

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. WARNER. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. JUSTICE). Without objection, it is so ordered.

TRUMP EXECUTIVE ORDERS

Mr. WARNER. Mr. President, it is good to see you sitting up there.

As a recent former Governor—I say that as a former Governor myself—I won't ask you what you are hearing in West Virginia, but I have to tell you, I rise to the floor today amongst a huge amount of confusion.

Two days ago, the Trump administration, without warning to any States, to any Governors, without warning to Congress, late at night, put out an order freezing all Federal spending for 90 days.

Earlier today, less than 48 hours later, that order was formally rescinded. But hold it. The good news—entirely good news—lasted about 30 minutes, 45 minutes, because 45 minutes later, the Press Secretary in the White House says: No, the freeze will actually stay in place and be rigorously enforced.

So—I don't know—as a Governor, which one do you follow? Because, as the Presiding Officer knows, an awful lot of our State programs are actually Federal dollars passing through our capitals into these programs. So I ask, which one is it?

Unfortunately, I am not the only one asking the question, and I have an awful lot of stressed Virginians to prove it.

In Virginia, as in West Virginia or any other State, Federal funding supports countless programs that serve kids, seniors, community infrastructure, and a whole lot more. Yesterday alone, my office was literally flooded with outreach from organizations and local governments.

I heard from firefighters from Southwest Virginia. They are worried they won't be able to replace their tanker truck with Federal funding that was supposed to be coming pretty soon.

I heard from an affordable housing organization in Northern Virginia that if they go 90 days without Federal dollars, they might have to shut down their organization. People would have to find different jobs. That organization—you can't turn on or off the flow of these resources.

I heard from law enforcement in the Shenandoah Valley and from the greater Richmond area that a lot of these localities depend on Federal dollars to pay police officers. If they don't have those funds for the next 90 days, this will take cops off the street.

I heard from a number—not just one but a number—of domestic violence shelters across the Commonwealth that without this funding, because they don't have huge reserves, they will have to leave women and children without housing support.

Listen to this one. We have a little town called West Point, VA. It was an old mill town. They have a very good Head Start Program. Head Start gets funded by the Federal Government. Their Head Start funding runs out on Friday, January 31. They had been told—they can't get any answer—that their next round of funding was in process and there would be no break in the action. What do the Head Start moms and dads who have kids in that program in West Point, VA, do starting next Monday?

Senator KAINE and I probably had 8 to 10 Head Start Programs here. As a matter of fact, there is a gag order put in place right now so that people can't talk about these things inside the administration, and the Head Start directors were trying to call their contact, kind of their resource person, and they got no response.

So whether you care about meals for low-income seniors, whether you care about Head Start for vulnerable kids, whether you care about teens who need that mental health support oftentimes coming from Federal dollars, that all is up in the air at this point. What do we tell these folks?

Many of these folks voted for President Trump because they thought he was going to bring grocery prices down.

Like the Presiding Officer, I have not only been a Governor, but I was a business guy. I can claim still that I was in business longer than in politics. This is not the way you run an operation. The truth is, this is unbelievable. I was so proud when I was Governor of Virginia. We got named the best managed State. This is management malpractice 101.

The most important enterprise in the world is the American Government, not only in terms of safety and security but in terms of how we treat our people.

The truth is, rescinded or not, these chaotic antics have real consequences. I know of an organization in Virginia that had to call an emergency board meeting yesterday to see if they should go out of business. I have heard from folks who are worried that they will have to lay off their employees. Without this Federal funding, they are just not going to be able to make payroll. One Virginian wrote to me and said that “the mental and physical damage is already immense.” It is not right to play with people's lives in such a grossly irresponsible way.

I have been doing this for a while. I have never heard of some kind of arbitrary freeze on all Federal spending. It was bad enough what happened when they put a freeze on Federal assistance to folks around the world.

I commend Secretary Rubio. One of the reasons why I was proud to support him was that he has actually tried to back off from that order, making sure that humanitarian aid is not going to disappear.

The story has been out. I have been very interested in the conflict in Sudan. There is a ship in Port Sudan

right now with American medicine on it. The aid group was going to take that out—the medicine—to save people's lives. That medicine will go to rot if those funds are not flowing.

It is bad enough, this issue of how we are treating Americans who depend on these Federal funds—these are real programs with real people—you take that and layer on the other whammy. In Virginia, we have a disproportionate number of Federal workers. You have quite a few in West Virginia I know as well due to great former West Virginia Senators. Suddenly, in an, again, unprecedented and I believe potentially illegal move, every Federal employee is offered this chance to quit and get paid for 6 months, until September 30, if you quit.

Now, nothing like this has ever been done before. Maybe this is the way you do business in the tech world, and I used to be in the tech world, but if you manage a good company, you don't go out and basically say to all your workers: Quit.

Of course, the problem is—and I urge my Federal workers to think about this—unfortunately, this President has a record of not only sticking it to Federal workers, but he has a record of sticking it to all the business contractors he did business with by not paying the bills.

So I worry because not only is there very much a legal question of whether the President can offer this buyout offer to all these Federal workers, but I can assure you, there is nothing in the budget—there is nothing in the budget—that we still haven't negotiated for the balance of this fiscal year that has got this X-billion-dollar number next to it that is going to pay for all of these buyouts.

We know where this comes from. It comes from the fellow that is being put up to be head of the OMB, Russell Vought, who wrote Project 2025, the very project that President Trump as a candidate said: Don't worry. I didn't read it. I don't know anything about it.

In that document, it goes on at length about how the goal of Project 2025 and Mr. Vought, who wants to be head of OMB, which kind of controls the management and budget of the Federal Government, was that he wanted to traumatize Federal workers. He wanted them not to go to work. He wanted to classify them as villains—his words, not mine.

I can tell you this: For a whole lot of Federal workers, they have already hit that goal. They are traumatized. And I worry like heck.

You say: Gosh, I don't know what I should do. Maybe I will take the offer.

But before you sign that and send it back—what may be an illegal offer that is not funded, that chances are you are not going to get paid—think a little bit about it. If this becomes another kind of passing fad where there is not any enforcement and not a payment, if you sign that and send it back, chances are you have made an indication that you

are going to be the first person that gets RIFed, maybe without that 6-month severance.

I also have to wonder. You know, we are a couple thousand air traffic controllers short right now. If air traffic controllers—who, by the way, take about a year to get trained—if 5,000 of them say “You know what, I am going to take that offer,” what happens to air traffic safety? We don’t have a fall-back. We don’t have a reserve of air traffic controllers to make sure that when you climb on an airplane, it is safe. Yet we have made that offer, to my understanding, to all the air traffic controllers in America: Sign here. We are going to pay you. You don’t have to work for the next 6 months.

Again, how many Americans are going to be happy with the fact that we are paying folks without them working for 6 months?

What happens as well—are we going to really say to all the folks who do bird flu research and are trying to seek it out—we have a lot of poultry and turkeys and chickens both in the Shenandoah Valley and on the Eastern Shore of Virginia. One of the things people are experiencing most now is the rising cost of eggs. If suddenly all the folks who are working on bird flu quit, maybe people won’t buy eggs, but I actually think it will drive up the already high cost of eggs two, three times. I thought President Trump was hired to try to bring down grocery prices.

What happens as well with the folks who are the food inspectors—salmonella? Are you going to really feel all right about going to the grocery store and buying something if a whole lot of folks have taken this buyout offer? This is not the way to run an operation.

I think about earlier today. I asked a question of Mr. Kennedy, who wants to be head of HHS. He had told me in his earlier comments in my office that he wanted to get rid of 2,200 people in HHS. I asked him: What is your plan? Who are those 2,200?

No answer.

I know he has got strong feelings about NIH, where, candidly, we have the best researchers in the world that have taken years for us to recruit. If suddenly, based on President Trump’s offer, all these NIH researchers quit because they can make two, three, four, five times as much in the private sector, but all that basic research is done at NIH, who are we going to fill those back in with? Not with as qualified people.

The list goes on and on and on.

Again, I would say this is management malpractice 101. You want to change your workforce. You want to make them more effective, more efficient. You don’t try to traumatize them. But that is what has happened so far.

To Americans across the country and to my fellow Virginians, if there are ways to find more efficiency, if there

are ways to logically—business-minded—think through the efficiency of our Federal Departments and maybe save some money and maybe cut back staff in a rational way, sign me up. But don’t sign me up for something that looks like it is a flimflam con job where people are being potentially suckered into sending an email back when there is no assurance that that email or that whole offer is legal in the first place. There is no money in the till. And if you go back to the case of the current President, look at his record from when he was in the private sector. Did anybody get paid 100 cents on the dollar?

So I know other Senators are going to be coming up. But I just think that, in many ways, President Trump got hired because they thought we could bring down consumer prices; they thought we could bring down grocery prices. None of this is bringing down grocery prices. None of this is bringing down consumer prices.

None of this, I think, is going to make our Federal Government more efficient or effective or, in the long term, save money. If our most talented people quit, it is going to cost more to re-hire them. Anybody knows that who has been in the private sector. And we are not going to get people with the same experience.

What it feels like, and I know what I have been thinking, is one of the things that was the most troubling about the first Trump administration was this sense of chaos that people kind of got exhausted with. My goodness gracious, this is day 10—day 10—of the Trump administration. We have chaos on steroids.

What I would hope is that my Republican colleagues in Virginia, in the legislature, in statewide elected office, and I would hope my Republican colleagues in the Senate and in the House would say: Hey, better efficiency, count me in. Across-the-board freezes of programs without regard to the people’s lives that are going to be changed or affected, that doesn’t make sense.

State budgets—all the State legislatures are in right now doing their budgets. How do you plan with those Federal dollars that are maybe going to be suspended for 90 days or then maybe arbitrarily suspended forever? How do you plan that?

And to the Federal workforce: I tell you, the idea of what potentially is illegal—a nonfunded buyout offer with no guarantee and, if anything, the opposite being true—I would urge people to think long and hard and not take this offer, not set you up for being fired, rifled, or eliminated.

And I would appeal again: There is a better way to do all of this. And I say this as somebody who has now voted for five of President Trump’s nominees for Cabinet positions. I have gotten a lot of grief from that already. From somebody who was a chief executive, I feel like a Governor or the President ought to get most of their choices but

for people that I think fall outside the norm and don’t have the credibility or judgment, and I will make those decisions.

I have a very important hearing tomorrow, as the former chairman of the Intelligence Committee and now the vice chairman, on TULSI GABBARD.

But I want to reach out and work with this administration. Let’s get back to lowering costs. Let’s get back to driving grocery prices down. Let’s not put people in fear not just for their jobs but for their lives, if you are that victim of domestic abuse, if you are that kid who needs Head Start, if you are that senior that is dependent upon Meals on Wheels.

