worrying about whether it is completed on a Wednesday or a Friday or what this Senator thinks or what that Senator thinks; they would like to know what is in the bill.

The reality is that for many, many decades, while Congress has paid rapt attention to the needs of the wealthy and large campaign contributors, it has significantly ignored the needs of working families, the middle-class, and low-income people. I think the reason that many of my Republican colleagues are so upset about this legislation is that we are changing the dynamic. We are now beginning to pay attention to the needs of working families and not just the wealthy and the powerful.

So what is in this bill? First, as a result of the extraordinarily successful American Rescue Plan, which went a long way to pull this country out of the severe economic decline that we experienced as a result of the COVID pandemic, as a result of the American Rescue Plan, we cut childhood poverty in the United States of America by over 50 percent, and for Black and Brown families, that cut was even higher.

Year after year, the United States has the highest rate of childhood poverty of any major country on Earth. We took a major step forward in cutting childhood poverty. Now it is clear to me and I think to people all across this country that we must extend the \$300-a-month-per-child direct payment that working-class and middle-class families now receive.

Let me be very clear. If we do not pass the reconciliation bill and not continue those payments, we would once again plunge the children of this country, millions of them, back into poverty, and that is morally unacceptable.

Furthermore, in the United States of America, every person should be outraged by the dysfunctionality of our childcare system. I don't think there is anybody who disagrees with that. We have millions of people who cannot find childcare. We have families in Vermont and Maine paying 20, 30, 40 percent of their limited incomes for childcare, which is pretty crazy. We have childcare workers who are employed at starvation wages. The system is not working. It is broken. It is dysfunctional.

It is not a radical idea to say that every family in America, when mom goes to work and dad goes to work, should be entitled to high-quality and affordable childcare. There are a lot of studies out there that say that the best investment we can make of Federal dollars is to our children, and that is why we have got to expand what we are doing in childcare. Under this legislation, no working family in this country will be paying more than 7 percent of their income for childcare. So if you are paying 20 percent now or you are paying 30 percent, we will reduce that to no more than 7 percent.

On top of that and of extraordinary significance, we are going to make pre-K education for 3- and 4-year-olds universal and free, and we are going to do, bottom line, what almost every other industrialized country on Earth does and understand that the most important investment we can make is in our children.

By the way, importantly, when we do that, we are going to allow well over a million women to go back into the workforce because they no longer will have to stay home because of a lack of affordable childcare. So if you are worried about labor shortages all over this country, you must support significantly expanding our childcare capabilities.

Further, what is in this legislation is, at a time when the pharmaceutical

industry charges us the highest prices in the world for prescription drugs, we are going to demand that Medicare start negotiating prescription drugs with the pharmaceutical industry.

I know that Americans now have seen a lot of the ads—the completely dishonest ads from the pharmaceutical industry, and let's be clear. Over the last 20 years, the pharmaceutical industry has spent well over \$4 billion on lobbying and hundreds and hundreds of millions more on campaign contributions. Guess what. They own the U.S. Congress. And that is why—when you walk into a pharmacy and you find that the price of your medicine has doubled, it is because they can do anything they want to do. They write the laws. They, right now, have 1,400 lobbyists running all over Capitol Hill, trying to make sure that we do not lower the cost of prescription drugs. And that is what this struggle is about.

These guys, year after year, make outrageous profits. Their CEOs get extraordinary compensation benefits, and they do that by charging us by far the highest prices in the world for prescription drugs. Well, those days are coming to an end if Members of the Congress finally have the guts to stand up to them.

Now, I understand that the pharmaceutical industry owns the Republican Party. I got that. And I understand that there will not be one Republican in the Senate who has the guts to stand up for his or her constituents and lower the cost of prescription drugs. Well, there should not be any Democrat who is in that position. There should be no Democrats who are not prepared to stand up to the pharmaceutical industry.

