

BUDGET RECONCILIATION

Tomorrow, we are going to begin to consider a budget resolution that creates the framework for providing those tax cuts to the very wealthy at the expense of all Americans. I serve on the Senate Budget Committee, and last week, we had a preview of all of this. We considered the budget resolution.

Those of us on the committee had an opportunity to propose amendments that would at least put up guardrails to protect the American people from deep cuts to services that are important to them to pay for tax cuts for the wealthy. And so I offered a number of those amendments. And we will have a chance on this full Senate floor to consider these amendments in the coming days.

One amendment I offered is very straightforward. It says:

It shall not be in order in the Senate to consider any bill, joint resolution, motion, amendment, [or] amendment between the Houses . . . that cuts funding to Medicare or Medicaid benefits.

So if there is abuse going on in the Medicare or Medicaid Programs, absolutely go for it. But that is not what we are talking about here.

We said: Don't cut benefits to the American people. We had a vote on this in the Senate Budget Committee, and it was party line. Every Democratic Senator voted to protect Medicare and Medicaid. Every Republican Senator voted against it. I am sure we are going to have a chance to vote on this again on the Senate floor.

I would point out, I think it was this morning or last night, President Trump said that Medicaid would not be cut. He said Medicare would not be cut. I hope since the time my Republican colleagues voted against this in the committee and the vote we will have in the next couple of days, we will have a unanimous consent vote on this bill to protect Medicare and Medicaid because President Trump just said he has absolutely no intention of doing that. Let's see what happens.

I also offered an amendment in the Budget Committee to make sure that Medicare continued to have the authority to negotiate lower drug prices for people on Medicare. We had a fight for decades to allow the Medicare Program to negotiate lower drug prices for the American people. The pharmaceutical companies have fought it tooth and nail, but we got it done a few years ago.

As a result of what we did, this year, Americans on Medicare, seniors on Medicare, will have no more than \$2,000 of out-of-pocket costs for prescription drugs because we finally gave Medicare the authority to negotiate drug prices, just like insurance companies have that power. Medicare is a big insurance entity in one way. Yet they were prohibited by law from negotiating lower drug prices for the Medicare Program and the American people.

But we changed that. We gave them the authority to negotiate those lower

drug prices. And guess what. It saved the Medicare Program money and it saved American seniors money because they now have lower drug prices on a couple of classes of drugs and they are continuing to move forward on that.

I had an amendment in the Budget Committee simply to say it shall not be in order in the Senate to consider any proposal that undermines and undoes and destroys the power of Medicare to negotiate for lower drug prices.

Again, the vote was all Democrats in the Senate Budget Committee voting yes to protect the ability of Medicare to negotiate lower drug prices. Every Republican Senator voted no.

I had a couple of other amendments as well. Another one was an amendment to prohibit cutting. Again, these are cuts that a lot of us don't want to make because they are important to many working families, and we certainly don't want to make these cuts to clear the way for tax cuts for the very wealthy.

So I also proposed an amendment that it not be in order to consider any legislative vehicle that would cut funding from the National School Lunch Program and the School Breakfast Program. These are very important programs to make sure that every child in the classroom has the nutrition they need in order to succeed.

It is pretty basic: Let's make sure every kid in the school has the nutritious meal they need simply to sustain themselves and be able to, therefore, pay attention to what the teacher is saying rather than pay attention to an empty stomach.

So I thought, surely, our colleagues would agree that we shouldn't cut that program to make way for tax cuts for the very wealthy, but, unfortunately, the result on the vote was the same. Every Democratic Senator voted to prohibit these cuts, and every Republican Senator voted to green-light these cuts going forward.

I know our colleagues will have a chance to vote on this on the Senate floor in a couple of days because Senator HIRONO and I will be offering that amendment.

Just to close and summarize, it was 30 days ago that just down this hall, President Trump was sworn in. He said he was going to usher in a great golden age for America. Of course, sitting right behind him were the people he was talking about providing a golden age for—Elon Musk, already the richest man in the world, and other billionaire tech titans. And what we have seen in the 30 days since is that great betrayal.

President Trump is not focused on reducing prices or costs for the American people. No, he is focused on implementing the plan that he disavowed on the campaign trail—Project 2025. That is what he is focused on, the plan he knew would be very unpopular. And what that plan does is call for very deep cuts and slashing very important services that matter to the American

people, including Medicaid, in order to make room for tax cuts for the very wealthy.