Those programs don’t last for 90 days. And if they suddenly shut down and we decide after 90 days, “Oh, we want to start them again,” the cost is going to be double or triple.

There is a better way to do this. So I appeal to my Republican friends. Maybe we need a gang on this to try to think about this in a more bipartisan way. But in the meantime, I implore the administration: Get your act together. Don’t put out two separate statements totally contradicting each other on the same day about your intentions—two totally opposite. It just makes chaos and the stress go up, and, ultimately, later in this week, the services disappear.

With that, Mr. President, 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.

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, on Monday night, President Trump threw America into chaos when he abruptly announced a freeze on trillions of dollars in Federal grants and loans that so many communities, States, and Americans depend on.

The reaction across the Nation has been uniform. We have a phone ringing off the hook, computers busy and buzzing. Everybody wants to know: What does this mean? What has happened?

Even members of the press were confused. Members of Congress were confused. Members of the American public were confused. And even members of the President’s own administration were confused about the intent and scope of the freeze.

Rightly so, Americans from across the country took to calling our offices and the offices of their Congressmen and asked what was going on. They needed clarity, and they wanted to know what the freeze on funds would mean to them—in agency after agency across the State of Illinois and the Nation.

Toni is a woman from Woodstock, IL. She shared with my office that her

brother has Down syndrome, and the care he receives is funded by a Federal grant. His health and safety would be at risk if this freeze is allowed to be implemented.

Or take Dr. Kay, a professor and scientist at the University of Chicago. Her work depends on funding from the National Institutes of Health and other Federal grants. She shared that the freeze would “interrupt crucial biomedical research, stopping progress, destroying sometimes years’ worth of research that cannot be undone.” And it could hurt the retention of our Nation’s future scientists.

Or Sarah, a supporter of community-based organizations that serve youth experiencing homelessness in the city of Chicago. If this freeze, in fact, takes place, the organization will not be able to access the Federal funding it needs to provide services for youth, help them escape violence, or help to reunify their families.

Yesterday, Americans across the country faced disruptions in accessing critical funds and services in popular programs like Head Start, Medicaid, and so many more. These are just a few of the many messages my office and others have received from Americans confused, outraged, and impacted by this freeze.

Then, last night, a Federal judge in DC ordered the freeze to be paused from going into effect until Monday, February 3. In response to the backlash from the American public, the organized efforts of many Democratic lawmakers, and the court ruling, President Trump’s Office of Management and Budget today rescinded the memo outlining the funding freeze.

But that isn’t the end of the story. The President’s Press Secretary now claims that while the memo ordering the freeze has been rescinded, the freeze itself still stands.

Who is on first? How does this make sense, you ask? Well, the honest answer is it doesn’t. The policy is as poorly thought out and communicated as can be.

In true Trump fashion, his administration has made clear that it doesn’t intend to abide by the will of the American people, the letter of the law, or the Constitution. It will do whatever it takes to push through this policy, even if it means hurting Americans across the country.

Let me be clear. We are going to continue to fight this unconstitutional, devastating, and grossly unpopular freeze in Federal spending. I want every American to know that your voice and participation in our democracy means more now than ever. The President is betting that you won’t notice when he abuses power or breaks the law; that amidst the chaos that surrounds him, you will be too confused, jaded, or just too tired to fight back.

But I urge America to continue monitoring the actions of this new administration, particularly when they touch

you and your family personally, and to report to our offices—both political parties—any Federal funding that your communities and organizations are unable to access.

This will not be the last time, I am afraid, that this administration defies our Nation’s laws to show a position of power, and we will be watching closely, ready to stop him if he tries again.

Some think this freeze was a mistake, a blunder by the new President’s team. Others think this was exactly what they wanted: chaos, confusion, a show of force. Today, we even don’t know exactly what the motive is or what the status is. The courts have to sort it out because the administration can’t even explain it. The best thing now, at this point, is to watch closely because programs that mean a lot are at stake.

I have a particular affection for the National Institutes of Health, the premier medical research Agency in the world. For their researchers to call in a panic over this decision is to me a litmus test of why it is the wrong thing to do for America.

Want to make America great again? Hook your star to one of the greatest Agencies in our government, the National Institutes of Health. Don’t suspend their funding, don’t stop their research. I watched closely as the story unfolded this afternoon, and with a lot of my friends, I thought, well, the Trump administration has realized they just made a mistake and they put everything back on track.

And then Karoline Leavitt, who is the new Press Secretary, issued a statement, and she said:

This is not a rescission of the Federal funding freeze. It is simply a rescission of the OMB memo. Why? To end any confusion created by the court’s injunction. The President’s [executive orders] on federal funding remain in full force and effect, and will be rigorously implemented.

That was her quote to try to clarify the situation; she couldn’t have made it worse. At this point, America doesn’t know what the future will hold. The judge in the case that is pending is the one who may have the last word, the important word on where this is headed.

I want to commend those who are in the courtroom trying to sort out the mess that has been created here in Washington for the good of this country to make it great again. We certainly need to have some understanding of what the policy of our government is.

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.

Ms. ROSEN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

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

Ms. ROSEN. Mr. President, my State of Nevada is unique. We are big in

physical size, but relatively small in population. We are independent people, but have a strong allegiance to our Nation. After all, we are the Battle Born State, born during the Civil War. And while we don’t like Washington telling us what to do, Nevadans depend on Federal resources to help our communities.

Now, it is simple. By coming together to form our Union and paying taxes, Nevadans deserve to receive our fair share of funding from the Federal Government. It is hard not to be affected by what goes on in Washington when more than 80 percent of your State—of our land—is owned by the Federal Government, more than any other State. Think about that. Eighty percent of Nevada is owned by the Federal Government. That is why I take my responsibility as representative of the people of Nevada incredibly seriously. It is why I rise today to speak on behalf of the reckless, cruel, and illegal action that President Trump took to freeze virtually all Federal grants and loans.

While this administration has now rescinded the memo from the Office of Management and Budget that announced the freeze, they have been clear that the funding freeze continues, adding to the chaos and confusion. Lack of clarity as to which programs will be affected and which ones would not be has been having devastating effects in States like my own and so many others. In fact, more than 30 percent of the Governor’s budget for the next 2 years relies on Federal funding, which is why this issue is critical for our State.

Since President Trump’s administration issued the guidance on Monday night, my office has received hundreds of calls and emails from Nevadans who are rightfully concerned just about what this would mean for them, for their families, for their jobs. We also received additional emails and calls from nonprofits, from service providers, from community stakeholders who depend on this funding and support Nevadans.

One of the messages my office received was from the Nevada Partnership for Homeless Youth. This partnership helps get young people, kids—kids—off the streets. And while many in this Chamber disagree about a lot of things, I think all of us agree that helping homeless kids is important work.

So I want to read part of their letter because I think it encapsulates what a lot of organizations that provide critical services—well, just what they have been feeling. They said this:

This decision will have an immediate and severe impact on organizations like ours, as well as countless others in Nevada and across the country.

Much of this funding has already been allocated and committed through contracts, and the sudden halt creates chaos and uncertainty for agencies that provide critical services.

Many organizations in our community simply do not have the financial reserves to

operate for more than a few months without these funds.

It is not just the Nevada Partnership for Homeless Youth that we heard from. My office also heard from Northern Nevada HOPES, a community health center based in Reno, NV. Northern Nevada HOPES provides affordable, high-quality healthcare services to people in our community, those who need it the most. In fact, 56 percent of their patients live at or below the Federal poverty level, and 10 percent experience homelessness.

This is what Northern Nevada HOPES told my office. I am going to quote again:

At Northern Nevada HOPES, this pause has significant implications for the services we provide to over 17,000 patients . . . many of whom are children and families.

As we assess the situation, we have been forced to take immediate actions, including implementing a hiring freeze and preparing to limit care for patients who rely on our sliding fee scale, including those who are uninsured or underinsured.

Think about that. Think about these children. Think about these families. President Trump's chaos and reckless actions have put the health of Nevada's families in jeopardy. That that means kids who need to go see a doctor, women who need to get a cancer screening—take a point off the script here. My mom passed away from cancer. No one should miss their cancer screenings.

It is impacting older people who need lifesaving medication, and all of them could be affected by this terrible, terrible action.

Many seniors also rely on other vital programs like Meals on Wheels to access the nutrition they need to live independently and with dignity. I have seen this critical work up close.

A few years ago, I joined an organization to deliver meals to seniors in Boulder City, NV. Seeing the joy on the faces of the seniors we visited is something I won't forget. They know the folks who come on their route to deliver to them. It is not just a meal for them, Meals on Wheels. It is a lifeline. They don't just provide nutritious foods for seniors who might be housebound, isolated, or living on a fixed income. These people become their friends, their lifeline.

For thousands of seniors in Nevada, this program is also their primary source of nutrition. In 1 year alone, Federal funding allowed Meals on Wheels to serve more than 2.5 million meals to seniors across Nevada.

In Nevada—I am sure in your State, too, Mr. President—we take care of our seniors. President Trump's proposed freeze on Federal funding threatens them all—threatens them all. Pausing the funding to this critical program means denying our seniors, our elderly, their access to something so essential, so comforting, a meal—a meal.

And the possibility of an interruption to this service, even temporarily, means seniors in Nevada and across the country lose the certainty of knowing

where their next meal will come from and the comfort of the visit of the person who brings it to them and often-times sits with them, listens to them, and gives them that comfort care that is so important to all of us.

I just want everyone to think about that. Is this who we are, taking meals away from seniors—Meals on Wheels? I hope not.

Another essential service under threat of this Trump funding freeze is public safety, something everybody worries about. And this action will make our communities less safe and stop critically needed Federal funding from reaching law enforcement officers, firefighters, and other first responders who look out for our communities each and every day. These heroic men and women depend on the funding from Federal programs to do their jobs safely and to protect our communities effectively.

And here are just a few examples of how this freeze will impact them.

Nevada, unfortunately, is no stranger to the horrific impact of wildfires and fires in general. Whether it is raging wildfires or the standard fire emergencies that happen in communities, well, they happen every day across our State. And the men and the women who make up our fire departments, they rely in part on Federal grants to purchase that equipment needed to do their job safely and effectively—equipment like emergency vehicles they travel in, the protective suits they put on, the helmets they wear, the oxygen tanks they carry so they can breathe fresh air while they save someone's life, and the tools that they wield to stop those fires from destroying people's lives, homes, and livelihoods. Each and every part of this gear is critical for our firefighters and for their safety.

Our firefighters also rely on Federal funding in order to make sure they have the staffing levels they need. Firefighting, like much of the work of our first responders, goes 24/7, 365 days a year. You never know when the next emergency will happen; it just will. You must always be ready. You must always be prepared. You don't know when it is going to happen. But our firefighters, our first responders stand ready, at a moment's notice, to run in to save the rest of us.

