

bother having courts if you are just going to ignore them?

This is a naked attack on the separation of powers, a very serious and damaging one if it ever would be enacted. If Republicans think they can pull a fast one on our courts by slipping this devious provision into their bill, they are dead wrong. Democrats will fight with every tool we have to stop this provision from ever—ever—becoming law.

UKRAINE

Mr. President, and finally on Mr. Putin, yesterday, Donald Trump posted online that Vladimir Putin “very strongly” said “he will have to respond” to the recent attacks on Russian airfields by Ukraine.

Here is what President Trump should have said to Vladimir Putin. He should have said: Vladimir Putin, end this war now. Stop killing Ukrainian civilians. Stop your illegal invasion.

But, instead, Donald Trump is busy announcing Putin’s military plans like a press secretary. Why is he acting like a bystander? He is the President of the United States. Donald Trump should show some backbone. Here is what the President needs to do: His administration has the power to help Ukraine defend itself with air defense systems, specifically, ammunition for its Patriot systems that the United States or our European allies can provide.

Ukraine has said these air defense systems are the best tools for protecting civilian life from Russian military strikes. We ought to do all we can to get them these very needed air defense systems ASAP.

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 President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.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. Without objection, it is so ordered.

SECOND AMENDMENT

Mr. BARRASSO. Mr. President, I come to the floor today to continue Republicans’ fighting, as we are fighting tooth and nail to protect the rights of American citizens. And one of those rights, of course, is one that you and I know very well from our home States, the right to keep and bear arms.

The Second Amendment guarantees that every American—every American—has the right to own and use a firearm, and every day people across your State of Oklahoma, my State of Wyoming, use that right responsibly.

We also know that, for the last 4 years, Joe Biden, CHUCK SCHUMER, and the radical Democrats have waged a war against the Second Amendment rights of American citizens. They tried to ban firearms, tried to tax ammunition to the point where it couldn’t be afforded, directed the ATF to harass law-abiding gun owners, tried to make it impossible for citizens to buy, own, transport, or use a firearm.

So now Republicans are in control in the Senate, the House of Representatives, and the White House, and we are defending the Second Amendment from those who would try to take it away from us.

Senator CORNYN of Texas has introduced the Constitutional Concealed Carry Reciprocity Act. This bold legislation allows qualified citizens to exercise their Second Amendment rights in any State that respects concealed carry.

Senator ROGER MARSHALL of Kansas has introduced something called the SHORT Act. This legislation stops rogue bureaucrats—Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms—from harassing lawful gun owners. It shields citizens from unconstitutional gun registration schemes.

Senator BILL HAGERTY of Tennessee has introduced the Protecting Privacy in Purchasing Act. This legislation is a direct strike against Democrats’ alarming overreach on gun purchases. It will safeguard gun owners from the government’s invasive tracking and spying on lawful purchases.

So, look, I am proud to be a cosponsor of all three of these pieces of important pro-freedom legislation. This fight is one of the most important that we are ever going to conduct. It is Democrats across the country that are determined to take away the rights of law-abiding American citizens.

They are pushing their anti-gun agenda in the courts. It is another place this is being fought out. They are scheming right here in the U.S. Senate to come after our Second Amendment rights.

When Democrats held the majority, we know what we saw. They had the audacity to try to ram through an unconstitutional so-called assault weapons ban, and they tried to do it by unanimous consent, coming here onto the floor and just trying to sneak it through. Well, I was proud to stand here in this Chamber, face them down, and emphatically say no to your unanimous consent.

Now Democrats are in the minority. Have they changed in terms of their beliefs in the Second Amendment? No, not at all. They continue to be obsessed with banning semiautomatic firearms simply because of the way the firearms look. That is what they are after. Let me be clear. Democrats’ ban on so-called assault weapons—that is their phrase—is an assault on law-abiding gun owners, an assault against all of us. Every single page of their bill adds a new restriction, a new burden, and a new attack on citizens who follow the law. It dictates what you can buy and what you can’t buy, bans more than 205 popular rifles, shotguns, and pistols, and it bans them by name. That is how extreme they have gotten. They want to trample on the rights of law-abiding citizens.

And it is a fascinating thing because they—instead of tramping on the rights of law-abiding citizens, they are

out there trying to protect illegal immigrants’ rights, saying they have rights. They don’t.

