

During his campaign, President Trump made it very clear that putting an end to our border crisis was going to be at the top of his agenda, and he has been delivering on that promise.

In just 2 months, his bold action to secure our border and enforce our immigration laws has led to a precipitous drop in illegal crossings at the southern border. U.S. Customs and Border Protection recorded just 11,709 encounters—apprehensions between ports of entry, plus inadmissible aliens—at our southern border for the month of February—11,709.

Just to put that number into perspective, in February 2024, with President Biden, Customs and Border Protection recorded 189,913 encounters at our southern border—189,913 to 11,709, a 93-percent drop.

President Trump and his administration have made incredible progress, and our Nation is more secure because of their efforts.

IRAN

Mr. THUNE. Mr. President, meanwhile, on the international front, President Trump is taking a similarly assertive approach to protecting our country and our interests.

Over the last 18 months, since Hamas's October 7, 2023, attack on Israel, Iran-backed Houthis in the Middle East have carried out literally hundreds of attacks on U.S. international shipping and on U.S. forces. Airstrikes by the Biden administration failed to stop the Houthis' activities, and international shipping has been significantly affected. Ships now routinely avoid the Red Sea and the Suez Canal in favor of going around the southern tip of Africa, a route that means longer travel times for goods. And those ships that do traverse the Red Sea face significant danger to their cargoes and, above all, to their personnel.

This is an unacceptable situation, and so President Trump is taking action. Within days of taking office, President Trump had redesignated the Houthis as a foreign terrorist organization—after the Biden administration took them off the list—and 10 days ago, President Trump ordered extensive airstrikes against Houthi targets. Even more importantly, he has made it very clear to the Houthis that those strikes will continue, unless and until the Houthis cease their attacks on U.S. forces and commercial shipping in the Red Sea.

And because the Houthis do not act alone but with the support of Iran, President Trump is also making it clear to Iran that it needs to stop aiding and abetting Houthi terror. So much of the violence and unrest in the Middle East is carried out by groups funded, armed, and sometimes trained by Iran, and any response to this violence must recognize Iran's role, as well as that of its proxies, like the Houthis.

I am grateful for the long-overdue action that President Trump is taking,

both here at home, on our border, and against Houthi terrorists abroad. It is this kind of decisive action that will encourage our enemies to think twice before menacing our Nation or threatening our interests.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

EXECUTIVE CALENDAR

Mr. THUNE. Mr. President, I move to proceed to executive session to consider Calendar No. 43.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The question is on agreeing to the motion. The motion was agreed to.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will report the nomination.

The assistant bill clerk read the nomination of Paul Lawrence, of Virginia, to be Deputy Secretary of Veterans Affairs.

CLOTURE MOTION

Mr. THUNE. Mr. President, I send a cloture motion to the desk.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The cloture motion having been presented under rule XXII, the Chair directs the clerk to read the motion.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

CLOTURE MOTION

We, the undersigned Senators, in accordance with the provisions of rule XXII of the Standing Rules of the Senate, do hereby move to bring to a close debate on the nomination of Executive Calendar No. 43, Paul Lawrence, of Virginia, to be Deputy Secretary of Veterans Affairs.

John Thune, Mike Crapo, Roger Marshall, Shelley Moore Capito, Tommy Tuberville, Jim Justice, James Lankford, John Barrasso, Markwayne Mullin, Tim Sheehy, Mike Rounds, Todd Young, Kevin Cramer, Ted Budd, Roger F. Wicker, Katie Boyd Britt, David McCormick.

Mr. THUNE. I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The assistant bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

The Democratic leader is recognized.

THE ATLANTIC REPORT

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, yesterday, it was reported that classified war plans were leaked by the Secretary of Defense over unsecured text messages. These text exchanges, confirmed by the administration as authentic, included the Defense Secretary, the National Security Advisor, the CIA Director, the Vice President of the United States, and, unintentionally, a journalist with no security clearance.

For the Defense Secretary to coordinate war plans in such a haphazard and dangerous way puts our national security, our troops, and every single

American at risk. They intentionally put highly classified information on an unclassified device.

