

I am going to end on this note. I am going to end as I began: What you do is what you believe, and everything else is just cottage cheese.

I have been here 10 years. Every one of those 10 years, but especially in the last 100 days since President Trump was reelected and started talking about reducing spending, I have listened to all of my Republican colleagues encourage the President and say: That is great. We have got to reduce spending. We have got to reduce spending.

Well, here is your chance. Here is your chance. It is gut-check time. You either believe in reducing spending, or you don't. You either support spending porn, or you don't. We are going to find out who does and who doesn't here in about 3 or 4 hours.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Vermont.

DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY

Mr. WELCH. Mr. President, the Department of Homeland Security has an extremely important mission: to keep Americans safe. Under that mission, the Department is tasked with two critical jobs: border security and disaster response.

Our current Secretary of Homeland Security, Kristi Noem, has failed both. In her short tenure, Secretary Noem has overstepped, underperformed, and endangered the lives of countless Americans. I believe it is time for Secretary Noem to resign or for her to be fired.

Secretary Noem has undermined FEMA's work and, in so doing, endangered disaster victims. Just a few months ago, Secretary Noem said in a Cabinet meeting:

We are eliminating FEMA.

And she meant it. She meant it. We saw evidence of that in what happened not just in Texas but in North Carolina, New Mexico, California, Kentucky, Hawaii, and Vermont, where FEMA is absolutely crucial to helping people in communities and businesses recover from disaster.

We need FEMA. It is only the resources of the Federal Government that can surge resources into affected communities. We can't lose that function and that capacity. When you need safety from a flood, when you need to start the long road to recovery, you need the support of the Federal Government. No State, no community can do this alone.

I have seen from our experience in Vermont that FEMA, in fact, must be reformed. It must not be destroyed, as Secretary Noem has suggested.

In my view, we cannot have a leader in charge of FEMA who is committed to its destruction. We must have one who is energetically committed to its reform.

We have seen the result of Secretary Noem's indifference to FEMA as the catastrophe in Texas unfolded. As the waters rose along the Guadalupe River

in Hill Country, it was the people of Hill Country, as my colleague Representative CHIP ROY of Texas said, who responded heroically. They were saving lives; they were rescuing stranded children; they were comforting those who lost loved ones; and they provided material assistance and constant support.

As for FEMA, it didn't answer the phone. Secretary Noem had instituted a policy to micromanage FEMA to death. Under Secretary Noem's watch, FEMA instituted a new policy that required the Secretary's signature on any expense more than \$100,000, which, at the time of a major catastrophe, is a very small amount.

Secretary Noem had an "eyes wide open" awareness that this policy would mean it would take "a minimum of five days for front office review." In a disaster, you do not have 5 days.

Contractors for FEMA answered the vast majority of calls—about 3,000—from flood victims on July 5. But according to news reports, after contracts with those companies were allowed to lapse, that response rate fell to 36 percent on July 6 and then only 16 percent on July 7. When people needed someone to answer the phone, FEMA left 13,793 calls unanswered.

In the aftermath of disaster, people cannot wait for help. Many are homeless or living in very dangerous conditions. Search and rescue teams were waiting to be deployed. Disaster recovery centers were slow to open. Current and former FEMA employees have raised the alarm about how slow the Federal Government was to respond and support Texas. We can reform FEMA in very commonsense ways—and we must—but we cannot risk the lives of countless Americans under the mismanagement of a Secretary who has called for its elimination.

There is a second reason Secretary Noem must resign. She is failing our country on immigration. We have three fundamental issues on immigration: border security, the deportation of criminals, and the status of people who are here without legal status but are working, are paying taxes, in many cases have families, and have no criminal record.

I want to step back for a minute and acknowledge something that too many Democrats have been too slow to state: The United States does need a secure border, and President Trump has largely accomplished that.

In December 2023, there were 249,740 illegal crossing arrests between official ports of entry. That was an all-time high. Last month, that number dwindled to 6,070 illegal border crossing arrests. I give President Trump credit for that change.

The second issue is that undocumented immigrants who have committed serious crimes should be held accountable. They should be prosecuted, punished, and deported. There is widespread consensus on that.