Let me tell you, when there is a fire in our State, our firefighters aren't clocking in at 9 o'clock and clocking out at 5 o'clock. They keep working around the clock until the fire is out and the job is done, until everyone is safe and the emergency is passed. And when we don't have the proper staffing levels, when our communities don't have the numbers of firefighters they need, well, our State suffers, our community suffers, families suffer. The damage is real, like I said, not just lives—lives, livelihood, and communities. It is devastating.

Thankfully, there is Federal funding through the SAFER Program to ad-

dress this issue, to increase and maintain a number of trained firefighters who are serving on the frontlines and are available to respond in our communities when an emergency happens.

The bad news—not just bad; the sad news, the cruel news—is that this kind of funding is the kind that President Trump's order could freeze. This doesn't make us safer. It doesn't save us money. It just puts us and our families and those we love and our communities in greater danger.

Like I said, it is not just firefighters who feel the effects of this freeze. Our law enforcement officers in Nevada could also be affected, and that is going to have a direct impact on public safety.

So make no mistake, like all 50 States, my State relies on funding from the Department of Justice's Office of Community Oriented Policing Services, also known as the COPS program. At a time when we are facing a national police shortage, this program allows Nevada to hire more officers who serve in our communities and take part in community policing efforts, building trust, engaging with Nevadans, combating crime.

Who would oppose that?

Well, due to the President's Federal freeze, this money could now be in jeopardy.

As Nevada and the rest of the Nation continue to deal with the deadly impact of the fentanyl crisis, this freeze could rob us of critical tools to combat this dangerous and deadly drug. Over the last few years, fentanyl has fueled a crisis in Nevada. Families across our State have seen loved ones face addiction and overdose. Hundreds of Nevadans are losing their lives each and every year from fentanyl.

This isn't a red State problem or a blue State problem. It is a national problem, and it is a crisis in Nevada. The State's opioid response programs, which do depend on Federal grant funding, are critical to reducing harm and preventing overdoses in our communities.

I have spoken with law enforcement officers in Nevada. I have spoken with parents and family members and friends who lost loved ones to fentanyl. It is clear that we need to be doing more to tackle this issue. And this freeze—this cruel freeze—does nothing to help; it is quite the contrary. If this funding were impacted, again, it would hurt our communities. It would hurt our families, our friends, our neighbors, those we love.

As long as we are talking about programs that are vital to community safety and well-being, we can't forget about the potential impact on our veterans. In Nevada, our veterans have always been top priority. I can tell you, I am so worried about how this funding freeze would jeopardize programs that support veterans' transition back to civilian life, provide them critical services, preserving the legacy of those who served, and so much more.

Take for example, if you will, a program called the Homeless Veterans' Reintegration Program, which provided \$17 million to Nevada to help homeless women veterans and veterans with children find secure and stable housing and employment. The Homeless Veterans' Reintegration Program is helping women veterans. For many of these veterans, this program provides them with the resources that they need to rebuild their lives.

These men and women signed on the dotted line, and they fought to protect our freedom. And the very least we can do is make sure they have the resources and support when they return home.

There is also the Veterans Legacy Grant Program, which provided more than \$2 million to Nevada to help preserve the history of our men and women in uniform so that we can honor their service and show them how grateful and thankful we are to them and to their families.

A pause in funding for something as critical as the Veterans Legacy Grants Program would threaten a key resource for educating future generations about the legacy and sacrifice of our veterans. The history of our veterans matters, and a pause in this money would be a slap in the face to those who literally, like I said, put their lives on the line to protect all of us—you, me, all of us—every single day.

The Trump administration has said that their pause won't impact programs for the VA, that all of the Agencies' programs pass their so-called review. But the administration also said it was rescinding the memo that started the pause. Then, not an hour later, they sowed confusion and uncertainty by saying the funding freeze is back on. So what is it? How can we believe them? It is one thing until it is not. It is another thing until it is not. It is chaos. Why would we trust them now with critical funding for our veterans? Why would we risk that?

I can keep going on and on about all of the ways that President Trump's freeze would hurt my State of Nevada. I could talk about how this freeze led to a disruption on the Medicaid website, which was down for hours, affecting Nevadans who rely on this critical program to literally stay alive in many cases, and this is precisely—precisely—the problem. The chaos and the disruption that this reckless action has caused is just unnecessary, and it is harmful. It is helping no one.

So I want to ask everyone at home—I want to ask you at home—to think about this: How is any of this actually helping you? Is it helping you at the grocery store? Is it helping you at the gas pump? Is it helping you get an affordable home?

It is not.

That is why I call on President Trump to fully and permanently rescind this harmful Executive order to freeze Federal funds now. Nevada families are watching. Nevada families are

waiting to see if President Trump thinks that they really matter.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mrs. SHAHEEN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

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

Mrs. SHAHEEN. Mr. President, I come to the floor this evening to join my colleagues to express my deep concerns about the Trump administration's extreme decision to take away services that millions of families and small businesses rely on. This is a decision that does not lower costs, that does not create jobs, that does not enhance public safety, or keep our communities safe. It is a decision that actually will hurt people in my State of New Hampshire and too many across the country who rely on services that are now in jeopardy.

On Monday night, more than 2,600 Federal programs were ordered to cease activities with less than 24 hours' notice. They were given little guidance on how this should be carried out, and in every State across the country, confusion and panic among too many people followed.

Since that order, I have heard from countless Granite Staters who are worried about what this means for them and their families—from healthcare providers to nonprofit organizations to so many who are doing essential, life-saving work. Many of these organizations are waiting on promised funding for projects that they have already completed, funding for which they went through the process. They were guaranteed they were going to get these awards, and now they are in jeopardy.

The Trump administration claims it wants to lower costs for folks. Well, let me be clear: This unprecedented decision does nothing to bring down the price of food, the price of housing, the price of childcare, the price of medications, or other lifesaving needs that families have. So what we saw this afternoon is that the administration tried to walk back their order; they rescinded the memo. Sadly, uncertainty and confusion remains because the White House says that they rescinded the memo but that the freeze wasn't rescinded.

So like a lot of people in New Hampshire, I am concerned, and I am frustrated. In my State and across much of the country, there is an affordable housing crisis. Because of the administration's action, housing organizations across New Hampshire are not able to use Federal funds. I heard from the executive director of the housing authority in the city of Rochester. They said they have 170 families who are at risk of being homeless if they can't get their operating funding—and that is just one housing authority.

Despite what the administration said about rental assistance not being affected, at no point yesterday did the Department of Housing and Urban Development say that this money would continue to be available. Housing funding that keeps all of these families and hundreds more across New Hampshire in their homes is at risk of being cut off.

Yesterday, we also heard from the Mortgage Bankers Association. They were asking for clarity because they couldn't be sure if they could help families complete the purchases of their homes.

The person we talked to said:

Americans are going to the closing table tomorrow and deserve to know that their loan will close on their home purchase. Without this clear assurance that the Federal Government will ensure new loans or pay claims under these programs, there will be severe harm to borrowers and disruption to the mortgage market.

Well, HUD gave that clarity for single-family mortgage insurance but not for multifamily properties, such as apartment buildings. That affects 20 percent of the multifamily housing construction across the country. Let me just say that again. It affects 20 percent of the multifamily housing construction that is happening right now. We are talking about 130,000 apartments nationally that are jeopardized by this administration's actions.

Now, we know we need to build more housing. We are already millions of units short of what we need. In New Hampshire last year, for the first time, the average price of a house was over \$500,000. And our rental vacancy rate? In a healthy rental market, the vacancy rate is about 5 percent. In New Hampshire, it is 0.6 percent. There is no rental housing. This careless action means higher rents and home prices in the future.

Our housing shortage is much of why the most recent point-in-time count for homelessness found it up 18 percent across the country. We have far too many people in this country who don't have a roof over their heads, and that is especially dangerous during these winter months. Meanwhile, even though 2 weeks ago New Hampshire's nonprofits and State and local governments were awarded more than \$14 million to help shelter people and support them, today, they couldn't access that money. That means they won't have the funding they need for rent or to get reimbursed for supportive services.

I want to be clear: Even after a judge stayed the order, my constituents still cannot access their funding. The Presiding Officer is a former Governor. He knows what that means. People in our States can't get the housing that they are counting on. If they can't get their funding, that means more people are forced to live in their cars, on the streets. It means more people can't get the help they need with substance use disorders or in finding work. It means

more people are stuck without permanent housing. These are veterans; they are families; they are victims of domestic violence. They are all placed at risk because of this order.

I heard from one constituent who has a mortgage from the U.S. Department of Agriculture. She has owned her home for 20 years now. She is almost at the point where she has paid off that mortgage, but without the mortgage assistance that she gets from the USDA, she is worried that she might lose her home entirely.

Another of my constituents, Kathleen, lives in housing for seniors. She has debilitating medical issues that make it hard for her to leave her home. She gets all of her food from a local food bank. She called my office because she is worried, if this funding stops, she will be on the street, and she doesn't know where her meals are going to come from.

That is what this order and these cuts are threatening—leaving seniors without a roof over their heads, not knowing where their next meal is going to come from.

It is not just in housing that people are concerned. The effects on communities are significant. The chaos of this order is hurting communities that have been promised funding for improvements they have made to their water infrastructure, to their energy use, and even to city parks.

We heard from the town of Conway, which is in the heart of the Mt. Washington Valley in the White Mountains. With help from the Environmental Protection Agency, Conway has fixed an aging sewer pipe, their sewer main, to keep sewage from leaking into the groundwater.

New Hampshire is really good at working at the local, State, and Federal level to address critical infrastructure. This week, Conway received word that, at least for now, they can't get paid, thanks to this order from the Trump administration. Conway has already done the work, they have already paid the contractors, and as of today, they are waiting for reimbursement of about \$400,000 from the Federal Government. That is a big deal for a town in a rural area that has fewer than 10,000 people. It affects their tax base. If the Federal Government doesn't come through with the money that has been promised, then taxpayers in Conway are going to have to make up that difference.

It is unacceptable for the administration to suggest that it won't pay this bill, leaving families on the hook for unaffordable rate hikes.

I have also heard from one town administrator who is not yet sure how broad the scope of the administration's order is and how it is going to affect their ongoing wastewater infrastructure project that is using a mix of Federal and non-Federal funds.

Their pump station relies on tarps to keep out the elements. The structure and equipment that keep the sewer sys-

tem functioning face imminent failure. Without the Federal funding—which, just to be clear again, has already been committed—there is no way this town can complete this project. That the whims of an unconfirmed budget director can create this degree of uncertainty is maddening.

I have heard from Kristen Murphy, who is with the town of Exeter. She is very concerned about the pause and the impact it will have on energy efficiency funding.

