

servicemembers. Our men and women in uniform deserve better, and Secretary Hegseth needs to do the right thing to restore the confidence of the Armed Forces, the American people, and our allies. Pete Hegseth must go, and Congress must investigate to fulfill its constitutional responsibilities.

CONGRATULATING SOUTH KNOX GIRLS' BASKETBALL TEAM

(Mr. MESSMER asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute and to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. MESSMER. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to give my personal congratulations to the South Knox girls' basketball team for taking the Class 2A State championship. In the stunning 55-33 win, the South Knox Spartans earned the school's first statewide championship victory.

Basketball is a foundational part of our identity as Hoosiers, and they even gave us a term, "Hoosier Hysteria," to describe just how seriously we take this sport and how many top players we produce.

Congratulations once again to the girls' basketball team at South Knox and to Coach Hollie Eaves for showing everyone just how well they play basketball in Verne, Indiana.

MICHAEL REED, PROUD SON OF TRENTON

(Mrs. WATSON COLEMAN asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute.)

Mrs. WATSON COLEMAN. Mr. Speaker, I rise today in recognition of a man whom I have known for his entire life; longer, in fact. I knew him when he was a bump in his mommy's belly.

Michael Reed is the proud son of Trenton and one of the most intelligent, dedicated, and capable public servants that I have ever had the privilege of knowing.

When I was first elected, it was Michael's counsel that I relied on to get my office up and running. It was Michael who helped me navigate this new and peculiar space, and it was Michael whom I could call day or night, weekend or weekday, and I still do.

I have the deepest love and respect for Michael. He has been a blessing in every sense of the word. I thank him for his public service. I know that he will continue to make a positive impact on people's lives in all that he does.

I wish Michael and his beautiful bride, Keenan, nothing but the best as they begin their next chapter in life.

BUDGET RECONCILIATION MOVING FORWARD

(Mr. LAMALFA asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute and to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. LAMALFA. Mr. Speaker, Congress is moving forward with reconciliation to rein in Washington's reckless spending and put the budget back on a responsible path. This process brings multiple committees together to craft one comprehensive bill that strengthens the economy, reduces waste, and prioritizes taxpayers.

The bill secures the borders with real enforcement measures, keeps taxes low for families and small businesses, and rolls back job-killing regulations. It also boosts domestic energy production, making America less dependent on foreign adversaries while lowering costs at home.

Every committee has worked to ensure this bill eliminates wasteful spending and focuses resources where they are actually needed. Budget reconciliation is about making the Federal Government work smarter, not bigger, and being accountable to taxpayers because the hard-earned money they have to send this place is certainly not voluntary.

Budget reconciliation puts America back on a strong track to what we should prioritize to begin with.

HONORING ALVIN VAN ZEE

(Mrs. MILLER-MEEKS asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute and to revise and extend her remarks.)

Mrs. MILLER-MEEKS. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to honor the life and service of Alvin "Al" Van Zee, a devoted veteran and public servant from Pella, Iowa.

As the longest serving commissioner on the Marion County Commission of Veterans Affairs, Al dedicated more than 20 years to ensuring Iowa's veterans received care, support, and the recognition they deserved.

A proud veteran himself, Al's service didn't end when he left the military. Through his work on the commission and his involvement on the Van Veen-Van Hemert American Legion Post No. 89, he was a tireless advocate for those who wore our Nation's uniform.

His wisdom, compassion, and unwavering commitment left a lasting impact on his community. Al's legacy is one of service, honor, and deep devotion to both our country and to those who serve our country.

May his family and loved ones find comfort in knowing his impact will endure for generations. We are grateful for his life, his service, and his unwavering dedication. Rest in peace, Al.

RECESS

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. GUEST). Pursuant to clause 12(a) of rule I, the Chair declares the House in recess subject to the call of the Chair.

Accordingly (at 12 o'clock and 11 minutes p.m.), the House stood in recess.

□ 1400

AFTER RECESS

The recess having expired, the House was called to order by the Speaker pro tempore (Mr. MOORE of Alabama) at 2 p.m.

PROVIDING FOR CONGRESSIONAL DISAPPROVAL OF THE RULE SUBMITTED BY THE OFFICE OF ENERGY EFFICIENCY AND RENEWABLE ENERGY, DEPARTMENT OF ENERGY RELATING TO "ENERGY CONSERVATION PROGRAM: ENERGY CONSERVATION STANDARDS FOR COMMERCIAL REFRIGERATORS, FREEZERS, AND REFRIGERATOR-FREEZERS"

Mr. GUTHRIE. Mr. Speaker, pursuant to House Resolution 242, I call up the joint resolution (H.J. Res. 75) providing for congressional disapproval under chapter 8 of title 5, United States Code, of the rule submitted by the Office of Energy Efficiency and Renewable Energy, Department of Energy relating to "Energy Conservation Program: Energy Conservation Standards for Commercial Refrigerators, Freezers, and Refrigerator-Freezers", and ask for its immediate consideration in the House.

