

pro-Kremlin talking points, such as the false claim the United States was operating biological research labs in Ukraine has made her a favorite guest on Russia state media.

We should be working together to elevate people in our national security apparatus who are sanctioned and banned from Russia because they have worked hard to oppose our enemies, not praised by them.

Our Nation faces real and growing security threats daily. We need an intelligence service resourced, equipped, and led to capably oppose them.

Can we count on Tulsi Gabbard to provide that leadership? I don't think so. And I cannot support her nomination.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. HUSTED). The Senator from Iowa.

DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE

Mr. GRASSLEY. Mr. President, every so often, I come to the Senate floor to bring my colleagues up to date on the lack of financial management system in the Department of Defense.

I am here again to address what I consider a festering bureaucratic sore. The Pentagon can't keep track of the taxpayers' money. And as I just indicated, I speak about this many times. In 30 years of watchdogging, little or nothing has happened.

Internal controls over the taxpayers' money remain weak or nonexistent at the Department of Defense. And I am here today to speak specifically about a recent inspector general's audit, driving home that point. Specifically, auditors discovered \$1.1 billion in undocumented payments by the Pentagon using funds Congress provided to assist Ukraine.

They examined 479 transactions for the calendar year 2022, totaling \$2.1 billion dollars. The auditors determined that 65 percent of the transactions could not be verified for a lack of documentation.

If the sample were doubled in size, the inspector general estimated a staggering 94 percent would be unsupported.

Now, we all agree that is unacceptable; or if we don't agree that that is unacceptable, there is something wrong with our thinking.

The rules are crystal clear. Supporting documentation is required when paying bills. Proper documentary support should include a contract, travel authorization, invoice, receipts, payment voucher, or things like that.

And I don't mean you have to have all those available to pay a bill, but you ought to have at least one of them or more before you spend the taxpayers' money.

Now, taken together, these records form an audit trail essential for payment verification and fraud detection.

If the documents match up, a bill is ready to pay. So \$1.1 billion went out the door, and there is no documentation to back it up.

I want to make very clear: That is an audit report, not CHUCK GRASSLEY say-

ing that. So we don't know how that money was used. Was it spent to assist Ukraine as required, or was it misused or stolen? We simply don't know.

Clearly, unsupported payments leave the door wide open to fraudsters. Paying bills without documentation shows neglect and indifference. It is reckless and should not be tolerated.

These undocumented expenditures occurred on the watch of Chief Financial Officer—or as we know him CFO Mike McCord. Though Mike McCord has departed the Department, he and his deputies are accountable. They failed to exercise due diligence over the public's money.

Such gross mismanagement is made worse by the Pentagon's pitiful accounting system—or as I said in my opening, the lack of a financial management system.

Top managers turned a blind eye to this problem as well, just like a long line of their predecessors. Instead of modernizing, they kept pouring out billions down a rathole to upgrade ancient systems that belong on the junk heap.

Why did such smart, experienced managers go down that rabbit hole? Why did they fail to acquire modern systems that could produce reliable information, effective controls, or clean opinions? Why has this problem not been fixed?

There once was a bravehearted watchdog in the Air Force's Comptroller's who claimed to know the answer. Ernie Fitzgerald was that person's name. I knew him in the 1980s. He worked in the Defense Department until he retired maybe 20 years ago, and he probably died about 3 or 4 years ago.

He had this to say:

Leaders in the Pentagon don't want to fix it. Sloppy accounting gives them flexibility to hide their shenanigans.

When there is no audit trail to follow, it is easy to make sneaky accounting adjustments to cover your backside. Pentagon managers have some explaining to do, and I am all ears. I want to give you just one recent example, and I am following up with the inspector general in the Pentagon to get some answers on this.

Over a period of 6 years, until earlier last year when she pleaded guilty to—can you believe this—stealing \$106 million out of the Defense Department. She was buying all kinds of homes and all kinds of expensive cars, and I don't have a long list of where \$106 million went, but can you believe over a period of 5 years, there was nobody in the Defense Department who caught it? Eventually, after 6 years, the IRS discovered it, but she got away with it for 6 years. Now, she is prosecuted and 15 years in prison. She wasn't prosecuted—she pled guilty.

But so I write to the IG to get an explanation of how come they have a financial management system—or a lack thereof—that doesn't catch somebody stealing \$106 million. So I sent along,

with those questions I am asking the IG, a report that I put out in 1998 that was a report of people stealing money at the Air Force base in Dayton, where they had this check-writing machine, and we found out that the person managing that check-writing machine could make checks out to people in his family. And there was about \$5 million stolen at that particular time.

And so we went to Dayton to study what was wrong, and what was wrong is exactly what this audit report shows today, they were writing checks without invoices.

Now, you see, we pointed something out, what, 26 years ago or something like that, that was wrong with financial management in the Defense Department, and I—so I guess you could say the Defense Department has learned nothing in the last 26 years.

And I just hope that they would take my report of 1998 and what is wrong with Janet Mello stealing \$106 million and try to change the system.

