

to seeing what he will accomplish in this next chapter of service.

SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA WILDFIRES

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

Mr. DESAULNIER. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to call attention to the continued suffering and amazing destruction caused by wildfires in southern California and the critical need for this body and for the President to aid those Americans affected by this natural disaster.

Over 16,000 homes and structures were destroyed in the L.A. fires, and at one point, 200,000 residents were under evacuation orders. Severe drought and powerful winds made firefighters' jobs even more difficult.

While we should be discussing how we, as Americans, help other Americans, as we have always done in other disasters, somehow we have gotten distracted with political theater and trying to score political points.

Successful recovery from any disaster wherever it is takes cooperation across all levels of government. We have done it before, and we can do it again. We can't afford to waste time with political games or unnecessary conditions on aid.

Mr. Speaker, I urge my colleagues on both sides to do the right thing and deliver aid to their fellow Americans who have had their lives upended by tragedy.

□ 1415

ADDRESSING THE HACK OF U.S. TREASURY PAYMENT SYSTEMS

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. BAUMGARTNER). Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 3, 2025, the gentleman from Illinois (Mr. CASTEN) is recognized for 60 minutes as the designee of the minority leader.

Mr. CASTEN. Mr. Speaker, HALEY STEVENS and I introduced the Taxpayer Data Protection Act last week. This is a very simple but, tragically, an urgently necessary bill to address the hack of the U.S. Treasury payment system by Elon Musk and his band of IT goons last week.

This bill would limit the Secretary of the Treasury's ability to give access to the payment system only to people who: A, have a top secret security clearance; B, have no conflicts of interest; C, are not special government employees; and, D, have been Federal employees for at least a year.

Why is this necessary?

What happened last week comprised one of the most significant breaches of privacy and threats to our national security, perhaps ever. I am not exaggerating.

This was done with the consent of Treasury Secretary Bessent. This point

is important because some of my colleagues across the aisle have suggested that somehow what they are doing is just normal diligence.

This is decidedly abnormal. It is so abnormal, in fact, that, when David Lebryk, the Fiscal Assistant Secretary of the Treasury and former Acting Secretary of the Treasury, refused to grant access to Elon Musk, Secretary Bessent fired Mr. Lebryk so that Musk could force his way in.

Let's understand the scope of what happened. The Treasury Department manages a \$5 trillion-a-year Federal payment system. This is the way that every branch of government pays their bills. Like any accounting system, it is critical that all of the bills it pays are approved, legal, and accurately recorded in our ledger.

This is how we make payments on savings bonds and other debt borrowed by the United States. It is how we pay employees. It is how we pay contractors. It is how we provide foreign aid. It is how we pay tax refunds, veterans' benefits, and Social Security reimbursements. It is how we distribute money to our intelligence agents and to intelligence assets who are embedded in hostile foreign governments. Take control of this system, and one can, quite literally, destroy the United States. To put it mildly, it is a target for our adversaries.

Yet, last week, unvetted, unelected, and unconfirmed individuals hacked into that system using insecure software and hardware.

Did they tamper with the code?

Did they manipulate payment systems to prioritize payments to companies controlled by Mr. Musk?

Did they inadvertently use hardware that had been infiltrated by our allies?

Did they take classified information with them on the way out that could make them a security liability?

As we sit here right now, we don't know the answers to any of those questions. All we have is denials from the hackers.

Mr. Speaker, on what basis should we trust them?

After all, they forced their way into the system with the full consent of someone who lied to his wife and was convicted of 34 counts of fraud for lying to financial and election regulators. As the saying goes: Fool me once, shame on you. Fool me every single time, shame on me.

I would suggest that we should instead trust what this individual said when he was on the campaign trail, when he promised to enact revenge on his political enemies.

Trump and Musk now have information that they could use to identify individual taxpayers who, I don't know, contributed to a charity that they oppose for selective retribution.

If they got control of the stop payment controls, they could now block congressionally mandated payments for healthcare, roads, and bridges; or to Governors or attorneys general who

are currently suing to block their unconstitutional actions in the courts.

With the personal information that they have hacked into, they could go after judges who have forced them to pay hundreds of millions of dollars in penalties after being convicted in jury trials of fraud and defamation, and they could go after companies who compete with one of their many private entities.

As long as those risks remain, we have to assume that this is going to make every single American less likely to trust that they can provide their personal information to the United States Government.

To put it bluntly, what they did last week compromised the full faith and credit of the United States. If the President and Elon Musk were acting under the direction of a hostile foreign government, this is exactly what they would do.

Mr. Speaker, I am not saying that they are. I don't know. What I am saying is that, if their actions serve only to weaken the United States, that is at the benefit of Russia, China, Iran, and all of the other countries that my colleagues across the aisle claim to love less than the United States.

A functioning Congress would provide oversight. A functioning Congress would be subpoenaing witnesses and demanding public testimony. A functioning Congress would be treating this like the five-alarm fire that every American understands that it is.

Yet, here we find ourselves knowing only that the Republican leadership is completely unwilling to fulfill their oath to defend our country against all enemies, foreign and domestic, and unwilling to protect the prerogatives of the House.

Mr. Speaker, I hope that I am wrong, but my fear is they are a lost cause, which brings us to my bill with Congresswoman STEVENS.

I know that there are Republicans in this body who love our country. There are Republicans in this body who I truly love and enjoy their company, and I know that they have told me privately that they are offended and ashamed by what Donald Trump is doing to it. Some of the Republicans have even called it out.

