

the cold. Public schoolteachers already worked to the bone will be thrown into chaos; class sizes will explode; job training programs will vanish; school districts will be at the mercy of State budgets that are already struggling to fund education; and the albatross of student debt will become insurmountable for tens of millions of Americans, many of whom come from working families.

Every single one of us wants our schools to do better, our students to perform better, and eliminate wasteful spending. Education reform is necessary, but to make things better—to improve education—you do not use a chain saw. Using a chain saw will make things worse because it doesn't discriminate between the funds that are needed and the funds that may be necessary or should be redirected.

Erasing the Department of Education in the blink of an eye is not what education reform looks like. Donald Trump should immediately reverse course before he causes irreparable harm to our students and our classrooms.

Again, let me just repeat that you do not—you do not—hire a Secretary whose purpose—whose very purpose is detonating the very Agency she seeks to lead. That makes no sense.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Now, on Social Security, I want to point my colleagues to a profoundly disturbing report this morning in the Washington Post. This morning we learned that the Acting Head of the Social Security Administration admitted what many of us feared: DOGE is calling the shots and their mistakes are going to put Social Security benefits in danger.

Listen to these stunning quotes from the acting head of the Social Security Administration. He says:

Things are currently operating in a way I have never seen in government before.

He says DOGE are:

[O]utsiders who are unfamiliar with the nuances of [Social Security] programs.

And he admits:

[T]hey will make mistakes.

Well, that is unacceptable. Social Security is perhaps the most sacrosanct program in government. It has helped seniors and people with disabilities for nearly close to a century. Now, for the first time, DOGE is putting Social Security benefits in real danger. The American people are frightened and outraged at the same time. DOGE is spreading outlandish lies about fraud and waste that we all know doesn't actually exist. They are cherry-picking data to spin a fantasy detached from reality so they can again use that chain saw.

Social Security is the last place where a chain saw should be used. Mr. President, the Senate, Democrats and Republicans need to wake up to this crisis. It is a disaster waiting to happen. I urge my Republican colleagues: Are you all fine with this? Are you all

comfortable letting Elon Musk and a bunch of inexperienced people bulldoze their way through Social Security benefits?

Mark my words: If DOGE's chain-saw approach leads to people missing their checks, the uproar from people back home will make all of Washington, DC, go deaf. Let's not kid ourselves: This is all part of the plan for Donald Trump. Donald Trump, Elon Musk, and DOGE are coming for people's Social Security benefits. They want to hide behind the boogymen of fraud we all know doesn't exist in order to justify stealing people's checks. They are already doing it.

Cutting 7,000 employees from SSA is a benefit cut. Closing field offices and eliminating customer service staff is a benefit cut, and I am alarmed this only might be the beginning.

I yield the floor.

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

The majority whip.

GOVERNMENT FUNDING

Mr. BARRASSO. Mr. President, the American people know our government is too big, and it spends too much. The American people want to see an end to this wasteful Washington spending. They want Washington to work for them, not for Washington.

President Trump shares those views, and he wants government to work both efficiently and effectively. He is putting a stop to waste, to fraud, and to abuse. Democrats in this body are now, believe it or not, threatening a shutdown—a shutdown of the Government of the United States.

Shutting down the government is not an outcome that President Trump wants. It is not an outcome that any of the Republicans want. It costs money to shut down the government; and then it costs even more money to open the government again.

These shutdown-Democrats are acting irresponsibly. Why are they doing it? Because they want to defend the wasteful Washington spending that has gotten the American people so upset. What kind of waste have people been finding?

Let me point out, Mr. President, what we have been seeing that President Trump and those working with him have been able to find in terms of government waste:

\$2 million to develop sustainable recycle models in the Balkans; \$19 million on biodiversity conversations—conversations on biodiversity in Nepal; \$47 million to improve learning outcomes in Asia; \$1.5 million on “voter confidence” in Liberia, Africa; \$21 million for voter turnout in India.

That is why the Democrats want to shut down the government. They want to continue this reckless Washington spending. They want to stop Republicans from rooting out the waste, the fraud, and the abuse.