The Clerk read the title of the joint resolution.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to House Resolution 242, the joint resolution is considered read.

The text of the joint resolution is as follows:

H.J. RES. 75

Resolved by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled, That Congress disapproves the rule submitted by the Office of the Office of Energy Efficiency and Renewable Energy, Department of Energy relating to "Energy Conservation Program: Energy Conservation Standards for Commercial Refrigerators, Freezers, and Refrigerator-Freezers" (90 Fed. Reg. 7464; published January 21, 2025) and such rule shall have no force or effect.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The joint resolution shall be debatable for 1 hour equally divided and controlled by the chair and ranking minority member of the Committee on Energy and Commerce or their respective designees.

The gentleman from Kentucky (Mr. GUTHRIE) and the gentleman from New Jersey (Mr. PALLONE) each will control 30 minutes.

The chair recognizes the gentleman from Kentucky (Mr. GUTHRIE).

GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. GUTHRIE. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members may have 5 legislative days to revise and extend their remarks and include extraneous material on H.J. Res. 75.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Is there objection to the request of the gentleman from Kentucky?

There was no objection.

Mr. GUTHRIE. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Mr. Speaker, as President Trump took office in January, the Biden-Harris Department of Energy finalized amended energy efficiency standards for commercial refrigeration equipment.

H.J. Res. 75, introduced by Representative GOLDMAN of Texas, a new member of the Committee on Energy and Commerce, repeals this final rule.

New standards for this equipment, which included a variety of products, became effective just 3 years ago. Yet the Biden administration moved ahead with implementing burdensome new standards.

In fact, these standards will require energy reductions up to 60 percent on top of the previous standards, pushing the price of this equipment higher than ever before. The Department of Energy itself estimates the final rule will cost \$8 billion. However, it substantially underestimated compliance costs throughout the rulemaking process.

The Department of Energy, despite feedback from stakeholders, did not account for the significant ongoing capital investment manufacturers must make to shift to new refrigerants.

When amending energy efficiency standards, the Department of Energy must prove that new or amended standards are economically justified, as well as technologically feasible, and that they result in significant savings. Not only is it unclear if compliance with the DOE's final rule is technically feasible but it is certainly clear that the rule is not cost-effective.

For example, one popular refrigerator design covered by this rule, vertically closed transparent commercial refrigerators, is estimated by the Department of Energy to have a payback period of almost 94 years under the amended standards. For retailers, many of which are small or family-owned businesses, it makes no sense to purchase equipment that will take nearly 100 years to recoup the cost on, especially when the average lifetime of this product is 14 years.

This will result in less efficient equipment being used beyond its recommended lifetime or a significant capital expenditure which will have to be passed down to American families in the form of higher prices. This is a lose-lose situation for small business owners and clearly violates the letter of the law.

We must pass H.J. Res. 75 to repeal this midnight rule and provide certainty to American manufacturers and small retailers.

Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman from Texas (Mr. GOLDMAN) for his leadership on this issue. I urge my colleagues to join me in supporting H.J. Res. 75, and I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. PALLONE. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Mr. Speaker, I rise in opposition to this resolution. Week after week, I find myself here on the House floor, not debating things that are important to

American families like protecting Medicaid or Social Security. Instead, we are debating standards for appliances. We have got refrigerators, air conditioners, and washing machines. This one isn't even something for use in a household. It is for commercial use.

Again, House Republicans have chosen this time to ignore the pressing issues that Americans face and to instead march forward with their anti-efficiency agenda that drives up energy costs for American businesses and consumers. Democrats, on the other hand, are here to defend these commonsense energy efficiency standards and the very real savings they provide Americans.

My home State of New Jersey was recently recognized among the top 10 States doing the most to advance energy efficiency, and I am pleased by my State's progress and want to make sure that Americans in all States benefit from similar efforts.

Today's resolution, like all the other anti-efficiency resolutions that we have seen recently from the Republicans, did not go through any regular order. I want to stress why that is important. We never received any expert witness testimony on the impact of the standards or on the impact of repealing them. Instead, we are left to trust a Republican Party that is decidedly antisense on the impacts of energy conservation standards.

Let me stress this. What do I mean by regular order? Well, a bill is introduced. We have a subcommittee hearing in Energy and Commerce. In this case, the Department of Energy would come in and show how there are so many savings and why these standards lead to more efficiency.

Then if the Republicans disagree, they can bring in experts that say the opposite. Of course, they don't want to do that because there aren't any experts that are going to say the opposite. They are just making this stuff up.

Today's resolution, H.J. Res. 75, targets a recently finalized energy conservation standard for commercial refrigerators and freezers. Again, this isn't even for households. These are commercial refrigerators and freezers. These are products that are primarily used in grocery stores and convenience stores.