That is the contrast of our party fighting for the rights of citizens, their party fighting for the rights of illegal immigrants.

Democrats are the party of defunding the police, the party of disarming the American people. Their actions have made our streets more dangerous, not safer. We are for safety and prosperity. They seem to be not for either.

So I oppose any of these policies that threaten the Second Amendment rights of the people of Wyoming, the people of your State of Oklahoma, and the people from States all across the country.

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.

RESCISSIONS

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, on Tuesday, President Trump sent Congress proposed rescissions. A rescissions bill is a cut to already enacted and funded programs. Looking closely at those cuts that have been proposed by the administration, I would like to speak to them this morning on the floor.

Where has the President suggested we cut a very miniscule percentage of the Federal budget to fund deficit-busting tax cuts for the ultrawealthy? From bipartisan programs—programs that both parties have supported for years: programs that help the poorest in the world survive, even lead a normal life, suffering from HIV and AIDS; that help countries become healthy democracies and trading partners, literally, for the United States; that support peacekeeping efforts to prevent the spread of war and migration; programs that counter Chinese influence and help stem the flow of illicit drugs; radio and TV stations that provide news for America. That is where the President turned to make the cuts that he wants the money for to pay for tax cuts for the wealthiest people in America.

For as long as I have been in Congress, there has always been a strong bipartisan support for foreign assistance programs. You ask the average person in the street, in Illinois or Oklahoma: What percentage of the Federal budget do you believe is spent on foreign aid?

The guesses are usually 10 to 20 percent. It is less than 1 percent.

There was an understanding that modest efforts like those, which cost just over 1 percent of the Federal budget, were the right thing to do by both political parties. You see, by helping stem pandemics and war and helping countries become healthy, free-market democracies, we are actually helping

our own country. We are stopping wars and upheavals before they start and spill over borders, alleviating the future need to send our troops into harm's way and strengthening our own national security at home by mitigating instability around the world.

We are creating allies in the process and trading partners for U.S. farmers and other American businesses that make for good jobs here at home.

We are also demonstrating the best of America when it comes to our values—compassion and ingenuity—something President George W. Bush understood when he created PEPFAR, which has saved millions of lives around the world from HIV and AIDS.

That is why Ronald Reagan and John McCain—no pushovers—understood the incredible power and strategic value of helping countries across the globe become free, democratic, and prosperous.

So why in the world would we cut such low-cost but impactful programs? I don't understand it. If there were international programs that were ineffective—and I admit such work can be difficult and with mistakes—then the place to fix them is through the regular appropriations process, not the wholesale gutting of a complete program like USAID.

CORPORATION FOR PUBLIC BROADCASTING RESCISSIONS

And a word, Mr. President, on the equally shortsighted proposed cuts to public broadcasting. While President Trump claims that eliminating funding for public media will end PBS's and NPR's so-called "woke" agenda—I can't even define that for you, but that is the reason given—he fails to understand that more than 70 percent of this funding goes to local public media stations.

I think people in Central Illinois, where my home is, would be hard-pressed to even explain to you what a "woke" agenda is on National Public Radio.

In rural communities, these publicly funded news stations are often the only place to get good, up-to-the-minute information and to have the kinds of warnings that are necessary when extreme weather is on the way. They provide local news coverage, educational programming, and emergency weather alerts.

Without public broadcasting, how will people in Kansas and Texas learn of tornado alerts? How will children who lack access to preschool in Idaho or in South Dakota be able to receive any education before kindergarten?

These cuts make no sense, and I call on my Republican colleagues, in a bipartisan fashion, to look at the impacts they are going to have objectively across America.

GAZA

Mr. President, on a different topic, I want to say a few words about the tragic war in Gaza. There has been so much suffering, so much death, so much destruction.

The Hamas attacks on Israel of October 7, 2023 and the taking of hostages,

with some 20 or 30 still left in captivity, left a stunned and grieving Israel with a difficult decision. From the start, I urged Israel to learn from our mistakes in the United States that we made in anger after the terrible attacks of September 11. We shouldn't make these life-and-death decisions, we have learned, in the fury of emotion. But I fear that lesson was not followed, and the near total destruction of Gaza and humanitarian suffering will be seen as terrible mistakes—mistakes that will cause generations of pain and will hurt Israel's ultimate relationship with its allies in the future.