The Energy Efficiency Community Block Grant Program was poised to host a presentation in February for resident-owned manufactured housing on funding opportunities for energy efficiency. That is particularly important for those people who live in manufactured housing. And I did when my husband and I were in graduate school. We lived in what we called a mobile home; now it is manufactured housing. I know how challenging it is to keep them heated and warm and comfortable for the people who live there.

As Kristen pointed out, support for these manufactured housing communities is essential because a greater percentage of their annual income goes to home heating costs than it does for most people.

The administration's actions also threaten other projects in Exeter, like a landfill solar array that is currently under construction, improvements to critical stormwater infrastructure, and funding for a multigenerational community center.

There are a dozen other small towns in my State—from Gorham in the northern part of New Hampshire to Keene in the west over the Connecticut River Valley along Vermont—that have made improvements to their parks and community spaces through the Land and Water Conservation Fund. These towns have matched Federal funding dollar for dollar to improve quality of life in their communities, and as of today, because of the uncertainty and the way this order is being interpreted, taxpayers are left holding the bag.

In the area of childcare and nutrition, the chaos and confusion from the White House over the past 2 days have created significant uncertainty for early education programs, and it risks further fueling the childcare crisis.

Again, like housing, we have a childcare crisis in New Hampshire. The cost of childcare for the average family, if they have a toddler and an infant, is over \$30,000 a year.

While the administration claimed yesterday afternoon that Head Start Programs wouldn't be affected, Head Start Programs have been frozen out of their payment system. While, hopefully, that should have been made available again, my office is still hearing reports of system delays and reduced availability that is harming programs.

Fortunately, the timing of this uncertainty has not disrupted services in

New Hampshire so far, but I am hearing stories of programs in other States that had to temporarily stop serving families because they were not able to access the funds they needed.

It is unclear what the impacts of these shifting policies will be on child care and development block grants, which working families rely on to be able to afford care for their children while parents are at work.

My office has heard from the Childcare Network Collaborative in New Hampshire with significant concerns that childcare providers may be prevented from accessing community development block grant funding that they have already been awarded. These funds are intended for the purchase of a building that will prevent huge rent increases for childcare providers and help fuel an expansion of childcare in the rural parts of northern New Hampshire.

Childcare programs are also concerned about the potential impacts on other Federal programs that the families they serve rely on. For example, while the administration eventually said yesterday that SNAP payments wouldn't be affected, programs are finding it hard to reassure families about whether they will actually get their monthly payments on time given the disruptions that we have already seen to programs that were not supposed to be affected according to the administration's own words. So more chaos and uncertainty.

That is why so many of my constituents are telling me they simply do not trust what they are hearing from the White House.

Families relying on programs like SNAP for food and WIC for women, infants, and children to keep from going hungry already struggle to make their benefits last until the beginning of the next month. Any payment delays, even if it is just a few days, will cause needless suffering for hungry children. It is cruel to be putting struggling families through this unnecessary anxiety.

When it comes to law and order, the President often speaks about his commitment to law and order. In 2020, he criticized Democrats who supposedly wanted "to defund" and "abolish" the police. Yet here we are with the President stopping Federal funds from going to police and law enforcement agencies. Make no mistake, this stoppage could place lives and livelihoods in jeopardy.

I heard from Strafford County Sheriff Kathryn Mone about how the cutoff of funds will affect them. I live in Strafford County, so I know the sheriff there very well. Strafford County was awarded a \$715,000 COPS technology grant to buy much needed modern and interoperable portable and mobile radios for first responders. The U.S. Department of Justice notified the county on Monday that they are going to withhold these funds, forcing the county to place a hold on the order of new, updated radios.

Now, this may not sound like a big deal to some, but this equipment helps Strafford County first responders protect Granite Staters. If first responders can't communicate effectively, by definition, they can't respond to emergencies and crimes.

When I was Governor, we had a horrible shooting in northern New Hampshire. Two State troopers, a judge, and a newspaper editor were killed. As they were trying to get the perpetrator, our State police couldn't talk to local police, they couldn't talk to the Vermont law enforcement, they couldn't talk to the Canadians, and they couldn't talk to Maine—all of whom were involved in trying to catch the perpetrator—because they didn't have the communication, the radios they needed to keep people safe.

In the same vein, the town of Newington on the seacoast was awarded \$80,000 to replace 20-year-old radios and technology that can't communicate with modern equipment. The town was on the verge of submitting its invoices to be reimbursed for buying this crucial public safety equipment when the Trump administration stopped the flow of Federal funds.

If they are in an emergency, like a natural disaster or a mass shooter, Newington's police and fire departments would not be able to communicate on their current radio equipment to coordinate an effective response with Federal, State, and local partners. This lack of coordination among first responders could result in Newington's police or fire departments not arriving in time to fight a fire or to rescue people in need of help. The lack of modern radio communications could result in people not getting medical care quickly enough.

Again, this is much needed equipment that allows officers to communicate quickly and effectively to not only protect the people they serve but to protect each other.

Thanks to President Trump, Newington is being forced to pause its upgrade of 20-year-old equipment.

It should also be noted that the White House payment freeze means that the businesses who sold Newington the radios and associated equipment are not going to get paid in a timely fashion.

So let's call it what it is: Stopping funds to law enforcement and first responders puts lives and businesses in jeopardy.

It also affects defense contractors. New Hampshire has a strong defense industrial base. We have a lot of companies that do great work to protect our men and women who are serving. The Federal funding freeze is hitting those small businesses and manufacturers that rely on defense contracts to pay their workforce, which is critical to maintaining our national security.

For example, the New Hampshire APEX Accelerator program relies on grants from the Department of Defense to help small businesses navigate Fed-

eral contracting. In New Hampshire, government contracts and sub-contracts totaled \$4 billion last year. Now, that is not just some number that helps fuel our economy. For people from big States, maybe that doesn't sound like a lot of money in your economy, but in New Hampshire's economy, that is a lot of money, and it is an investment in our national defense. It is a manufacturing worker's ability to support their family. So let's not lose sight of what and who we are talking about here.

The freeze blocks funding under the Defense Production Act, which expands the defense industrial base under national security emergencies. Right now, we have a lot of businesses in New Hampshire that are receiving funding under the Defense Production Act to support their operations. These grants strengthen military readiness and capacity.

In the area of health, this pause will also cause real harm to healthcare providers and patients across our State. Everyone from our largest hospitals down to individual patients is reaching out to my office. They are confused, and they are scared.

The most immediate consequences will be felt by safety net providers like community health centers. They are vital to caring for our most vulnerable populations. Their patients are often uninsured for healthcare. Sometimes they are homeless. Some of them suffer from substance use disorders or mental illness. They rely on their community health centers just to get through the day.

As much as 50 percent of community health center funding comes from Federal grants, and their operating margins are slim.

Lamprey Health Care in Newmarket, in the southern part of New Hampshire, tried and failed to draw down Federal funds yesterday. They have another scheduled drawdown for early next week. This means that Lamprey has a limited number of days before the Trump administration's order limits the services they can provide to the community.

Amoskeag Health—another one of our community health centers—provides services in Manchester, our largest city. It would also suffer from a funding pause. Thirty-five percent of their funding comes from Federal grants, and they only have 19 days of cash on hand, which would cover just 1 week of payroll. They are scheduled to get funding on Monday, and that is now in the lurch.

Federal funding to train the healthcare workforce is also being threatened. New Hampshire struggles to retain and recruit healthcare providers, and Federal funding is critical to ensuring we have enough providers in rural and underserved areas.

Last week, Elliot Hospital—one of the largest hospitals in the largest city in Manchester—received notice that \$3 million in funding for its nursing ex-

pansion grant program was put on hold. There are currently 80 potential students enrolled in this program. The program is designed to address the acute nursing workforce shortage by attracting local applicants in the greater Manchester community. The funding freeze now puts that effort in jeopardy.

And Coos County Family Health, the northernmost county in New Hampshire, up along the Canadian border, is another community health center where access to healthcare can be extremely limited. Patients frequently have to drive hours to get access to some of the most basic services.

Coos County Family Health received a planning grant through the Health Resources and Services Administration, HRSA, to establish a rural medical residency program. Just this week, they received their accreditation, which is so exciting. They were so excited. And now the process begins to recruit and retain future doctors. The sole purpose of this program is to train health providers in Coos County, an area that struggles to attract talent. When we train these doctors in rural areas, they are more likely to stay after residency and become core members of the community. Any other week, this would be great news: more doctors to treat patients in need. But, today, their future funding through HRSA is at risk, thanks to the uncertainty created by these Executive orders.

Training doctors to treat sick or injured patients shouldn't be a controversial issue, but according to this administration, it is.

Coos County Family Health also uses Federal funding to support the victims of domestic violence that come into their practice. Specialized staff offer the victims counseling and support services—things like access to shelter. The staff connects victims with law enforcement and even offers prevention programs in local schools. Without Federal funding, they will be forced to lay off these staff members.

I don't know. Does the administration think that domestic violence survivors are unworthy of our support? Does this administration believe that causing chaos is more important than protecting our most vulnerable? Maybe this is what President Trump meant when he said he wanted disrupters. I don't believe this is what the public wanted.

Mental health programs are also at risk. New Hampshire's suicide rate is higher than the national average, and we need every available resource to help address this issue.

Northern Human Services and the National Alliance on Mental Illness use funding from the Garrett Lee Smith Suicide Prevention grant to provide afterschool support to youth experiencing suicidal ideation or those who have recently attempted suicide. We are literally talking about taking away services from children who are thinking about committing suicide. I heard

from the folks at NAMI, the New Hampshire Alliance on Mental Illness. They were almost in tears when they talked about what was going to happen if they couldn't serve these kids who need help.

And there is also Navigating Recovery, offering around-the-clock substance use disorder services in the city of Laconia. They are a small nonprofit, and they make use of every dollar they get by offering 24/7 support for individuals that have just overdosed, and that includes literally going into the hospital to be with the patient as they recover. They offer wraparound services like connecting individuals to housing, job opportunities, and childcare so they can find stability as they go through recovery.

And 53 percent of Navigating Recovery's funding comes from Federal sources, including the State Opioid Response grant program. I have worked for years to get dollars to the State under that SOR program, including last year when New Hampshire was awarded nearly \$30 million.

And I have to say, in the first term of the Trump administration, President Trump was very supportive of these dollars. We worked with his administration to get additional funding to address the fact that New Hampshire was one of the hardest hit States. So I don't know why, suddenly, they are willing to put that funding at risk by this freeze, because it has done more to prevent fatal overdoses and support recovery services than any other Federal program. Navigating Recovery uses those dollars on the ground. Without it, they would only have weeks before they start laying off staff and stop offering services.

Despite what this administration claims, it is the individuals who will pay the price of this uncertainty and chaos. This spending freeze is yet another example of the administration ignoring how their policies affect individuals' peace of mind, the livelihoods and the health of Americans at risk.