When we have Medicare negotiate prescription drug prices, we can save over \$500 billion. One of the things we are going to do with that \$500 billion is do what the American people desperately want us to do, and that is to expand Medicare to cover dental, vision, and hearing aids. This is the United States. Elderly people should not walk around without any teeth in their mouths. They should be able to afford to go to a dentist. It is not a very radical idea. Grandparents should be able to communicate with their grandchildren because they have a hearing aid that they need in their ears that today they cannot afford. Older people should be able to read their daily newspaper because they can get a pair of glasses that works for them.

The need to expand Medicare to cover dental, hearing aids, and eyeglasses is absolutely critical. Nobody in the year 2021 denies that oral health, hearing, and vision are essential parts of healthcare. Medicare is supposed to cover the healthcare needs of seniors. Well, oral health, hearing, and vision are parts of healthcare.

Not surprisingly, out of all of the provisions in President Biden's Build Back Better plan, expanding Medicare to provide dental, vision, and hearing

aids is by far the most popular. According to a June 30 Morning Consult poll, adding dental, vision, and hearing benefits to Medicare is supported by 84 percent of the American people. It is not often you get 84 percent of the American people supporting anything. And yet that includes 89 percent of Democrats, 79 percent of Republicans. This is what the American people want, and this is what we must deliver for them.

Given that, it is just hard for me to imagine that any Member of the House or Senate would oppose this very popular and important provision.

It is a bit embarrassing that our Nation, the richest on Earth, is the only major country not to guarantee paid family and medical leave. I have been all over this country, and I have met with women—low-income women—who are forced to go back to work 1 week after having their baby because they need the income. We are the only major country on Earth not to guarantee paid family and medical leave, not to make sure that a mom can stay home with her sick kid or a dad can spend time with his dying father or mother.

This legislation finally does what should have been done a long, long time ago and guarantees paid family and medical leave.

And what this legislation does is address the reality that many of our younger people are unable to obtain the good-paying jobs that are out there because they lack the ability to get a higher education.

Now, my own view is we should make public colleges and universities tuition free. My own view is we should cancel all student debt in this country. That is not in this bill. But what is in this bill is the reality that every American will have the right to get at least 2 years of community college tuition free. And they can use that to get the training they need for jobs. They can use that to accumulate credits that can be transferred to a 4-year college, if that is what they desire.

A few blocks away from here and in every major city in America, there are Americans sleeping out on the streets. They are veterans. They are people with all kinds of issues. They are working people who simply cannot afford the housing in their community. Two blocks away from the U.S. Capitol there is an encampment of homeless people. Six hundred thousand Americans are homeless today, and on top of that, we have some 18 million households that spend 50 percent of their limited incomes on housing.

In other words, we have a major housing crisis. This legislation addresses that, and, in an unprecedented manner, invests in low-income and affordable housing. And when we do that, by the way, we create a whole lot of good-paying jobs.

We are an aging society. And whether people have severe disabilities or whether they are just getting old, peo-

ple would rather stay at home in many cases rather than be forced into nursing homes. What our legislation will do is to significantly improve home healthcare in this country and make sure that those people who provide that important service, that difficult service, are adequately compensated, because today they are not. We need more of those workers, and we need to pay them decent wages.

I am sadly aware that many of my Republican colleagues do not believe that climate change is real or, at the very least, don't believe that we should do anything about it. But they are dead wrong. In my view, we cannot go home and look our children and grandchildren in the eye knowing what we know and knowing that the scientists are telling us that we have a very, very few years to address the climate crisis or else there will be irreparable harm done in our country and around the world.

We have turned on the TV this past summer, and we saw the unbelievable fires in Oregon and California and learned that in Siberia their fires were larger than all the other fires combined; smoke went thousands of miles. We learned that July was the hottest month ever and that climate is exacerbating extreme weather disturbances like Hurricane Ida, which brought havoc to Louisiana.