So this is what the Elon Musk operation is all about, and it is all about the great betrayal. People around the country from all parties are waking up to this—not just Democrats, Republicans, Independents, people who voted against Donald Trump, and also those who voted for him thinking that he was going to deliver on those promises to cut costs—only to wake up and realize for the last 30 days that something very different is happening in America; that he is slashing and illegally slashing all of these important investments for the American people in order to take care of those people who were sitting right behind him on Inauguration Day—Elon Musk and the billionaires.

That is a betrayal.

I yield the floor.

THE PRESIDING OFFICER. The Democratic whip.

UKRAINE

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, it was nearly 3 years ago that the world watched in horror as Russia pursued a bloody, full-scale invasion of the sovereign nation of Ukraine.

I was in Vilnius, Lithuania, with my colleague Senator Chris Coons on that cold, dark morning in the airport when we heard reports first trickle out that the war was, again, starting in Europe.

Three years ago, the Russian invasion of Ukraine was not a partisan issue in the United States. Congressmen, Senators on both sides of the aisle agreed on the basic facts: Russia was waging an unprovoked, illegal war and must be stopped at all costs. And for the past 3 years, we have supported Ukraine with the funding it needed to beat back Russian aggression and defend the frontline of democracy in Europe. And the Ukrainian people have done just that. Forty-six thousand Ukrainian lives have been lost—46,000 defending their Nation against Putin.

We have joined with our NATO allies and many other countries around the world standing by Ukraine, and they have shown an extraordinary courage, a courage for the history books. But it turns out that the new President of the United States, Donald Trump, does not see this the same way as I do and as we have for 3 years.

The fact of the matter is that President Donald Trump is a pushover for Russian President Vladimir Putin. He has always been, and he will always be. Since Trump took office, he has played right into Putin's hands. The outrageous comments he posted today on Truth Social make that painfully clear. In the post, Trump attacked not Putin for the invasion but the Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy—blaming him for Russia's invasion which, as I said, has killed more than 46,000 Ukrainians and displaced millions more.

It is disgusting to say that President Trump called Zelenskyy, the President

of Ukraine, a “dictator without elections.” Can you believe it? An American President is selling out a democratic leader who is bravely defending his country from an actual dictator, Putin—a former KGB apparatchik at that. It is insulting to say that—it is shameful—but from this President, it is no surprise. President Trump is doing nothing more than parroting criminal propaganda and spreading lies that Putin whispers into his ear.

I could call on Trump to apologize to the people of Ukraine, who have suffered so much because of this disruption to their nation, but it would be a waste of breath.

Let me be clear to President Trump: You don't make America great by selling out our Nation and our allies to a Russian dictator.

Most of my Republican colleagues know this. I have spoken with them over the years. They have joined me in a bipartisan coalition to be part of the Ukrainian Caucus in the Senate, but it is time now for them to speak up. I know they are politically fearful of Donald Trump and his power. If they say the wrong thing, he, with Elon Musk's money, will come in and take them out in the primary. But there has to be a point where they stand up and say what they really believe and have the courage to do it.

I am reminded of a quote from a fellow Illinoisan, our Nation's 16th President. It was 1865. Our Nation had been torn apart by the bloodshed of the Civil War. Ahead of his inauguration for a second term, President Abraham Lincoln addressed the Nation—right out there.

He said:

Both parties deprecated war; but one of them would make war rather than let the nation survive . . . and the other would accept war rather than let it perish. And the war came.

Although President Lincoln was referring to the two factions of the Civil War, I believe it applies here as well. Putin has made war rather than let Ukraine survive, and Ukraine has had no choice but to accept war rather than see itself perish.

President Zelenskyy and the Ukrainian people have led that noble effort with strength, fortitude, and determination. As their ally and fellow democracy, which Putin certainly is not, and as a nation committed to freedom, the United States of America has an obligation to stand by Ukraine, not to appease Putin.

USAID

Mr. President, on a separate topic, this photo says it all. It shows the world's richest man Elon Musk—who has not been elected to anything and has taken the greatest pleasure in senselessly gutting U.S. food aid for some of the world's poorest people—somehow or another giving a tribute. I won't even try to describe it here.

This month, President Trump and Elon Musk attempted to dismantle the USAID—the largest distributor of humanitarian aid on this Earth.