All it takes now is for three of my colleagues across the aisle to stand up to ensure that these last 22 days are an anomaly in our history rather than the beginning of its end.

For any Republicans watching who are, shall we say, democracy curious in this moment, who privately acknowledge that this has gone too far but worry about the political and, worse, personal threats that will surely come if Republicans stand up to Donald Trump, I leave my colleagues with the empathy and the wisdom of Thomas Paine:

These are the times that try men's souls. Many will, in this crisis, shrink from the service of their country, but he that stands by it now deserves the love and thanks of

men and women. Tyranny, like hell, is not easily conquered. Yet, we have this consolation with us, that the harder the conflict, the more glorious the triumph. What we obtain too cheap, we esteem too lightly. It is dearness only that gives everything its value.

To my Republican colleagues: The times have found us, and America needs them.

Mr. Speaker, I yield to the Congresswoman from Michigan, **HALEY STEVENS**, my esteemed colleague and author of this bill.

Ms. **STEVENS**. Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague, the gentleman from Illinois (Mr. **CASTEN**), for his remarks, his dedication to this Chamber, to this process, and to the lawmaking. We are both in our fourth term.

Mr. Speaker, I thank you in obliging us with this Special Order on the grand discourse of our democracy.

It has always been a delight to work with Mr. **CASTEN**, a longtime member of the Science, Space, and Technology Committee, a dedicated member of the Financial Services Committee, and a thinker, to say the least.

When we came together last week to introduce H.R. 1101, the Taxpayer Data Protection Act, I actually don't think that that piece of legislation was on our minds until we witnessed the very troubling, concerning, and questionably legal actions of an unelected bureaucrat, billionaire, appointee going into the Bureau of Fiscal Service to get access to the wires and the information of our taxpayers to do God knows what with.

All of a sudden, the phones of Members of Congress were ringing off the hook: What is going on?

I couldn't take two steps in my beloved Oakland County in southeast Michigan, the district which I am so proud to represent, without somebody asking me, in deep concern, what was going on.

Mr. Speaker, I mentioned Mr. **CASTEN**'s background, which was also tied to business and certainly tied to the workings of our Congress, but I happen to be a former Treasury official. I went into the Treasury Department as a political appointee right after an oath of office was taken in the early, early days of President Barack Obama's administration because I was a part of the auto rescue team.

What we were looking at was actually a real crisis in this Nation. For the kids watching back home, I don't know how old they are and how much they would remember, but we had a great recession going on. We had double-digit unemployment. We had a rocked financial services sector. We had an insurance market that was practically crumbling. We had housing with subprime mortgages up the wazoo. There weren't for-sale signs in front of people's homes.

Then there was the question about what was going to happen to General Motors and Chrysler because they were staring liquidation in the face.

Mr. Speaker, this Congress, in a different session and a different time, al-

most in that lameduck period before President Obama took office, passed something known as the Troubled Asset Relief Program to stabilize, ameliorate, and address our economy to make sure it didn't roll off of a cliff.

The Main Street effort of the Troubled Asset Relief Program was this effort to save General Motors and Chrysler from liquidation along with millions of jobs across this country, including 200,000 in Michigan.

They all came into the Treasury Department, from the smallest of suppliers, to the mayors, to the auto dealers, small businesses in their own right, even the foreign original equipment manufacturers, saying: Do not let them liquidate.

We used \$80 billion of taxpayer money, which, by the way, was repaid—which, by the way, worked and which, by the way, rebounded the U.S. auto industry.

Did you hear that point? The Federal Government made money off of the \$80 billion to save General Motors and Chrysler. Now we have a strong manufacturing economy with true innovation happening, and we are producing and making cars at a rate that was unfathomable at that time, over 15 years ago.

Never once, by the way, did we ever question or seek to knock on the door of the Bureau of Fiscal Service, which is off campus, by the way. It is not in the main Treasury building. We had bipartisan emergency workers. We had people from the Bush administration stay on. We had people from the Obama administration coming in. We were trying to save this country from falling off of a cliff. We were trying to save us from a true great depression, and no one was meddling in the wires.

Mr. **CASTEN** and I had to write this bill, the Taxpayer Data Protection Act, to put up and remind ourselves of guardrails. The painful point of this is that we are waiting and eager and just wondering when our colleagues, who don't even seem to be in this Chamber right now, are going to give us the bill to lower the price of goods? We are waiting.

I had a meeting in my district on housing. I brought all of the stakeholders together. We have beautiful homes in Oakland County, Michigan, but we don't have enough of them. We have homes that need to be rehabbed. There is building that needs to happen. So I brought together, as Members of Congress do, all of the stakeholders. I brought them together, and we invited HUD.

We invited HUD, but you know what, per a new executive order, HUD can't go to meetings. So we can't even have a conversation about how the heck we are going to lower the price of housing and get more housing built.

Mr. Speaker, the other thing my constituents are talking to me about on overdrive are the eggs. There are no eggs. We don't have eggs.

Mr. Speaker, there are eggs, but there are shortages on the eggs. People

are going to the store, and they can't find eggs.

There was a headline last week in Pennsylvania that \$40,000 worth of eggs were stolen. Just yesterday, in Washington State, more eggs were stolen.

I see this Commander in Chief doing all of these press conferences about every revenge tactic and different type of endeavor for the Federal Government.

What are we doing about the costs? What are we doing about the costs of everyday goods?

An executive order came out about the cost of prescription drugs, which are about to skyrocket again, and it is rolling back what we did to lower the cost of prescription drugs and put Medicare at the negotiating table.

