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Senate

LEGISLATIVE SESSION

The Senate met at 10 a.m. and was called to order by the President pro tempore (Mr. GRASSLEY).

PRAYER

The Chaplain, Dr. Barry C. Black, offered the following prayer:

Let us pray.

O God, our rock, fortress, and deliverer, we trust You to strengthen us today. Empower our Senators with humility to listen, wisdom to understand, courage to attempt, and power to obey. May they devote themselves to the honorable, the noble, and the good. Keep them from deviating from the path of strict integrity as You guide their hearts and minds in the knowledge of Your love.

Lord, purify their ambitions so that they may set their hearts only on the things which please You. May they find, even in problems, opportunities to discover Your mighty power.

We pray in Your great Name. Amen.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The President pro tempore led the Pledge of Allegiance, as follows:

I pledge allegiance to the Flag of the United States of America, and to the Republic for which it stands, one nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.

RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. MULLIN). Under the previous order, the leadership time is reserved.

CONCLUSION OF MORNING BUSINESS

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Morning business is closed.

DISAPPROVING THE RULE SUBMITTED BY THE BUREAU OF CONSUMER FINANCIAL PROTECTION RELATING TO "OVERDRAFT LENDING: VERY LARGE FINANCIAL INSTITUTIONS"—Resumed

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate will resume consideration of S.J. Res. 18, which the clerk will report.

The assistant bill clerk read as follows:

A joint resolution (S.J. Res. 18) disapproving the rule submitted by the Bureau of Consumer Financial Protection relating to "Overdraft Lending: Very Large Financial Institutions".

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Iowa.

FBI

Mr. GRASSLEY. Mr. President, I am going to ask my colleagues, as a reminder, that there are some tricks of the trade to get to your political enemies or for other reasons like covering up embarrassing situations or just to cover up wrongdoing.

I am going to use and compliment this administration. As one of its first acts after taking office, the Trump administration and Attorney General Bondi shut down the FBI's Foreign Influence Task Force. Despite criticism, this is a positive step, given what the task force had been twisted into by the Biden administration.

This task force was created in 2017 by then-Director Wray for very good reasons. We were told it was designed to counteract maligned foreign influence operations. However, this task force became infected with politics. In other words, this task force came to be used as a political weapon.

So let me explain how this became weaponized.

As an example, in 2020, during my and Senator JOHNSON's Biden family investigation, that FBI task force was

used in unnecessarily briefing us two Senators, but that only happened after pressure from our Democratic colleagues for it to happen. So pure and simple, this was a setup.

The FBI wrongly did the bidding of the Democrats. The results of the setup was this: The contents of that briefing were later leaked to the media, even though the FBI promised Senator JOHNSON and this Senator confidentiality. Those leaks were used to falsely link our Biden family investigation to somehow advancing Russian disinformation. The FBI's conduct undermined and frustrated our congressional investigation.

My and Senator JOHNSON's investigation made public Obama-Biden administration records. That included Treasury information of financial transactions between and among Biden family members. We also made public authentic bank records showing deep financial connection between and among the Biden family and China. Authentic records like these, as we all know now, have nothing to do with Russian disinformation.

So I compliment President Trump and Attorney General Bondi for getting rid of this Foreign Influence Task Force and its obstructive conduct. That is how it ended up.

If the task force did any good, I only know what it did bad, and that was setting Senator JOHNSON and I up because there was some embarrassing information that they obviously did not want out.

I yield the floor.

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. THUNE. 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 MAJORITY LEADER

The majority leader is recognized.

• This "bullet" symbol identifies statements or insertions which are not spoken by a Member of the Senate on the floor.



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S1879

BROADBAND EQUITY ACCESS AND DEPLOYMENT PROGRAM

Mr. THUNE. Mr. President, broadband deployment has long been a priority of mine. It is something that is important to my home State of South Dakota where many rural communities still lack access to reliable internet connection. And it is something I have worked extensively here on in the Senate.

More than 3 years ago, Congress created the \$42.5 billion BEAD Program to bring broadband services to unserved parts of the country like those in my State.

It was the single largest Federal investment in broadband expansion ever made, but to date, it has not connected a single household to the internet. That is right, not \$1 of this \$42 billion program has gone to connect even one household to the internet.

Now, you might ask why. Well, because the Biden administration chose to add a host of conditions to the funding that made it unworkable for many providers like those serving rural areas in my home State of South Dakota.