Musk was gleeful when he said:

[We are] feeding USAID to the wood chipper.

USAID provides clean water in Haiti and Jordan; helps fight malaria and tuberculosis in Kenya and Uganda; and supports human rights programs in Burma, China, Iran, North Korea, and Sudan. It provides economic assistance in Central America to help address the root causes of migration and counter the flow of fentanyl into the United States. And it funds humanitarian operations in Syria, including for security at camps to prevent the resurgence of ISIS, as well as campaigns to counter disinformation from Russia and China—all programs critical to our national security.

Not only are these cuts to USAID a betrayal of American values to satisfy the narcissism of Elon Musk, but they hurt innocent people, and they hurt American farmers, while we are at it, who for decades have helped provide such critical and strategic food aid.

You see, despite the lies by Elon Musk and others about U.S. foreign aid, it accounts for about 1 percent of our Federal budget—1 percent—and the fact they conveniently leave out is that billions of these aid dollars actually flow back into the American economy. These programs have broad bipartisan support historically in Congress. They make America stronger, more influential on the global stage. And America, with these programs, is doing the right thing; that is, until President Trump's reckless and illegal freeze on such assistance already appropriated into law by Congress.

Look at this headline: “Gutting U.S. aid threatens billions of dollars for U.S. farms, businesses . . . including American farms dealing in rice, wheat, and soybeans purchased as food aid.” Yes, I come from a farm State, and I am proud of what my agricultural people do. We grow some of the best crops in the world, and God has blessed us with the land and climate to achieve that. They not only feed the world; they feed the poorest people in the world as well.

Not only is this sweeping U.S. aid cut illegal and counterproductive, but it hurts our farmers and people in America—in Illinois, Kansas, Louisiana, Nebraska, Iowa, Texas, Wisconsin, and many other States. American farms supply more than 40 percent of the food aid that USAID distributes around the world, and now, hundreds of millions of dollars' worth of such commodities are stranded in ports, rotting away at the direction of the new administration. Talk about waste.

DOGE, take a look. You are causing it.

Here is what the president of the Illinois Farm Bureau said recently:

It's not just food aid to developing nations, and the exercise of soft power . . . USAID has substantially benefited farmers by funding crop research that has produced useful varieties of corn and soybeans over many decades. Some of that research happens at places like the University of Illinois.

That is what the president of the Farm Bureau said about USAID programs.

But even in instances where American lives and livelihoods are not directly threatened, gutting USAID threatens Americans' safety. USAID-supported programs help stem pandemics, help failed states, and displacements from war—threats that don't respect borders. But because of this President's sweeping directive to pause international aid, bipartisan, congressionally appropriated funds to provide help and lifesaving humanitarian aid in places like Venezuela, Iran, and North Korea have ground to a halt.

Programs like PEPFAR have been a key example of humanitarian successes abroad. It was started under President George W. Bush—as a reminder, a Republican President—who wanted to curtail the AIDS epidemic ravaging many parts of the world, including Africa. PEPFAR and the Global Fund have saved more than 25 million lives so far, but because of President Trump's directive, it has been halted.

Make no mistake, sad as it is to say, people will die as a result of this political decision.

In the last decade, USAID clean water and sanitation programs have provided more than 70 million people with first-time sustainable access to clean drinking water—something we take for granted in America, which really decides a person's fate in the developing world. These programs have a 6-to-1 return in dollars saved in health, economic, and education; but because of President Trump's directive, innocent people across the world will suffer, and America's reputation will be weakened, not made stronger.

American defense officials, for generations, have supported these programs. These have always been bipartisan programs because they are far cheaper than military interventions and are clearly effective—proven so over the years.

Trump's first Secretary of Defense Jim Mattis said that if we don't fund foreign aid, “then I need to buy more bullets.”

When did saving the lives of innocent people, strengthening the American economy in the process, and growing our soft power presence around the world become a political issue? Under President Donald Trump and the “co-President,” Elon Musk.

Lastly, I want to highlight how lies about USAID have been spread online—some amplified by Russia, China, and other adversaries.

For example, there is a false video created by a private company which links to the Kremlin alleged celebrities who were paid by USAID to visit Ukraine. This Russian influence campaign was reposted on Twitter by Elon Musk—no surprise—and became a viral disinformation rallying cry against USAID. But it was false, like so many allegations of supposed outrage by