And then we are seeing broader attacks by the Office of Management and Budget on Federal employees. The Trump administration didn't stop at ripping funding away from vulnerable Americans this week. While much of the public's focus has been held by that order, they have continued their relentless attack on Federal employees.

Over 2 million civil servants working in thousands of essential fields—from healthcare to law enforcement to national security—who keep our country running, are under attack. And listen, I think we need to be more efficient and more effective, and we may have people who are not doing their jobs the way we want them to, but what this order has done is created confusion over the spending freeze—the hiring freeze instituted by the President's Executive order.

The administration claims this is temporary, but thousands of Americans who had job offers on the table

saw those offers revoked—even those who were ready to fill some of our most urgent vacancies, like at the VA. Even though the Department of Veterans Affairs said it would not apply this hiring freeze to many VA positions dedicated to providing veterans' healthcare and benefits, many crucial programs that veterans depend on will not be able to hire staff to serve our veterans.

For example, the VA will not be hiring caseworkers who help veterans get into permanent housing and related support. They won't be able to hire the personnel that literally keep the lights on and buildings running, such as fire protection, housekeeping, plumbing, boiler plant operation, laundry services, and other essential roles.

And we should remember that, year after year, the VA has had challenges in addressing these critical gaps. Last year, the VA reported almost 3,000 severe occupational staffing shortages. But that didn't stop this administration from pulling every pending job offer the day they took office. And while some have been reinstated, others are still in limbo. In just one example, VA employees at a facility focused on research and care for veterans with late-stage cancer were told their jobs were under review and they may be terminated altogether.

Now, I know everybody in this Chamber believes that we have made a commitment to those who have served this country in uniform, and we don't want to fail our veterans when they return home and enter civilian life. So how does this firing of people who take care of them help us fulfill that commitment?

And then, if we want to talk about jobs that keep Americans safe, let's talk about keeping planes from falling out of the sky or colliding on runways. I worked closely with the National Air Traffic Control Union and the FAA's Collaborative Resource Working Group to adopt a new staffing model in last year's FAA reauthorization bill.

We have a significant number of air traffic controllers in New Hampshire. They do a great job of keeping people in the flying public safe as they enter North America, all the way down to New York, in some of the most congested airspaces in the country. Now, the FAA made good progress in hiring last year as a result. They are still more than 3,500 controllers, however, short of their staffing target, and the controllers we do have work 6-day weeks, 10-hour days on a good week. They are exhausted; they are overworked; and they face severe mental health challenges as a result.

The FAA estimated that 10 percent of the Federal air traffic controller workforce would depart last year as a result of these conditions. And despite this, these air traffic controllers still haven't been told conclusively whether or not air traffic controllers are exempt from the hiring freeze.

Now, if preventing us from filling shortages and taking care of some of

our most vulnerable wasn't enough, OMB is actively trying to get rid of the civil servants we do have. This week, millions of Federal employees received emails offering to pay their salaries for the rest of the fiscal year in exchange for resigning now—and that included every single air traffic controller in the country.

Now, you might be asking yourselves why, when we are short more than 3,500 air traffic controllers, did we offer to pay the ones we have not to work? Well, like the hiring freeze, this order is an irresponsible, reckless, nontargeted effort that could have devastating consequences for critical positions.

What is more, they are trying to convince us that this will save money, making it clear that even if we lose thousands of employees with no plans to replace them, we will be better off.

Well, that is bad news for tourism in New Hampshire, for those who work closely with U.S. Forest Service personnel and depend on sound management of the White Mountain National Forest, and it is bad news for people who value clean air and clean water.

This message was also sent to more than 780,000 civilian employees who work for the Department of Defense. In New Hampshire, we have almost 8,000 civilians who work at the Portsmouth Naval Shipyard that we share with the State of Maine. There are four public shipyards in the United States. Our employees in Portsmouth have the best on-time, on-budget record of any of the public shipyards. These employees contribute to the maintenance of our nuclear submarines, an essential tenet of our national security and a crucial capability to deter major conflict. Any impact to their workforce will strain a shipbuilding industrial base that is already saturated with demand to meet the requirements of our Navy.

The bottom line: If the shipyard can't get boats to the fleet on time, our Nation is less safe.

The freeze on Federal assistance also affects critical programs that support men and women in uniform, including DOD's financial assistance and grant programs that support servicemembers and their families.

This administration has said repeatedly that it wants to "restore the warrior ethos" at the Pentagon. I don't know about you, but slashing our defense workforce doesn't help me sleep any better at night. I don't think that restores the warrior ethos.

So in conclusion—I see my other colleagues here, and I know they are waiting to speak—the actions this week have only created confusion, chaos, and stress. That is the best-case scenario, if it ends right now. But if not, if the Trump administration and Elon Musk get their way and cut these programs, working Americans will be the ones to suffer the most.

The need for housing, sewers, and childcare doesn't go away when this administration says they don't want to

pay the bills. These costs just get pushed down to towns and end up coming out of people's paychecks. It ends up being paid on the backs of our local taxpayers.

Now, again, the administration tried to walk this back by rescinding Monday's memo, but then they added confusion by claiming that the underlying funding freeze was still in place. And they are unable to answer basic questions about who and what will be affected.

Maybe it is just me and the hundreds of Granite Staters whom I have heard from, but if you are going to stop all the critical funding that helps seniors, children, and families across this country, you need a better answer than we are hearing from this White House.

Instead, what we heard during the White House briefing—when asked one of these basic questions, Americans were told: We'll check on that and get back to you.

So to Granite Staters who have called my office in distress, wondering what this far-reaching, unprecedented move means for their lives and their livelihoods: Don't worry. The White House is going to get back to you.

That is outrageous—and this, despite not one but two Federal judges who have ordered the White House to stop holding these funds. The administration has made it clear that they intend to move forward with vague, irresponsible Executive orders that jeopardize billions in infrastructure, energy, healthcare, workforce, and educational investments.

Hard-working families, businesses, and nonprofits have been calling my office asking for clarity, and this administration hasn't been willing to provide any.

Common sense calls for all of us to work on a bipartisan basis to help our constituents to put an end to the chaos and uncertainty that has been created by this administration in only its second week.

I hope we can do that.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Democratic leader.

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, I want to thank my Democratic colleagues: Senators SHAHEEN and BLUMENTHAL, Senators KIM and PADILLA, and so many others; Senator SCHATZ, Senator DURBIN, so many others who came on the floor tonight. And why did we all come on the floor? To sound the alarm of the reckless, lawless things Donald Trump is already doing to American families.

Americans need to know what is happening. They need to know what kind of damage people like Russell Vought will do to them. Tonight, we are holding the floor to sound the alarm. And, to augment that, I just got off the phone with a whole bunch of Democratic Governors from across the country, and we talked about Trump's administration's Executive orders, his erratic policies, and, most important, the impact on their States.

In State after State, people are on edge, people are so worried, because of what these executive orders would do: Head Start, rural hospitals, police, firefighters, you name it; schools, local governments. In every one of these States, people are angry and scared because of the damage that President Trump's Executive order would do.

Our group, the Governors and I, discussed paths forward to best respond and fight back. We are going to have a coordinated approach. We talked about how these policies would hurt their States. The amount of Federal money that is needed to support these States—and not just State government, so to speak, but feeding people, building roads, employing people, teaching kids, dealing with mental illness, helping keep us safe in fire and police—these are real things. And every one of these States could not provide the help that people need, provide the decent life that people seek, if this Executive order was fully implemented.

And so we talked about how we could inform them as to what is going on. We talked about how we can coordinate. And I told them that thanks to the Democrats' work here in the Senate, Donald Trump and Russell Vought hit a speed bump today. But I told them, as you will hear from my later remarks, we must keep fighting and working together to make sure they don't succeed, because if they succeed, they are going to hurt millions and millions of average working families. So we are working together to do that.

Now, today, we saw what happens when Americans fight back against disastrous policies. We saw what happens when Americans make their voices heard. A few days ago, President Trump launched his most reckless broadside yet against the American people here in his second term. In the blink of an eye, OMB announced a universal freeze on all Federal funding. The blast radius—the blast radius—of OMB's announcement was seemingly limitless—States, cities, towns, schools, small businesses, law enforcement, nutrition services, elderly care; hospitals, rural and urban and suburban; communities, people helping feed people, people helping people with mental illness, people helping house homeless veterans were all just so, so put on edge by the potential of these cuts.

Donald Trump's freeze can be boiled down to three Cs. You can talk about it in many ways, but the three Cs are apt: chaotic, creating chaos back home because there is chaos here in Trump's government; careless, not even knowing and realizing how badly these cuts would affect people; and cruel—cruel—outright economic sabotage against working families.

Make no mistake, OMB's funding freeze was intended. It is precisely what Project 2025 looks like in action—Project 2025 by another name. When Project 2025 first was announced, it was

during campaign season, and it was amazing the reaction by the American people—Democrats, Republicans, conservatives, liberals, Independents—against it. It was strong, much stronger than I ever imagined. And as a result, it got a very bad name. I think one poll showed 68 percent of Americans opposed it.

So what did Donald Trump do? Typical in his fashion, he said: I never heard of Project 2025. I don't even know what it is.

They were so afraid of it. You think they would have learned a lesson during the campaign, but they didn't.

And, now, within a few weeks of his being inaugurated as President, President Trump seeks to implement Project 2025. Well, Americans were furious. Americans let Donald Trump know about it. They let their Republican Congressmen and Senators know about it. They pushed back, and today, after 24 hours of outrage from one corner of the country to the other, Donald Trump backed off.

He rescinded the OMB memo—for now. Of course, the danger is not over. Rescinding one OMB memo will not nullify all of the Executive orders Donald Trump has issued, which will continue to pose a threat to these funds. And we know damn well that if they can't do it this way because they were caught redhanded, they will try to do it another way. But I can assure the American people, we will be vigilant.

But I want to say to my colleagues and to my constituents in New York and to my fellow citizens—American citizens—the roots of democracy are real. So many of us are worried that Trump will try to upend them—he and his cohorts—but they are real.

And this week was a good example. People heard how bad this was. They raised their voices. And now Trump has backed off.

This won't be his last essay, his last attempt to do this. We know that. But we also know that, when we raise their voices, and we will again, he knows that he will lose ground with the American people in a very severe and bad way, and if we keep fighting, he will back off and back off and back off until he stops. And once and for all, this evil scheme—this scheme that hurt so many American families—will be gone.

It is clear Donald Trump, with this freeze, seeks to violate the law, seeks to help his billionaire buddies, and hurt the American people. Violate the law, help his billionaire buddies, and hurt the American people—that is what he is trying to do. But we won't let him, America. We won't.

Now, let's talk about Mr. Vought, the chief cook and bottle washer of 2025. This episode, what happened today, should be a lesson to President Trump that following Russell Vought and Project 2025 is a loser—a loser, of course, for America, but a loser for him.