Yet on the third issue, those who are here without committing crimes, who

in many cases were brought here as young people, we are seeing under the leadership of Secretary Noem that her response is an across-the-board embarkation on a massive and far-reaching deportation plan. There is no distinction in her policy among those who were brought here as children, who have families, who have jobs, who pay taxes, and who serve their communities.

But there is a big difference between deporting known criminals and rounding up immigrants—some of whom have status to be here, in fact, are here legally—from work sites, from schools, and from churches. This mass deportation policy is not about serving America and doing what our country needs to be strong and safe. It is, instead, about Secretary Noem accumulating the highest possible head count of deportees. It is hurting those folks, their families, and their communities, of course, but it is also hurting America and, particularly, rural America.

Our farmers depend on labor to milk their cows and to pick their crops. It is weakening our construction industry, where workplace raids are shutting down construction sites, including for low-income housing, which we so desperately need. It is decimating our healthcare workforce, in the hospitality industry in every State of the Union.

We need a Homeland Security Secretary who will help us develop a sensible policy for folks who are here without status but have no criminal record, who work, who have families, and are taxpayers.

There is no restraint. There is no nuance. There is no judgment being applied by the Department leader, the Secretary of Homeland Security, to develop a policy that makes sense, a policy that balances security and our economy, a policy that makes a distinction between law-abiding people who know no country other than the United States of America versus criminals who should not be allowed to remain in the country.

And finally, I have significant concerns about Secretary Noem's fiscal mismanagement and self-aggrandizement as DHS Secretary. This fiscal issue is particularly important in light of the billions of dollars that were allocated to that Department in the recent legislation.

Secretary Noem awarded as much as \$200 million for an ad campaign that she started, thanking President Trump for his immigration policy and warning migrants in the United States to leave, a campaign that was reportedly awarded to a Republican campaign consultant.

Secretary Noem spent \$21 million to transport 400 migrants to Guantanamo Bay—\$55,500 per person.

Do we really need to spend that much?

And several of those migrants were quickly transferred out of the facility.

There are also too many instances of Secretary Noem putting her personal

ambition ahead of her mission responsibility. She has posed for photos and videos using detained people as props. She has joined television interviews in various uniforms—as a Border Patrol agent. She has treated ICE raids as political theater.

And while in Vermont at the Haskell Free Library and Opera House—it is a library that sits directly on the Vermont-Canadian border—the Secretary jumped from one side of the line in the middle of the library and parroted terrible things about Canada; “51st State”—and then she jumped back, “United States”; “51st State, United States.”

That was deeply offensive to Vermonters who have an enormous amount of affection for our Canadian neighbors, and we have suffered the consequences of dramatic downsizing of our tourism industry—totally unnecessary, totally provocative and wrong.

We have an obligation to protect the safety of the families that all of us represent, and I urge every one of my colleagues to demand better for our constituents and for every American. We need a Secretary at the Department of Homeland Security who puts public safety and preparedness before her personal image or political aspirations.

Secretary Noem must resign.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Tennessee.

RESCISSIONS

Mrs. BLACKBURN. Mr. President, I am so pleased that we are going to move forward today on the rescission package that has come over to us from the House.

As I talk to Tennesseans, one of the No. 1 things they talk about is the debt; what are we doing to stop the out-of-control spending and to get this national debt under control.

After you look at what happened with COVID and with the Joe Biden years, we are sitting at \$37 trillion in debt. So last November, the American people voted to make a change on how this country is running. One of the things they wanted to see changed was out-of-control, reckless spending.

Now, if you look at this debt and where it stands right now and you say: How much am I, as an American citizen, responsible for, each and every citizen in this country would be holding \$108,000 in debt. Think about that. All of our citizens, each and every one of us—whether you are the dad, the mom, the children—each and every citizen bears the burden of \$108,000 in our Nation's debt.

One of the things that came up this weekend when I was at home and somebody was asking about the rescission package and when we were going to get this done and start making some of the cuts, start making the DOGE cuts—this was a veteran, and they pointed out that they were aware that we are spending more money to pay the interest on our debt than we are spending to fund the U.S. military.

