

their activist judges to try to undo the will of the voters.

Let me be very clear. When partisan, unelected district court judges try to micromanage the President of the United States, that is not judicial review, it isn't checks and balances, it is purely partisan politics, and it is wrong. Radical district judges are not going to succeed in blocking Republicans from getting this Nation back on track.

I applaud President Trump. He is fighting to uphold the rule of law. He is appealing these bad rulings. He is representing the values of the American people.

Let me go back to where I began. Last week, NBC reported Democrats are at the lowest level of support in the history of polling. At the same time, more Americans say that our country is on the right track than they have in the last 20 years. The Republican agenda for America continues to be popular.

Americans want to escape the last 4 years of high prices and open borders. Republicans' shared agenda will deliver safer communities, secure borders, affordable prices, and peace through strength. Republicans are committed, Mr. President, to getting America back on track.

I yield the floor.

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 President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

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

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, let me take you back to January of 1985.

Ronald Reagan had just begun his second term as President, and one of his policy priorities was to include the abolition of the Department of Education. What did it finally take to get him to back down from that commitment? Congress. Congress stood firm to protect this vital Agency in 1985.

In a letter to Senator Orrin Hatch, a Republican Senator from Utah, President Reagan said that, although he wanted to dismantle the Department, "the proposal has received very little support in Congress," and because of the lack of support from Congress, which would be necessary, of course, to close down the Agency, President Reagan decided not to proceed with his plan.

Sound familiar?

That is because, currently, another Republican President, who ran on the slogan of "making America great again," has suggested abolishing the Department of Education—only this time, he is not consulting with Congress; he is taking steps to do it. Last week, President Trump signed an Executive order to close down the Department of Education.

Demolishing the Federal Agency dedicated to the success of our next

generation is shortsighted and deeply damaging to the future of this country. Families, schools, and young people in my State of Illinois and across the Nation depend on the Department of Education. In Illinois, the Department provides critical annual funding for K-through-12 schools to meet the needs of 4,000 schools and more than 2 million students. This includes \$652 million in annual Federal funding for nearly 300,000 kids with disabilities.

I can remember a time when I went to school, and it was rare that you saw a disabled child in school. I don't know where they were—they were being hidden or something or held back—but they certainly weren't being given the opportunities they have today.

That also includes \$778 million in annual funding for schools enrolling 1.3 million students from low-income backgrounds and so much more. These are kids who are attending schools which aren't in the best and wealthiest neighborhoods. They have got good families who care about their educations, and we give them a helping hand to make sure those kids have a fighting chance.

President Trump has repeatedly promised to "send education back to the States," but State and local funds already account for the vast majority of K-through-12 education funding, and States and school districts decide what is taught in schools, not the Federal Government.

Cuts to Federal education programs and funds will hurt the Nation's students and the communities they live in. Shuttering the Department of Education threatens funding for low-income students and special education, and it makes uncertain the future of Federal student loans and Pell grants.

We all know what a Pell grant is. It is an opportunity for a child from a family of modest means to finally go to college. Funding degrees with these Pell grants opens the door for opportunity. It prepares these students to be part of the future workforce and the economy, and it allows America to continue to compete on the global stage. In Illinois, 226,000 students receive \$1 billion in Pell grants to afford higher education—a program that has received bipartisan support.

So what does President Trump plan on doing with these student loans if he abolishes the Department of Education?

Well, they made a proposal. They want to shift the administration's loan program to the Small Business Administration—a separate Agency—while, at the same time, the President and the DOGE folks have planned to fire 40 percent of the Federal employees at the Small Business Administration.

So follow the bouncing ball here. He wants to eliminate the Department of Education and call into question the administration of a program that literally millions of students rely on to go to school, and he is going to shift the responsibilities for administering

that program to the Small Business Administration, which is not a large Agency. At the same time, he is going to cut the number of employees at the SBA by 40 percent.

Do you have any idea what is going to happen as a result of that? Most people know. It is going to be an administrative disaster.