This government runs out of money in 8 days. We need to pass legislation to get beyond that, but more and more Democrats in this Congress are calling for a shutdown as this deadline nears. Here is a headline from Politico this past week: “Democrats are serious about a shutdown.”

Here is another from The Hill this past week:

Democrats digging in against full-year CR as shutdown deadline ticks closer.

Senator ANDY KIM of New Jersey said:

Yes, Democrats would shut down the government.

Senator CORY BOOKER of New Jersey who is a member of the leadership of the Democratic Party said:

Democrats will use every possible tool to stop President Trump.

Senator JEFF MERKLEY from Oregon, what did he say? He said he is open to shutting down the government.

Democrats in House leadership also refused to come to the table and negotiate a spending deal.

The Senate should reject these reckless efforts. A shutdown strains Border Patrol agents. A shutdown strains our military because we know, Mr. President, Border Patrol agents and our troops will have to work regardless, and they won't get paid during the shutdown. They get paid later, but not during the shutdown. It makes very difficult to make ends meet if the paycheck isn't there at the end of the week.

These brave men and women should not have to pay the price because Democrats hate President Trump. These people make enough sacrifices on behalf of keeping our Nation safe and secure. Congress should be willing to make sure that they get a paycheck, not get caught in political games.

Make no mistake, Mr. President, the American people want President Trump's urgent action. They want it to continue. President Trump is doing exactly what the American people voted for.

Democrats calling for a shutdown are failing the American taxpayers. They are failing our servicemembers, and they are failing our Border Patrol agents. They sat on their hands during President Trump's inspiring address to the Nation the other evening. They oppose the commonsense changes that Americans voted for.

If there is a shutdown, Mr. President, it will be driven by and directed by the Democrats. Thank you, Mr. President.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Democratic whip.

TRUMP EXECUTIVE ORDERS

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, it is my understanding that the new Secretary

of Education Linda McMahon made some money on the professional wrestling business—at least, that is what I was told. If that is true, she clearly is ready to rumble when it comes to cutting money for American schools.

It appears that the formula for greatness, which the President is pushing, includes reducing Federal aid to education and cutting medical research. How can you build a greater nation by reducing investment in schools for kids and closing down laboratories that are developing cures for diseases? For my way of thinking, that is exactly the opposite of what we should be doing as a nation.

Of course, I want to stop waste, fraud, abuse, and inefficiency. We are all signed up for that. But eliminating the Department of Education? Press reports that people in this administration are jubilant with the idea of closing down a whole Federal Agency. What are the impacts of that closure? What about the money that is going to school districts in Illinois and across the Nation? If there is a cutback in Federal funds for our school districts—and that would be part of eliminating the Department of Education—that would put more pressure on local property taxpayers to pay more for the schools or to cut back on the salaries of teachers and increase the number of kids in the classroom.

How can that be good for the future of this country? How could you build greatness by closing down schools or increasing the number of kids in a classroom? Penny-wise, pound foolish. It is ridiculous.

It is not the only area. The National Institutes of Health now—I have talked to the researchers in Illinois and across this Nation—they are at their wits end to figure out what to do. This is the leading medical research Agency in the world. And 99 percent of all the new drugs—you know all the drugs you see on television, 99 percent of all these new drugs started at the National Institutes of Health, a Federally supported Agency of researchers who set the standard for the world in medical research. And now they are facing closure of many of their laboratories because of DOGE and Mr. Musk.

So they want to cut money to schools. They want to cut money to medical research. My way of thinking is that is shortsighted as can be. You can't build a great nation that way. That is not the only research.

I want to tell a story about a young lady whose name is Jeannie Klein-Gordon. Jeannie grew up on a dairy farm in Oregon. During her undergraduate years at Oregon State, she became interested in plant pathology or the study of plant diseases and spent time assisting with research at the USDA Agriculture Research Services.

"I really appreciated the environment there," Klein-Gordon said, of working at ARS during her undergrad years. "Everybody was super nice, very passionate about science and agriculture and helping growers."

Then it was on to 5 years of doctoral work at the University of Florida before moving to Michigan State University for two shorter postdoctoral stints. From there, she applied for a position as research plant pathologist at the National Center for Agricultural Utilization Research in Peoria, IL, commonly known as the Ag Lab.