□ 1430

This is unbelievable. This is a simple bill and a simple measure to protect the American taxpayer, to reestablish trust, yes, as duly elected Members of Congress, the stewards of the public trust as quoted and delivered by the great Henry Clay, otherwise known as the great compromiser of the 1800s.

We are the holders of the trust, so this bill is a matter that should just be done tomorrow. We should get this done. We are waiting for the leadership of this very body, those who move the bills to the floor, to give us something that will actually help the pocketbooks of the American people.

Mr. **CASTEN**. Mr. Speaker, I yield to the gentlewoman from New Mexico (Ms. **STANSBURY**).

Ms. **STANSBURY**. Mr. Speaker, it is Tuesday afternoon. I am here on the floor of the United States House of Representatives and my question is, where are my Republican colleagues?

There is not a single one of my Republican colleagues here on the House floor. In fact, I am standing on the Republican side of the aisle and there is not a single one in the Chamber right now. While Donald Trump and Elon Musk and their group of teenage hackers are dismantling the Federal Government, not a single one is to be found here on the House floor this afternoon.

Let me say to the American people: This is not normal. What is happening right now in this country is not normal, and Democrats are fighting back.

We are fighting to defend the Constitution, the rule of law, the separation of powers, vital funding for our communities, the health and safety of our people, and saving our democracy because what is happening in this country right now is not normal.

Over the last 3 weeks since Donald Trump took office, Federal agencies have been dismantled. Thousands of Federal workers have been fired and put on leave and are left in limbo. Millions in Federal funds have been frozen for our communities and your private data has been hacked by a group of teenage software hackers at the Department of the Treasury.

Elon Musk and Donald Trump are breaking the law daily inside of these

agencies. In fact, not only are they breaking the law, they are violating the Constitution, appropriations law, and statutory law. There are 55 court cases pending right now in front of Federal courts. Federal stays filed by Federal judges to stop Trump and Musk from these illegal activities, and Democrats are here on the House floor fighting.

We are fighting in the Halls of Congress. We are working with our allies on the outside to fight in the courts, and, yes, we are fighting in the streets alongside the American people.

Where are the Republicans? Have you so abdicated your constitutional responsibility that you can't hold your own party accountable?

Just last week in the Oversight Committee, we asked for Elon Musk to come testify, and when we tried to subpoena him, Republicans went out of their way to stop him from appearing in front of the United States House of Representatives' Oversight Committee.

If Republicans are so proud of what Donald Trump and Elon Musk are doing inside of these agencies, then why are they trying so hard to shield them from public scrutiny and appearing in the people's House?

What the hell is going on? That is what the American people want to know.

Why are they trampling on their fundamental rights as millions of Americans are terrified right now across this country, and we know that thousands of their constituents are calling their offices as we speak.

Seniors and elders from our communities are afraid that their Social Security checks aren't going to come. Housing and homeless organizations are afraid they are going to have to shut down and not be able to give out vouchers so that people have housing. Food banks are concerned they are not going to have enough funding to get to the end of the month to make sure that families can eat.

Hospitals and clinics are wondering if they are going to have to shut down whole parts of their treatment to the public, universities whose funds have been frozen, and State, local, and Tribal Governments who are continuing to get notifications from the administration that their funding is not coming, even though a court has already ordered Donald Trump more than once that they are violating the law.

Where are our Republican colleagues? Why are they pretending like there is nothing to see here? Maybe it is because while we are standing here, they are literally meeting behind closed doors putting together a tax package that has yet to see the light of day, that will literally make permanent the largest tax breaks for billionaires in the history of this country.

That is right. That is what they are up to. That is what they are doing. Do you know who those tax breaks are going to go to? They are going to go to people like Elon Musk, Donald Trump,

and all the billionaires and millionaires who are serving in the Cabinet right now and giving unfettered access to Elon Musk and his software engineers to hack your private data.

How are they going to pay for it? They already told us how they are going to pay for it. They are going to steal your Medicaid and your Medicare. They are going to do it by illegally shutting down grants and funding for these agencies and for all of the countless services and programs that we know they are hacking this data to do.

We know what they are up to and the Republicans are acting like there is nothing to see here because they are in on it. That is why they are not here on the floor. That is why they are missing. That is why they are letting Elon Musk and his Silicon Valley buddies raid the Federal Treasury.

We want you to know, the American people, what is actually going on here. Tomorrow, in the very first hearing of the Oversight Committee's new DOGE Subcommittee, Democrats are ready to fight. We are ready to show the American people what is actually happening and how we are fighting back to defend and to serve our people and to reveal what is actually going on not only in this Chamber but across this town as they try to dismantle our agencies and funding.

I say to the American people: Not only are we fighting for you but continue to join us in the fight. We need your voices. We need them loud. We need them clear. Keep calling your Republican Representatives, keep calling us, and let them know not only is this not normal but this is not okay. We are going to continue to fight for our democracy.

Mr. CASTEN. Mr. Speaker, I yield to the gentlewoman from Wisconsin (Ms. MOORE).

Ms. MOORE of Wisconsin. Mr. Speaker, I took the following oath my 20th year in Congress. I will read it and remind you, Mr. Speaker, of this oath of office: I do solemnly swear that I will support and defend the Constitution of the United States against all enemies, foreign and domestic; that I will bear true faith and allegiance to the same; that I take this obligation freely, without any mental reservation or purpose of evasion; and that I will well and faithfully discharge the duties of the office of which I am about to enter, so help me God.

This is an oath, Mr. Speaker, that you and I took.