Donald Trump is not trying to move education back to the States. In a real-life shell game, he is moving pieces around until we lose sight of the ball and, in the process, making drastic changes to our education system.

This administration will not stop in its relentless effort to weaken America's public schools. Before signing last week's Executive order, President Trump made significant staff cuts at the Department—already one of the smallest Agencies. He fired more than half the staff at the Department of Education.

Why does he need this money that he is going to bring back to the Treasury by firing these people? Because, of course, he needs to pay for tax cuts for wealthy people. We have seen it before. In President Trump's first administration, he had the distinction of having created more national debt in 4 years than had any previous President. He is out to set a new record this time. It is not that he is just for tax cuts; they have to be tax cuts that really favor the wealthiest taxpayers in America. That is just wrong.

He has fired employees at the Office of Federal Student Aid. He has slashed the staff at the Office for Civil Rights. This means students applying for financial aid will have to wait longer to learn whether they can afford to go to college. It means students defrauded by predatory for-profit colleges won't see the student loan relief they are entitled to.

What am I talking about here?

You can tell the story of for-profit colleges and universities with two numbers: 8 and 30. Eight percent of the graduates of high school in America end up in for-profit colleges and universities, but 30 percent of all the student loan defaults are these same students.

Why this difference, this disparity? They charge too much for tuition. They offer far less education than promised, and the students are often defrauded in the process.

Historically, they have turned to the Office for Civil Rights in the Department of Education to get forgiven some of the loans they have incurred because of the fraudulent conduct of these schools. Now, of course, in closing the Department of Education and closing the Office for Civil Rights, it denies them their opportunity and their day in court. It means weaker enforcement of Federal laws passed by Congress to protect students from marginalized backgrounds and students with disabilities, and it means the students and families with open cases in the Office for Civil Rights are unlikely to see any resolution.

Meanwhile, instead of investigating instances of genuine discrimination, the administration is laser-focused on targeting universities that do not align with its values, in hopes of suppressing free speech and banning transgender athletes from participating in women's sports.

How does closing the one Agency responsible for shaping our Nation's young people and for building the competitive workforce of tomorrow make America great?

It doesn't. Not only will closing down the Department of Education hurt millions of young people across the country and weaken our Nation's future; it is also illegal. The President does not have the power or the authority to unilaterally close these Agencies. That is being tested in court, and the President is not doing well in those tests.

I want to make sure the Department of Education is efficient, and I want to make sure it is responsive. But the notion that we are going to shift all of the student loans to the SBA is an example of someone who didn't think it through. With fewer employees at that Agency, they will be unable to do the job which they were assigned the responsibility of doing, and they will change the lives of a lot of American students in the process.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. SHEEHY). The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. CORNYN. 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 Senator from Texas.

RUSSIA

Mr. CORNYN. Mr. President, for some reason, the Presiding Officer has drawn the short straw to be the Presiding Officer during my daily or frequent speeches here on the floor, though I appreciate your patience and indulgence.

This morning I come to the floor to talk about the Intelligence Committee's "Worldwide Threats" hearing that is ongoing now in the Hart Office Building. We have all the leaders of the intelligence community, including the Director of National Intelligence, there.

We hold this hearing once a year. It serves as an important reminder of where the United States stands in terms of the rest of the world and what you should be concerned about and what we should protect against.

Key among the threats that have been testified to already in open session—and we will be going to a closed, classified session here shortly—but key among the threats discussed this morning was the threat of Russia.

Russia is engaged, of course, in an ongoing hot war with Ukraine, a conflict that President Trump is rightly seeking to end. While this is perhaps

toward the forefront of many people's minds when they think about Russia, it is not the only threat Russia poses to the West, and I use the term "West" advisedly. That is not just the United States. That includes the United States, but it is far broader than that.

Some have described—and I think even the Director of National Intelligence, Tulsi Gabbard, this morning confirmed—that Russia is engaged in a shadow war against the West.