They added union labor and climate requirements. And despite the law itself banning rate regulation, the Biden administration tried to add that too. The Biden administration took a program that promised to advance an important bipartisan priority and overburdened it with rules and mandates.

The administration added so many requirements that the program couldn't fulfill its core function, which is connecting households to the internet. So we are in a situation today where you have a \$42 billion program that hasn't connected a single household to the internet after, I might add, 3-plus years since its enactment.

Think about that, \$42 billion 3 years ago authorized, not a single dollar spent, not a single household connected. Why? Because the Biden administration weighted it down with so much of their liberal wish list agenda that the providers in this country are unable to even use it.

Well, now we have a new administration in the White House, and Commerce Secretary Howard Lutnick is committed to finally getting this program off the ground and beginning to connect unserved Americans to the internet. This morning, I am sending a letter to Secretary Lutnick with several of my colleagues in the Commerce Committee urging his Department to remove the Biden administration's extraneous requirements that are preventing this program from doing what it was designed to do.

We are asking Secretary Lutnick to look at the restrictive labor requirements in the program that disadvantage rural communities and States with few union workers, right-to-work States like mine in South Dakota.

We are urging the Commerce Department to remove provisions that favor government-owned networks over private investments and guidelines that

prioritize certain technologies over others, which contradict, again, Congress's direction for the program to be technology-neutral.

And we are urging the elimination of climate change mandates and rate regulation that create unnecessary barriers that slow deployment and increase costs.

These regulations undermine the very purpose of the BEAD Program, and by reviewing and ultimately eliminating these unnecessary requirements, we can ensure that this funding is finally deployed to expand broadband access to unserved areas quickly and efficiently.

I appreciate that President Trump and Secretary Lutnick are both focused on ensuring that this program lives up to its goal, and I look forward to continuing to work with them to eliminate the redtape that has undermined its effectiveness and meant that not a single dollar spent or single household connected in 3-plus years since its enactment. That, frankly, is staggering.

The National Telecommunications and Information Administration, or NTIA, which is responsible for administering the BEAD Program, will need to be a partner in that effort.

This afternoon, the Commerce Committee is holding a hearing with Arielle Roth, a staffer for the Commerce Committee and President Trump's nominee to lead the NTIA.

Ms. Roth is very familiar with the burdens that have weighed down the BEAD Program, and I am looking forward to working with them to remove these barriers to broadband deployment after she is confirmed.

Many parts of our country have waited a long time for broadband deployment, and the unnecessary and extraneous rules the Biden administration imposed on the BEAD Program have only prolonged that wait.

It is time—it is high time—to remove these barriers and start getting households connected to the internet.

I yield the floor.

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 minority leader is recognized.

TRUMP ADMINISTRATION

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, so first on tariffs, yesterday, President Trump announced a new round of tariffs of 25 percent on all auto imports into the United States, but we have no details, no timeline, no plan, only more chaos. Donald Trump's trade war has accomplished only one thing to date: chaos.

In the 66 days since Donald Trump has become President, he has had 66 different positions on this issue.

One day he says yes to tariffs; the next day he says no; then the day after he says yes again. Can't make up his mind which country should have them, which country shouldn't, how much, what products.

Donald Trump's tariffs—make no mistake about it, I say to the American people. Make no mistake about it. Donald Trump's tariffs are a national sales tax on American families. Tariffs without a plan will only raise prices without anything to show for it. It is like he is playing Russian roulette with the economy. Whatever seems to pop in his mind one day, he talks about; and the next day it is something else.

Chaos. His trade war is sending stock markets crashing, hurting people's retirement, increasing the risk of a recession. A lot of the banks have increased their risk assessments of a recession because of Trump's actions. Consumer confidence is cratering. Yesterday, we learned people's outlook for the economy has hit a 12-year low, even lower than it was during the height of inflation—a 12-year low.

And how can anyone feel confident about the economy when Elon Musk is taking a chain saw to Social Security? How can anyone feel confident about the economy when Donald Trump is imposing tariffs on people?

The average credit card debt, meanwhile, surpasses \$10,000 for the first time since 2009. With such chaos in the economy, with such chaos in what is going on with tariffs, it is no wonder that the American consumer doesn't have confidence in Donald Trump and the way he is handling the economy. And as a result, the American consumer is being more cautious about spending, keeping a little more money in their pocket just in case something happens. And now it looks like a lot of bad things will.