Mr. Speaker, this was not an oath that they gave to the Democrats, this was not an oath that they gave just to the Republicans, this is an oath that we all took, and the insurrection continues.

The insurrection really started, I think, December 14, 2020, when all of the electors in various States had put together their scheme and the plot to overturn the government. January 6, 2021, we saw the beginning of the insurrection.

Four years later, we re-elected Donald Trump and the insurrection continues. It started with just pardoning violent criminals, people who caused the death by suicide and other means of police officers, who speared them and caused injuries to police officers and the insurrection continues.

We now have unelected billionaires who have broken into the Treasury Department and this is not a political grab for power; it is a crime what they did. It is criminal, and courts have backed this understanding up.

They have said to the Treasury Department: We want you to stop getting people's personal information. Stop getting their Social Security numbers. Stop putting your thumb drives in and taking it off to some laptop because we don't know what you are doing with this information.

Mr. Speaker, guess what?

Elon Musk and our Vice President, this is from the day's paper, have said that they should just ignore those court orders. These court orders should not matter, that they should continue to violate the law.

Mr. Speaker, for the purposes of a colloquy, I will ask the gentleman from Illinois a question.

I marched into our Speaker of the House's office to try to meet with the Treasury Secretary to ask them why they were committing crimes. Why there was unchecked authority over the Treasury data, to stop doing it? Why they needed to do this? Why they needed to surveil, penalize, or control this financial access?

The Speaker told me he had no idea what they were doing. The Speaker of the House does not know what they are doing. These are the same people who have taken the same oath of office that all of us have taken, to have these 19-year-old kids with microwave processed security clearances, if they even have that, putting thumb drives in our mainframe.

I am asking you, Mr. CASTEN, what does your Taxpayer Data Protection Act do to stop that?

Mr. CASTEN. The first thing we do is make sure that unless you have a security clearance, a top-secret security clearance, you cannot access those records.

The second thing it does is, if you have not been a Federal Government employee for at least a year, you cannot access those records. You cannot access those records if you are a special government employee because, let's remember, we have to have oversight over the people who are doing this.

People need to disclose what their conflicts of interests are, which brings us to the fourth piece. You cannot access those records if you have a conflict of interest.

Let's just say, hypothetically, you were running a satellite company that had large contracts with the United States and were also doing business in China and you might have reason to gain that system, that would be a conflict of interest.

Ms. MOORE of Wisconsin. Let me get this clear: Have any of those conditions been met?

Mr. CASTEN. No.

Ms. MOORE of Wisconsin. Has anybody gotten the appropriate security clearances? Have they told us what they are going to do with it? What of Article I?

We are Article I of the Constitution. Americans elected us to represent them, 300 million Americans, and the President of the United States says that he does not have to—Mr. Speaker, I realize that I am not supposed to mention his name. I didn't mention his name, but Mr. Speaker, I associate myself with the words of the gentlewoman from New Mexico, this is not normal. We are not having a normal session.

Mr. Speaker, the House is on fire. The House is on fire. There is nothing legal or constitutional that is going on. We have unelected billionaires running the country. We have a President who is pardoning violent criminals. I suppose if they ignore the court orders, he will just have his daily list of people that he will pardon, so they can continue.

□ 1445

Mr. Speaker, the House is on fire. The insurrection is continuing, and it is affecting you whether you are a Head Start child out there who needs it, a senior in a nursing home who will get inadequate care—you are going to be lying in your feces for 10 hours because they are cutting Medicaid—or a farmer who has not gotten your USDA funding.

The House is on fire. If you are a Social Security recipient, they have gone in and created a back door to your data. They know your bank account number.

The House is on fire, you-all. We need to stop acting like things are normal. It is not normal.

Mr. CASTEN. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentlewoman from Wisconsin (Ms. MOORE) for her remarks.

Mr. Speaker, I yield to the gentleman from Texas (Mr. TURNER).

Mr. TURNER of Texas. Mr. Speaker, this past weekend was Super Bowl weekend, and of course, I was in my district in Houston, Texas. I went back to get prepared to go to several events in reference to the Super Bowl. I thought the number one question that I was going to be asked was who I favor since the Houston Texans were defeated by Kansas City on their way to the Super Bowl.

However, all this week, Mr. Speaker, the question that kept coming back to me was: Congressman TURNER, what is happening in D.C., and what is this about our personal information being in the hands of someone else?

From one event to the next, I was stopped and got these questions over and over again.

At the Super Bowl party, I guess you could say, again I thought people would be focused on Kansas City or

Philadelphia, but when I arrived, people would come up to me and say: What is this that I am hearing about my personal information possibly being in the hands of someone else?

That is what I had to deal with this entire weekend. It is an issue that we simply cannot ignore, that someone—let's say, in this case, Elon Musk and his team of engineers—would go to the United States Treasury Department and literally take it over and have access to people's Social Security information, Medicare information, Medicaid information, taxpayer information, and the list goes on and on. This is a payment system that literally processes about \$6 trillion on an annual basis.

When I came to this Congress as a new Member, that was not one of the issues that I thought I would be facing in the first month of being here in this 119th Congress, but it is an issue that I have had to deal with now over and over again.

Then, the next question that came to me, Mr. Speaker, was: All right, Congressman TURNER, you are there, so what are you all doing to protect our information? What is the next step? What is Congress intending to do?

That was a difficult question to answer. What I did say to people is that many of us are not in agreement with what has taken place over the last few weeks. We did not approve someone coming in, taking over the U.S. Treasury Department, and obtaining your private, confidential information without your consent, so we are standing up and speaking against it.

