

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Ms. DUCKWORTH). The Senator from Iowa.

#### FBI INVESTIGATIONS

Mr. GRASSLEY. Madam President, we all know that Congress has a constitutional responsibility to ensure that the executive branch executes the laws and uses taxpayers' money appropriately in accordance with congressional intent. It doesn't matter whether we have a Republican President, a Democratic President, a Republican Senate, or a Democratic Senate. We all have the constitutional responsibility of checking the executive branch.

In furtherance of that constitutional responsibility, Congress has an obligation to investigate the executive branch for fraud, for waste, for abuse, and even gross mismanagement.

And if Congress finds potential wrongdoing, we have an obligation to the American people to make sure that it is public because transparency of the public's business brings accountability to those who conduct that public business.

Last week, I made public two oversight letters that I have sent to the Justice Department and to the FBI. These two letters are part of my investigation into a political bias that is infecting the Department of Justice and the FBI.

These letters are based on information provided to my office by whistleblowers, and I hope everybody knows that I consider whistleblowers as patriots. And whistleblowers have to have guts, and they do have guts.

And Director Wray has personally told me that these whistleblowers won't be subject to retaliation, as often, whistleblowers in the Federal Government are subject to retaliation, hurting themselves professionally and maybe even losing their jobs.

Now, these letters that I sent follow up on a May 31, 2022, letter to the Justice Department, the FBI, and the inspector general.

In those letters, I provided evidence of extreme leftwing bias shown by a special agent in charge by the name of Tim Thibault. He is special agent in charge of the FBI's Washington field office.

Now, he has since been referred to the Office of Special Counsel for potential Hatch Act violations. Thibault is at the center of my two letters sent last week. The first letter relates to an FBI investigation that Thibault opened on the Trump campaign and its advisers. He allegedly had help from Richard Pilger, an official in the Justice Department's Election Crime Branch within the Public Integrity Section. During Chairman DURBIN's investigation into the Justice Department misconduct, Pilger really stood out.

The committee interviewed Richard Donoghue, the former Principal Associate Deputy Attorney General during the Trump administration. He was also a key January 6 Committee witness. Donoghue testified to the Judiciary

Committee that Pilger's conduct frustrated the Department's ability to properly operate the Elections Crime Branch.

Thibault and Pilger played a major role in opening the criminal investigation into the Trump campaign. And this isn't a preliminary investigation; it is a full investigation, which requires heightened standards to go forward with that investigation.

According to the whistleblowers that contacted my office, the opening memo for that investigation is based, in substantial part, on liberal news reporting. Liberal news reports are not enough for a full investigation. The Washington Post reported on the investigation last Tuesday. However, the Post did not report that Thibault and Pilger were involved in opening that case against Trump and his advisers. Yet Attorney General Garland and Director Wray allegedly approved opening those investigations.

Now, as I have said in my letter to those two people, if you are going to open an investigation, you have to do it in the right way.

So let's contrast this investigation with what the FBI has done with the information received from sources relating to Hunter Biden. Whistleblowers have told my office that the FBI maintains many sources that have provided extensive information on Hunter Biden. That information allegedly involves potential criminal activity, such as money laundering. That is the same criminal concern that Senator JOHNSON and I raised in our 2020 Biden report. To clarify, that was way back in 2020. According to the whistleblowers' allegations, the underlying information was verified and was verifiable.

Now, here is where it is appropriate to raise questions about politics and political interference in investigations. However, instead of green-lighting the investigative activity, the FBI shut down the Hunter investigation.

So, now, how did they do that? According to allegations, in August 2020, FBI Supervisory Intelligence Analyst Brian Auten opened an assessment. That assessment was used by the FBI officials to improperly discredit Hunter Biden's information as you know what? Disinformation. Those officials allegedly included Thibault.

Then, in October 2020, an avenue of additional Hunter reporting was ordered closed at the direction of Special Agent Thibault. It has been alleged that Thibault and others suggested to FBI agents that the information was at risk of being you know what? Disinformation. However, according to allegations, the source reporting was either verified or verifiable via criminal search warrants.