So the economic alarm bells are ringing. Donald Trump is pouring fuel into the fire by launching America into a trade war with no plan whatsoever. And making things even worse, he is cutting both Social Security and the Agency that helps give Medicaid and Medicare to people.

This morning, the Wall Street Journal reported that Donald Trump and Secretary Kennedy are planning to cut 10,000 jobs—10,000 jobs—at HHS. Let's be very clear what these layoffs represent: an assault on Medicare, an assault on Medicaid, an assault on families and consumers from one corner of the country to the next. When you fire people who provide Medicare and Medicaid, that is the same as a benefit cut. When you fire people who prevent the spread of diseases like measles, America will get sicker, schools will get sicker, people, families, will suffer.

Mass layoffs to Medicare workers will not make things more efficient. Mass layoffs to Medicaid workers will not make things more efficient. It is more sabotage, just like the attacks on Social Security. Donald Trump and

Secretary Kennedy should reverse this attack on Medicare and Medicaid immediately.

And where are Republican colleagues? They say they want to protect Medicare. Some of them are worried about cutting Medicaid. We heard them say it. Well, when you cut 10,000 employees from HHS, you are cutting Medicare and Medicaid in terms of the benefits people will receive—similar to what they are doing on Social Security. They don't say outright they are going to eliminate it, but they try to strangle it. They try to strangle it, and the American people suffer.

So that happened on Social Security yesterday. Yesterday, after a huge wave of public outrage, the Social Security Administration temporarily delayed its plan to cut phone services for seniors and people with disabilities. But this is only a 2-week delay. This is not stopping it; it is just delaying it because of the outrage, hoping it will subside. But it won't. Americans from one end of the country to the other want to keep their Social Security. The outrage will not stop because they know that Donald Trump, Elon Musk, and DOGE want to cut or even eliminate, as Musk said, Social Security. What Donald Trump and DOGE are doing to Social Security is strangulation. They are taking a telephone wire and wrapping it around the neck of Social Security.

But, sadly, it is only the tip of the iceberg of the attack on Social Security. Up to 60 percent of all regional offices are shutting down. Dozens of field offices will be closed. Wait times will explode. Disability claims will face months of delay, and people will be in danger of losing the benefits they so desperately need.

But the administration doesn't care. Listen to this. This is just incredible. It is hard to fathom who is running the show in the Trump administration. Howard Lutnick, the Commerce Secretary, thinks that if seniors lose their benefits for a month, they won't mind. He said his mother-in-law wouldn't.

Spoken like a true billionaire. Once again, I remind Mr. Lutnick not everyone has a billionaire son-in-law, and so many people depend on that monthly check for vital things like food and medicine and rent.

And what have Senate Republicans done while Donald Trump and DOGE take a chain saw to Social Security? Absolutely nothing. They are quiet as a church mouse. Instead, Senate Republicans are moving forward with the President's nominee to lead Social Security, who is a self-proclaimed DOGE person.

Let me tell my Republican colleagues once again: A vote to confirm Frank Bisignano is a vote to cut Social Security. Senate Republicans should think very carefully about their vote, because once the damage is done to Social Security, there is no going back.

Now, on the budget, I want to reiterate something I have said about Re-

publican plans to cut taxes for billionaires while slashing Medicaid for millions of people. It sounds as if Senate Republicans will soon go to the parliamentarian to push their so-called current policy baseline gimmick to hide the true cost of their billionaire tax giveaways. This is budgetary hocus-pocus. Even CHIP ROY called it fairy dust.

Republicans can try to use whatever baseline, whatever fake math they want, but the American people and the markets can see right through it. Don't be fooled by this hocus-pocus, this current baseline hocus-pocus. It will increase the deficit by \$37 trillion over 30 years, and the American people will pay the price in higher interest rates, and American standing in the world will go down.

THE ATLANTIC REPORT

Mr. President, finally, on Mr. Hegseth and what happened this week. Yesterday, I said Pete Hegseth should be fired from his position as Secretary of Defense. In the short time that Secretary Hegseth has been on the job, he has already shown—no surprise to us; we said this at the hearing—that he lacks the judgment and character to lead America's national defense. What we learned yesterday regarding the information he shared on Signal is shocking. He sent very specific details about military plans over unsecured text messages.

Yesterday's revelations were alarming, but they were not enough. We need answers—more answers—because more damage may have been done than the public and all of us know. That is why my colleagues and I are calling on the Trump administration to release the full, unredacted text conversation from this Signal chat, including everything communicated after the journalist prudently removed himself.

