

deserve the benefits are getting the benefits and that people who are scammers and liars and fraudsters and are ripping off the Federal Government, that they get prosecuted for the way they are ripping off the Federal Government.

Now, President Trump is determined to strengthen these programs, and Senate Republicans have promised to deliver relief to senior citizens by cutting taxes on Social Security benefits.

Today, nearly 56 percent of retirees pay taxes on their Social Security benefits as inflation pushes seniors' benefits into higher and higher income brackets. This is inexcusable because people have paid into that.

We had a Lieutenant Governor in Tennessee at one point. He would sum this up by saying: No one should ever be paying taxes on taxes.

People have paid into Social Security, and then, as they retire, they are going to get this money back.

And for the past few years, I have worked on legislation called the RETIREES FIRST Act. It would address this problem by lowering the tax burden on Social Security benefits for seniors by raising the provisional income threshold. Social Security, Medicare, Medicaid are essential programs for millions of Tennesseans.

It is appropriate that we exempt out seniors from paying income tax on those Social Security benefits. It is appropriate that we make certain that these programs are there for the beneficiaries for which they are intended. And it is appropriate that we ask our colleagues across the aisle to join us in making certain these programs are strengthened, not weakened.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Vermont.

AFGHANISTAN

Mr. WELCH. Mr. President, it has been 3½ years since August 30, 2021, when the last American forces withdrew from Afghanistan.

The withdrawal was, by any objective measure, a total fiasco. However, the Biden administration does deserve some credit for evacuating at least 120,000 Afghans in those chaotic days after the Taliban overran Kabul. It was one of the largest—if not the largest—humanitarian airlifts in history. Nevertheless, hundreds of thousands of Afghans and their families remain stranded in Afghanistan and other countries, especially Pakistan.

Many of these people had worked for our government or participated in programs funded by the United States, in women's rights, in education, judicial and economic reform, in counter-narcotics, and many other areas.

These refugees worked with and for our government, our soldiers, our diplomats, and our intelligence officers. Some of these refugees have made it safely to the United States, thanks to the determined persistence of humanitarian organizations, including one in Vermont, the Vermont Afghan Alli-

ance, and the outstanding work of Molly Gray and her staff.

These organizations have advocated for refugees ceaselessly. They have not forgotten what those refugees did for our soldiers in Afghanistan. And these organizations have helped arrange for the practical needs that refugees face—housing, employment, and other social services—upon their arrival in the United States.

I so appreciate the work of the Vermont Afghan Alliance and the many other refugee assistance organizations around the country, including in your State, Mr. President. They have been indispensable in helping us meet our obligation to support the Afghans who helped our soldiers. That is our obligation.

But, ultimately, the resettlement is the responsibility of the Federal Government. In the end, the Biden administration did fall short in its promises to the Afghan refugee population. This population of refugees exists, I state again, because of their work with and for our government, for our soldiers, for our diplomats, and our intelligence officers. We have abandoned our partners in their time of need.

One of the things, the screening process for these refugees became hopelessly bureaucratic, opaque, and fraught with inexplicable delays, including the processing of long-delayed special immigrant visas for Afghans who supported the U.S. mission. Many of them were interpreters. Congress failed by not providing the necessary funds and authority to streamline the resettlement process.

And then, regrettably, in one of President Trump's first Executive orders, signed on January 20, he made the situation exponentially worse by suspending admission to the United States of Afghan refugees. And now Pakistan has threatened to deport them back to Afghanistan where many of them would face the risk of arrest and, literally, execution.

Today, thousands of Afghan refugees are facing total abandonment by the U.S. Government, and this is despite the fact that they completed or they have nearly completed the laborious and time-consuming process of obtaining the necessary security and medical clearances for themselves and their families.

I would like to share one example. For over a year, my office has tried to help an Afghan man, now in Vermont, who worked at the U.S. Embassy in Kabul. This man is working to support fellow Afghans in finding employment for Afghans in Vermont. This man's father served as a Deputy Minister of Justice supporting U.S. rule of law projects.

Since 2021, the father and his family have been hiding in a third country, knowing they would face arrest and persecution if they are deported back to Afghanistan. Then, in December 2024, after years of waiting, they were finally cleared to fly to the United

States. He thought his father was coming home. The son had already signed the lease for an apartment and was paying the rent for this to happen. But since January 20, as a result of the President's order, the father and his family have remained in hiding, preparing for the worst as the son is continuing to pay rent on an apartment that was to be available for his father.