Here is what she said:

I spent 11 and a half years [to get] this position, and I got the position of my dreams. This is my dream job.

Jeannie Klein-Gordon moved her family from Michigan to Peoria in December of 2023 and set out to work on research projects. She recently focused on red crown rot, a disease that appeared in Illinois in 2018 and presents a significant threat to the State's multi-billion-dollar soybean industry. The team's experiments looked to develop products for farmers to fight the disease.

That all ended on Thursday, February 13. Klein-Gordon's employment was terminated by email at 10:05 p.m. She was 15 months into a standard 3-year probationary period for government scientists, and she wasn't alone. Other Ag Labs across the United States lost their researchers as well.

You know what else—this is not unique to this young lady—they put on the termination notice that these employees were terminated for poor performance when exactly the opposite is true. They were receiving awards for achievements that they had witnessed and been part of in a short period of time. They were probationary employees, but they were on the track to become full-scale senior researchers.

And now they have been terminated, and it has been announced it was done for poor performance. Why would Elon Musk and the DOGE group want to put poor performance on this? So it disqualifies the employee from receiving unemployment insurance. Poor performance, when it is not true, is now going to be part of her resume record.

The good news is, the courts have stepped in and said, once again, that the Trump administration has overstepped in closing these jobs down. You know, this Ag Lab may sound—as I describe the projects, they sound so far-fetched you wonder, Would we really miss that? Can't the farmers take care of themselves? Well, the honest answer is they need help in research, good research, and the Ag Lab in Peoria is one of the best. Most people don't know it, but the Ag Lab in Peoria is responsible for one of the dramatic breakthroughs of the 20th century. They helped to develop penicillin during World War II.

Penicillin was known before, but it just wasn't developed to the point where it could be administered when a person needed it. It was the Ag Lab in Peoria that took up that challenge, and as a result of taking it up, penicillin was available for our troops in World War II and saved countless lives.

Is research worth it? I think it is. Whether it is ag research or medical re-

search at the NIH, it is fundamental to our future. And these researchers, they don't make a fortune. This young lady put 11 years-plus into her education so that she would have this opportunity to come to Peoria and the Ag Lab. And as far as DOGE is concerned, she is expendable—just another probationary employee, let her go. And, incidentally, on the way out the door, stamp poor performance on her resume so she has to answer for that for the rest of her applications. Why? To deny her unemployment insurance.

Well, I think that is cruel and I think it is shortsighted and I don't think that it builds greatness.

JOINT SESSION OF CONGRESS

Mr. President, they cheered, everybody in the Chamber, Democrats and Republicans, cheered when the President said that the Mexican cartels responsible for fentanyl coming into the United States were now going to be characterized as terrorist organizations. I joined in that cheer because I know what fentanyl is doing to this country.

We have a bill coming before us this morning. It will extend the coverage of fentanyl analogs, which in chemical terms means somewhat related to fentanyl but not directly. They are going to be put in the category of dangerous category, as they should be. We have extended that over the years.

I don't think that is enough to end the Federal crisis. I think we need to do more, but it is a good start to continue this classification. I will support it. I think we should have considered some amendments to this bill in the Judiciary Committee, and that is why I voted against it in the committee. But I have consistently supported extending this definition of "fentanyl" to include analogs, and I will do it again when it comes to the floor.

But that isn't enough. We can't stop the fentanyl crisis simply by repeating what we have been doing for the last 6 years. We have got to be innovative and thoughtful. If you want to stop the cartels, there are lots of ways to do it. Sign me up if you are going after this terrorist organization, and it is a terrorist organization. But don't overlook the fact that we are complicit in arming these cartels with weaponry. Forty percent of the weapons recovered in the many raids in Mexico of the cartels, 40 percent of those weapons come from where? The United States of America.

We are selling deadly weapons to these cartels that they are using to kill police and soldiers in Mexico. If this is truly a terrorist organization, and I believe it is, it should be treated as such. Let us put an end, once and for all, to Americans who are selling these high-powered weapons into Mexico and arming these cartels so that they can fight law enforcement in that country. That is inconsistent with the goal of ending fentanyl in the United States.

It is a real test. The firearms industry is pretty powerful in Congress, but can we say, once and for all, when it