We need to know if anyone, if any senior national security official, was using his or her personal devices. Ms. Gabbard's silence on this issue when asked repeatedly in committee was very, very troubling.

And we need to know if there have been other sensitive conversations like this on unsecured channels. Senate Democrats across committees of jurisdiction are taking action. It is encouraging that both Ranking Member REED and Chairman WICKER are calling for a DOD IG investigation.

Now for the past day, the Trump administration has tied itself into knots about semantics. They are spending all their energy on what counts as classified or not, what counts as a war plan, an attack plan, and on and on and on. But that is utter nonsense. The plain fact is that if the Russians or Iranians or the Houthis had somehow known about these texts, if someone more nefarious than Mr. Goldberg had been added to the text chain, our troops would have been in danger. The mission would have been compromised.

And once he got caught, did Secretary Hegseth take responsibility for

his shocking lack of judgment—which is what he should have done? Any upstanding Secretary of Defense would have done that. Did he exhibit the 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 accept that responsibility? Nope, he didn't. Instead of accepting responsibility, Secretary Hegseth attacked the journalist—amazing, amazing; it is like an Alice in Wonderland world—and called him deceitful. He pointed fingers. He blamed the liberal media, moaned about hoaxes.

Mr. Hegseth, this is not a hoax. It is very real and very serious. You should not be in your job.

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

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. SHEEHY). Without objection, it is so ordered.

ENERGY

Mr. BARRASSO. Mr. President, let me start with a simple truth, something we both know. It is good to produce more American energy—energy that is available, affordable, and reliable. It is good for our workers, good for our country, good for our safety, and good for our Nation's security.

We in America are an energy superpower, and under President Trump and Republicans, we are finally beginning to act like it. Last week, President Trump announced a dramatic change. America is going to produce more critical minerals, in addition to more energy, unlike what we had been doing for years in the last administration by locking away our critical minerals. They need to be developed. Interior Secretary Doug Burgum is spearheading this change. It is part of the bold agenda of "mine, baby, mine." It is exactly what America needs to do to get back on track.

There is a growing demand for critical minerals, and America must boost our mining workforce in order to meet it. That is why, this week, I have introduced bipartisan legislation to support our mining schools. The students we recruit, the students we train, the students we empower, the talent that we unlock will fuel America's energy dominance for generations to come. We need to fuel our success by fueling theirs.

A vital piece of the Trump energy dominance strategy is unleashing clean coal. President Trump wants America to produce more coal. I agree. This is good for Wyoming, and it is good for America. Wyoming is America's energy breadbasket. We have world-class coal, and Wyoming's Powder River Basin produces the cleanest burning coal in

the world. Now, the climate alarmists are going to say that coal is the energy of the past. They are misinformed. Clean coal is the energy of the future. Tomorrow's technologies are going to need more affordable, reliable, available energy, not less.

America is making bold innovations in new technology. Only an "all of the above" energy approach is going to sustain it. Coal is one of the most affordable, reliable, and abundant sources of energy on the entire planet. In America today, it is much cleaner than ever before. With it, we can power our data centers. We can win the energy race. We can win the artificial intelligence race. Clearly, this is a focus against communist China, and Wyoming energy producers and Wyoming energy workers are going to lead the charge to victory. American energy dominance is the source of our Nation's strength. It keeps America and our allies safe and secure now and into the future.

We learned from Europe an important lesson: Dependency is deadly. Europe banned fracking because climate zealots in Russia told them to. Europe shut down nuclear powerplants because the extremists told them to. Unreliable and unaffordable energy sources couldn't keep up with the demand for energy. As a result, you know what happened. Europe, last year, spent \$23 billion on Russian oil and gas, and \$23 billion is actually more money than Europe sent in aid to Ukraine. If this doesn't prove that energy dependence is self-defeating, nothing else will.

Under the Trump administration, things are now different. America finally has an "all of the above" energy strategy. On day one, President Trump declared a national energy emergency. President Trump slammed the brakes on Joe Biden's electric vehicle mandate. I have legislation that pulls the plug on the Democrats' electric vehicle subsidies. President Trump withdrew from the disastrous Paris climate deal. President Trump lifted the self-destructive Biden ban on liquefied natural gas exports. President Trump created the National Energy Dominance Council.