Let me point out, which I think this is important, the questions that came to me did not just come from Democrats. The questions were also coming to me from Republicans, moms and dads, people who care about their information when they have heard so much about cybersecurity threats and information being stolen. That is what came to me.

For 8 years, Mr. Speaker, I was the mayor of the city of Houston, a non-partisan position. As the mayor of a city, potholes are neither Democratic nor Republican. When it rains, it doesn't just fall on Democratic neighborhoods; it will fall on Republican neighborhoods. I have had a reputation of trying to call it as I see it, call a ball a ball and a strike a strike.

In this case, when I was at home, I heard from people from all walks of life and both sides of the aisle concerned about where their information was going, who had it, and whether or not the people who now have it were sufficiently vetted.

I could not say to them that the persons who have their information, who are going through their information, and who are using it for whatever purpose, that they have been sufficiently vetted. I can't respond to that. Literally, I can't respond to it because it was an issue that has not been debated on the House floor, but it is an issue

that is important to moms and dads; people who are on Social Security, Medicare, or Medicaid; and for taxpayers who don't like sharing their information with just anyone.

I have been a lawyer for 40-plus years. During that time, there are certain things that are just very important for the average person, and their information is that important. My mom did not graduate from high school, and I don't say that in a negative sense because she and my dad raised nine kids and, I think, did an outstanding job. My mom, after my dad died, guarded her information very carefully, and a lot of things she would not even share with her kids. I was a lawyer in the family, but she was always concerned about who had access to her banking accounts, Social Security number, and things of that nature.

Right now in America, whether you come from Houston, Texas, California, Massachusetts, or Georgia, people are concerned about who has their personal information. If this issue is so important, then this is an issue that should be debated in the people's House by those of us who are closest to the people who we represent.

That is why I am a strong supporter of the Taxpayer Data Protection Act. Mr. Speaker, when I came here during orientation and in the days since, I was reminded that this Chamber is the people's House. We represent the folks who are closest to the ones who we speak for and should represent.

Now, I am not one who wants to stand up and demonize Elon Musk. I am not that person. However, when Elon Musk steps into this role with his team that very few of us have ever met, then he steps into the arena where we are the ones with the responsibility of safeguarding the American people's interests. Elon Musk and his team should not carry any more weight than those of us who have been duly elected and represent the people in our districts, in this country.

This is an issue, Mr. Speaker, that should be fully debated in this Chamber in the people's House. It is simply that important. That is why we must immediately debate and pass the Taxpayer Data Protection Act, which will protect our Nation's payment system and give hardworking Americans some sense of security.

I close by saying this: This is not a partisan issue. It is the people's interest. Throughout all of last year, we talked about what the people wanted, the real issues that affected real people. Nothing hits closer to them than their medical bills, their Social Security information, and their taxpayer information. People should have a right to know who holds that information, what they are doing with it, and how it is being used.

Congress has a responsibility here, Mr. Speaker. We cannot abdicate our role. If we are not allowed to debate it and decide what is in the people's interest, then we may as well go home

and allow Elon Musk and his team to sit in these chairs and make the decisions on what happens in our future.

That is something that I find unacceptable, so I am asking for Congress to debate this particular bill, the Taxpayer Data Protection Act, and allow the people's House to decide who should hold their information, who should have access to it, and how that information should be used. If we fail to do that as Congress, then we have abdicated our role to speak and represent the people.

Regardless of what district, regardless of what city or State, I hope we will not abdicate our role, be we Democrat or Republican. The people need to know that we stand up and represent their interests.

Mr. CASTEN. Mr. Speaker, may I inquire how much time is remaining.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The gentleman from Illinois has 18 minutes remaining.

Mr. CASTEN. Mr. Speaker, Joseph Stalin said that one death is a tragedy and a million deaths is a statistic. When we talk about constitutional crises and hacks into \$5 trillion systems, that risks sounding like a statistic.

I want to share just a couple of stories from my district—I represent, like all of us, $\frac{1}{435}$ th of the population—to understand the real-life consequences that are happening now, first because of what Elon Musk and Donald Trump have done and second because of the failure of this body to fulfill its oversight role.

When these announcements came through, one of the first calls I got was from a local homeless shelter. They had been almost immediately locked out of their HUD portal. They were unable to receive any more payments. That means that 200 people in my community who thought they had housing for a cold night in the middle of January were at risk of being put back out on the street.

I got a call from a county health department that was wondering if they would be able to fulfill their WIC obligations. These are the payments to women, single women often, who have new children and are trying to make sure that they can get food. They didn't know what to tell these women, who relied on them for food and nutrition, about whether they would have the resources to keep their children alive.

The department of health and human services that called my office said that any pause of this legal, congressionally mandated funding could force them to shut down their employment and residential services offered to adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

What you do to the least of these, you do unto Me, right?

Four hundred people in my district and their families would have been shut out of that critical program.

I have heard from almost every single town in my district. Republican

mayors, Democratic mayors, Federalists, Whigs, you name it, they are all calling and asking me whether the Federal Government will fulfill the obligations that they have underway for bridge repair, road repair, rail grade separations. They are wondering if they should continue those projects and potentially shift the risk onto their constituents.

What do they do if they don't have the borrowing capacity? If they have to shut down the project, can they finish it because it will probably raise the costs? This is all being done by a White House that claims to be pursuing financial efficiency.

At a local organization that provides victims of domestic and sexual violence with legal counseling, they have about 2,000 survivors they serve each year. They said that they are going to have to immediately scale back services and potentially close down entirely.