Thibault allegedly ordered the matter closed without providing a valid reason as required by FBI guidelines. In other words, Thibault shut down an allegedly legitimate avenue of information. So in order to shut down Hunter

Biden sources and investigative leads, the FBI engaged in a disinformation campaign against itself and its own agents. If these allegations are true and accurate, the Justice Department and the FBI are and have been substantially corrupted.

Before I conclude, I want to know four things regarding the summer of 2020. Yes, the summer of 2020: The opening of Auten's assessment in August 2020; secondly, efforts by the FBI officials to shut down Hunter Biden's investigative activity; third, efforts by the FBI to provide a really unnecessary briefing to me and Senator JOHNSON in August of 2020—that reading was purportedly about our Biden investigation, but it had nothing to do with the Biden investigation—fourth, and lastly, leaks relating to the briefing and the liberal media and Democrats falsely accusing me and Senator JOHNSON of advancing Russian information.

All of those four data points happened as Senator JOHNSON and I prepared to finalize our September 2020 Biden report. These data points show a plan was in place at the FBI to undermine anything related to Hunter Biden.

Attorney General Garland and Director Wray, you both have an obligation to the country to immediately investigate these allegations and to clean house.

And my oversight work on this and related matters will certainly continue.

#### INSPECTORS GENERAL

Madam President, on another point and a much shorter point, just in case some of my colleagues are wondering how long I am going to have the floor—today, I come to speak on the importance of inspector generals, IGs, as they are called in this town.

IGs play an important role watchdogging executive branch Agencies. They help make sure that government bureaucrats are held accountable when they engage in waste, fraud, and abuse of taxpayers' money.

IGs are force multipliers for Congress in overseeing our responsibility of checks and balances of the executive branch of government. They are charged with keeping Congress informed of wrongdoing and to provide objective, nonpartisan recommendations on even the most politically sensitive issues.

As of today, there are currently 13 IG vacancies throughout the Federal Government. Some have nominees; some don't have nominees; and some haven't had Senate-confirmed IGs in years.

Now, to hone in on one vacancy that I paid special attention to over the years is that of the Department of Defense inspector general. Believe it or not, that office has not had a Senate-confirmed IG in more than 6 years. The Department of Defense has an annual budget of well over \$700 billion, and to date it looks like they will have much more money the next fiscal year.

Now, I have spent many years calling out waste, fraud, and abuse of taxpayers' money at the Department of Defense, and I know full well the importance of having a Senate-confirmed IG in place at that very important Department. Having an independent and effective watchdog at this point is critical to keep the Congress informed of all the tomfoolery that happens at the Pentagon. Whether that be paying exorbitant amounts of money for a hammer, constructing buildings in foreign countries that remain vacant to this day, or failing to hold contractors accountable, it all happens time and time again.

We in Congress need a watchdog with teeth, not afraid to fight off the corporate fat cats who seek to enrich themselves off the backs of the American taxpayers. Some of these contractors have made careers from ripping off the taxpayers through wasteful spending at the Department of Defense. A few thousand dollars here, a couple million there, it turns out to be waste many times.

We need a watchdog—an inspector general—at this post, and we need it now. I believe my colleagues here in the Senate share my belief in the importance of having Senate-confirmed IGs in these vital roles. The President must act to nominate, and the Senate should confirm qualified and effective watchdogs to the vacancies like this, particularly the one at the Department of Defense.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Tennessee.

#### DEMOCRATIC PARTY

Mrs. BLACKBURN. Madam President, Joe Biden and the Democrats have ushered us into what will be remembered as one of the most cynical and dangerous periods in our Nation's history. For 18 months, they have wreaked havoc on the economy, welcomed drugs and crime into their own backyards, and enabled the rise of the new axis of evil, which is my term for Russia, China, Iran, and North Korea.

Last week was really a particularly bad week for the Biden-Harris administration, but it was even worse for the people watching it play out, sitting at home in their communities. Inflation hit a 41-year high, consumer confidence hit a historic low, and we confirmed that the American economy is indeed in a recession.

But rather than taking responsibility, my Democratic friends decided they would go on an all-out campaign and redefine the word "recession," and they insisted that the economic ruin that they have rained down on us all is in our imaginations. The economy is in great shape, they say. It is better than ever, they say. But Tennesseans sitting at their kitchen table, trying to figure

out how to make ends meet, they know different.