Now we are debating whether or not the refrigerators in grocery stores should be energy efficient. I can't imagine more of a waste of floor time. When there are so many other issues that have to be discussed here today, we are doing this instead.

The energy conservation standard targeted by this resolution would save businesses \$4.6 billion over 30 years. Republicans have already taken away options for households to save money on their energy bills. Now they are going to strip businesses of these options as well.

Repealing these standards would also raise costs and increase demand on the

electricity grid. It is also not necessary because two-thirds of the products on the market today already meet these new efficiency standards. The payback period for any up-front costs of the more efficient products is about 3.5 years, while the products themselves last for 12 to 14 years. To argue that there is some kind of major regulatory burden or imposition on small businesses is just false.

At a time of increased energy costs, increased grid strain, tariffs, and rising household costs under the Trump administration, we have to ask ourselves: Why do Republicans keep targeting policies that save money and save energy? They ran on the fact they were going to make things more affordable. Things are less affordable, and this will also make them less affordable.

The only answer I can come up with is that when more energy is consumed or more energy is wasted, the oil and gas industry benefits. We know that the Washington Republicans continue to do the bidding of Big Oil and Gas.

This resolution proves that Republicans are completely out of touch. Americans are struggling to make ends meet and are facing the reality that Republicans may soon strip them and their families not only of healthcare but repealing commonsense energy efficiency standards.

Republicans also continue to look the other way as the Trump administration and Elon Musk undermine Social Security, threatening the benefits seniors have earned over a lifetime of hard work. Instead, they are focusing on refrigerators.

Mr. Speaker, I don't know what else to say. I oppose this resolution, and I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. GUTHRIE. Mr. Speaker, I yield 3 minutes to the gentleman from Texas (Mr. GOLDMAN), the sponsor of this bill.

Mr. GOLDMAN of Texas. Mr. Speaker, I thank the chairman for yielding the time.

Mr. Speaker, I rise today in support of my resolution, H.J. Res. 75, which repeals the Biden administration's burdensome energy conservation standards for commercial refrigerators and freezers.

In the final months, the previous administration prioritized their energy policies over Americans' prosperity and freedom. This unnecessary and costly mandate would burden small businesses, increase red tape, and jeopardize food safety.

The Department of Energy estimates implementing this rule would cost Americans \$8 billion. This massive financial burden will fall on small businesses that rely on commercial refrigeration for their daily operations. Cafes, restaurants, and grocery stores would be forced to purchase more expensive, less effective equipment. As we all know, these costs would be passed on to consumers, increasing food and beverage prices nationwide.

Beyond the financial strain, the rule would force manufacturers into costly,

potentially unfeasible redesigns of refrigeration equipment. The Biden administration failed to account for real-world conditions, including how frequently refrigerators are used during peak business hours. Ignoring these realities poses serious food safety risks.

The evidence is clear. If not repealed, these extreme regulations will raise costs, increase red tape, and endanger food safety.

Mr. Speaker, I urge my colleagues to support this resolution. In November, Americans voted for change, common sense, and freedom from government overreach and regulations. Let's honor that mandate by rolling back the Biden administration's extreme regulations and supporting small businesses across our Nation.

Mr. PALLONE. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Mr. Speaker, I am not trying to disrespect the sponsor of the resolution. He is on our committee. He is from the great State of Texas.

What I hear is that he said: "The evidence is clear." The evidence is not clear that these standards for commercial refrigerators are actually worse or a burden on small businesses. He hasn't cited anything that says that.

He says that we should have change. That is what we voted for in November but not change that is going to hurt people or that is actually going to cost them more money.

The bottom line is and the way this works is that the Department of Energy, under the existing law, is required to look at appliances and see whether or not they can be made more efficient and more cost-effective. That is what they did. They found that these standards were more efficient and cost-effective.

Mr. Speaker, I haven't heard from the other side or any experts they cite to, other than their own opinion, to say the experts at the Department of Energy made a mistake.

The experts at DOE who established these energy conservation standards were not politicians. DOE's process involves extensive stakeholder engagement, working with manufacturers and advocates to establish standards that are economically feasible, economically justifiable, and result in significant energy savings.

This is a highly technical process. My colleagues across the aisle are making claims that this resolution before us today reduces costs and cuts red tape, and nothing could be further from the truth. We know there are manufacturers out there that support these standards and support having consistent guidance from DOE, as opposed to ever-shifting goalposts.

Again, even if my colleagues on the other side come up with testimony or documents today that say that the Department of Energy was wrong, it would have been helpful to hold a hearing where their experts could come in and challenge the Department of Energy experts who put these standards

together. Then we as members of the Committee could look at this and say who is right.

They didn't do that. There was no regular order. There was no hearing. We had no benefit of a hearing on this resolution and the implications of revoking these standards.

Mr. Speaker, this resolution isn't some well-reasoned proposal that has been properly vetted. It is a way to kill floor time. It is a way to target any and every regulation without any assessment of the consequences.