□ 1500

We are getting calls from people saying if a billionaire is so intent on cutting their access to Social Security, what happens to their health payments? I had a woman, who was a decent, kind, hardworking person, asking me if she should even bother paying her taxes this year because it is clear that Elon and Donald are dodging theirs and that they are defunding the enforcement agencies that would run an audit, and asking why she should even trust a Trump-led Treasury Department with that information.

These people are not limited to my district. They are not limited to people who voted for Kamala Harris. This hack affects every single one of us. Three patriotic Americans, Republicans, are all we need.

Mr. Speaker, I yield to the gentleman from Pennsylvania (Ms. HOULAHAN).

Ms. HOULAHAN. Mr. Speaker, I rise in support of the Taxpayer Data Protection Act, but before then, I will hold this piece of paper up for just a little while because it is my anticipation that before I finish speaking, the internet will have transcribed this piece of paper and the data that is in it.

Mr. Speaker, what if I told you that, somewhere in the multiverse, there was a person, dare I say a villain, who was intent on accessing all the data of the world's most powerful nation and of all of her people. Imagine him sitting in his lair. Perhaps he is stroking a cat. In his mind's eye, he envisions the files of data that he and his minions will soon have access to. Perhaps he will have access to your Social Security number or perhaps your health information. Perhaps he will know about your financial status or what you buy. Perhaps he will unilaterally refuse payments to the defense programs, take a cut of his own from payments, or even will authorize contracts to only his very favorite people and his very favorite organizations.

He will also know deeper secrets that our government works so hard to make sure remain so, so that our citizens can be protected, and so will our adversaries have those same secrets, either intentionally or unintentionally.

You would probably really enjoy this scenario if it were the plot of the new 007 movie, but imagine if it wasn't just a plot and that it was, instead, a reality. This is, in fact, what president Elon Musk and his unelected, unvetted, and untrained minions are attempting to accomplish.

Elon Musk is not rooting around in our Treasury data so he can find fraud and waste. He does not care about curbing spending or getting the budget balanced. He is not trying to optimize our Nation's wealth or to help us all make smarter choices. He never cared about any of this, and he never will.

Yet, knowing this, Trump has, in fact, set him loose on the hunt for data. Make no mistake about it, he is attempting, if he has not already, to access this cache of information, both the personal and the national interest information of our entire people and our entire Nation that will forever be his and his minions' and at their disposal forever, should they be successful.

My guess is that by now, the internet has already translated this piece of paper into data because that is the way the internet works. That is not a read-only piece of data. You may have been able to read it, but in that space of time, my guarantee is that someone on the internet has not only translated it but is also now spinning it into different directions and thoughts.

This all should strike fear in the hearts of all Americans for all kinds of different reasons. It is a blatant and overt theft of information that is not theirs to have. Think of the power that that information will wield. It is a violation of our Constitution and of the checks and balances that we all grew up honoring, regardless of what party we associate ourselves with.

What is a person to do? A person has to think hard about how they feel about the means and ends. You may be one of those people who believes that this government needs to be held in check. I understand that you may have voted for this, but is this, in fact, the way that you want this to be accomplished?

You should be concerned that the law is being broken in your name. You may be one of the people in the middle who fears that your information will be used against you and just now is waking up and realizing that this may not be exactly what you want. You should also be outraged and concerned.

If you are one of those people who never signed up for this to begin with, I am truly sorry. We are in a situation right now where the House, Senate, and White House are all under Republican control. We need all of you, all three different kinds of you, to tell us to do our jobs.

What does doing our job look like? It looks like supporting this bill that is on the floor, the Taxpayer Data Protection Act. What it looks like is passing this bill on the floor with a resounding majority and making sure—a la “Schoolhouse Rock!”—that it goes to the Senate as well and that it gets to the President’s desk with a veto-proof majority.

What it looks like is stopping the executive orders and actions of the executive, Trump, so that this kind of thing cannot continue to happen. The legislative branch, us, but really specifically the Republican majority today are the only ones who can put a stop to this dangerous lawlessness, but they are not going to do that even though they will privately acknowledge how wrong it is, even though they privately hope that Musk and Trump will wear themselves out, even though they privately hope the courts will work, and even though they privately say it is readily accessible and is not that much data.

Mr. Speaker, it is dangerous, unconstitutional, and illegal. I ask my friends to step up and speak up. Please continue to call your Congressmen, particularly your Republican ones.

Mr. CASTEN. Mr. Speaker, I yield to the gentleman from New York (Mr. KENNEDY).

Mr. KENNEDY of New York. Mr. Speaker, I rise in strong support of the Taxpayer Data Protection Act. I thank Congresswoman STEVENS and Congressman CASTEN for introducing this important legislation.

The American people deserve a government that protects their most sensitive personal information instead of one that allows an unelected billionaire to rifle through it.

The Treasury Secretary shirked his duty and granted Elon Musk and his so-called Department of Government Efficiency access to Treasury payment systems. This isn’t efficiency. It is an outright betrayal of the public’s trust.

Under this guise of efficiency, however, this administration has handed over Social Security and Medicare beneficiaries’ private data to a billionaire with no oversight and endless ways to profit.

Make no mistake, this is not about improving government operations. It is about consolidating power in the hands of the few at the expense of hardworking families, at the expense of the 167,000 western New Yorkers in my district who rely on Social Security benefits and the 335,000 taxpayers in my district who file tax returns every year.

Fortunately, attorneys general from New York and 18 other States sued, and a judge has blocked Elon Musk’s access.