Now that Donald Trump has rescinded the OMB order, he should rescind the nomination of Russell Vought as well. If not, Mr. Vought will be the architect of more losses for President Trump because the next time this happens, Russell Vought will be the one calling the shots at OMB, a nightmarish scenario for working people.

I sat down a few days ago with Mr. Vought in my office. Because he is seeking nomination, he came to visit me. He told me, plain as day—plain as day—if he is confirmed, these are the kinds of things he wants to do at OMB.

The Senate must not confirm Mr. Vought to lead OMB. His views are way too fringe for the majority of this country, and I am sure, if you asked in a secret ballot, for a majority of the Republican Senators who sit across the aisle from us.

But, tomorrow, the Senate Budget Committee is scheduled to hold a markup of Mr. Vought's nomination. I join Ranking Member MERKLEY in calling on the chair to delay this markup by at least 2 weeks. Why? First, because of the devastation that these Executive orders will do and that the funding freeze was prepared to do. But, second, because it is clear that Mr. Vought was not honest during his hearings, and we need more answers from him. When something this consequential is launched by an administration, the person behind it all deserves—or America deserves—to hear exactly his thoughts and exactly what he is going to do.

During his testimony, Vought refused to answer direct questions related to the impoundment, for instance, of congressional funds, of which this is a related issue. And we now know why. He didn't want to alert Congress about the incoming decision from OMB to freeze all grant funding. Mr. Vought clearly withheld information that Senators were entitled to know, that the American people were entitled to know, and he needs to give us answers.

In the meantime, the American people also are learning just how fringe Mr. Vought truly is. His North Star is very simple: He wants to eradicate trillions in basic services that help American families so Republicans can give tax cuts to their billionaire buddies.

The last time Vought led OMB, he pushed multiple budget proposals that slashed Social Security and Medicare and public health. During the last default crisis, Mr. Vought was a key adviser to hard-right Republicans who pushed America to the brink of disaster by using a debt ceiling as blackmail to cut trillions in funding for healthcare, for seniors, for hungry kids, and for so many others.

Mr. Vought wants to eliminate the Department of Education, eliminate education funding in many ways.

He has proposed to cut disability payments for retired veterans. He wants to cut SNAP, feeding hungry children. He wants to raise drug prices.

And he is also one of the chief proponents of a truly sinister theory about the powers of the executive branch that calls for the impoundment of congressional funds. That means, basically, that Russell Vought thinks the President gets to pick and choose which laws he wants to follow and which he doesn't.

Why have a Congress? If the President can say, "Well, I will follow this law but not that, and this one and not that," that is so fundamentally against what the Founding Fathers believed, what Americans have believed through centuries, and yet he wants to just toss it away, again, so he can pay for the tax cuts his billionaire buddies desperately want.

If Congress wants to pass legislation investing in infrastructure or tech innovation or national defense, even, Mr. Vought thinks the President can just say nope, an explicit assault on our checks and our balances, which has served this Republic so well for centuries.

And, again, let me repeat so people understand clearly what is the end goal: to cut the daylights out of funding for middle-class families in order to line the pockets of the ultra-ultra-wealthy—tax cuts for Donald Trump's billionaire buddies, funding cuts for parents and kids and seniors in healthcare.

I believe the Budget Committee tomorrow, because the chairman of the Budget Committee has not granted the delay that is so desperately needed, will not go to vote on Mr. Vought, because a vote without him coming clean to the American people, what is it worth? It is not a process that should be. And then they will explain to the American people why this man doesn't deserve a vote in such an unfair hearing practice and setting.

And now let's talk about President Trump's increasing lawlessness. It may be tempting to think everything Donald Trump has been doing, including halting Federal funding, is part of his chaotic, unthinking approach to government, but we should not be so sure that it is just that and nothing else, because beneath the surface, a very clear pattern is emerging from Donald Trump's second term in office, a pattern of sheer lawlessness—a pattern of sheer lawlessness. First, he pardoned over 1,500 insurrectionists on his first day in office, including people convicted of assaulting Capitol Police officers. These were hooligans. I was within 30 feet of them. They were not peaceful. I couldn't believe one Congressman said they were tourists. Give me a break. They had hatred in their eyes, and they sought to stop our government from functioning in its lawful way. Some of them were violent, and Trump pardoned them—over 1,500 insurrectionists—on his first day in office.

Can you image anyone, let alone a President, being proud that he pardoned insurrectionists, some violent,

all trying to overthrow this government, on his first day in office? What does that say about this President?

Then, in the dead of night, he got rid of over 17 independent government watchdogs—people who report abuse and fraud and waste in government—without any notice or justification.

Yesterday, he eliminated Commissioners sitting on the NLRB and the Equal Opportunity Employment Commission. The NLRB, folks—you may not have heard those initials, but it has been in place I believe since Roosevelt's time to make sure workers are treated fairly, to make sure that employers who don't want a union don't go beyond fairness in preventing a union from occurring.

When Donald Trump gets rid of the Democratic Commissioner on the NLRB who has always represented working people, he is saying to working people: I don't care about you. I care about the people who employ you but not you. And if they want to take advantage of you, Donald Trump says when he gets rid of the NLRB member, I don't give a hoot.

Another example. By the way, again, almost certainly against the law. The rule is, there should be a certain number of Democratic Commissioners and a certain number of Republican Commissioners. Whoever is President gets the Chairman, and then there are two Democrats and two Republicans. But Donald Trump didn't fire a Republican member of the Board. Maybe that would be less unfair. He fired the Democrat who stands up for working people.

Then, after all this, he issues his sweeping OMB memo virtually halting Federal grant funding.

These are actions of a lawless President, of a President who wants to erode, eat away at the rule of law and our system of checks and balances. And why? Why is Donald Trump storming right out of the gate so lawlessly? Why is he breaking one law after another? Might be because the Supreme Court said he can't be held accountable. Might be.

But it is simple. What is he trying to do? Before our very eyes, Donald Trump is rigging the system and breaking the law to help his billionaire friends at the expense—at the expense—of working families. That is the goal.

Finally, let's talk about how awful yesterday was for so many people. I heard from people in every corner of my State—frightened, worried, concerned—that they, average New Yorkers, no different than average Americans, were going to really suffer because of this funding freeze.

When I talked to the Governors, as I mentioned a little earlier, on the phone, it was happening in every State. It could be a rural State, it could be an urban State, a State that is large, a State that is small, from one end of America to the other, people are just fearful about what would be done.

The American people did not deserve to endure this 24 hours of panic and confusion, and they won't deserve to have to sit through that again when Donald Trump seeks another way to do the same thing even though we gave a speed bump, even though we thwarted him—not "we." The Democratic Senators didn't thwart Donald Trump. The Democratic Senators, by our advocacy and our strength, alerted the American people, and they thwarted Donald Trump.

So, America, congratulations. Congratulations. Let's keep doing it when he is trying to hurt us.

Did Donald Trump consider for a moment the damage he was unleashing? Did he know he was kneecapping cops and firefighters from purchasing literally lifesaving equipment—bullet-proof vests, breathing gear? Did he know he was essentially shuttering community health centers that so many people depend on for their health, that so many people bring kids to when they have a fever and might get something more damaging, like strep throat or influenza? Did he know that he was hurting rural hospitals that had to turn people away because they didn't know if they would get the funding? Did he know that he was telling food pantries: You are not going to get food next week to feed the hungry.

Yesterday was absolute hell for so many Americans trying to understand how Trump's order was going to hurt them; 24 hours of panic, confusion, deep, visceral frustration—all unnecessary.

All 50 States reported that the Medicaid portal was frozen, and 7½ million New Yorkers were shut out of Medicaid all together. That is just in New York. Nobody knew what would happen next.

My office was smothered by an avalanche of calls from New Yorkers, local leaders from every corner of the State in panic and fury.

I was getting calls from New Yorkers of both parties who were furious that the administration would have the gall to launch this sneak attack on them out of the blue.

I got calls from Republican town supervisors and mayors asking about flood prevention and sewer construction.

I got calls from food banks like Feed More in Western New York, fearful they wouldn't be able to make deliveries to hungry people.

I got calls from Rochester Head Start and other Head Start Programs worried sick—worried sick—that they weren't going to be able to pay the rent or pay their staff.

I got calls from the Roswell Cancer Center, which does some groundbreaking research—they developed the PSA test up there in Buffalo; Northwell Health on Long Island, one of the biggest hospital providers; Churches United for Fair Housing; local leaders in places like Syracuse; community health centers like Cornerstone Family healthcare in the Hudson

Valley—from one end of the State to the other.

So we won't know what the administration will try to do next. An hour from now, we could get a new memo outlining a new round of freezes. They did the last one at night, in the evening. That is how this administration under Donald Trump works—governing by chaos, governing by confusion. And who pays the price? The American people—parents, kids, doctors, teachers, healthcare workers, police, firefighters, and so much more.

So, my friends, in conclusion, I see my colleagues waiting. I will cut short my remarks. I could go on for a while because I am so aggravated and angry about what he has done and will attempt to do.

Even though the Trump administration failed today, it is no secret they will try to find another way to cut these funds. When they do, I want to assure the American people that Senate Democrats will be there not only to call it out but to fight back, to defend American families and beat another evil proposal back—with you, the American people, as our real sword and shield—making sure he doesn't do bad things to you.

So thank you to my colleagues for being here. I see we have four colleagues waiting. Thank you for sounding the alarm on the terrible things this administration is preparing to do, and thank you for being true patriots who believe in our democracy.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. HUSTED). The Senator from New Jersey.

Mr. KIM. Mr. President, I rise today to try to make some sense of it all. Why are we seeing nothing but chaos coming from the White House? Why are people feeling a sense of fear and confusion? Why should Americans be paying attention to any of this?

I want to start by saying to the American people: You are not alone in feeling overwhelmed by what is going on right now.

Just yesterday, my office received more than 700 calls asking questions about the Trump administration's unconstitutional and brazen decision to take money away from them, to freeze programs that help people in every corner of our State and country. That translates to a call every 2 minutes.

I am going to share some of the stories of concern that I received yesterday, but before I do, I want to try to explain what exactly is going on.

On Monday, the Acting Director of the Office of Management and Budget sent a memo ordering Federal Agencies to "temporarily pause all activities related to obligations or disbursements of all federal financial assistance."

I know that sounds complicated, so let me put it another way. The Trump administration said that taxpayer money going to help people across the country was stopped. That is money that you have paid through your taxes

that goes to do important things. It helps provide meals to seniors. It keeps roofs over people's heads. It helps combat the fentanyl crisis. It helps get veterans healthcare. It keeps childcare programs open and schools funded. It helps small businesses get back onto their feet after disasters.