If ever there were a time to listen to what the American people are telling each and every one of us, it is now. Yet here we are facing now what is possibly the Democratic Party's most cynical and dangerous move to date: a trillion-plus—a trillion-plus-dollar spending spree. It is full of tax increases and policies so unpopular that its negotiators had to hide its existence from our own colleagues.

CHUCK SCHUMER and JOE MANCHIN have dubbed this secret plan—I guess is what it was—they have dubbed it the Inflation Reduction Act, which immediately brings to mind one simple question: How out of step can you possibly be with where the American people are? You are so out of step. And do you truly think that the American people are so stupid that they think raising taxes is going to bring a reduction in inflation?

If the situation weren't so dire for people back in Tennessee, I would assume this was some sort of joke, but it is not. The American people are drowning, and CHUCK SCHUMER and JOE MANCHIN have thrown them a cinder block instead of a life preserver. People cannot believe this. They absolutely cannot believe this.

This bill represents the worst elements of a radical socialist agenda that Americans have already rejected: a multihundred-billion-dollar tax hike that will kill tens of thousands of jobs, sabotage energy producers, and make it even more expensive to heat homes and fill gas tanks; a multihundred-billion-dollar payday for climate activists and the environmental lobby; innovation-killing price controls on prescription drugs; and tax breaks, but only for the wealthiest Americans.

Nothing in this bill will make life easier. Nothing in this bill will lower gas prices or reduce inflation. But it is exactly what Tennesseans were afraid would happen if Joe Biden and the Democrats took control of the Federal Government.

This week, every Member of this body has a choice to make: Will you stand with the American people, or will you make their life harder every day because of more spending, more tax increases, and more Green New Deal? Will you ease their pain, or will you make their pain worse by supporting this bloated, foolish spending spree?

I hope that my colleagues will come to their senses because this is a breaking point between Congress and the American people.

I cannot tell you how many times I heard that very statement this weekend from Tennesseans. They cannot even believe another trillion dollars in spending—another trillion. Money does not grow on trees.

If you, as an individual who has a vote on this bill, if you choose to support this bill and tax and spend this country into oblivion, that is a road that you are going to have to go down

alone because the American people cannot afford to go down this road with you.

#### PACT ACT OF 2022

Madam President, the Democratic press machine has done a great job framing the debate over much needed changes to the PACT Act as an attack on our most vulnerable veterans. This framing ignores reality.

I supported the PACT Act. I voted for final passage last time around. I have worked for years on the issue of toxic exposure. I intend to vote for the bill again, so do many of my colleagues who have joined me in still pushing for critical improvements to this bill.

Before we vote on final passage this week, I would ask my colleagues one question: Why wait to fix the problems we all know will hamper the effectiveness of this bill? Why not fix the PACT Act now and ensure that veterans actually have access to the care they deserve once this bill leaves the President's desk with his signature? That is the real choice here.

Now, I know my Democratic colleagues are on a tight timeline. They want this thing done. They want it done before the elections. They want this signed. They want to get out there and campaign on this. They want us just to move on and not have to fix it until later.

But it is not my job to make CHUCK SCHUMER's life easier or those running for election, to make their lives easier. It is my job to be certain that I represent these veterans in Tennessee who have given their commitment to defend this Nation. They have done it honorably. They have done it expecting care from the VA for harms that have come their way. And we should make certain that they have access to the care that they need.

The PACT Act in its current form is not the best that we can do, but we can get it there in a few more hours with a few amendments that would make sure this bill can help veterans suffering from the effects of toxic exposure and help them get the care that they deserve.

And I want to make it clear that Senator SCHUMER and Chairman TESTER know this. The majority of my colleagues who sit with me on the Veterans' Affairs Committee support a vote on these amendments, so much so that, at one point, we had all agreed to give these amendments a vote because we all know that the VA is not capable of implementing this bill as it is currently written.

The VA cannot deliver on the promise that is in this bill. In fact, it will do the exact opposite. Right now, the claims backlog at the VA sits at 168,000 cases. You heard me right on that—168,000 cases. That is the current backlog.

The PACT Act, as written, will increase that backlog by more than—get this—1 million cases—1 million. That is not according to me. That is according