The Taxpayer Data Protection Act would protect any unelected billionaire from having unlawful access to private and sensitive data. This bill would restore proper safeguards for the Treasury and ensure that no administration can hand over control of taxpayer data to an unelected, unvetted, and unqualified billionaire.

Mr. Speaker, we will not stand by as our institutions are auctioned off for the rich to profit at the expense of hardworking families. I urge my colleagues on both sides of the aisle to join me in defending the well-being and security of the people we were all elected to represent.

Mr. CASTEN. Mr. Speaker, I yield to the gentleman from Colorado (Mr. NEGUSE), the assistant Democratic leader.

Mr. NEGUSE. Mr. Speaker, first, I thank my colleagues, Representative CASTEN and Representative STEVENS, for their leadership and courage of conviction in taking on this important legislative effort.

Over the past 3 weeks, America has watched with alarm as President Trump and his administration continued to throw the Federal Government into chaos, slashing funding for a variety of different programs, unlawfully attempting to freeze Federal programs, and ultimately, in my view, taking steps that are unconstitutional and inconsistent with the values of the American public.

My office has been inundated in particular with calls from constituents who are deeply troubled and concerned. Mr. Speaker, about what is happening at the Treasury Department.

The Trump administration has placed an unelected billionaire and his associates in extreme areas of power, giving them access to Americans’ most sensitive information. Americans are outraged. They are right to be outraged.

The good news, Mr. Speaker, is that we have a legislative response that would ameliorate this particular challenge, and that is the bill that Representative CASTEN and Representative STEVENS have introduced, the Taxpayer Data Protection Act.

It is a simple bill, a straightforward proposition that your data, Mr. Speaker, your Social Security number and identifying information, just as every American’s, should be protected.

One would think that that would be something that every Member of this body could agree upon, yet we have been unable to convince a Republican colleague, a colleague from the other side of the aisle, to join this effort.

We only need three, Mr. Speaker, three Republicans who decide to do the right thing, to stand up for the American taxpayer, to protect their data. If three join Mr. CASTEN and Ms. STEVENS, we can get this bill across the finish line.

House Democrats will certainly continue to do everything in our power to achieve that outcome. I thank the Representative from Illinois for his leadership and for continuing to make the clarion call to the American people about this particular issue.

Mr. CASTEN. Mr. Speaker, some people have said that this bill is unnecessary because what is being done by the White House is simply going after waste, fraud, and abuse. I want to ex-

plain why that is actually the opposite of what they are doing.

First, we have to clarify that all of us in this body are the fiscal custodians of our Nation’s wealth. To allow corruption or waste to persist is to squander the taxpayers’ hard-earned money. We are all aligned on that issue.

Second, I would note that while we certainly have had our share of financial scandals and corruption over our history, they have almost always involved the illegal transfer of wealth from the government to the private sector—from patronage jobs to no-bid contracts to inflated hotel rates for Secret Service agents at the Trump hotel.

There is a pattern there. The easy proof of that is that while our Nation seems to have a lot of billionaires lately, you won’t find them among our country’s TSA workers, air traffic controllers, food inspectors, IRS agents, soldiers, intelligence officers, or the numerous other people who have dedicated their lives to public service, which makes sense.

Those of us in public service have chosen to live lives of elevated public scrutiny. A free press keeps tabs on us. Inspectors general and whistleblowers exist to ensure that grift and fraud are caught quickly.

If the Trump administration were genuinely concerned about waste, fraud, and abuse, what would they do that would be consistent with existing law? That is pretty easy. They would submit budget requests to Congress to increase funding to inspectors general and whistleblower protections. They would notify Congress of specific areas where they believe this abuse is happening, ask us to pass laws to close loopholes, and increase funding for enforcement. They would use their bully pulpit to strengthen the rule of law, remind everybody that there is a higher ethical standard to live to, and demonstrate by their behavior that they live by that standard and demand it of others.

That is the exact opposite of everything they have done. They have failed to submit budgets. They have ignored Congress’ congressional power of the purse, putting spending decisions in the hands of economically connected oligarchs. They have fired or are threatening to fire inspectors general and whistleblower advocates, making it harder for ethical Federal employees to call out fraud when they see it.

They are firing FBI and other law enforcement officers who could prosecute those crimes, including ones who have active cases ongoing. They seem to have a specific bias, I would note, against FBI officers who are pursuing prosecuting waste, fraud, and abuse against the Trump family.

They are pardoning people who assaulted police officers and sending a message to the American people that ethics don’t even matter. If you ignore the law, you can ignore the orders of

the court, according to JD VANCE, because we are now living in a post-congressional era, according to OMB Director Russell Vought.

They are doing that while giving access to the Federal payment system to people who are not cleared and are massively conflicted. What they are doing is a case study in how to expand, perpetuate, and get away with waste, fraud, and abuse. A Congress that fulfilled its obligation to act as a check and balance on the executive branch would put a stop to that immediately.

Mr. Speaker, may I inquire as to the time remaining.

THE SPEAKER pro tempore. The gentleman from Illinois has 1 minute.

Mr. CASTEN. Mr. Speaker, I yield to the gentleman from California (Mr. TAKANO).

Mr. TAKANO. Mr. Speaker, if you were approached on the street by a stranger and asked for your Social Security number, your home address, or your bank account information, you would say no. When the government asks for this information in order to process Social Security checks or a refund, Americans say yes because there is an expectation of privacy and trust.

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Mr. Speaker, they trust that their information won't fall into the hands of bad actors. They trust that their information will be secure with people who are qualified, vetted, and who have been proven worthy of having access to our sensitive data.