Late last year, after more than a year of horror on this small strip of land, I thought we were finally seeing some progress toward the release of the remaining hostages, a long-term ceasefire, and an easing of the humanitarian crisis. There have also been growing public demonstrations from Gazans who are bravely protesting for an end to the rule of Hamas. That is good news. These protesters face serious threats and risk of arrest by Hamas, but they still do so, knowing Hamas has to go and does not have the people's real interests at heart in Gaza.

But instead of building on these modest but important openings, Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu continues to put his own political survival ahead of everything. Instead of a more surgical response to Hamas or offering a long-term vision for Gaza under reformed Palestinian leadership, Netanyahu has offered nothing. He has blocked all aid to Gaza for 3 months, with experts warning of mass starvation, and he has restarted the fighting with no short- or long-term strategy. The only strategy is to keep his coalition in Israel intact. Netanyahu knows his coalition won't stand for any kind of two-state solution, so he avoids this viable path, instead threatening untold innocent lives by blocking and undermining aid delivery and restarting a dubious military offensive.

Key allies and the new Pope, Pope Leo, continue to make appeals to allow aid to flow into Gaza before the famine and starvation take hold completely.

Just the other day, former Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert said:

The government of Israel is currently waging a war without purpose, without goals or clear planning and with no chances of success.

Those are the words of former Israeli Prime Minister Olmert.

I implore our Israeli allies to pursue a cease-fire that sees the release of all remaining hostages, allows sufficient aid to flow, and advances a serious postwar vision for two states.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. MORENO). The Senator from Oregon.

NOMINATION OF JAMES O'NEILL

Mr. WYDEN. Mr. President, I urge a "no" vote on Jim O'Neill to be the Deputy Secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services.

His nomination comes before the Senate as Republicans push ahead on

an agenda that is going to cut Americans' healthcare by more than a trillion dollars and cause 16 million Americans to lose their health coverage.

The legislation is filled with ideas straight out of the for-profit insurance industry's playbook. Republicans are rolling out more redtape at a time when Americans are already sick of jumping through hoops so that insurance companies can continue to post profits.

The legislation, in my view, is also a disaster for America's senior citizens. A million low-income seniors are going to see their Medicare premiums go up by nearly \$200 a month.

The legislation is going to make nursing homes less safe for frail, older people. In a word, they are going to start taking the nurses out of nursing homes. If Mehmet Oz has his way, nursing homes would replace staff with AI bots. That is not going to work for a senior who needs help getting to the bathroom in the middle of the night.

The legislation is going to hurt hundreds of thousands of seniors and kids with disabilities by reducing services for those who count on Medicaid to get care at home.

Americans have heard a lot about Medicaid in the bill, but the legislation is such a deficit buster that it is going to trigger \$500 billion in Medicare cuts. This legislation is going to hit rural hospitals like a wrecking ball.

This comes on top of the Trump administration stepping back from tough negotiations with the big pharmaceutical companies that would lower the cost of medicine.

Here is the truth: Trump and Republicans are willing to kick millions of folks off their health insurance and hurt older Americans so there will be more tax breaks for corporations and the ultrawealthy.

I asked Mr. O'Neill in the Finance Committee to basically give us a straight up-or-down on whether he is going to oppose cutting Medicaid during his confirmation hearing. All he would do is repeat the same tired talking points about how only certain groups of people deserve healthcare.

The Trump administration and Republicans in Congress are simply unwilling to defend the bill. They know it is morally bankrupt. They basically won't even talk about it in public. I guess that is why we are not having an open-to-all Finance Committee discussion or markup of the bill because I guess the Republicans would rather just pretend to make up what the bill actually is all about.

Mr. O'Neill has gone out of his way to defend Robert Kennedy's disastrous approach to prevent infectious diseases like measles. To make matters worse, Mr. O'Neill expressed his support for Kennedy's appalling views about the livelihoods of Americans with autism.

As Deputy Secretary of Health and Human Services, Mr. O'Neill would be Robert Kennedy's right-hand man. That person needs to be willing to challenge the Secretary's worst impulses,