Every single Senator, Democrat and Republican and Independent, must demand accountability. I am calling for a bipartisan investigation in the Senate of this mishandling. I am also calling for the Defense IG to fully investigate. This is too serious not to know exactly what happened, why it happened, and how to prevent it from ever happening again.

The Senate and the executive branch have an obligation to fully investigate how this mishandling of sensitive national defense information was allowed to happen. Republicans must not just shrug their shoulders and call this incident "one of those learning moments"—no, no, no. This is a serious matter—a potential breach of classified intelligence, of imminent war plans against America's adversaries.

The Senate as well as all relevant authorities within the executive branch must investigate this incident fully. We need to know how this conversation was allowed to happen in the first place on an unsecured channel. We need to know the potential damage it could have caused our national security. We need to know how to prevent this from ever, ever happening again.

Any Senate Republican who was up in arms years ago about emails and unsecured servers should be outraged by the Secretary of Defense's carelessness. What if Russian intelligence gained access to this text thread and shared it with their Iranian allies? What if the Iranians had shared it with their allies the Houthis—a terrifying thought, putting American lives, the lives of our Armed Forces, in jeopardy.

At best—at best—Secretary Hegseth showed a colossal lack of judgment. At worst, he put America's national security and perhaps American troops in danger. Once he got caught, did Secretary Hegseth take responsibility for this fiasco? Did he exhibit any kind of leadership Americans expect from the man who may deploy our troops into battle, from the man who may send our family members, our friends, our neighbors into harm's way? Did he show how he would do things differently next time? No, he did not. Instead of accepting responsibility, outrageously, Secretary Hegseth attacked the journalist and called him deceitful. He took the "deny till you die" approach even though these messages were already authenticated by the National Security Council spokesperson.

Secretary Hegseth's refusal to accept responsibility yesterday was eerily similar to the way he conducted himself during the confirmation process. I fear how he will react to future moments of crisis. Again, when Pete Hegseth came before the Senate as a nominee, Democrats warned something like this could happen.

These people—Secretary Hegseth and so many others—are clearly not up for the job. We warned that confirming

them was dangerous, that they would behave recklessly, and unfortunately—unfortunately—we were right.

SOCIAL SECURITY

Mr. President, now on Social Security, what is happening at the Social Security Administration is an utter travesty, and Senate Republicans are doing nothing—absolutely nothing—at all to stop it.

As we all know, Social Security is among the most beloved programs that have ever existed in American history, but right now, Donald Trump and Elon Musk—two billionaires, one of them the richest man on Earth—are taking a chain saw—a chain saw—to Social Security. This is one of the darkest examples of Donald Trump's attempt to erode away the American dream. He and Musk are rigging the system more and more in favor of billionaires while stealing from working people in order to cut taxes for the rich.

Let's be very clear. What is happening right now to the Social Security Administration is already a benefit cut. They are shutting off phone lines, closing down field offices, firing staff by the thousands, adding red tape—not reducing red tape, adding red tape—with burdensome new rules. Wait times to talk to someone over the phone are now 2 hours, and in some cases, people wait for 4 or 5 hours. This is not efficiency; it is sabotage.

What Musk and DOGE are doing is a classic hostile takeover. They are swooping in, cannibalizing Social Security from within, and then they will sell what is left for parts.

Make no mistake, if the American people don't believe this is coming directly from Donald Trump, just listen to his address to Congress, where he spent a full 10 minutes spreading lie after lie after lie about fraud, about checks to people who are 150 years old. This is a lie that Trump's own Acting Commissioner has said is false.

What Senate Republicans are allowing to happen to Social Security is deeply immoral, and their silence is an absolute disgrace.

Today, the Senate Finance Committee will hold a hearing on the nomination of Frank Bisignano to lead the beleaguered Social Security Administration. Someone with Mr. Bisignano's background is the last person we need at the Social Security Administration. The Agency is standing on a knife's edge, and now Republicans want to appoint someone famous for shrinking the organizations he has led.

Mr. Bisignano's nomination should go no further after today's hearing. If Republicans care one bit about seniors and their benefits, they should immediately reject his nomination and stand up to DOGE.

A "yes" vote on Bisignano is a vote to cut Social Security. Let me say it again. A "yes" vote on Mr. Bisignano is a vote to cut Social Security, plain and simple.