I spent last week in my district meeting with constituents and holding a townhall. What I heard was that people were really concerned that the economy was heading into a recession because of President Trump's policies. They were concerned about costs to Medicaid and threats from Elon Musk to dismantle Social Security. Nobody mentioned commercial refrigeration requirements to me. I didn't hear anybody mention that. Republicans have really lost the plot, and I think Americans are taking notice.

Mr. Speaker, I reserve the balance of my time.

□ 1415

Mr. GUTHRIE. Mr. Speaker, I have a letter here from the National Automatic Merchandising Association—vending machines, as most of us would know it—that it would be affecting their vending members. Most are small businesses. Ninety-plus percent of their operators have revenues of less than \$10 million a year.

Mr. Speaker, I yield 3 minutes to the gentleman from Georgia (Mr. ALLEN), my good friend.

Mr. ALLEN. Mr. Speaker, I rise today in support of H.J. Res. 75.

My colleagues on the other side of the aisle will say this resolution is unnecessary. We have heard that. Let's be clear. What is unnecessary is placing so-called energy standards on commercial refrigerators and freezers, which will only lead to higher equipment costs and additional burdens on small businesses.

I come from the small-business community. I have felt that, and, again, that is what we are hearing from our small businesses and why I am standing here today.

Time and time again, the Biden-Harris administration imposed new standards with high price tags. First, it was regulations on cars and trucks. Then, it was gas stoves and washing machines and, now, commercial refrigerators and freezers. The list goes on and on.

In fact, I stood on the House floor in the last Congress and defended my very own wife's gas stove, and we won that battle.

Fortunately for the American people, under the leadership of House Republicans and President Trump, common sense has a seat at the table again.

All we are doing is rolling back the senseless and unending bureaucratic

red tape ushered in under the previous administration that harms hard-working Americans and small businesses.

In fact, the Department of Energy estimates that these standards on commercial refrigerators and freezers will cost approximately \$8 billion, as stated earlier, which we know will be passed down to consumers.

When did the Department of Energy get into the appliance business?

Mr. Speaker, this is an easy "yes" vote. I encourage all of my colleagues to support H.J. Res. 75, and I thank Congressman GOLDMAN for his leadership.

Mr. PALLONE. Mr. Speaker, I yield such time as she may consume to the gentlewoman from Florida (Ms. CASTOR), the ranking member of our Energy Subcommittee.

Ms. CASTOR of Florida. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman from New Jersey for yielding the time.

Mr. Speaker, I rise in opposition to H.J. Res. 75, a bill to force small business owners to use more energy and spend more money.

Here we are at the end of March, and Republicans have not brought one bill to the floor to lower costs and tackle the cost of living for our neighbors back home. Instead, Republicans in Congress have stood idly by while American families and small business owners are left to twist in the wind, making life harder for people back home, more expensive, more difficult to receive the Social Security they rely on, adding taxes through tariffs.

It is just unconscionable because what people really want is for us to work together on solutions, and Republicans in Congress are missing in action. People want answers, but Republicans won't have townhalls. Some of them will not even answer the phone.

I also had a townhall back in St. Petersburg, Florida, last week when I was home, and people want answers. They want to know what you are doing to tackle the cost of living. Then, you come up here to the House of Representatives, and Republicans are making it more expensive because they don't want you to have an energy-efficient appliance.

This isn't something that happens overnight. This is something that manufacturers and consumer advocates worked on for years.

The previous speaker asked when the Department of Energy got into energy efficiency. It has been decades that they have been doing this, trying to help people save money through conservation.

I know that doesn't align with my Republican colleagues' Big Oil and Gas allies, but people want to save money. They want to cut pollution. They don't want us wasting their time with inane bills like this that are simply going to cost people more money.

It gets worse because Republicans in Congress are barreling toward a massive tax giveaway to billionaires paid

for by targeting the family members we love the most: our parents who rely on skilled nursing, children, pregnant women, and our neighbors with disabilities.

We know what this is. This is an attempt to distract from what is going on behind the scenes here in Washington, D.C. I have to say I think my Republican friends are out of touch with working people.

People are tired of being ripped off by special interests and politicians in Washington. This resolution is another example of that. This makes it harder for small business owners to save money through energy-efficient appliances. It essentially picks your pocket.

Mr. Speaker, have you ever been in a crowd where you are getting jostled, and then you reach back and your wallet is gone? That is exactly what is happening right here.

I hope that Republicans join Democrats in trying to reduce electric bills, but no. I hope that Republicans are going to stand up to Elon Musk as he takes a chain saw to Social Security, but no. Today, the Republicans don't even want to address the real challenges facing our neighbors, helping them with the cost of living, housing, healthcare, and electric bills. This bill will simply make matters worse.

These DOE standards are long overdue. It has been, I think, at least 6 or 7 years since they have had an update. The law says you update energy-efficient standards for appliances every few years. That is what happened under the Biden administration. They came together. Those kinds of standards also incentivize American innovation. Manufacturers in America have been the leaders.