One of the ways that they have engaged in this shadow war is through sabotage. That, again, was also confirmed by the Director of National Intelligence this morning. She said these have included attacks against transportation targets like trains, airplanes, and other vehicles, attacks against government and military targets. And some of these attacks have been directed toward critical infrastructure like pipelines, undersea fiberoptic cables, and the electric grid.

Russia has also targeted industries like defense companies and the leaders of such companies that support their adversaries. These attacks have accelerated in recent years.

Between 2022 and 2023, Russia has quadrupled its orchestrated sabotage attacks in Europe. And then they nearly tripled again in 2024.

And while this behavior has escalated in recent years, it should come as no surprise to anyone who is familiar with Russian history or the history of Russian actions when it comes to their adversaries.

Given Russia's geography, it has always been part of their strategy to extend their westernmost border to provide a larger buffer and a smaller border for Moscow to have to defend. But above and beyond their history of aggressive expansionism, trying to restore, really, the now-collapsed Soviet Union, Russia also has a history of using tactics outside of conventional warfare.

These are tactics that advance Russia's strategic interests and weaken those of its adversaries but may not rise to the level that would merit countermeasures by the target of these efforts.

The Soviet Union, the predecessor to the Russian Federation, has historically heavily relied upon such tactics during the Cold War; for example, the KGB, which was the name of the premier Russian intelligence agency back during the Cold War. The KGB led a campaign to influence public opinion among certain populations to advance Soviet interests. And, of course, that has continued today under Vladimir Putin and the Russian Federation.

One of the reasons the KGB and now the modern intelligence agencies of the Russian Federation use these methods is they do not necessarily trigger article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization agreement. Article 5 is the agreement that an attack against one member of NATO will be considered an attack against all, which is why it is

called a collective defense agreement. And the United States, of course, is one of the signatories to that North Atlantic Treaty Alliance.

And one of the risks of Russia triggering article 5 is that it would necessarily risk a broader war, regional or even worse. And, of course, I know we are all acutely aware of the dangers posed by any country triggering article 5 of NATO.

This is, in part, why President Trump has rightly insisted that our NATO allies increase their defense spending in line with their NATO commitments. It is just not fair or appropriate or, actually, in NATO's self-interest for those countries to depend entirely on the United States, which is why President Trump has said the 2 percent of GDP defense spending requirement is really out of date and that really NATO countries should be spending somewhere closer to 5 percent of their gross domestic product on their defense. Again, that is also to relieve the burden on the American taxpayer who has been picking up the tab for far too long.

And we see the success that President Trump has had by urging our NATO allies to provide more for their self-defense, with France and Germany leading the charge to reinvigorate their defense budgets. That is encouraging, but it takes time. But it needs to start, and it has already started.

But in any case, it is clear that Russia is concerned about anything that might trigger article 5 treaty obligations. Russia, in fact, knows that in a conventional war, it is no match for the West or NATO. And so they resort to behind-the-scenes activities to indirectly advance their own interests and harm those interests of their adversaries without triggering a reaction from the West.

Now, some of these are the reasons why—because Russia knows that it cannot win a conventional war in Europe, were one to break out, is why it continues to rattle the nuclear saber and why Putin, over and over and over again, threatens the possibility of the use of tactical nuclear weapons, which, of course, would be catastrophic for everybody involved.

Some of my colleagues may be familiar—I am sure the public is—with the analogy of a frog in boiling water. If you drop a frog in a pot of boiling water, it will immediately jump out, but if you put a frog in a pot of lukewarm water, you can slowly acclimate the frog to that temperature and it will not jump out. But, of course, once the water comes to a boil again, it will kill the frog and, obviously, be too late.

That analogy, I believe, applies to the threat that Russia continues to pose to the United States and our friends and allies around the world.

This could, in fact, be the West, if we are not vigilant, because we know that the approach and the tactics and the intentions of the Russian Federation have really not changed over time.