During today's hearing, we need the answers to some very important ques-

tions—not just from the nominee but also from our Republican colleagues themselves. Do Senate Republicans and Mr. Bisignano agree, for one, that Social Security is a scam like Elon Musk and Donald Trump said? Do they agree with Secretary Lutnick that if seniors miss benefits for 1 month, they will be perfectly fine with it? Do Senate Republicans and Mr. Bisignano plan to do anything—anything at all—to reverse the profound damage that is happening right now to the Agency?

Time is short to stop permanent damage to the Social Security Administration. If Republicans continue to do nothing, the political backlash will be unprecedented.

I yield the floor.

THE PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Wyoming.

TRUMP ADMINISTRATION

Mr. BARRASSO. Mr. President, you know better than anyone, having just won election to this body, that Americans elected Republicans all across the country to get our country back on track. That is what this last election was about, and Republicans are keeping our promises.

Today, more Americans say our country is on the right track than they have said for the last 20 years, and that is because President Trump and Republicans' commonsense revolution is working.

By contrast, what we see with the Democrats—they have abandoned all common sense. The American people are resoundingly—amazing numbers—according to a recent poll—CNN did a poll. They are no friends of Republicans. What did they say? They said that only 29 percent of the American people view the Democratic Party favorably. Even worse, according to a recent NBC poll, only 27 percent of Americans had a positive view of the Democrats.

The Democrat approval rating is at its alltime low in the history of polling in this country. Why is that? Well, let me tell you. It is because Democrats in this body—in this Senate—are taking positions and continuing to take positions that are truly radical. Democrats in this body support people who support terrorism. That is who they side with.

They refuse to protect women in sports. Eighty percent of Americans say we need to protect women and girls in sports against biological men.

Democrats refuse to stand with Israel.

Democrats, through their votes, are trying to support higher energy prices, not lower energy prices. It was inflation which cost them the election—the open borders and the high prices of the last administration. Democrats are refusing to protect taxpayers.

In terms of specific wasteful Washington spending that we have been seeing, Democrats are refusing to allow us to remove some of this wasteful Washington spending. They want Americans to pay higher taxes—\$4 trillion in in-

creased higher taxes is what they are hoping for at the end of this year.

The minority leader, who just spoke, appeared last week on a television show called "The View." What did he do? He spent his time attacking not the abuses against America but against hard-working and successful American families—people who just want to keep more of their hard-earned money; people who don't want to see the government waste it, fritter it away, as we have seen from these examples and lists of money being spent in ways you just wouldn't think makes sense to anyone.

The minority leader had nothing good to say about the innovators or the job creators, the hard-working Americans who make this country great.

Over the last 4 years—the 4 years of the last administration—wasteful spending caused the worst inflation in 40 years. Democrats raised our taxes. They took our money, and they spent it recklessly.

Today, Democrats are pulling out all the stops to block our bold Republican agenda. This is an agenda that the American people support. How do they do it? They don't have the votes in the House. They don't have the votes in the Senate. They don't have the White House. How can Democrats and their radical views be reflected in what is happening in this country? You know they are doing it through radical district court judges.

That is what the American people are hearing about today in the news—radical district court judges who oppose President Trump, oppose his agenda. How many district court judges are there in the country? The number is 677. That is how many there are in the United States. Last week, 1 of them—1 of the 677, just 1 of them at the district court level—ordered a nationwide ban to stop deportation of illegal immigrant gang members. This is wrong. One district court judge in one district court out of 677 of these district judges is saying "stop" for the entire country.

Well, these gang members, these illegal immigrants, they are part of a criminal group, and it is a criminal group designated by President Trump as terrorists. They are murderers and rapists. They are drug dealers. They threaten the safety and security of every American community.

Last month alone, there were 15 nationwide injunctions issued against the Trump administration by who? By activist district judges from Washington to Seattle. These activist district judges think they know better than the American people. Their radical order blocks signature pillars of our Republican agenda, the agenda the American people voted for in November.

These radical activist judges are protecting criminals, they are protecting terrorists, and they are after people that we know we need out of the country—they want to keep them here. They are against accountability. It is clearly an effort by the Democrats and