By weakening these rules, we open our markets to companies in countries that manufacture low-efficiency products, like from China, at the expense of American companies and American families. It is not right.

I heard Mr. PALLONE say that he had a townhall. A lot of the Democrats are having townhalls. I had a townhall back in the Tampa Bay area. They want help with hurricane recovery. Do you know what they are having to replace right now? Appliances. They want an appliance that is the most modern, the most efficient, the most affordable, and that is made in America, and that is what these appliance standards do. They help you save money over the long run.

They also want us to safeguard their healthcare. They want us to have an eye on Elon Musk as he takes his chain saw to all sorts of agencies.

Social Security was a topic of conversation in my townhall. Lo and behold, yesterday, there was a press report about the backdoor cuts to Social Security. It says: "The Social Security Administration website crashed four times in 10 days this month because the servers were overloaded, blocking millions of retirees and disabled Americans from logging in to their online

accounts. In the field, office managers have resorted to answering phones in place of receptionists because so many employees have been pushed out. Amid all this, the agency no longer has a system to monitor customer experience because that office was eliminated . . . by Elon Musk. And the phones keep ringing. And ringing."

"The turmoil is leaving many retirees, disabled claimants, and legal immigrants needing Social Security cards with less access or shut out of the system altogether."

Mr. Speaker, I include in the RECORD the article titled: "Long waits, waves of calls, website crisis: Social Security is breaking down."

LONG WAITS, WAVES OF CALLS, WEBSITE CRASHES: SOCIAL SECURITY IS BREAKING DOWN (By Lisa Rein and Hannah Natanson, Mar. 25, 2025)

A flood of cuts led by Elon Musk has sent the agency into chaos as a new commissioner prepares to take charge.

The Social Security Administration website crashed four times in 10 days this month because the servers were overloaded, blocking millions of retirees and disabled Americans from logging in to their online accounts. In the field, office managers have resorted to answering phones in place of receptionists because so many employees have been pushed out. Amid all this, the agency no longer has a system to monitor customer experience because that office was eliminated as part of the cost-cutting efforts led by Elon Musk.

And the phones keep ringing. And ringing.

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

Financial services executive Frank Bisignano is scheduled to face lawmakers Tuesday at a Senate confirmation hearing as President Donald Trump's nominee to become the permanent commissioner. For now, the agency is run by a caretaker leader in his sixth week on the job who has raced to push out more than 12 percent of the staff of 57,000. He has conceded that the agency's phone service "sucks" and acknowledged that Musk's U.S. DOGE Service is really in charge, pushing a single-minded mission to find benefits fraud despite vast evidence that the problem is overstated. The turmoil is leaving many retirees, disabled claimants, and legal immigrants needing Social Security cards with less access or shut out of the system altogether, according to those familiar with the problems.

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

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

Leland Dudek, who became acting commissioner after he fed data to Musk's team behind his bosses' backs, has issued a series of rapid-fire policy changes that have created chaos for front-line staff. Under pressure

from the secretive Musk team, Dudek has pushed out dozens of officials with years of expertise in running Social Security's complex benefit and information technology systems. Others have left in disgust.

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

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

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

'CREATING A FIRE'

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

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

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

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

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

Musk's Department of Government Efficiency team began poring through Social Security's massive trove of private data on millions of Americans, working in a fourth-floor conference room at the Woodlawn, Maryland, headquarters, with blackout curtains on the windows and an armed security guard posted outside.

At first, the DOGE team was obsessed by false claims that millions of deceased people were receiving benefits. Then came new

mandates designed to address alleged fraud: Direct-deposit transactions and identity authentication, operations that affect almost everyone receiving benefits, will no longer be able to be done by phone. Customers with computers will go through the process online; those without will wait in line at their local field office. A change announced internally last week will require legal immigrants with authorization to work in the United States and newly naturalized citizens to apply for or update their Social Security cards in person, eliminating a long-standing practice that sent the cards automatically through the mail.

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

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

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

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

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

'NOT ACCEPTABLE'

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

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

Shonda Johnson, a vice president at the American Federation of Government Em-

ployees Council 220 who represents 5,000 call center staffers, said low pay (starting salary is \$32,000 a year), anger at a return-to-office mandate after years of telework, rapid policy changes, and frustration with how the Trump administration is treating federal employees have hurt morale to the point that people aren't giving their all to the job.

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

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

"I want people who want to get to a person to get to a person," he said, adding that "all options are on the table" to improve phone service, including outsourcing some call center work.

The new limits on phone transactions take effect at the end of the month, but field offices have been deluged for weeks, even as DOGE is targeting an unspecified number of field and hearing offices for closure over the next three years.

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

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

Complicated benefits cases are falling by the wayside, the employee said. Online claims, which are completed by field staff, are piling up.