You know, this is really shameful. These are folks who were there for us and our soldiers and our diplomats and our intelligence officers. And the situation for this family is typical of the situation for so many Afghan families who served us.

I have long believed that the U.S. invasion and occupation of Afghanistan was a terrible mistake. Tracking down Osama Bin Laden and the other members of al-Qaida responsible for the September 11 terrorist attacks was justifiable and was necessary. But spending literally hundreds of billions of dollars to try to transform a country of warring clans, led by corrupt and ruthless warlords with no history of democracy, was doomed to fail. Yet we did do that.

And millions of Afghans believed in us, and they shared our vision for that country. And many of them served us, acting as interpreters for the U.S. military or faithfully serving our intelligence Agencies. And these men, some of whom now live in Vermont, risked their lives for us, something that our soldiers take very seriously and have expressed immense gratitude for. Thousands were rushed to the airport in the first frantic days of the evacuation. When they got there—and some who got out—they were told to leave their wives and their children behind and that their families would join them in the United States within 1 year.

This is an obligation we have to those folks who, as a result of the collapse in Kabul, were in serious physical jeopardy. It now is 3½ years later, and I am not aware of a single evacuation or reunification of family members of these men. They are here or elsewhere, and their families are still in Afghanistan.

These refugees, as I stated and will state again because it is the heart of the matter and the heart of the obligation, they worked with our government, they worked with our soldiers, our diplomats, and our intelligence officers, and we have abandoned our partners when they need us.

Some are still waiting on the SIV processing, others on their green cards, and most on the broken promise of reunification. This is really shameful.

These men continue to stand with the United States, working in our communities, paying taxes, and growing our economy. We owe it to them, the Afghans who made it here, and to our honor to bring their families to join them.

Yet there are alarming reports that President Trump plans to ban admission to the United States for citizens of

11 countries, including Afghanistan—here is the part that is so terrifying—with no exception for Afghans and their families who qualify for the special immigrant visas or are awaiting evacuation. That is really unconscionable.

Although the Taliban leadership issued a so-called general amnesty for former officials in the U.S.-backed government more than 3 years ago, the reality is that the U.N. has reported what we knew would happen—at least 200 killings of former Afghan officials and members of the Afghan Army who were trained and equipped by the United States. The Taliban, of course, has also reneged on its pledge to uphold the rights of women, including allowing girls to attend school. Today, the situation that faces Afghan women and girls is literally no better, regrettably, than under the Taliban before the U.S. occupation.

The Trump administration's termination of USAID's assistance programs in more than 100 countries, including Afghanistan, without any meaningful review, has caused people everywhere to doubt that they can rely on the United States. We are putting our reputation in jeopardy.

President Trump and Secretary Rubio provided, literally, no credible explanation and justification, in clear violation of Congress's intent, with the destruction of these USAID Programs. But by abandoning thousands of Afghans who do face persecution if forced to return, we reinforce those doubts. And by doing so, we encourage those who have long seen the United States as a world leader and as a partner to look for more reliable partners elsewhere. That is bad for our national security.

President Trump's January 20 Executive order triggered a 90-day review of our Refugee Admissions Programs. In February, a Federal court did issue a nationwide preliminary injunction prohibiting the implementation of the order. But despite that, despite that court order, the Trump administration issued termination orders to refugee resettlement agencies in States around this country. Again, this is going to affect these folks who work for our government, our soldiers, our diplomats, and our intelligence officers. We owe them. There is no justification for us to abandon them.

I am really concerned about the administration's, what I see as an increasingly brazen flaunting of court orders. I think all of us in Congress should condemn any deviation from abiding by court orders by the administration.

I hope the administration's review of the refugee admissions is not another pretext review like we had supposedly of the USAID Programs. It cannot be an excuse to manufacture a false justification for abandoning the victims of our nation-building debacle. We have to take ownership of what it is we did.

We have to meet our commitments to people who helped us in our efforts in Afghanistan.

This must be an opportunity to expedite—expedite—the resettlement to the United States of these Afghan refugees who trusted in us and whose lives are very much at risk.