The President and Republicans are serious about building the infrastructure we need to power our Nation. President Trump supports new natural gas pipelines and more powerplants. This is a 180-degree turn from the previous administration. For 4 years, the previous administration went on a regulatory rampage. Heavy-handed Washington bureaucrats attacked American energy producers and American energy workers, including those in my home State of Wyoming, and the costs were catastrophic.

Let me ask a few rhetorical questions:

Does anyone believe that America was better off when energy prices rose 31 percent? Of course not.

Does anyone believe that we were better off begging dictators to power our Nation? Of course not.

Were Americans more prosperous? No, we were not.

The truth is, American energy is not the enemy of the economy. American energy is the engine of the economy. American energy is a God-given blessing, and we finally have an administration that treats it that way.

So I applaud Secretary Burgum, Secretary Wright, and Administrator Zeldin. They are America's energy all-stars. Their bold actions are restoring American energy dominance.

Republicans in Congress are working aggressively on legislation that will fully unleash American energy, and here is why: When we produce more affordable, reliable American energy, our Nation is better off. When we empower energy producers and energy workers, America is better off. America has the energy; we have the workers; and we have the capacity to produce energy responsibly. Today, America has a Senate majority that is committed to making America energy dominant.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Democratic whip.

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that I be permitted to speak for 10 minutes and that Senator MERKLEY be permitted to speak for up to 15 minutes prior to the scheduled vote.

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

SOCIAL SECURITY

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, the State of the Union Address was quite a performance by President Trump.

Maybe one of the highlights of humor was when he focused on the Social Security Administration. Remember what he told us? There were 4.7 million "Social Security members"—that is the term he used—4.7 million Social Security members who were between 100 and 109 years old. He went on to say that 1.3 million Social Security members were between the ages of 150 and 159 and that 130,000 were over the age of 160. These were the President's words. He goes on to talk about 1,039 between the ages of 220 and 229—even one who is a 360-year-old person. The place was rocking with laughter to think that a Federal Agency as important as Social Security could be defrauded by people claiming to be this age and still receiving checks—what a great joke, what a misrepresentation of the truth. What the President said was not true. It was misleading. It was overblown. It was inaccurate. In fact, it was just plain wrong.

He delivered this address to a joint session of Congress to the American people—the one time each year when we are focused on the President's words—and he made these deliberate misrepresentations of the Social Security Administration.

He claimed that the unelected billionaire, Elon Musk, and his DOGE boys had identified "shocking levels of incompetence and probable fraud within Social Security." Mr. Musk then

claimed at a later point that tens of millions of dead people over the age of 100 were still receiving Social Security benefits.

Outrageous. Outrageous and untrue.

In his speech, President Trump claimed there was a 360-year-old somehow receiving Social Security benefits as a member. I am not sure what that means. Obviously, it raised eyebrows. How could somebody born in the 1600s be receiving Social Security benefits? It turned out it wasn't true. What the President said was misleading and untrue, not truthful.

The Social Security Administration has databases that include the information of millions of Americans. Some of those records lack a recorded date of death, but of course, that certainly doesn't mean that the people are still alive, and it certainly doesn't mean, further, that they are receiving any Social Security benefits.

The Washington Post obtained internal records which showed the Social Security Administration looked into this very issue last month. What did they find? Only 1,300 Americans over the age of 100 were still receiving benefits. That is far short of the "shocking levels" the President said "of incompetence and probable fraud."

The truth is, you would be hard-pressed to find another Agency that is more closely scrutinized than Social Security. It routinely audits benefit payments to make sure they are accurate. The Office of Inspector General conducted a report in 2024 which found that less than 1 percent of Social Security payments were improper—less than 1 percent—but President Trump's statement made it seem like Social Security is riddled with fraud and incompetence. Payments to a 360-year-old individual? Outrageous. Untrue.

You wonder why he said these things to the American people in his State of the Union Address. I believe President Trump and Mr. Musk are intentionally misrepresenting the challenges Social Security faces as the rationale to implement their harmful policies. The Trump administration's disdain for Social Security is clear.

Elon Musk, the President's unelected buddy, describes Social Security as the "biggest Ponzi scheme of all time," said Mr. Musk, and shared a post on Twitter that called those who benefit from Federal programs—get ready—the "parasite class." The "parasite class" are Social Security recipients.

