

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 plain-clothes officer—Officer Gazelle kept the Capitol Complex safe, and he was

instrumental as the floor officer in making sure the body could carry out the work of the American people day in and day out.

We all owe Officer Gazelle our deepest gratitude for his service to the Capitol Police, to the Congress, and to the Nation. We say to him thank you and wish his family the very best.

Thank you, Mark.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Wyoming.

Mr. BARRASSO. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to speak for up to 6 minutes, followed by Senator WHITEHOUSE for up to 6 minutes, prior to the scheduled rollcall vote.

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

NOMINATION OF LEE ZELDIN

Mr. BARRASSO. Mr. President, I strongly support Congressman Lee Zeldin as the nominee to be the Administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency. We are blessed in America with enormous natural resources. I support using our resources responsibly; I support sensible environmental stewardship; and that is what we will have with Mr. Zeldin.

Americans deserve clean water and clean air. They deserve good jobs and economic strength. Environmental protection and economic growth should go hand in hand; they are not mutually exclusive. As the head of the EPA, Lee will return the Agency to its original mission of protecting America's air, water, and land without, as he puts it, suffocating the economy.

Nearly 2 weeks ago, the Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works held a hearing on Lee Zeldin, and as the former chairman of the committee, I was honored to introduce him. He is highly qualified, and his support is bipartisan. He is a lifelong public servant, and he is a seasoned lawyer and has a sharp legal mind.

He has over 20 years of military service and currently serve as lieutenant colonel in our U.S. Army Reserve.

Lee also served 8 years in Congress, in the House of Representatives, as a Representative from New York. In that role, he worked to strengthen our economy as well as protect his district's unique ecosystem. He worked across party lines to accomplish his goals.

For the last 4 years, the so-called experts at the Environmental Protection Agency went on a reckless regulatory rampage. They saddled American families and businesses with higher costs and with heavyhanded restrictions. They bowed to climate extremism while ignoring common sense.

In 2024, the EPA introduced one of the most expensive regulations in American history. It is called the electric vehicle mandate. The EV mandate was truly leftwing lunacy at its worst. According to the Competitive Enterprise Institute, the total cost of compliance is over \$760 billion—with a "b." To put this in perspective, the cost of this one regulation coming out of the Biden administration was equal to the

entire pricetag of 8 years of regulations under the Presidency of Barack Obama. The EV mandate would also cost hundreds of thousands of jobs.

Americans rejected the EV mandate and other costly climate policies this past November at the ballot box.

President Trump revoked the EV mandate on his first day in office. Here in the Senate, repealing the Biden EV subsidies is one of my top priorities. These subsidies alone are estimated to cost taxpayers more than \$393 billion.

Americans shouldn't have their taxpayer dollars pay for vehicles that most Americans don't want, can't afford, and actually don't work for them and their families. Americans shouldn't be dependent on communist China like we are today with electric vehicles.

Lee Zeldin will continue President Trump's mission to roll back these punishing political regulations.

The EPA does important work. It does that work in States and in local communities. Lee will be a fantastic partner to my home State of Wyoming. He is not going to impose one-size-fits-all mandates on American consumers and American businesses. Instead, he is going to cut redtape. We will see a new wave of creativity and innovation. Lee knows that innovation, not government intervention, is the best solution to lower prices, to grow the economy, and to protect our environment.

Many Americans are confident that Lee will right the ship and restore the balance needed at the EPA. One of these organizations is the National Association of Clean Water Agencies. In a letter to the committee, the association said that Lee has "shown a willingness to engage with a broad spectrum of stakeholders to address pressing issues."

Lee also impressed our colleagues here in the Senate. That is why my Democrat colleague from Arizona said about Lee:

He's a qualified candidate for this job.

I share America's confidence in Lee.

Through 3 hours of tough questions, Lee Zeldin provided quality answers and proved that he is well qualified. He showed he is committed to strong environmental protection and to energy production. He is the right nominee to lead the EPA. The Senate should confirm him quickly.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Rhode Island.

Mr. WHITEHOUSE. Mr. President, I am a friend of the distinguished Senator from Wyoming, but on this matter, we disagree quite a lot. I think, clearly, everybody likes clean air and clean water. My opposition to Lee Zeldin is founded on where he is likely to be on a different issue—climate change.

Climate change is coming at us, and the context for Lee Zeldin's nomination, I believe, is this: We went through a long period of science on climate change, starting with the early days of

Dr. Hansen and NASA's work, work by Exxon and other Big Oil majors themselves, lots of work at universities and in U.S. and State government. And the science pretty well nailed it. They pretty much got it right. They warned what was going to happen, and it began to happen, and it has continued to happen.

Based on those warnings, we moved into phase 2, which was the political era of climate, where it was our job here in this building to listen to those warnings and figure out what the best and smartest thing was to do about them. The problem was that the fossil fuel industry got involved with Citizens United climate money in the hundreds of millions behind it, and they squelched that conversation. As a result, Congress has failed to address the looming climate crisis purely from fossil fuel-funded Republican opposition.

That takes us now into era 3, the era of the "forewarned but not prevented" consequences, and the place in which those consequences are most saliently making themselves felt is in the homeowners insurance industry.

Homeowners insurance is in crisis in this country and is in near meltdown in various States and counties in this country because the risk that the insurers have to bear is now unpredictable to them. So what we are seeing is homeowners insurance prices skyrocketing. We are seeing homeowners insurance companies going bankrupt, leaving States, firing their long-time clients because they don't want to provide coverage in these danger areas, which include coastal areas—Florida, as a result, is kind of first and worst in the home insurance meltdown—and wildfire-adjacent areas second, which puts California and a lot of other Western States very much in harm's way.

Now, the problem with that is it doesn't just end with an insurance crisis. When you get a sufficient number of properties that cannot get affordable home insurance or cannot get home insurance at all, those properties become unmortgageable.

If you are a billionaire living in Palm Beach, you can find another billionaire to buy your property who can write a check, but if you are a real-life person—a plumber in Orlando, living in a development, who paid for their home with a mortgage—you are going to want to sell that home to somebody who can get a mortgage. When your home can't be mortgaged any longer, that will crash its property value. In fact, if your homeowners insurance goes from \$4,000 to \$16,000—a case we heard of—then that crashes your property value, too, because a \$16,000 carrying cost on a piece of property knocks its value way down.

So not from the "greenies," not from the environmental community, but from Freddie Mac, the mortgage giant, we heard the warning that an insurance crash turns into a mortgage crash, turns into a coastal property values crash, which is serious enough