This legislation that we are proposing does not go as far as I think it should on climate. But make no mistake about it. It is a major, major step forward in transforming our energy system away from fossil fuel to energy efficiency and sustainable energy.

So that is where we are right now. We are at a moment where millions and millions of Americans have lost faith in their government. They think that we are incapable of addressing their needs, that all we do is listen to wealthy campaign contributors and the lobbyists and the billionaire class.

The question we face right now is, At this moment, do we have the courage to keep faith with the American people and show them that their democracy in fact can work for them and not just powerful special interests?

So let us go forward. Let us do the right thing. Let us pass this \$3½ trillion reconciliation package.

With that, I yield the floor.

VOTE ON BIANCHI NOMINATION

The PRESIDING OFFICER. All time has expired.

The question is, Will the Senate advise and consent to the Bianchi nomination?

Mr. SANDERS. I would ask for the yeas and nays.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there a sufficient second?

There appears to be a sufficient second.

The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk called the roll.

Mr. DURBIN. I announce that the Senator from California (Mrs. FEINSTEIN) is necessarily absent.

Mr. THUNE. The following Senators are necessarily absent: the Senator from Wisconsin (Mr. JOHNSON), the Senator from Louisiana (Mr. KENNEDY), and the Senator from South Dakota (Mr. ROUNDS).

The result was announced—yeas 85, nays 11, as follows:

[Rollcall Vote No. 377 Ex.]

YEAS—85

Baldwin	Hagerty	Portman
Barrasso	Hassan	Reed
Bennet	Heinrich	Risch
Blackburn	Hickenlooper	Romney
Blumenthal	Hirono	Rosen
Blunt	Hoeben	Sanders
Booker	Hyde-Smith	Sasse
Brown	Inhofe	Schatz
Burr	Kaine	Schumer
Cantwell	Kelly	Scott (SC)
Capito	King	Shaheen
Cardin	Klobuchar	Sinema
Carper	Leahy	Smith
Casey	Lee	Stabenow
Cassidy	Lujan	Sullivan
Collins	Lummis	Tester
Coons	Manchin	Thune
Cornyn	Markey	Tillis
Cortez Masto	Marshall	Toomey
Cramer	McConnell	Van Hollen
Crapo	Menendez	Warner
Daines	Merkley	Warnock
Duckworth	Moran	Warren
Durbin	Murkowski	Whitehouse
Ernst	Murphy	Wicker
Fischer	Murray	Wyden
Gillibrand	Ossoff	Young
Graham	Padilla	
Grassley	Peters	

NAYS—11

Boozman	Hawley	Scott (FL)
Braun	Lankford	Shelby
Cotton	Paul	Tuberville
Cruz	Rubio	

NOT VOTING—4

Feinstein	Kennedy
Johnson	Rounds

The nomination was confirmed.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. VAN HOLLEN).

Under the previous order, the motion to reconsider is considered made and laid upon the table and the President will be immediately notified of the Senate's actions.

CLOTURE MOTION

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Pursuant to rule XXII, the Chair lays before the Senate the pending cloture motion, which the clerk will state.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

CLOTURE MOTION

We, the undersigned Senators, in accordance with the provisions of rule XXII of the Standing Rules of the Senate, do hereby move to bring to a close debate on the nomination of Executive Calendar No. 241, Daniel J. Krittenbrink, of Virginia, a Career Member of the Senior Foreign Service, Class of Minister-Counselor, to be an Assistant Secretary of State (East Asian and Pacific Affairs).

Charles E. Schumer, Robert Menendez, Patrick J. Leahy, Patty Murray, Maria Cantwell, Sheldon Whitehouse, Brian Schatz, Debbie Stabenow, Catherine Cortez Masto, Christopher A. Coons, Ron Wyden, Margaret Wood Hassan, Edward J. Markey, Benjamin L. Cardin, Richard J. Durbin, Tina Smith, Elizabeth Warren, Angus S. King, Jr.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. By unanimous consent, the mandatory quorum call has been waived.