Secretary of Commerce Howard Lutnick called Americans who were calling in to report missing Social Security benefits "fraudsters." This same billionaire, Mr. Lutnick, bragged that his mother-in-law wouldn't care if she didn't receive a monthly check from Social Security. Well, perhaps, if your son-in-law is a billionaire, you don't care, but most people don't live that kind of life.

These comments are not only wrong and misleading, they are sickening—sickening. These people work their

whole lives paying into Social Security with the promise that it will take care of them when they decide to retire, and now the question is being raised as to whether they were parasites throughout their lives.

First, this disdain for Social Security and the Americans who rely on it can be found in the policies that are being pushed by the administration. The President announced that 7,000 workers at Social Security will be terminated—7,000. That is 12 percent of the total Social Security workforce at a time when the Social Security Administration is facing a 50-year staffing low.

Second, the President announced that Social Security will limit 1-800 phone services. It already takes a half an hour to reach a representative at Social Security. Now there are reports it is taking several hours to get a call picked up if you have a question. Nearly 9,000 people become eligible for Social Security benefits every single day. They should not have to wait hours to speak with someone if they have a legitimate question.

Third, President Trump announced the closure of Social Security offices across America, including some in my State of Illinois. I ran into an individual in the coffee shop in Springfield a few weeks ago. He is retired now.

He said: Senator, it was smarter for me to get in the car and drive 40 minutes each way to Litchfield, IL, to the Social Security office rather than to wait in line for hours at the Springfield office.

Each one of the actions taken by the Trump administration has made it more difficult for seniors and people with disabilities to access their benefits. Americans are worried, some are even terrified, questioning whether or not they will continue to have access to earned benefits and essential services. How do I know? Many have written to me.

Carolyn from Chicago recently told me she tried to call Social Security to make an appointment. She was told the wait time on the phone was 120 minutes. She waited the 2 hours but still didn't get to speak to someone. She hung up and tried again later and was told again it was another 120-minute wait. Imagine waiting on hold for 2 hours for your phone call not to be picked up. Carolyn told me the level of service from Social Security right now is unacceptable. She is kind, and she is right. Americans depend on Social Security and its workers to pick up the phone, answer their questions, and help them secure their benefits.

Social Security is a bedrock of American society. It is a promise. Almost all of us contribute to it throughout our lives and expect it will be there when we need it, but as usual, President Trump is making the problem even worse.

Since 2010, Social Security's customer service budget has been reduced by 20 percent when counting for inflation. Staff has fallen by 11 percent

while 13 million additional beneficiaries have started to receive benefits. For too long, we have asked the Social Security Administration to do more with less, and now President Trump is taking that to an extreme, so I am calling on him to abandon these plans.

If you actually want to make Social Security more efficient, it needs more well-trained people, more resources, more funding. We do not need the recent college graduates in the so-called Department of Government Efficiency to take Social Security for a joyride while their grandparents are in the back, holding on for dear life. We certainly don't need the sage advice of billionaires who cannot begin to understand what it means to live month to month while waiting for a Social Security check as so many Americans do.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Oregon.

NATIONAL DEBT

Mr. MERKLEY. Mr. President and colleagues, back in 1974, the Senate and the House were very agitated over the increases in the national annual deficit that was adding considerably to the national debt. They said we needed to do something about this. The levels that they were concerned about at that time seem so small, to date. The debt-to-GDP ratio was 23 percent. Now we are over 100 percent. The annual deficit was about \$6 billion. Now we are at about \$2 trillion of annual deficit. The total debt was only a third of a trillion rather than, now, \$37 trillion.

But those increases were seen as such a threat to the future of our Nation that Democrats and Republicans together, House Members and the Senate together, said: We have to get this under control. So they created a bill—the 1974 Budget and Impoundment Control Act—to say: We can't let this go forward.

Here is what it did. First of all, it created a fast-track for a special bill called a reconciliation bill that would reduce the deficit and not add more to the debt.

Second of all, it says that we have to have integrity in numbers. When Republicans are in charge, they tend to increase the deficits and then want to use smoke screens in order to say: We are not really doing that. When the Democrats are in charge, the same thing. They both wanted to undertake strategies that increase the deficit but pretend they were being fiscally responsible.

So they said: We must have integrity on the numbers, so we are going to create a new organization. The Congressional Budget Office will be an independent assessor of the cost of any change in law related to programs or related to tax revenue. Honesty and integrity will be the foundation for the debate that takes place in this Chamber. Honesty and integrity will be the foundation for the debate that takes place in the House Chamber down the

hall. Honesty and integrity in numbers will be the foundation for the American people who are following the decision making that is made by their representatives in the House and Senate.