Think about that. Think about what that message is that goes to other countries as they are looking at what we are spending on national defense compared to what we are spending on our debt.

What does that say about the priorities that we have as a nation?

So Tennesseans know that the path we are on with this spending is not sustainable. We can't continue this.

When you look at where we were with our debt when George Bush was President and we were at about \$10.5 trillion when he left the Oval Office and Barack Obama and Joe Biden come in, and they doubled that number; you had President Trump's first term and COVID hit; and then the out-of-control spending by the Biden White House, that is how you end up at \$37 trillion, and it should concern everyone.

I guess we are learning the autopen was signing a lot of those sales receipts over at the White House. The point is, we have this debt.

Now, the good thing is, that when the American people voted to get this spending under control last November, they sent President Donald Trump back to the White House, back to the Oval Office. And, yes, indeed, he has gotten busy looking at how we spend the taxpayers' money.

He has spent time looking at the resources that we have and how we utilize those resources. And indeed, they have targeted \$190 billion in this year's budget documents for waste, fraud, and abuse and for removing those programs to yield that savings to the American people.

And I think the American people see this as a victory for them and for their pocketbook. Hard-working taxpayers want to keep more of their money. They don't want to be sending it to DC for programs that outlived their usefulness, programs they have never heard of, programs that they don't want.

So we have the opportunity now to go in and claw back some of that money, draw a red line right through the middle of those programs in that budget document and make these savings permanent.

Should we do that? Absolutely. We should be doing that.

That is why you are seeing Republicans here in the Senate choose to move forward on the rescission package that will save \$9 billion out of this year's budget. And you know, as you think about it, budgets are 10-year windows so you are not going to see those items next year or the next or the next. So you are going to compound those savings.

Nine billion dollars each year in that 10-year budget—those savings mount up, and it is what the American people are wanting to see us do, to get rid of some of this reckless spending.

Now there are some good examples of programs that we are going to draw that red line through those programs and eliminate them from this budget document. There is \$1.1 billion for the Corporation of Public Broadcasting.

Now, this is an organization that funds NPR and PBS. And what we know—think about NPR. They have been pushing a leftwing ideology using the taxpayers' money for years. And my colleague from Louisiana Senator KENNEDY talks some about Katherine Maher, who is NPR's CEO, and the things that she has had to say about President Trump.

She has called him all sorts of names. Now, she is not somebody that is neutral, and she is not somebody that wants to give you a point and a counterpoint. She has an opinion, and she is using your tax dollars to spread her opinion far and wide.

One of the things that they did ahead of the 2020 election, NPR refused to cover the revelations about Hunter Biden's laptop and his overseas business deals. And at that time, NPR's leadership had this to say:

We don't want to waste the listeners' and readers' time on stories that are just pure distractions.

Now, that was their opinion. They are entitled to that opinion, but they are not entitled to take the taxpayers hard-earned money and spend it to push their opinion.

As we now know, they were wrong—they were wrong.

Now, the rescissions package that is coming before us also cuts billions of dollars in foreign aid spending that really does nothing to promote American values and interests around the globe. Here are a few of these things.

There is a \$4 million item for “sedentary migrants” in Colombia. That is their term. That is the line item—\$4 million for “sedentary migrants” in Colombia.

There is \$3 million for an Iraqi version of “Sesame Street.”

There is \$1 million for voter ID efforts in Haiti; \$500,000 for electric buses in Rwanda; \$6 million for “Net Zero Cities”—that means no carbon emissions—“Net Zero Cities” in Mexico; and \$2.1 million for “climate resilience” in Asia, Latin America, and Africa.

I could stand here for hours and go through some of the ridiculous, absurd items that are listed and the amounts of your money that you have earned and you have sent to Washington, DC, to be spent on God knows what.

So it is important that we look at this, and, yes, we are going to make reductions in spending in the appropriations process, but do you know what? Doing these cuts helps to push this forward.

You know, there is also some money in this rescission package that is going to be removed from some of these international organizations that work against our interests.

Now, all during COVID, we heard about the World Health Organization and how the World Health Organization was covering up for China, and they were going to be certain that they covered for China, and we would not know the truth about what happened with COVID.