

Despite their recordbreaking profits, many defense contractors said that they couldn't ramp up production of key weapons without more taxpayer support. So the U.S. Government wanted to support, with my vote, Ukraine against Putin's invasion. Ukraine needs weapons. And the defense contractors said: Hey, if you want us to help Ukraine, get them weapons, we need to ramp up production. We need more Federal aid.

And so, as part of that process, Congress repeatedly appropriated emergency funding with roughly 78.5 billion going to buy equipment and services from the major defense contractors for Ukraine.

And how did, with all of that money, these patriotic defense contractors respond? Did they say: "Well, thank you. We are going to do everything we can, get all of the weapons we can at a reasonable price to Ukraine, which is fighting for its life"? Not quite.

What the defense contractors did is jack up the prices they were charging us in order to help Ukraine. RTX increased prices for Stinger missiles from \$25,000 in the 1990s to \$400,000 in 2023. Even accounting for inflation and improvements in technology, that is an outrageous price increase.

But it wasn't enough for RTX. A recent NATO contract reveals RTX is now charging approximately \$745,000 per Stinger. Lockheed Martin and RTX raised the price of the Javelin missile system from about 263,000 per unit just before the war to 350,000 this year.

The United States has provided more than 10,000 Javelins to Ukraine. Similar price hikes took place for Patriot missiles and other weapons systems.

And make no mistake, every time a contractor pads its profit margins, fewer weapons reach the frontlines. The greed of these defense contractors is not just costing American taxpayers huge amounts of money, it is killing Ukrainians. They are getting less weapons than they should, given the amount of money that we are spending.

And there is a name for all of this. It is called war profiteering, and this is not a new problem. During World War II, then-U.S. Senator from Missouri Harry Truman was shocked by the profits made by military contractors while American boys were getting killed in Europe and in the east. And he appointed a special commission—it is called the Truman Commission—to investigate war profiteering, and they found massive amounts of fraud.

In my view, that is exactly what we should be doing now. We should be instituting a Truman Commission, or call it whatever you want, to take a hard look at the prices that the defense industry is charging us for the weapons they provide.

We should also consider other ideas to reduce waste and fraud in the military industrial complex, such as wider use of the Defense Production Act, significant penalties for audit failures, and a windfall profit tax on hugely profitable defense companies.

Most Americans would agree that we need a strong military, and I agree that we need a strong military. But we do not need a defense system that is designed to make huge profits for a handful of giant defense contractors while providing less of what the military needs. We do not need to spend almost a trillion dollars on the military while half a million Americans are homeless, while children go hungry, and while elderly people have difficulty heating their homes.

Let me conclude by saying something, which I think is one of the more profound statements ever made by a President, and that is that Dwight D. Eisenhower, who was a former five-star general and a Republican President from 1952 to 1960—he warned us about everything that I am talking about in his farewell address in 1961, and it would be very wise for us to remember what President Eisenhower said, and this is the quote. I quote President Eisenhower:

In the councils of government, we must guard against the acquisition of unwarranted influence, whether sought or unsought, by the military-industrial complex. The potential for the disastrous rise of misplaced power exists and will persist.

What Eisenhower said was true in 1961. It is even more true today.

I intend to vote against this inflated military budget.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Louisiana.

ENDING IMPROPER PAYMENTS TO DECEASED PEOPLE ACT

Mr. KENNEDY. Mr. President, with me today are two of my colleagues from my Senate office, Mr. John Lowery and Mr. Jackson Bewley. I am grateful for their good judgment, counsel, and advice.

I am delighted to see so many Members of Congress—and I mean this sincerely—so many Members of Congress embrace the call for a less wasteful Federal Government, for a more efficient Federal Government. We spend a little over \$6 trillion a year, as Senator SANDERS so eloquently pointed out. When you spend \$6 trillion a year, somebody is getting \$6 trillion a year.

Every penny in our budget has a constituency, and that constituency will fight us. They will fight us. And I recognize that, and it is something that as we go about downsizing government, we have to be mindful of. However, there is one constituency that is not going to be able to fight us in our quest to scrutinize Federal spending, and I am referring to dead people, and that is what I want to talk about today. I want to talk about dead people and the fact that they are getting money from the Federal Government.