So two pillars: a fast-track for reducing deficits—a reconciliation bill; and integrity in numbers by using the Congressional Budget Office—creating it and using their numbers to have honesty in the debate on policy and revenue plans.

Well, that first pillar was destroyed in 1996 by a nuclear option done by the Republican majority, who said: Do you know what, we are going to reinterpret the law. So instead of just using this fast-track to reduce the deficit, we are going to also use it for tax policy that will increase the deficit.

Today, the second pillar of integrity in the numbers is under attack by the Republican majority. They have lost their minds when it comes to fiscal responsibility. They destroyed first, a couple of decades ago, the fast-track dedicated only to deficit reduction, and now they want to destroy the integrity in the accounting for what a tax policy costs or what a program policy costs—all for a simple purpose, and that is, they have a plan. That plan is to put forward a proposal that would cost an additional amount to the debt of \$37 trillion over the next 30 years. But they want to tell this Chamber that that \$37 trillion addition to the debt is actually a zero-dollar addition. They want to tell the American people that that \$37 trillion addition to the national debt that is in their plan is actually a zero-dollar addition.

I can tell you that a \$37 trillion deception—that is not a minor fraud; that is a major fraud. In the process, they are destroying the integrity not just for this budget cycle but for every budget cycle to come.

The gimmick they are putting forward to accomplish this diabolical plot is called current policy baseline. Why do they want to pursue this Republican plan? Because they want to give tax breaks to the wealthiest Americans and do so not only for a 10-year period but for permanent tax breaks into the future. It is not just magic math. I mean, that is almost too nice of a name to give to it. It is devastating fraud.

Last week, the Congressional Budget Office released a report requested by a Republican Congressman, DAVID SCHWEIKERT. He had asked them: How much will this fraud cost, this Republican plan cost? The CBO laid it out—\$37 trillion of additional debt over the next 30 years.

It so happens that right now, our current national debt is just shy of \$37 trillion. They want to say the debt that has been run up in the last 250 years—next year, we will be celebrating our 250th year as a nation. The debt that has been run up over this first 250 years—we are going to add that additional amount with one bill, with one vote, in this budget cycle. This is fraud on an unparalleled scale.

SCHWEIKERT then said:

Anyone that says current policy baseline [is the right way to go] is engaging in intellectual and economic fraud . . . it's intellectually lazy. My basic mission in life is just to try to create some honest math.

Honest math is what Democrats and Republicans together said they were pursuing in 1974—House and Senate together—honest math. Honest math is on the verge of destruction.

CHIP ROY of Texas said this plan—referring to the plan—“This is fairy dust, and they're full of crap. And I'm gonna call them out on it.”

Anyone who cares about growing deficits and growing debt should call them out on it—\$37 trillion in this Republican plan of additional debt and then adopting a gimmick to tell the American people and this Chamber it costs zero.

In the free market, businesses need transparency—transparency so investors can decide if things are going in the right direction, so the board of directors of a company can change direction. They know that they have to have integrity in their numbers. They know that it is important for their board of directors. They also know that it is important for those who buy their stock, the investors. Without honest numbers, they can't make good decisions about where they are going.

The same is true for us in government. If we are not willing to use honest numbers, we can't make good decisions about how we go forward. It is that important. Integrity and honesty in our numbers are that important.

That is the debate we need to have, an honest examination. Are you for or against a plan that will add \$37 trillion to the debt on top of what additions might otherwise happen under current law? That is the question we will be facing.

This idea of integrity in the numbers existed before the 1974 Budget Control Act, but it was so important to have outside numbers that people could rely on—independent numbers, bipartisan numbers or nonpartisan numbers—that they created a whole Agency, the Congressional Budget Office, to produce those numbers. It is that essential, so you don't have some think tank giving you pretend numbers from the right or some other think tank giving you pretend numbers from the left. It is that important.

You know, this plan, this Republican plan, is like a landlord saying: Don't worry. Your rent is free over the next 30 years because we are not making any changes to your tenant contract.

What a farce because you know you have to keep paying that rent every single month.

So there is \$37 trillion of additional debt being hidden through a gimmick.