TARIFFS

Mr. President, it was a relief, I think, to all of us that the President announced that he was going to pause for 90 days these tariffs that have caused so much turmoil and havoc. It is only a pause, and it also continues tariffs with Canada and Mexico that continue to create enormous havoc for us in Vermont and, I think, for many States in the country as 34 of our States have as their major trading partner the country of Canada.

There is enormous back-and-forth in the car industry, as the Presiding Officer knows better than anyone that these tariffs are very detrimental to. What we saw in Vermont—in talking to our businesses, in talking to our farmers, in talking to folks who have utility bills at the end of every month and whose electricity comes from Canada, and in talking with folks who in the northern part of the State get their gasoline from Canada shipped down to Vermont to gas stations where they go to get it, and our home heating fuel and the disruption and the threat to businesses and the erosion of trust that had been built up for decades—centuries—between Vermont neighbors and Canadian neighbors—was unfathomable.

I am relieved that the President has paused the tariffs, but I am appalled at the manner in which the President and his economic advisers are proceeding without any coherent rhyme or reason or justification for these tariffs on Canada that hurt us so much.

I am going to urge that the administration back off on tariffs that serve no useful purpose but absolutely and directly and immediately are going to do so much harm to Vermont farmers, to Vermont manufacturers, and to Vermont utility customers.

We are struggling in Vermont—folks who work really hard to pay their bills—and the idea that, by Executive action, we would increase the costs of so many families and businesses is totally unjustified. My hope is that all of us here whose constituents face the same repercussions of these reckless tariffs will speak out on their behalf so that folks and businesses can have some security at the end of the month and are not going to have a big spike in their expenses.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Massachusetts.

Ms. WARREN. Mr. President, Donald Trump is trashing our economy.

First, Donald Trump imposed across-the-board tariffs. Then, just a few hours ago, he dropped those tariffs to 10 percent on everyone and moved the tariffs up to 125 percent on China, up from 105 percent yesterday. Now there is confusion. There is chaos. No one knows what the tariffs will be tomorrow or the next day or next week or next month.

But here is what we do know: Are prices still going up? Yes. Are businesses still wary about investing? Yes. Are millions of working people still worried about their jobs and millions of small businesses still worried about closing shop? Yes.

Right before Donald Trump declared that some of his tariffs were off again, he sent out a message to his billionaire buddies. He posted “THIS IS A GREAT TIME TO BUY!!!” Was that market manipulation? Was it corruption in plain sight? We need an independent investigation into market manipulation because Americans need to know whether President Trump or anyone in his administration manipulated the market to benefit their donors all while they are working for the American people and while small businesses and those working families are paying the price.

It is a disaster, but here is the thing: Republicans in Congress have a chance to stop him right now. If they do nothing, they, along with Trump, are responsible for the fallout. Congress could end this dangerous trade war right now by passing my bipartisan resolution with Senator RON WYDEN to turn off the fake emergency authority that Donald Trump is using to impose his worldwide and chaotic tariffs.

So I have a simple question for the Senate: Why aren't we passing this resolution this instant?

Let's take a step back and talk about what has happened since Trump imposed his illegal, across-the-board tariffs 1 week ago today. Americans' retirement accounts took a hit. Businesses started hiking prices, and many are preparing for layoffs. Consumer confidence hit its lowest point in years as millions of Americans wonder will they have a job in 3 months' time. Economists have said that if we continue down this path of uncertainty, recession is inevitable.

We have actually seen this before—in 2008 during the mortgage meltdown and in 2020, as we were hit by a once-in-a-century virus. But this time, there is no mortgage meltdown; there is no virus. No, the crisis is entirely the fault of one person: Donald Trump.

This might be the first time in history that the actions of a single man have destroyed so much economic value around the planet. If we do not reverse course, this catastrophic mistake will seriously hurt people, seriously hurt small businesses, and seriously hurt the United States' position in the world.

We all know what is happening. It isn't possible to turn on a television or check your news feed without seeing it. Every single elected Republican in Congress knows what these tariffs would mean for people—from farmers who are pleading for help as they brace for the trade war, to seniors who are on the verge of retiring and now having to scramble to figure out how they can work longer, to workers who don't know how many more paychecks they will get before being laid off.

I know there are people who say tariffs are always a bad idea. I don't agree. I have long argued that smart tariff