"There is just no time to breathe or get anything else done," she said. "We used to be efficient."

Another employee in a regional office said the staff was told at a recent briefing that field offices across the country are seeing "exponential growth" in foot traffic. The elderly are not only calling but showing up at bricks-and-mortar buildings to ask about the DOGE-led changes.

In one Philadelphia office, the federal government's return-to-office edict has left 1,200 staffers competing for about 300 parking spots, according to an employee. Staffers wake up as early as 4:30 a.m. to try to snag a space, and some are buying backup spots for \$200 a month nearby. As morale has cratered, some employees have stopped wearing business clothes and now come to work in jeans and a T-shirt because, as they tell colleagues, they no longer take pride in their work, the employee said.

'OFF THE CHARTS'

Scammers are already taking advantage of the chaotic moment, according to internal emails obtained by *The Post*. Last week, employees in several offices were warned that seniors were reporting receiving emails from accounts pretending to be linked to Social Security. The messages asked recipients to verify their identity to keep receiving benefits.

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

In Baltimore, an employee who works on critical payment systems said nearly a quarter of his team is already gone or will soon

be out the door as a result of resignations and retirements. Talented software developers and analysts were quick to secure high-paying jobs in the private sector, he said—and the reduction in highly skilled staff is already having consequences.

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

His team is also called on to fix complicated technology glitches that stop payments. But many of the experts who make those fixes are exiting.

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

Meanwhile, a DOGE-imposed spending freeze has left many field offices without paper, pens and phone headsets—at the exact moment phone calls are spiking, the employee in Indiana said.

The freeze drove all federal credit cards to a \$1 limit, and purchasers for the agency were reduced to about a dozen people for 1,300 offices, said one employee in the Northeast.

These purchasers must get a green light from higher-ups for anything other than 12 specific preapproved transactions, according to emails obtained by *The Post*. The list includes "shipping costs," "phone bills," "Legionella testing" and "services to support fire safety and emergency response." It does not include basic office supplies.

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

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

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

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

Ms. CASTOR of Florida. Mr. Speaker, this is a real cry for help, and we need Republicans and Congress focused on Americans' pocketbooks, not trying to distract from the massive tax giveaway to billionaires and special interests.

Mr. PALLONE is absolutely right. They are out of touch. Let's send a message and vote "no" on this bill and get back to work on safeguarding the pocketbooks of our neighbors back home.

Mr. Speaker, I urge a "no" vote.

Mr. GUTHRIE. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume. It is difficult for small businesses to stay in business. I would say if this equipment was going to do for small businesses what the Department of Energy

and the other side is saying, they would buy them. They wouldn't have to be told to buy them.

I have a letter from the National Association of Food Equipment Manufacturers, which sells to restaurants and so forth. It says these costs must be passed on to customers, many of which are small businesses like restaurants, bars, retailers, hotels, grocers, and schools. As the Department of Energy acknowledges in its own analysis, the increased capital expense caused by these standards may take more than—not many small businesses will invest their money if it is going to take more than 10, 75, and up to 94 years. Most small businesses don't stay in families more than a couple of generations. In many instances, to match cost reductions achieved through higher efficiency gains, more expensive equipment translates into higher costs for consumers. This is simple economics. As the cost of inputs in doing business increases, a restaurant's or grocer's prices also must increase to make enough of a profit to stay in business.

The other argument you can make is that if you buy this, you are going to be more efficient. The other side has said that then you can make more profit. If that is the case, believe me, our small businesses would be doing it without a government mandate.

Mr. Speaker, I will yield 3 minutes to the gentleman from Indiana (Mr. BAIRD), my friend.

Mr. BAIRD. Mr. Speaker, I thank the chairman for giving me this opportunity to speak.

Mr. Speaker, I rise in support of H.J. Res. 75. Once again, I join my House colleagues in working to overturn another last-minute, so-called energy efficiency standard from the previous administration.

In reality, the Biden administration imposed standards that are nearly impossible for commercial refrigeration equipment manufacturers to meet. According to estimates from the Biden Department of Energy, the final rule will cost approximately \$8 billion. This will be borne by those purchasing equipment, many of whom are small businesses. The payback period for certain commercial refrigeration equipment under these standards is up to 93.9 years. That is right, nearly 94 years.

To make matters worse, the Department of Energy's test procedures do not align with real-world conditions. The DOE's estimate of the CRE door openings in an hour often undercounts the real number of door openings. This means the appliance's interior temperature may rise above safe food-storage conditions, jeopardizing food safety.

Once again, the left's pro-Big Government, Green New Deal agenda harms the little guy. The Biden Department of Energy implemented a policy that threatens small businesses, harms consumers, and drives up costs, even as many Americans continue to struggle

under the long-term effects of the Biden administration's inflationary economic policies.

That ends now. I am proud to join my House Republican colleagues in standing up for America's consumers and small business owners across the country. With this bill, we are continuing to deliver on the mandate of the American people to cut burdensome red tape and ensure American consumers and small businesses can thrive.