In fiscal year 2023 alone—this is just 1 year—our government sent \$1.3 billion—not \$1.3 million—we sent \$1.3 billion in checks to dead people. Those aren't my numbers. Those numbers come from the Office of Management and Budget. That is just 1 year.

Not only is the Federal Government sending checks to dead people, those checks are being cashed. Now, I have heard of dead people voting, but cashing the checks? You don't have to be God's perfect idiot to realize that there is fraud happening with respect to all this money.

Here is how this problem arises. When you die in America, your name is sent to the vital records office in your State. And at that point, the Social Security Administration pays each State to give an ongoing list of deceased Americans in that State. So far, so good.

The Social Security Administration takes this down, this list of deceased people, and they compile on an ongoing basis a list called the Death Master File. The Death Master File. That is just a list of everybody, updated daily, of people in the United States who are deceased.

Why does the Social Security Administration do this? Well, so the SSA, the Social Security Administration, can stop sending people who have died checks. So far, so good.

There is just one problem. I discovered this about 7 years ago. The Social Security Administration refuses to share that list with anybody else in the Federal Government. They won't share it with any other Federal Agencies, many of which send out checks.

The Department of the Treasury, for example, sends out checks. SSA won't share the information with them. The Small Business Administration sends out a lot of checks. The Social Security Administration has a list of all deceased Americans, but SSA will not share that information with the SBA.

I will give you some examples. You remember when we were in the coronavirus crisis, and we had an economic meltdown. We sent stimulus checks to Americans to try to keep the economy on its feet. We paid \$1.4 billion to dead people, and they cashed the checks.

The Paycheck Protection Program, which was a part of our stimulus program, paid out \$38 million in loans to dead people. These were people who were using—live people, obviously—who were using dead people's Social Security numbers to collect payments.

The COVID-19 Economic Injury Disaster Loans fund—another culprit—was involved in sending checks to dead people.

The Department of Veterans Affairs—and I am not blaming them. In many respects, it is not their fault. A couple of years ago, a scam artist stole the Social Security number of a deceased person—a deceased veteran—and received about \$825,000 in checks from 1997 to 2024.

Now, the person committing this fraud was just quietly accepting the checks. Somehow, the Department of Veterans Affairs, for some reason, stopped sending that person the checks. So the fraudster just picked up the phone and called the Department of

Veterans Affairs, impersonated the dead person, and convinced them to start sending the checks again.

Again, it was not necessarily the fault of the Department of Veterans Affairs. The VA didn't know that the Social Security number belonged to a deceased person.

Another example: A person in Ohio was able to collect her deceased mother's Veterans Affairs benefits for 48 years—48 years. Of course, she was caught.

The truth is, it is sort of like being asked: You didn't go fishing on Saturday; how many fish do you think you didn't catch?

We don't know how much money we are sending out every year to dead people.

Let me give you an example of how screwed up the data is. This is a strong indicator of what is wrong.

The Social Security Administration, if you asked them, will tell you that there are, according to their records, 6.5 million Americans living today in America who are 112 years of age or older. They say there are 6.5 million Americans who are at least 112 years old or older.

Now, I don't know about you, but I don't know anybody who is 112 years old. And I checked. At any given time, there are about 40 people on an ongoing basis in the world who are fortunate enough to live to be 112. The data is so screwed up. According to SSA, 6.5 million people are 112 years old.

A number of years ago—7 years ago—I started working with Senator TOM CARPER, a fine American if there ever was one. I started working with TOM on this issue. I went to Social Security, and I said: Look, this problem is easily solved. Just share the Death Master File with other Agencies and especially share it with the Department of the Treasury.

I don't want to confuse anyone, but the Department of the Treasury has a "Do Not Pay" list of people who aren't supposed to receive checks for a variety of reasons that other Agencies consult. But I said to my friends at Social Security: Why don't you just give the Death Master File to other Agencies?

They said: We can't. It is illegal. The way we construe our enabling statutes, we don't have the authority.

Well, I said, OK, I am not going to argue with them; we will just go pass a law. It was harder than I thought. But we did. In 2020, Senator CARPER and I passed a bill. The bill was called Stopping Improper Payments to Deceased People Act, and it gave the Social Security Administration permission and, indeed, directed the Social Security Administration to start sharing its list of dead people with other Agencies in the Federal Government.

