

NOMINATION OF KASHYAP PATEL

Mr. President, on an unrelated issue, tomorrow the Senate Judiciary Committee will hold a confirmation hearing for Kash Patel, President Trump's nominee for FBI Director.

What is the Federal Bureau of Investigation? We all have an image of it from television and from life experience. But it is 38,000 men and women, some of the best law enforcement professionals in not just in the United States but in the world, who are charged with keeping America safe.

I witnessed 9/11 in this building, looking down the Mall, watching billowing smoke coming in from the plane that crashed into the Pentagon. And we thought to ourselves immediately: Who is doing this to the United States? Whom should we ask? The Federal Bureau of Investigation. And that is what we did.

Time and again, we have gone to the FBI when the most serious law enforcement issues came up, and we still do. It is a critical Agency—38,000 employees and investigators, 400 offices all around the world. The person who heads the FBI has an awesome responsibility and an awesome authority.

Kash Patel is the nominee of President Trump to head up this Agency. Let me tell you about him.

I met with him, and I reviewed his record. I am deeply concerned about his fitness to serve as FBI Director. He has neither the experience, the judgment, nor the temperament to head this critical Agency.

As the lead investigative Agency of the Federal Government, the FBI plays a crucial role in keeping America safe from terrorism, violent crime, and other major threats. Our Nation needs a Director of the FBI who is ready on day one and who understands the importance of maintaining the integrity and independence of the Agency.

Unfortunately, Mr. Patel's record of service to the government demonstrates the opposite. He has pledged his loyalty to President Trump and promised to weaponize the FBI on President Trump's behalf. Mr. Patel has published an enemy's list of 60 people whom he called "government gangsters." He told far-right extremist Steve Bannon that "these people need to go to prison." I am not going to go through all the names, but Mr. Patel has published it in his book, which I had an opportunity to read, not once but twice.

"Government Gangsters," it is called. It spells out in detail his enemies list—his hit list—that he would have. This list includes many distinguished public servants who dedicated their lives to our Nation. Among them are Democrats and Republicans, including former Trump administration officials like Secretary of Defense Esper.

And then there is Mr. Patel's plan to "shut down the FBI Hoover Building on day one and reopen it the next day as a museum of the 'deep state.'" This

man wants to head the FBI and calls for closing down its headquarters the day after he would have that authority—for goodness' sakes.

Mr. Patel has peddled debunked conspiracy theories throughout his adult life that benefit President Trump. Patel claims that January 6 was "never an insurrection" and the FBI—get this now; this is what Patel says: The FBI "was planning January 6 for a year."

Can you imagine that? He has even coproduced and sold recordings of a song performed by January 6 rioters who violently assaulted our police officers.

During tomorrow's confirmation hearing, I will continue to press Mr. Patel on his many statements and positions. Will he focus on keeping the public safe from terrorism, drug trafficking, and violent crime, or will he focus on his trail of grievances and President Trump's agenda?

I fear Mr. Patel's record demonstrates the latter.

President Trump came into office promising to shake up the government. What he has done is wreak havoc.

Late Monday, President Trump, through a bureaucrat I never heard of, Matthew Vaeth, the Acting Director of the Office of Budget Management, ordered a freeze of Federal funding, which was set to begin at 5 p.m. last night. Thankfully, a Federal judge stepped in and temporarily blocked the sweeping, unconstitutional order until February 3.

Should this order be allowed to take effect, it will have devastating consequences, ranging from preventing communities from accessing natural disaster relief to halting food assistance.

Today, I want to speak specifically about how this action would harm the National Institutes of Health and medical research.

The National Institutes of Health is the premiere medical research Agency in the world—the premiere medical research Agency in the world. The \$38 billion they spend each year makes America and the world better by finding new drugs and cures for serious diseases. They support more than 400,000 jobs nationwide in medical research—jobs focused on conducting that research that leads to these cures and treatments that save lives.

Can you think of any more important Federal responsibility other than perhaps national defense?

Because of the work funded by NIH with taxpayer dollars, people with cancer are living longer and even being cured. HIV/AIDS is no longer a death sentence, and groundbreaking treatments exist to slow the progression of neurological disorders such as ALS and dementia.

Chances are, if you or a loved one takes any medication, you have NIH to thank, because 99 percent of the drugs approved over the past decade benefited from NIH research—99 percent.

Chances are, if you or a loved one ever get sick and wonder what options exist to save your life, the doctors will suggest a treatment developed by NIH.

