

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.

Last week, hundreds of employees at the National Nuclear Security Administration were fired without warning. This week, the administration is scrambling to try to hire most of them back because they didn't realize they oversee our nuclear stockpile.

The Department of Energy fired more than 1,000 employees, including three-quarters of the State and Community Energy Programs Office. Now, I don't know if the people who are making these decisions in the administration even know what that office does, but I can tell you that in New Hampshire, we depend on them because they help keep weatherization programs up and running, and they support emergency operations in the wake of disasters.

With folks in New Hampshire dealing with some of the highest home heating costs and worried about how they are going to keep themselves warm this winter and States around the country still recovering from floods and fires and winter storms, I can't imagine why anybody would think that it is a good idea to get rid of the people who are helping make sure those programs operate.

Then on Monday, we found out that dozens of USDA employees—the Department of Agriculture—who have been working to prevent bird flu were fired, and then the White House realized what they had done. They panicked, and they tried to bring them back. Now, that is on top of all of the people around the globe who have been monitoring the bird flu potential epidemic who have already been fired with the closure of the U.S. Agency for International Development.

Just this afternoon, we heard that nearly 500 employees at the National Institute of Standards and Technology would be fired, including almost 60 percent of the CHIPS Office. So the effort that we stood up—that this Congress stood up—to try to make sure we could compete with China, with Taiwan in the production of semiconductors, which are included in almost everything we use, from our cell phones to our refrigerators, to our cars—60 percent of those people are now gone. So who is going to provide that effort we need in order to compete with China? These are the staff that make sure our high-tech semiconductor manufacturing industry stays competitive.

Example after example shows that the firings that Elon Musk has taken credit for have not been thought through. Either he is doing it deliberately in an effort to undermine the United States or he is doing it because he is so ignorant, he has no idea what any of these people do or what the operations do. Either way, it is inexcusable.

I heard from a constituent this week who worked for the New Hampshire Fish and Game Department for 24 years, and she just took a job as a wildlife biologist with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service last year. Her job focused on implementing the Pittman-

Robertson Wildlife Restoration Act. As my colleagues on both sides of the aisle know, this involves conserving bird and wildlife habitat, hunter education, and shooting ranges. Its funds come not from taxpayer dollars but from excise taxes on firearms, ammunition, and archery equipment. Yet her job was terminated under the guise of government efficiency.

She has a mortgage. She has kids in college who need healthcare coverage. But her main ask to me was to help put a stop to these firings and to simply help her get her job back because, like most of our public servants, she cares about the mission of her work.

Over and over, we are seeing this administration take out irresponsible, reckless initiatives, with devastating consequences for critical positions, without taking a second to think through or learn about what those positions do. When things inevitably break as a result, they don't own up to their mistakes. Instead, they try to convince you that keeping the lights on at control towers or inspecting airplane engines, making plans to manage some of the busiest airspace in the country really isn't critical to your safety. Well, I don't believe that, and I don't think you should either.

For the sake of the American people, we can and we must do better.

I don't think people elected Donald Trump to dismantle this country's air traffic control system. I think they elected him because they wanted to see inflation go down, they wanted to see their grocery prices reduced, they wanted to see help with rental costs, with mortgage rates, with energy costs. What have we seen in the weeks since Donald Trump got inaugurated? No effort to address any of those things. All we have seen is an effort at retribution against his perceived enemies, at firing and undermining services and programs within the government that serve the American people.

For the sake of our citizens, we must do better. I am calling on this administration to right this wrong as quickly as possible before it is too late.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Vermont.

DEPARTMENT OF GOVERNMENT EFFICIENCY

Mr. WELCH. Mr. President, I would like to speak about the importance of FEMA, the importance of fixing it but not destroying it. Mother Nature, this week, provided yet another reminder of the devastating impacts of natural disasters.

In Kentucky, we had catastrophic flooding that inundated communities and led to thousands of evacuations. At least 14 are dead, and all of us, our hearts break for the people of eastern Kentucky. To my colleagues from the Commonwealth, I offer all of my support in getting the aid that you need to help recover.

That is the same commitment I have offered to our colleagues in Hawaii, North Carolina, California, and Flor-

ida, and it is also the commitment many of my colleagues made to me and Senator SANDERS after Vermont's devastating floods in July of 2023 and 2024.

What we know in Vermont is the disasters that have afflicted us all over the country, they don't care whom you voted for. They don't respect county or State lines. They are indiscriminate and unpredictable, and the storm metes out its suffering in a bipartisan way. There is no escaping it, but we need FEMA. That is what we learned in Vermont.

When the storm arrived, FEMA was there. In the immediate aftermath when people had seen literally their homes swept down a river, when the crops and farms had been destroyed, when businesses were ruined, FEMA was there to help in the immediate aftermath.

But we also experienced something that I have heard from my colleagues in FEMA-related situations, and that is that in the longer term recovery, you run into the frustration of a distant bureaucracy that can't make quick turnaround decisions and such things as granular as whether you can install a 24-inch culvert instead of a 16-inch culvert.

That is why the reform we need is focused on empowering local communities to have much more decision-making and implementation authority in executing the recovery that takes, oftentimes, well over a year or 2 years.

You simply can't have that done by folks not in the community. Those folks in the community are totally invested in getting their community back on its feet, helping its businesses, helping the folks who lost their homes, and helping the farmers who lost their crops.

So the reform that we need in FEMA is definitely there, and we can do that and must do it together because any of these natural disasters are going to come our way at some point, regardless of which side of the aisle you represent.

It is one of the reasons I am absolutely so concerned about what is happening at FEMA now. There has been a DOGE invasion. I use that explicitly. What does Elon Musk know about the suffering in these communities? Where does he get the authority—where does he get the callousness to say FEMA should be destroyed? Something, by the way, the President himself has said.

When I think about all the folks in Vermont, all the folks now in Kentucky, all the folks in California from the fires, Hawaii and the fires, to be told that the response of the Federal Government, when a catastrophic event happened in their community, without any responsibility on their part—they were on the receiving end of Mother Nature making its decision to hit that community at that time. Why do Trump and Musk say we ought to get rid of the Agency that is on the scene as the storm arises and stays there, hopefully, until people get back on their feet?