That is just a small example of what the Trump administration attempted to take away from you. And let's be clear: This is your money, and they tried to take it away.

What happened next was they got caught, and the backlash was fast. The outrage was real. Their actions were stopped last night when a judge issued an injunction and questioned the constitutionality of the administration's actions.

Then today, in the span of an hour, the Trump administration rescinded their directive, only to contradict that with a tweet from the White House Press Secretary:

This is NOT a rescission of the federal funding freeze.

It is simply a rescission of the OMB memo.

Why? To end any confusion created by the court's injunction.

It goes on to say:

The President's EO's—

Executive order—

on federal funding remain in full force and effect, and will be rigorously implemented."

In short, the first time we tried to take away your money, it was probably unconstitutional, but we are going to keep trying in different ways until we get it right.

If this feels like your head is spinning, I get it. We have seen nothing but mass confusion and chaos for the past week and a half since Donald Trump reentered the White House. It is not governance; it is whiplash.

If you are watching me on C-SPAN or catching a clip on social media, there is one thing I want you to take away: The chaos is just a smoke screen for corruption. It is quite clear. They want to take away your money and give it right to the billionaire donors and corporate interests.

The Trump administration isn't taking this money away from you because they are serious about making government more effective or efficient. They are not doing this because they want to help more people and target our resources where they can do the most good. They are doing this because they are getting ready to gut programs you rely on every day and use that money for another round of tax cuts for those at the very top. They are doing this because the big corporate interests want to dismantle the public servants who work every day to make sure that your water is clean, that your kids get a good education, and that your parents are able to safely get to their doctor's appointments.

We should not lose sight of what is at stake here. We shouldn't get wrapped into the noise and confusion and chaos that the White House throws at us because behind that chaos, there are real

victims of this corruption. There are real lives on the line when people are left behind. Let me share just a few stories.

I heard from a lot of seniors and people who support seniors about their fears about what this means.

Yesterday morning, I got an email from someone who helps operate senior living facilities in Edison, N.J. They said the freeze was “obviously alarming” for those “who rely on federal funding to help people with disabilities become more independent.”

One of my staff received an email from a leader of senior services organizations in Hackensack and Jersey City who said:

Those in most need of services in New Jersey will lose all support.

Another staff received a message from Frank in Toms River. Frank said:

I am paralyzed and use Ocean Ride to get to all my doctors appointments. . . . I am unable to travel in a regular vehicle and without the significant discount of Ocean Ride, I could not afford to get to the doctor. Ocean Ride is essential to my daily life.

Now, you may never have heard of Ocean Ride, but for people like Frank, it is their lifeline. These actions by the Trump administration to take away money could force Ocean Ride to close their doors.

It is not just our seniors who lose out in this corruption and chaos; it is our kids.

I got a call from Kelly, a nurse from Parsippany.

I work with children who need food from free school programs, babies who need WIC, children who are bullied in school, children with disabilities.

She told me that the Trump administration should “quit playing games with politics.”

I heard the same thing from Manny from Bergen County, a public school teacher who said that he had “students that benefit directly from programs” that are on the chopping block. Manny said that this moment makes it hard to look at his 3½-year-old and think about the future. It is a feeling that so many of us have right now.

I heard from Susan from Hudson County who works in a nonprofit that helps the homeless. She said in a call to our office yesterday:

Our funds have been frozen. We are not going to be able to serve our clients or our staff. This is going to have a significant impact, not only with my agency, but the entire community of those we serve.

I am sharing these stories with you because it is important to remember that the impact of the decisions made at the White House go beyond the feeling of hopelessness and helplessness. If the White House continues down this path, those at the very top—the well-off and the well-connected—will get their tax cuts and whatever else they want. They will get it at the expense of a senior who will have to miss a doctor’s appointment because their ride support program has been cut. They will get it at the expense of a young

kid whose aftercare was cut or free school lunch was eliminated. And they will get it at the expense of the person who just needs a helping hand to put a roof over their head.

Mr. President, this isn’t just about ending this chaos; it is about protecting our neighbors, our communities, and our families. We know this fight is not over. The White House was very clear about that today. This was just the beginning.

We have seen these freezes for infrastructure spending that could impact big projects like the Gateway Tunnel and small projects like paving the road you drive on to take your kids to school.

These freezes could make America less competitive on a global stage by cutting research for AI and other next-generation technologies. In a week where we are seeing China make gains, we can’t take our own foot off the gas.

And these freezes could stop critical research into diseases that impact Americans across the country. We should be supercharging our efforts to cure Alzheimer’s and cancer, not cutting them.

Meanwhile, we have seen nearly 20 inspectors general fired from government Agencies, trying to hide what is happening. The American people want more accountability, not less. And making it harder for watchdogs to call out bad behavior could result in a golden age of corruption.

But when it comes to standing up against attempts to take away your healthcare, your childcare, your eldercare, the basic protections that your government provides because you pay into it, we will be with you every step of the way to fight back.

This is just the beginning. We hear your concerns, your frustrations, your anger. Your voice still matters. Your story stills matters. And Democrats in this Chamber will lead the way. But together, we will push back and make sure that it is the people’s priorities that win the day.

Mr. President, I ask the American people to see the chaos for what it is: a smoke screen to benefit the ultrawealthy. And although I know this chaos is unnerving and it is frightening, the American people can rest assured that we will fight this chaos and focus on what matters most here: protecting you from the blatant corruption that is the administration’s attempt to take money from our working families and give handouts to those at the very top. Let’s get to work.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from California.

Mr. PADILLA. Mr. President, colleagues, a little over a year ago during a FOX News townhall, Sean Hannity gave Donald Trump, then-candidate for President of the United States—the chance to assure the American people that he would not abuse power or become a dictator if he won a second term.

But instead of committing to the rule of law during that townhall, he answered defiantly saying “Except for day 1.”

Well, it has been 9 days since he was sworn into office, and as then-candidate Trump promised, we are already seeing how hell-bent he is on pushing the limits of his power. We see a President unburdened by the rule of law after the Supreme Court handed him blanket immunity and a President with a blatant disregard to the guardrails put in place by the authors of our Constitution.

Over the last week and a half, here is what we have seen him do: He has declared an end to birthright citizenship in clear violation of the 14th Amendment to the Constitution; he has illegally fired 18 inspectors general—individuals, professionals we count on to hold departments and Agencies accountable; he has issued 1,500 pardons for the January 6 insurrectionists, including many who attacked law enforcement officers in an attempt to overthrow an election; and late Monday night, almost 48 hours ago, he set off an actual constitutional crisis.

The President ordered a sweeping freeze on “all Federal financial assistance,” pending a review by his political appointees who have passed his loyalty tests. Yes, those are documented.

Donald Trump has attempted to implement nothing less than a one-man Presidential government shutdown. But, thankfully, the American people would not stand for it. Communities in every corner of California and every corner of the country have raised alarm bells and filed lawsuits. They have not backed down.

President Trump’s administration has backed down—at least for now—because we are not naive enough to think that he is not going to try to do it again. The vague document released by Donald Trump’s budget office threatened to withhold billions of dollars from social safety net programs, for example, all to lay the groundwork to pay for his big tax cuts for large corporations and billionaires—yes, like the billionaires he surrounded himself with during his inauguration.

Working families—again, not just across California, but across the country—knew immediately what the consequences and the impacts mean in real life. Preschools closed, lifesaving cancer treatments halted, meal programs for seniors threatened—I can go on and on with specific real-world examples. But here is another dynamic I ask you to take to heart. The billionaires who sat next to him and the billionaires who set to benefit from the tax breaks he is hoping to achieve, of course, they wouldn’t have felt the impact of this at all.

As we stand here right now, we are told that he has rescinded the order in order to avoid a court battle because, of course, this was already challenged and tied up in court. But we know that the fight is far from over. In fact, the

White House Press Secretary threatened that his Executive order blocking Federal funding that he issued day one in office is still in effect: “Remains in full force” and “will be rigorously implemented.”

Let’s be clear about what President Trump has tried. He has tried to block hundreds of billions of dollars in aid to support families recovering from catastrophic fires in California. He has attempted to block aid to law enforcement agencies that we rely on to keep our communities safe. He is trying to block aid to children and families who depend on Federal childcare and nutrition programs. That is the reality of what is going on here.

And, sadly, for the most part, my Republican colleagues have obediently fallen in line. I have to believe you are getting the same phone calls that I am—countless calls from constituents and community groups and individuals searching for answers, searching for guidance, asking for our help because the way these orders and memos are written, nobody knew which specific programs were affected or for how long. The executive Agencies that were supposed to implement the order didn’t even know how they were affected. And most glaringly, the White House itself changed its story every few hours on what was supposed to be affected by the Executive order that they themselves wrote.

So the Trump administration, through either their intent or their incompetence—or maybe both—and a disregard for the law sowed chaos, confusion, and fear amongst hard-working American families.

State Agencies and local governments, not just throughout California but, again, throughout the country, were blocked from accessing Medicaid and housing assistance grant portals. In case you thought folks were exaggerating, yes, that really happened. Colleagues on both sides of the aisle, I know you know about this.

The director of a grant-funded program with the district attorney’s office in Los Angeles supporting victims of violent crime was concerned about the future of their work because of the uncertainty of Federal assistance. Funding for research on cures for childhood cancer was threatened. Local commuter rail officials in Sonoma raised concerns about their ability to continue service if outstanding Federal funding is frozen—service that workers need to get to work, to do their jobs, keep our economy going. The city of Vacaville was worrying about the potential impact to their housing authority and vouchers.

There is a housing affordability concern and homeless crisis in many parts of the country. This is not helping. Head Start grantees were frozen out of their Federal payment management system. And if those kids can’t go to Head Start, their parents have a tougher time getting to work.

What are you doing?

Health centers in San Francisco met to assess their ability to provide services if grant funding and Medicare reimbursements were frozen. The Oakland Fire Department raised alarm bells about having to cut staff if an outstanding FEMA grant to support pay for 35 firefighters were paused.

The impacts are real, colleagues.

Mr. President, as you know, my home State of California has been devastated by historic fires these last few weeks. Fueled by wind gusts of up to 100 miles an hour, the Southern California fires burned more than 12,000 homes and businesses and more than 40,000 acres—nearly or approximately three times the size of Manhattan. And over two dozen Californians lost their lives.

Thanks to a swift major disaster declaration that President Biden issued in his final days, Federal Agencies like FEMA and the EPA have been instrumental in not just the response to the fires but in the early stages of recovery and rebuilding efforts.

But in his typical, vindictive, and reckless fashion, President Trump didn’t stop to think about the actual impacts of a decision like this. His OMB order shamefully put our disaster relief at risk. The freeze would have delayed FEMA’s public assistance programs supporting debris removal, meaning—look, if you delay the debris removal, you are delaying the rebuilding efforts. It threatens funding for emergency shelters as well as the grant money that supports hiring firefighters and firefighting equipment purchases.