This administration has allowed this trust to be broken. I was quick to cosponsor the Taxpayer Data Protection Act to protect the Nation's payment system from reckless and unlawful interference.

It would require anyone who is accessing this system to have a reliable track record of professional service, the necessary security clearance, made an ethics commitment, and has no conflicts of interest.

I will note that The New York Times reports that Elon Musk will make no public disclosure of any conflicts of interest in his financial disclosure.

Mr. CASTEN. Mr. Speaker, I yield back the balance of my time.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Members are reminded to refrain from engaging in personalities toward the President and to direct their remarks to the Chair and not to a perceived viewing audience.

IT'S THE MATH

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 3, 2025, the gentleman from Arizona (Mr. SCHWEIKERT) is recognized for 60 minutes as the designee of the majority leader.

Mr. SCHWEIKERT. Mr. Speaker, I yield to the gentleman from North Carolina (Mr. MOORE).

FEMA CORRUPTION

Mr. MOORE of North Carolina. Mr. Speaker, I rise today on behalf of my constituents in western North Carolina who are angered and disgusted by what we have uncovered in Washington, and they have every right to be.

Just yesterday, Elon Musk and the Department of Government Efficiency uncovered that FEMA bureaucrats, holdovers from the last administration—and against the Trump administration's wishes—tried to send payments of \$59 million to luxury hotels for illegal immigrants in New York City. They had the gall to try to sneak this under our noses, but I will tell you, Mr. Speaker, not anymore. That is just the tip of the iceberg, though.

Since late 2022, FEMA has spent over 1.4 billion of our hard-earned tax dollars on illegal immigrant housing, transportation, and services. That is \$1.4 billion that could have been sent to disaster victims for rebuilding communities, for helping Americans in crisis, and it was squandered on Biden's failed border policies.

Meanwhile, Hurricane Helene devastated my district and tore through communities throughout western North Carolina, eastern Tennessee, and other southern States. It took over 100 lives, wiped entire towns off the map, Mr. Speaker, and left thousands of American families homeless. They needed FEMA to step up and do their jobs. They needed help.

Mr. Speaker, but for the volunteers, but for the nonprofits, but for the churches, we would be looking at more loss of life, more loss of property, and more devastation.

Shortly after I was sworn in, we had a winter storm. Tell me why, during that winter storm, were illegal immigrants given luxury hotel rooms while my constituents, American citizens, were calling my office, asking and pleading for help from FEMA to extend their hotel vouchers during a winter storm. They had nowhere to go home to, and no heat. Washington bureaucrats turned their backs on them. Thank God for President Trump, for Secretary Kristi Noem, and for DOGE because this is getting turned around fast.

Mr. Speaker, I also want to show you something with this new poster that was just put up beside me. This is a photo in western North Carolina. This is a photo that I took, and this is what Biden's FEMA has ignored. I took this picture, as I say, two weekends ago in Chimney Rock. It is a very small town, but it gives us a glimpse of things. These people need help to rebuild their homes, their businesses, as well as major bridges and roads. This is just a snapshot of some of the damage we had. We are still in the thick of it.

Who showed up for us? Who showed back up? President Trump did. He made it his very first trip of his second term and one of his administration's biggest priorities. We were also honored when Secretary Noem came here,

literally with a shovel and a wheelbarrow, to help and to see what was happening.

Just yesterday, Secretary Duffy visited us in western North Carolina to see the damage along I-40 and pledged his support to ensure that I-40 gets rebuilt. Even before the elections, Tulsi Gabbard came after the storm with her nonprofit to bring everything from chain saws to food. My friends, this is real leadership in action.

When it comes to the Federal Government, President Trump is working very hard to root out corruption. He is making sure that the bureaucrats who betrayed the American people are held accountable. There are no more backdoor deals, no more slush funds for illegal immigrants, and no more Washington elites ignoring the very people they are supposed to serve.

It took President Trump to step in and fix this mess, and let me say he is fixing it fast. We are already seeing money flowing back to the disaster relief where it belongs. We are cutting through the miles of bureaucratic red tape that delayed rebuilding efforts in North Carolina and Tennessee. We are making sure that no American is left behind ever again.

Mr. Speaker, this is just the beginning. Every single Federal employee needs to hear this loud and clear. If they think they can keep wasting taxpayer dollars, if they think they can keep sneaking through payments for illegal immigrants, and if they think they can ignore the suffering of the American people, their time is up.

To the many bureaucrats who refuse to go to work, they need to get out of their pajamas, show up to the office, start doing their jobs, or get DOGE'd.

Mr. Speaker, President Trump is leading. We are rebuilding, and we are making sure the American people—not illegal immigrants, not political insiders, not corrupt bureaucrats—the American people are put first. This fight is not over by a long shot. I promise we will win it.

Mr. SCHWEIKERT. Mr. Speaker, I have a handful of things we need to do. A little while ago, we had an Oversight Subcommittee hearing—I chair the Oversight Subcommittee on Ways and Means. Some of the things that get said around here, we just shake our heads. Think about some of the things we hear from the press, from the Democrats, they are just panic-stricken.

I need to actually walk the American people and our own staff through a little bit of the facts and a little bit of the truth.

We have done multiple presentations here, saying if we want to find waste and fraud, if we want to find programs that are mis-designed, and other things that are going on, don't hire a bunch of lawyers. Don't actually hire a bunch of investigators. Hire data scientists. It turns out the truth is in the math. The math can tell us.

What is amusing is listening to some of the Democrats talk about how we