I don't want to get down in the weeds, but—believe it or not—we had people oppose the legislation, and many people within the Federal Government. So in order to get our bill passed, we had to compromise. We had

to agree to only implement this requirement that Social Security share the list of dead people with everybody else—we could only get them to agree to do it for 3 years, in a trial program.

This clock started ticking on our 3-year period in December of 2023. So, obviously, 3 years is right upon us. And if we don't make this program permanent, it is going to expire in 2026.

So Senator CARPER and I have introduced another bill. It does basically the same thing as the 2020 bill, but it makes the program permanent. This new bill is called Ending Improper Payments to Deceased People Act, and we need to pass it.

There has been a lot of squabbling back and forth. I don't want to do anything to step on too many toes to jeopardize my bill, about how much the States are going to be paid and who is going to pay Social Security for sharing their dead persons list with the rest of the government. I think we have a lot of it worked out. But we need to go pass this bill.

I mean, this makes no sense whatsoever. I can understand if we talk about changing the Medicaid Program, for example—what is fair, what is unfair. I can understand debating that, and I can understand reasonable people disagreeing over what changes, if any, we ought to make to the Medicaid Program. I get it.

I just listened to Senator SANDERS, once again, speak very eloquently about the waste at the Department of Defense. That is something that reasonable people, all of whom agree that we ought to have a strong defense—but reasonable people—can disagree over how to achieve that.

But, my God, you don't have to be Euclid to figure out that this is just fraud. It is abuse. It is low-hanging fruit, and it is so easily solved. All we have to do is direct the Social Security Administration, on a permanent basis—not a 3-year trial basis, on a permanent basis—to start sharing the list of dead people with the Department of the Treasury and everybody else in the Federal Government who wants it. And then everybody is on the same page, and we know who is deceased. And we can stop sending the money to dead people who cash the checks.

Now, I am talking about this now—I have talked about it before on the floor. I am not going to try to pass the bill this year. I am not. We are running up against a clock, and we have the NDAA. We have a CR to pass, and we have to keep government open. We have to renew the flood insurance program. And you know all that. But I am going to be back. I am like "The Terminator." I will be back as soon as the new Congress is sworn in.

Many of my colleagues have said to me: You know, it is time we stop talking about who needs to pay more in taxes and start talking about and asking the question with respect to "What the hell happened to the money?" And I agree with that. I can't think of an easier place to start.

Let's just pass this simple bill. Let's stop sending money to dead people. Again, we can debate about the wisdom of dead people voting. We all know it happens. But cashing checks is a bridge too far.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mrs. FISCHER. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Ms. HASSAN). Without objection, it is so ordered.

UNANIMOUS CONSENT REQUEST—H.R. 8413 AND H.R. 8219

Mrs. FISCHER. Madam President, I come before you today to discuss a grave situation that is unfolding in the southwestern part of my State.

Two Nebraska communities—one at Swanson Reservoir and the other at Red Willow—are at risk. Over the past 50 years, residents of these two communities have built friendships. They have started and supported businesses, and they have enjoyed the recreation that the local area offers. But in just 2 months, these Nebraskans will be forced to leave. They will be forced out of their homes over a disagreement between the Federal Government and local stakeholders on how the land should be managed.

The good news is, there is a simple solution to this problem. In working with the rest of the Nebraska delegation as well as the Bureau of Reclamation, I have introduced legislation that benefits all parties. It transfers the ownership of this land from the Federal Government to local officials.

I want to thank Congressman ADRIAN SMITH, especially, for introducing companion legislation in the House.

Once the counties control the land around these reservoirs, the residents of Red Willow and Swanson can work with local authorities to chart a better path forward—one that preserves the communities and one that also improves the recreation areas.

Since I introduced this bill, I have heard from over 1,000 Nebraskans about how urgently they need this land transferred. I have received numerous letters of support from local communities and businesses. Everyone—everyone—involved supports this bill. The residents and their local government officials support this bill. Our colleagues on both sides of the aisle have offered no objection to this bill. The Committee on Energy and Natural Resources passed this bill on a voice vote. We also worked with the Bureau of Reclamation on this solution. Everyone—everyone—agrees that my bill offers the best future for the hundreds of Nebraskans who call these areas home. It is time to do what is right and to save these communities.

I yield to the Senator from Hawaii.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Hawaii.