Mr. Speaker, I urge my colleagues to support this underlying bill.

□ 1430

Mr. PALLONE. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Mr. Speaker, I think it is important to clarify some of the numbers that we are hearing from the Republicans. The chairman keeps mentioning a 94-year payback period for one of the products impacted by the rule, and he claims that this number comes from the DOE's rule. However, this is really a total misunderstanding of what happened.

There may have been some analysis of this 95 years, but the DOE did not propose or adopt efficiency levels like that for the product mentioned. In fact, for that particular product that he is mentioning, the final rule made no changes to the existing standards.

Now, I am not surprised that my friends across the aisle are throwing this number around, this 94 years, even though it has nothing to do with the final rule. They are not interested in a good-faith debate on the merits of these standards. If they were, as I said, we would have had hearings on this resolution so Members could better understand the details.

The truth is that the actual payback period for this particular class of products, since there were no updates to the standards, is zero because it wasn't changed. The average payback period for the other products impacted by the rule, as I mentioned earlier, is close to 3.5 years. So this 94-year analysis was not in the rule, it was not made for the product, and it wasn't proposed for the product.

For everything else, it is about 3.5 years. What this means is that after the 3.5 years, every year you are saving money. So all this just goes to show that my colleagues across the aisle pretend to be experts in energy conservation standards, but they can't even read the final rule correctly.

Again, this wouldn't be the case if we had a hearing and went through regular order, but that didn't happen.

Mr. Speaker, I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. GUTHRIE. Mr. Speaker, the Federal Register lists this class of equipment, and the simple payback period in years is 93.9 for all purchasers. I have it right here.

Mr. Speaker, I yield 3 minutes to the gentleman from Pennsylvania (Mr. JOYCE), who is the vice chair of the Energy and Commerce Committee.

Mr. JOYCE of Pennsylvania. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to support H.J. Res. 75, legislation to repeal the Biden administration's energy efficiency standard for commercial refrigerators and freezers.

This regulation was implemented as a last-ditch effort by the Biden administration to force its Green New Deal agenda on the American people without regard to the impact that it will have on small businesses.

Drastically changing efficiency standards, without input from the American public, hurts both businesses and consumers. This will cost American businesses \$8 billion to meet the new standards, and it will, indeed, take over 90 years for businesses to recapture that loss.

After 4 years of President Biden's inflation, business owners and consumers are searching for relief. Repealing this out-of-touch energy regulation will keep costs low for the American consumer and allow small businesses to reinvest and to expand instead of being forced to meet bureaucratic regulations.

Let me put it very simply. This is exactly the type of regulation that the American people voted against in November. Americans want less red tape. Americans want lower costs.

Mr. Speaker, I encourage all of my colleagues to support H.J. Res. 75 which delivers results for the American people.

Mr. PALLONE. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself the balance of my time.

I rise in opposition to this resolution. We have heard a lot today about upfront costs to businesses, the rising cost of doing business, and the slim margins under which businesses operate.

First, let me say that no one is forcing businesses to replace their commercial refrigerator equipment. These standards don't go into effect until 2029, and even then it is only when existing products need to be replaced that businesses will be looking at the upfront cost of any new products.

Many of these products already exist on the market, the ones with the new standards, so it is not like businesses will be faced with totally new and unfamiliar options. Sixty percent of the products on the market right now meet these efficiency standards.

As I have already said, the payback period for these products is about 3 years. After that, businesses will be saving money every month on their energy bills.

If Republicans were serious about reducing costs for businesses and for Americans, they would push back on Trump's tariffs. That is what they should be pushing back on is tariffs. They are the ones who are causing all the unrest, the possibility of recession, and raising costs. All of our economic indicators show that we are heading toward a recession and that consumer confidence is extremely low.

Why aren't Republicans fighting policies like the tariffs that impact the

cost of things now instead of the cost of commercial refrigerators in 2029? I don't know what else to say.

Mr. Speaker, I urge opposition to this resolution, and I yield back the balance of my time.

Mr. GUTHRIE. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself the balance of my time.

Mr. Speaker, as we have heard today, the Biden-Harris administration DOE's final rule for commercial refrigeration equipment will have a detrimental impact on small businesses and the consumers. If small businesses thought this was going to benefit their businesses, I guarantee you, Mr. Speaker, as a family business owner, we would invest in it. We would not have to be mandated to invest in it.

This final rule does not even meet the statutory requirements laid out in ECPA for new or amended energy efficiency standards. With a cost of at least \$8 billion, questions surrounding the technological feasibility of the standards and serious food safety concerns cloud this rulemaking.

Simply put, the DOE far exceeded the bounds of its authority with this rule. If Congress does not act, this final regulation will harm small businesses, drive up costs for American families, and put already expensive equipment out of reach for many who need it for their livelihoods.