Do you think these fires were devastating? We have all seen the images on television. Some of you may have an appreciation for the scale of the communities impacted. Let me remind us, folks, we are in the middle of winter. Summer is just a few months away. The risk and the threat will continue to grow, and we are going to delay the hiring of firefighters and the purchasing of firefighting equipment?

After threatening to withhold Federal aid for disaster victims in California as leverage to pass other elements of an unpopular agenda, this was just another slap in the face to the thousands of Americans who lost everything and are now counting on our collective support.

Just yesterday, after Federal firefighters returned home from working 24-hour shifts to battle unprecedented fires in dangerous, life-threatening conditions and after risking their own lives to protect our communities, Federal firefighters received a message from President Trump. You would think that maybe—just maybe—it was a message, saying “Thank you for your service. Thank you for your sacrifice. Thank you for your time away from your family to help fellow Americans in need,” but it was not. The message Federal firefighters received after being gone for weeks—24-hour shifts, protecting lives—the message they received was a request for their resigna-

tion. That is right. President Trump offered them a buyout.

It was not just to them; he offered this to all career Federal employees who are not beholden to his loyalty tests without having the clear authority or funding to do so. We have seen this before from President Trump and his co-President, Elon Musk.

I think it is important to share with everybody tonight, especially to Federal employees who are watching: Anybody who received this offer and thinks that maybe this is an offer that is too good to be true, that maybe I should jump at it, let me assure you this offer is too good to be true because there is no Federal funding to pay people who do not show up to work.

Our Federal firefighters saw this attempted buy-off for what it was, and I want to read for you, colleagues, some of the messages—just a few of them—that I have received.

From one brave firefighter:

It’s hard to put into words just how disrespectful this feels to any civil servant but especially to someone who’s given so much—sacrificing precious time away from family, risking everything for the greater good.

Another message reads as follows:

Today I returned home after a two-week fire assignment in California. . . . A slew of executive orders over this last week have put myself and a lot of others on edge. I am worried for my livelihood and my future. A purge of federal Wildland firefighters will have catastrophic outcomes. Our fire seasons are only getting longer, neighborhoods continue to expand well into wild landscapes. We cannot control when a fire will choose to wreak havoc on a community, but we will show up. We want to show up.

Colleagues, tomorrow, as some of the members of the Budget Committee have recognized, we have an opportunity to show these brave Federal workers that we hear them and that we are fighting for them and that we will continue to fight for them.

The Senate Budget Committee will meet to vote on the nomination of Russell Vought to lead the Office of Management and Budget.

By the way, this is the very office that is the source of much of the chaos over the past 48 hours. During his previous tenure with OMB, Vought tried on numerous occasions to withhold and slow the distribution of congressionally appropriated disaster relief and foreign aid based on political motives. During his confirmation hearing last week in the Budget Committee, he continued to hedge on answers that he would not politicize government assistance. He refused at every opportunity to fully commit to following the law when it comes to the distribution of Federal funding.

To any of my colleagues on both sides of the aisle who have worked hard to secure funding for their constituents back home and who don’t want to see the money that families in their States are counting on recklessly withheld, we must vote no on this nominee.

Here is where we stand at the moment: President Trump may have

backed down for now thanks in part to so many of my Democratic colleagues who have spoken out against these outrageous abuses of power that will hurt our constituents, but the chaos over the last 48 hours is only a sign of things to come throughout this administration that has just begun.

I would like to speak to my colleagues on the other side of the aisle for just a moment.

Yes, you all won the majority in this November's election. I respect that. I am not an election denier. But for those of you who just won your campaign, who were just elected, and who just joined the Senate—actually, I think, to everybody, whether you were elected now, 2 years ago, or 4 years ago, I will ask you this: When you ran for the Senate, for the privilege to serve in this body, did you run on a platform of cutting veterans' housing assistance? Did you reach out to voters who are now your constituents and say "Vote for me, and I will cut school lunch programs"? Did you suggest during the courses of your campaigns that, if elected, you would cut disaster relief?

As a colleague, I ask you this: Are you more loyal to your oath of office, to your constituents, and the Constitution or are you more loyal to a wannabe dictator—Trump? Are you just going to stand down silently while he tramples all over your independent constitutional authority and then race to either Mar-a-Lago or to the White House for a picture and for him to thank you? Your silence over the last 48 hours is deafening.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Nebraska.

LEGISLATIVE SESSION

MORNING BUSINESS

Mr. RICKETTS. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate resume legislative session and be in a period of morning business for debate only, with Senators permitted to speak therein for up to 10 minutes each.

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

TRIBUTE TO CYNTHIA BAJJALIEH

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, Americans across the country depend on their elected officials, not only to represent their interests in government, but also to provide every day support and services. But what most Americans do not see is the staff that make it all possible. Today, I want to take a moment to tell you about one invaluable member of my team: Cynthia Bajjalieh. For 20 years, Cynthia, my director of constituent services, has been living, breathing proof that the purpose of government is to help people. I am sad to share that this Friday will mark her last day on our staff. Her de-

parture leaves a void that will be hard to fill.

Cynthia got her start on my staff as an intern, serving out of our Chicago office. I have long told the hard-working young people who work for me: "Treat each constituent as you would your own grandmother." During her outstanding service to our State, Cynthia took this to heart, serving the people of Illinois as if they were her own family.

That directive has defined Cynthia's service to our State and this Nation. Over the past two decades on my team, she has become an integral part of the heart of our office—a problem solver, a redtape cutter, and goodwill ambassador all rolled into one person.

Cynthia always takes the time to get to know the whole story. Ask her about any case she has handled, and chances are she will recall not only the constituent's name but also the names of their family members and details about their lives. She cares deeply about her work and the lives of others.

You can find examples of this in her work each and every day, but one of my favorite stories is from 2018, when Cynthia got a call from the Sisters of Mercy about a Congolese mother who had been separated from her young daughter. The American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) would eventually take this case to Federal court to stop the cruel practice of family separation and force the government to reunite more than 2,000 children with their parents. It also was Cynthia who fielded hundreds of calls from Americans stranded around the world—and on cruise ships—during the pandemic, helping them get their medications and find their way back home.

To me, Cynthia truly is a miracle worker. For so many Illinoisans over the last 20 years, she has made the seemingly impossible, possible. And she does it all with a smile and compassion. Cynthia embodies how the government should serve Americans; I am lucky to have had her on my team. I wish her all the best as she begins the next chapter of her life.

SUBCOMMITTEE MEMBERSHIPS OF THE SENATE COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS FOR THE 119TH CONGRESS

Ms. COLLINS. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the memberships on the twelve subcommittees of the Committee on Appropriations for the 119th Congress be printed in the RECORD. I thank Senator MURRAY, the vice chair of the committee, for her leadership and cooperation with me in making these important assignments.

There being no objection, the material was ordered to be printed in the RECORD, as follows:

SUBCOMMITTEE ASSIGNMENTS

Senator Collins, as Chair of the Committee, and Senator Murray, as Vice Chair of the Committee, are ex officio members of all subcommittees of which they are not regular members.

AGRICULTURE, RURAL DEVELOPMENT, FOOD AND DRUG ADMINISTRATION, AND RELATED AGENCIES

Senators Hoeven (chair), McConnell, Collins, Moran, Hyde-Smith, Fischer, Mullin, Rounds, Shaheen (ranking member), Merkley, Baldwin, Heinrich, Peters, Gillibrand, and Ossoff. (8-7)

COMMERCE, JUSTICE, SCIENCE, AND RELATED AGENCIES

Senators Moran (chair), Murkowski, Collins, Graham, Capito, Kennedy, Hagerty, Britt, Fischer, Van Hollen (ranking member), Reed, Shaheen, Coons, Schatz, Merkley, Peters, and Gillibrand. (9-8)

DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE

Senators McConnell (chair), Collins, Murkowski, Graham, Moran, Hoeven, Boozman, Capito, Kennedy, Coons (ranking member), Durbin, Murray, Reed, Schatz, Baldwin, Shaheen, and Murphy. (9-8)

ENERGY AND WATER DEVELOPMENT

Senators Kennedy (chair), McConnell, Murkowski, Graham, Hoeven, Hyde-Smith, Hagerty, Britt, Rounds, Murray (ranking member), Durbin, Merkley, Coons, Baldwin, Heinrich, Peters, and Ossoff. (9-8)

FINANCIAL SERVICES AND GENERAL GOVERNMENT

Senators Hagerty (chair), Boozman, Collins, Mullin, Fischer, Reed (ranking member), Durbin, Coons, and Van Hollen. (5-4)

DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY

Senators Britt (chair), Murkowski, Capito, Kennedy, Hyde-Smith, Hagerty, Murphy (ranking member), Murray, Shaheen, Peters, and Van Hollen. (6-5)

DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR, ENVIRONMENT, AND RELATED AGENCIES

Senators Murkowski (chair), McConnell, Capito, Hoeven, Fischer, Mullin, Rounds, Merkley (ranking member), Van Hollen, Heinrich, Baldwin, Gillibrand, and Ossoff. (7-6)

DEPARTMENTS OF LABOR, HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES, AND EDUCATION, AND RELATED AGENCIES

Senators Capito (chair), Graham, Moran, Kennedy, Hyde-Smith, Boozman, Britt, Mullin, Rounds, Baldwin (ranking member), Murray, Durbin, Reed, Shaheen, Merkley, Schatz, and Murphy. (9-8)

LEGISLATIVE BRANCH

Senators Mullin (chair), Fischer, Rounds, Heinrich (ranking member), and Ossoff. (3-2)

MILITARY CONSTRUCTION, VETERANS AFFAIRS, AND RELATED AGENCIES

Senators Boozman (chair), McConnell, Murkowski, Hoeven, Collins, Hagerty, Fischer, Rounds, Hyde-Smith, Ossoff (ranking member), Murray, Reed, Schatz, Baldwin, Heinrich, Peters, and Gillibrand. (9-8)

STATE, FOREIGN OPERATIONS, AND RELATED PROGRAMS

Senators Graham (chair), McConnell, Boozman, Moran, Hagerty, Britt, Mullin, Schatz (ranking member), Durbin, Shaheen, Coons, Merkley, and Murphy. (7-6)

TRANSPORTATION, HOUSING AND URBAN DEVELOPMENT, AND RELATED AGENCIES

Senators Hyde-Smith (chair), Collins, Boozman, Capito, Graham, Hoeven, Kennedy, Moran, Britt, Gillibrand (ranking member), Murray, Durbin, Reed, Coons, Schatz, Murphy, and Van Hollen. (9-8)

ADDITIONAL STATEMENTS

TRIBUTE TO CELMA SILVEIRA

● Ms. HASSAN. Mr. President, I am honored to recognize Celma Silveira of