Late last week, President Trump ordered NIH to stop all grant reviews and advisory council meetings, which allow researchers to decide what are the new research proposals we are funding.

Monday night, President Trump went a step further with his order coming down from the Office of Management and Budget—an order to stop all Federal grant funding, including at the National Institutes of Health.

I know this happened because the major universities in the Chicagoland area, which I respect so much, called me in a panic and said: We are supposed to stop all of our research. We are in the middle of some critical things.

I had to say: That is exactly what this temporary pause or temporary freeze would do.

Each year, NIH awards nearly \$38 billion in research grants to all 50 States and the District of Columbia. They support hundreds of thousands of jobs, generate \$92 billion in economic activity, and facilitate lifesaving medical research.

Do you know what the leading cause of death is in the United States? The No. 1 cause of death is heart disease, but there are others—cancer, unintentional injury, drug overdose, stroke, respiratory disease, Alzheimer's, and diabetes. NIH researchers work every day to find breakthroughs to save lives in America from these leading causes of death.

So when you freeze this Agency's work, when you tell their researchers to stay home, when you tell them not to spend a penny because they can't be compensated, it means you are putting a stop to the research that critically is trying to keep us alive. You handicap our Nation's efforts to develop new cures and treatments that address the top causes of death.

NIH is considered the world's leader in biomedical research, providing treatments and cures that other people in the world just dream of. President Trump's proposed freeze on NIH work is cruel and will have life-or-death consequences.

If your parent has dementia, you want the NIH work to continue. If your husband or wife has been diagnosed with glioblastoma, ALS, or Parkinson's, you need NIH work to continue. If you have a child diagnosed with a rare childhood cancer or heart condition, you are desperate for NIH work to continue.

This should not be a partisan issue. Over the past decade, Congress has, on a bipartisan basis, increased the NIH budget by 60 percent. We believe in their work.

A Federal freeze must not be allowed to take effect. I would hope my Republican colleagues would join me in calling President Trump to reconsider this harmful policy. Lives depend on it.

I yield the floor.

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Democratic leader is recognized.

TRUMP EXECUTIVE ORDERS

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, 2 nights ago, the Trump administration committed a breathtaking act of economic sabotage. In the blink of an eye, OMB announced a near-universal freeze on all Federal grant funding. Donald Trump's actions can be summarized with three C's: chaotic, careless, cruel. It is a gross overreach by Republicans, and it is no surprise that the American people are furious.

Last night, a Federal judge issued an administrative stay of OMB's announcement, but the danger is not over, not by any means. Donald Trump and his ultraright puppet Russell Vought will keep trying to make this freeze happen.

Today, I will speak to Democratic Governors around the country to discuss how this freeze is hurting their States and talk about coordinating our responses against this gross abuse of Presidential power.

The blast radius of OMB's announcement was seemingly limitless—States, cities, towns, schools, small businesses, local law enforcement, nutrition services, elderly care, and so much more were impacted. It is as if OMB designed their announcement to maximize chaos and confusion and suffering for the American people.

Make no mistake, this decision from OMB is Project 2025 in action—Project 2025 by another name.

Donald Trump's lawless behavior fits a pattern. First, he pardoned insurrectionists. Then, he fired independent watchdogs and labor commissioners. And now he is freezing—freezing—congressionally approved funding.

Before our eyes, Donald Trump is rigging the system and breaking the law to help his billionaire friends at the expense of working families.

I got calls yesterday from Republican town supervisors and mayors in panic about flood prevention and sewer projects, who told me they had shovel-ready projects to go but now those projects were in limbo. I got calls from food banks, like FeedMore in Western New York, fearful that suddenly they won't be able to make deliveries to hungry people. I got calls from groups like Rochester Head Start, worried sick they are not going to be able to pay rent or pay their staff. I got calls from the Roswell Park Cancer Center in Buffalo and Northwell Hospital on Long Island, asking if funding was suddenly going to vanish.

How is freezing all of this funding going to help families pay for groceries or make neighborhoods safer or create new jobs? Of course, it won't. In fact, it is going to do the opposite.

One week ago, OMB nominee Russell Vought refused to answer in testimony questions about the impoundment of congressional funds. Now we know why. He did not want to alert Congress

about this freeze on funding. Mr. Vought clearly withheld information that Senators were entitled to know, and he needs to give us more answers.

