

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

USAID. Yet this kind of nonsense is used by Mr. Musk to justify gutting entire congressionally appropriated, American soft power programs while many of my Republican colleagues—virtually all of them—sit silently.

Nations like China already sent strategic openings under President Trump's decisions to halt U.S. foreign aid. This Senate—Republicans and Democrats—cannot afford to roll over, play dead, and hand over congressional authority on these bipartisan programs and on larger constitutionally designated congressional appropriations powers.

I know foreign aid is misunderstood by many Americans. They think it is about 20 percent of the Federal budget when asked. As I said, it turns out to be 1 percent. I have seen it in action around the world. Some of the scenes that I have witnessed, I will never forget: a dusty village in India or the children who are given for lunch something that my kids would never have touched and the Presiding Officer's probably wouldn't either. It was like a dough ball that they used for catfish bait in my part of the world.

You look at that ball, and you think: You are going to eat that? Sure, it is full of good grains and nutrients, but it doesn't look very appetizing.

They ate it like it was their last meal, but they didn't eat it quickly. They hesitated and stopped for a moment and bowed their heads in prayer, then lifted up and started eating their lunch.

I asked the person who was running the program: What was the prayer about? They said they were thanking the United States of America for sending this food to them because, otherwise, they would have nothing.

I take great satisfaction in that experience and memory. It says a lot about these programs and what they mean to people around the world, and it said a lot about America. This was one of our priorities, too. The nameless, faceless kids somewhere around the world got something eat to keep them alive because America cared. That defines America and its values, as far as I am concerned.

The notion of “feeding [the] USAID [program] to a wood chipper” may be a big laugh for Elon Musk, but it is a sad commentary on the values of Mr. Musk and this administration. For goodness' sake, let's stand by American values. A lot of people depend on them.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

THE PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

THE PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

TRUMP ADMINISTRATION

Mrs. SHAHEEN. Mr. President, I come to the floor today to call atten-

tion to the Trump administration's unconscionable disregard for air safety.

Last month, here in Washington, we saw the deadliest commercial aviation event on U.S. soil in over 23 years, and while this loss of life was horrifying, it was, unfortunately, not unimaginable. In recent years, near misses at airports across the country have increased, and the incident at DCA illustrated just how quickly these dangerous situations can take a turn for the worse. Several times last year, runway incidents were narrowly avoided due, in no small part, to the heroic actions of the certified, professional air traffic controllers who staff our towers. These controllers are hard-working Americans. They often log 6-day weeks and 10-hour days, and that is on a good week.

So even before this week's misguided and frankly stupid—I mean, I have to stay, I think it is a stupid decision to lay off hundreds of FAA workers and air traffic controllers who have been overworked and understaffed.

This is not a new problem; we have known about it for years. For years in Congress, we have been sounding the alarm about the need to invest in our air traffic control workforce. In last year's FAA reauthorization bill, we worked in a bipartisan fashion to address this issue—to support our air traffic control workforce so they can do their vital, often lifesaving jobs effectively.

By partnering with the national air traffic control union and the FAA, we successfully adopted a new staffing model in the reauthorization bill. They have been making good progress, but, of course, we have more work to do.

It is important to acknowledge that any response to the tragedy at Reagan National Airport must include a commitment to reinforce all parts of our aviation safety workforce. Controllers would be the first ones to tell you that they don't work in a vacuum. The equipment they use is maintained by hundreds of dedicated support personnel who go through years of highly specialized training.

Many towers and facilities operate in buildings and on equipment that is 5, 10, even 15 years old. When something goes wrong, they need to know that there is someone on call to fix things because lives literally depend on it.

Americans need to know that the skies are secure and that their safety is a top priority. Sadly, I can't say that the actions we are seeing from this administration does any of that.

Secretary Duffy said he wants to surge air traffic controller hiring, and I agree with him on that. We can and we should hire more air traffic controllers but not at the expense of the rest of the FAA's workforce. We could hire any number of air traffic controllers tomorrow, but without the dedicated support staff that make their work possible, it wouldn't matter.

So how is the administration responding to the American people's distress over increasingly frequent close

calls and indeed crashes—sadly, like the one we saw in Toronto this week? Well, over the weekend, this administration fired nearly 400 FAA employees, some of them in my State of New Hampshire.

We heard an outpouring of concern over the weekend from controllers, pilots, airlines, and passengers who want to know that they are going to be safe when they fly. I am sure the administration must be hearing this, too. But when asked about the impact of the irresponsible and reckless effort, this is what Secretary Duffy had to say:

Zero critical safety personnel were let go.

So I am not sure I understand this. We are telling the American people that if a communications system goes down while the plane is approaching the runway, the person who knows how to get it back up and running isn't critical? That if the power goes out at an en route facility while 747s are flying overhead, the 18 fired maintenance personnel who know how to turn the lights back on won't be necessary? That the staffers who develop innovative safety and flight procedures every time there is an incident to make sure your plane takes off on time and arrives safely are fair game to be fired? Because we just lost 13 of them.

To anyone who is worried about our national security—good news. According to this administration, the FAA employees working on a classified radar system to detect cruise missiles aren't all that important either. They also were fired.

So I am going to say that again because this administration thinks that the civil servants at the FAA's National Airspace System Defense Program are apparently not critical to our safety. None of this makes me or my constituents sleep better at night, but I will bet you it makes our enemies happy.

The administration has tried to defend this by saying that everyone who was fired was probationary. They would like you to believe these are all brandnew employees—sort of the philosophy that the last one in is the first one out. That is not how the system works, and it sure as heck isn't how you keep Americans safe. In fact, employees who were promoted based on stellar performance within the last year—many of them who have been with the FAA for 10 or 15 years—are also labeled as “probationary employees” when they start their new positions. So, in fact, the administration just fired some of the people with the most experience, not the least.

This speaks to what is a bigger problem. Time and again, we are seeing this happen with so-called government efficiency experts. Listen, like most of us in this Chamber, I think we should do everything we can to make government run efficiently and effectively, but indiscriminately freezing hiring across the board and pushing out thousands of civil servants make that problem worse, not better.