That is why the following groups are supporting this CRA: The National Association of Food Equipment Manufacturers; NATSO, representing truck stops and travel centers; SIGMA, representing fuel marketers; and National Automatic Merchandizing Association, which includes vending machine operators.

Mr. Speaker, I urge my colleagues to oppose this.

I just want to be clear. I don't have anything in my family business in any of these businesses, but I will tell you what we look at is do we get a return on investment and can we serve our customers better.

The list I just said, they looked at it and said that if they don't get a return on their investment, then they can't serve their customers better by this rule.

Mr. Speaker, I urge my colleagues to support H.J. Res. 75 to overturn these unworkable energy standards for commercial refrigeration equipment, and I yield back the balance of my time.

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. VAN DREW). All time for debate has expired. Pursuant to House Resolution 242, the previous question is ordered on the joint resolution.

The question is on the engrossment and third reading of the joint resolution.

The joint resolution was ordered to be engrossed and read a third time, and was read the third time.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The question is on the passage of the joint resolution.

The question was taken; and the Speaker pro tempore announced that the ayes appeared to have it.

Mr. PALLONE. Mr. Speaker, on that I demand the yeas and nays.

The yeas and nays were ordered.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to clause 8 of rule XX, further proceedings on this question will be postponed.

—

HOOR OF MEETING ON TOMORROW

Mr. GUTHRIE. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that when the House adjourns today, it adjourn to meet at 9 a.m. tomorrow.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Is there objection to the request of the gentleman from Kentucky?

There was no objection.

—

A REPUBLIC IF WE CAN KEEP IT

(Mr. TRAN asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute and to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. TRAN. Mr. Speaker, in 1787, after the Second Continental Congress, Benjamin Franklin was asked: Do we have a monarchy or a republic?

He solemnly replied: a republic, if you can keep it.

For nearly 250 years, those immortal words have lived at the heart of our Republic. Representative democracy is not just something that appears, it doesn't happen by accident, and it isn't maintained by sheer inertia. We have to fight each and every day to maintain it.

I am the child of refugees. My parents came to this country from Communist Vietnam in search of the very freedoms that had been ripped away from them in the country of their birth. I joined the Army when I was 18 years old because I wanted to protect the freedoms that have given me so much.

I fear that this President does not share this same commitment to our Republic. He seems not to care whether we keep it or not, as long as his personal political desires are met. This is a trying time for our Republic, and I invite my Republican colleagues and the rest of America to join me in fighting to keep our Republic.

—

RECOGNIZING KENNY CHESNEY ON HIS BIRTHDAY

(Mr. BURCHETT asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute and to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. BURCHETT. Mr. Speaker, today, I rise to recognize my friend, the legendary musician, American, and east Tennessean, Kenny Chesney. Today is his birthday, Mr. Speaker, and I can't think of a more fitting birthday present for Kenny than the announcement that he will be inducted into the Country Music Hall of Fame.

He was born in Knoxville. Kenny is a graduate of Gibbs High School, which is not a mile from my house, where he

had a storied career in baseball and football. He went on to graduate from East Tennessee State University, Mr. Speaker.

Kenny has cemented himself in American history with his timeless hits. While I know the accolades mean very little to a man of his character, I am going to name a few of them anyway.

Kenny has won four Country Music Association Entertainer of the Year awards. He has had 33 number one hits and has been nominated for multiple Grammys.

I wish Kenny a happy birthday. I congratulate him on his induction into the Country Music Hall of Fame. I thank him for making east Tennessee proud.

I will always remember the first time he won Country Music Entertainer of the Year. He took his momma up on stage. I thought that was pretty cool. His dad, Dave, was a teacher at Bearden Junior High School where I attended. His whole family has just been wonderful to me.

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ADVANCING AMERICA FIRST POLICIES

(Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 3, 2025, Mr. MOORE of Utah was recognized for 60 minutes as the designee of the majority leader.)

GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. MOORE of Utah. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members may have 5 legislative days in which to revise and extend their remarks and include extraneous material on the topic of this Special Order.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Is there objection to the request of the gentleman from Utah?

There was no objection.

Mr. MOORE of Utah. Mr. Speaker, the last few weeks have been nonstop. The Trump administration and congressional Republicans have been advancing legislation and policies that put Americans first.

Just last week President Trump issued an executive order that puts decisions about our students' education back where it belongs, in the hands of parents and the States.

As the father of four young boys, I know firsthand that those closest to educating my children—the teachers, administrators, and special aides—are the ones who know what they need to get ahead academically and succeed.

Data shows that our current educational system is failing our students. Our outcomes are not where they need to be. Reading and math scores are not where they need to be, et cetera.

We have got plenty to focus on with this particular issue. I am right in the thick of it. My wife and I are very much in the thick of it. We could not be more grateful for the support that we have back home with our teachers. It has been probably one of the most positive things in our lives as we see those boys progress.

House Republicans are also continuing to assess our education system