The Senate Budget Committee should not proceed with Mr. Vought's confirmation until we get answers. I join my fellow Democrats in calling for a 2-week delay of Mr. Vought's markup.

TRUMP ADMINISTRATION FIRINGS

Mr. President, yesterday, President Trump showed his true, hostile colors to working people and union members in America. Without cause, the President took the unprecedented step of firing a duly appointed Commissioner of the National Labor Relations Board 2 years before her term was set to expire. Then, last night, President Trump fired two Democratic members of the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, leaving that body frozen without a quorum.

Let's be very clear. These unlawful firings are a direct assault on working people. The President's decision will increase workplace discrimination, worsen unfair hiring practices, and erode workers' ability to push for better wages and safer working conditions. What these firings will do is stack the deck against employees trying to organize or join a union to get better benefits and better pay.

Donald Trump says he wants to help working families. This is no way to do it. And these firings are clearly unlawful—unlawful.

These purges are another example of Donald Trump's lawless Presidency, like his pardoning of insurrectionists, eliminating independent watchdogs, and illegally freezing congressionally approved funding. Everything Donald Trump is doing fits a pattern. He is abusing the Office of the Presidency and is breaking the law to rig the system to help his billionaire friends—all at the expense of working families.

NOMINATION OF ROBERT F. KENNEDY, JR.

Mr. President, today, Robert Kennedy begins testifying before the Senate Finance Committee.

To state the obvious, having a very wealthy anti-vaxxer running America's public health would put every single American in danger. Mr. Kennedy is a walking public health crisis waiting to happen.

Of course, he is doing exactly what everyone thought he would do in his hearing. He is suddenly saying what people want to hear about vaccines. He is claiming he was never against vaccines or that his words have been twisted. We need to look at Kennedy's record. He has spent years making millions peddling conspiracy theories and outright lies. His nomination should go no further.

NOMINATION OF KASHYAP PATEL

Mr. President, on Mr. Patel, tomorrow, the Senate Judiciary Committee will hear testimony from Kash Patel, President Trump's nominee to be the next FBI Director.

Mr. Patel is not remotely prepared to serve as FBI Director. In fact, he has a long history of spreading lies about the FBI and of smearing the public servants who work there to keep us safe. He is a conspiracy theorist, a hard-right ideologue, and openly hostile to the free press.

During tomorrow's hearing, the most important questions for Senators is, How on Earth will Mr. Patel's confirmation make Americans safer? How will Americans be safer if the FBI is led by a darling of the QAnon movement? How does it serve America's public safety to elevate a January 6 sympathizer to the highest level of enforcement in the land? How can Americans trust that Donald Trump will drain the swamp if he puts one of his most loyal political fixers as chief law enforcer?

It is written you can't serve two masters, and that is sure true of Mr. Patel. He either serves the interests of the American people or he serves the interests of Donald Trump. Given Patel's history, it is very clear who he will choose—Donald Trump.

NOMINATION OF TULSI GABBARD

Mr. President, on Tulsi Gabbard, tomorrow, the Senate Intelligence Committee will hold a hearing for President Trump's nominee for DNI, the Director of National Intelligence, Tulsi Gabbard.

Of all the people President Trump could have nominated for the job of DNI, few could be worse for our national security than Tulsi Gabbard. If confirmed, Ms. Gabbard would be a walking liability to our intelligence community and our national security. She has a long and troubled history of spreading falsities and sympathizing with the likes of Vladimir Putin and Assad. Given her history, it is not unreasonable to ask if Ms. Gabbard would use the DNI job to push false intelligence for political ends.

Is Ms. Gabbard really the best Republicans have to offer for the job—someone who is known to make things up out of thin air? Is this really who Republicans want managing our intelligence community, which is fact-based? Our intelligence Agencies and the people who work there rely on truthfulness and facts to keep our country safe. Ms. Gabbard is deficient in both qualities and clearly does not merit elevation to the position of DNI.

TRIBUTE TO MARK GAZELLE

Mr. President, on Officer Mark Gazelle on his retirement, I want to honor a longtime officer with the U.S. Capitol Police who is retiring this month after 34 years, Officer Mark Gazelle.

For the last 34 years, Officer Gazelle has carried out his duty to protect and defend this great citadel of democracy with supreme excellence, courage, and professionalism. No matter his assignment—from the first responders specialty unit, to the mountain bike unit, to the Senate Chamber as a plainclothes officer—Officer Gazelle kept the Capitol Complex safe, and he was