I pointed out this enormous addition to the debt, but what is the purpose? It is to give tax giveaways to the richest Americans. Sixty percent of the additional debt goes to the richest 10 percent in America. Half of that addi-

tional debt, \$37 trillion, half of it goes to the richest 5 percent of Americans. So they are not just running up \$37 trillion in additional debt; they are running up \$37 trillion in additional debt to give the vast majority to the already richest Americans. This is a straightforward, simple provision in which families lose and billionaires win.

They are going to attack the spending on Medicaid. That is health insurance that a good third of America, approximately, relies on, that veterans rely on, programs that those with disabilities rely on. They are going to attack that program for tax giveaways to the richest Americans. They are going to steal from Social Security and make it dysfunctional—already, the lines are starting to pile up, and the phones aren't answered—in order to give tax breaks to the richest Americans. They are going to betray working families with a tax on healthcare, housing, and education. Why? To give massive tax breaks to the richest Americans.

The situation is clear: Families lose, and billionaires win.

Democrats are paying attention. My colleagues the Republicans need to pay attention. They said when they were running that they are for fiscal responsibility, that they are for decreasing the deficit, but, in fact, their plan increases the deficits massively—an additional \$4 trillion over the next 2 years and an additional \$37 trillion in debt over the next 30 years—to give tax breaks to the wealthiest Americans while slashing programs that help ordinary working families to thrive.

This is a vast betrayal of Trump's campaign plan. He campaigned on being a champion for families. But that was a campaign. Now he is in office, and the real plan? Families lose; billionaires win.

We must reject this gimmick that destroys the integrity of the budgeting process. One pillar—a filibuster-free pathway for deficit reduction—was destroyed by my Republican colleagues in 1996. The second pillar—integrity in numbers using an outside, independent CBO to give us honest numbers to work with here and for the American people—is going to be destroyed under current policy baseline being proposed right now.

Be awake, pay attention, and say hell no to this massive fraud on the American people.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from North Dakota.

WAIVING QUORUM CALL

Mr. HOEVEN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to waive the mandatory quorum call with respect to the Lawrence nomination.

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

The clerk will read the title of the joint resolution for the third time.

The joint resolution was ordered to be engrossed for a third reading and was read the third time.

VOTE ON S.J. RES. 18

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The joint resolution having been read the third time, the question is, Shall the joint resolution pass?

Mr. BARRASSO. I ask for the yeas and nays.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there a sufficient second?

There appears to be a sufficient second.

The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk called the roll.

The result was announced—yeas 52, nays 48, as follows:

[Rollcall Vote No. 153 Leg.]

YEAS—52

Banks	Graham	Mullin
Barrasso	Grassley	Murkowski
Blackburn	Hagerty	Paul
Boozman	Hoeven	Ricketts
Britt	Husted	Risch
Budd	Hyde-Smith	Rounds
Capito	Johnson	Schmitt
Cassidy	Justice	Scott (FL)
Collins	Kennedy	Scott (SC)
Cornyn	Lankford	Sheehy
Cotton	Lee	Sullivan
Cramer	Lummis	Thune
Crapo	Marshall	Tillis
Cruz	McConnell	Tuberville
Curtis	McCormick	Wicker
Daines	Moody	Young
Ernst	Moran	
Fischer	Moreno	

NAYS—48

Alsobrooks	Heinrich	Reed
Baldwin	Hickenlooper	Rosen
Bennet	Hirono	Sanders
Blumenthal	Kaine	Schatz
Blunt Rochester	Kelly	Schiff
Booker	Kim	Shumer
Cantwell	King	Shaheen
Coons	Klobuchar	Slotkin
Cortez Masto	Lujan	Smith
Duckworth	Markey	Van Hollen
Durbin	Merkley	Warner
Fetterman	Murphy	Warnock
Gallego	Murray	Warren
Gillibrand	Ossoff	Welch
Hassan	Padilla	Whitehouse
Hawley	Peters	Wyden

The joint resolution (S.J. Res. 18) was passed as follows:

S.J. RES. 18

Resolved by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled, That Congress disapproves the final rule submitted by the Bureau of Consumer Financial Protection relating to “Overdraft Lending: Very Large Financial Institutions” (89 Fed. Reg. 106768 (December 30, 2024)), and such rule shall have no force or effect.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

EXECUTIVE CALENDAR

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. HAGERTY). Under the previous order, the Senate will proceed to executive session and resume consideration of the following nomination, which the clerk will report.

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

CLOTURE MOTION

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Pursuant to rule XXII, the Chair lays before the Senate the pending cloture motion, which the clerk will state.