Now, we, in the Congress, with our power of oversight, or as you study in high school government, checks and balances of government, we appropriate money, we pass laws, but we don't enforce those laws. We have a constitutional responsibility to point out when the executive branch of government or the people in the executive branch of government aren't faithfully executing the laws that we pass or properly appropriate spending the money the way we appropriated.

So we don't enforce the laws; we make the laws. We have oversight.

But what do you do? You come to the floor of the U.S. Senate and try to raise Cain about it and get some changes made. But the Defense Department is a little bit different than any other Agency of the Federal Government because they are the only Agency of the Federal Government that has never had a clean audit.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

REAGAN NATIONAL AIRPORT FLIGHT ACCIDENT

Mr. MURPHY. Mr. President, a lot of Americans turned on the TV today hoping that the President of the United States was going to make a non-political, nonpartisan statement grieving the loss of those who died in the awful plane crash last night. Instead, he almost immediately launched into a political tirade, blaming what he called DEI. That accusation was echoed by the new Secretary of Transportation and the new Secretary of Defense.

Apparently, the allegation is that by hiring non-White men at the FAA, this plane crash occurred. That is not true. That is offensive. It is not grounded in

fact. It is just not accurate that by hiring women or Black people or Hispanics that the safety of this Nation is compromised. That is offensive.

What we have just learned, though, is that the initial FAA report suggests that the tower staffing was not normal during the crash, that the controller on duty last night was doing a job traditionally handled by two people. There is supposed to be someone handling helicopter traffic and someone guiding planes into the airport. There was one person doing that job last night.

We will learn more about what caused this crash. But it is not lost on us that the President of the United States made a choice when he came into office. He threw the FAA into immediate crisis. He ousted the Administrator, replaced the Administrator with no one, and spent the first week trying to bully and intimidate Federal employees. He fired the entire FAA Safety Advisory Board.

So we will take the time to find out what actually happened, but this happened under President Trump's watch. Clearly, something was not right in that tower last night, and it is important for us to follow the facts instead of making quick accusations.

TRUMP EXECUTIVE ORDERS

Mr. President, I came to the floor to continue the discussion that my colleagues have been having over the course of the last 2 days about something fundamentally dangerous that the President is engaged in: an attempt to seize power from Congress.

I don't understand why my Republican colleagues aren't outraged by President Trump's announcement 2 days ago that he was suspending all Federal spending. I don't know why my Republican colleagues don't see how that essentially makes us irrelevant if we spend hundreds of hours of time engaged in very difficult, bipartisan negotiations to come up with a Federal budget every year, as is our constitutional responsibility under article I, and then the President of the United States decides to cancel all spending for weeks or months or longer. That is what the President did 2 days ago.

Now, the courts have put a stay on that order, but the White House Press Secretary yesterday afternoon made it clear that they are still intending to pursue a shutdown of Federal spending. And notwithstanding the very confusing set of news that came from the administration yesterday, notwithstanding the court order, my office has continued to be peppered with phone calls from organizations in Connecticut that are doing incredibly important work that can't get paid.

One of our most critical homeless shelters called this morning to tell us that the disbursement system was still down. This is a homeless shelter that relies on Federal dollars in order to pay the bills. Right now, they are potentially not going to be able to pay certain rents for their clients that are in emergency housing right now. They

are facing an immediate cash flow issue. They will be able to make payroll this week but not next week. They still haven't been able to get paid by the Federal Government because their payment system was shut down yesterday. It is still not back up.

Another not-for-profit in Connecticut that relies on Federal funding to provide food for families and children that are having trouble putting a meal or two meals on the table reports that they are still not able to log on to get reimbursement. This is, again, a small not-for-profit that helps keep people alive with emergency food, that does not have ample cash flow in their bank account, that is still unable to get Federal reimbursement. The result of them shutting down or suspending operations is literally kids going hungry tomorrow, the day after, the day after that.

The State of Connecticut has a really important series of grants still suspended. Payments have been suspended for a Federal grant that helps install solar and clean energy projects in Connecticut. That is not back up and running either.

This is just the tip of the iceberg, so nobody should think that this crisis has passed. Donald Trump suspended Federal spending. The Medicaid system got turned off. Many other important payment systems got turned off. Some of them got turned back on after the order went into place or after it was clear that there was going to be a court order to stop the President from engaging in this unconstitutional action, but many of these Federal programs are still suspended.

There are literally people who may be tossed out on the street and become homeless. There are kids who may go hungry because this crisis has not been fixed.

This is a fundamental corruption, what is happening right now, because what Donald Trump will be able to do, if he seizes control of Federal spending from us, is to be able to use his unilateral discretionary power to be able to send money to people that agree with him and deny it to people who don't agree with him; to send money to his billionaire friends' companies and deny funding to the competitors of those companies; to decide that this disaster in a red State will get funding, but this disaster in a blue State won't get funding.

And if you don't believe me, just look at the way that Donald Trump and Republicans are behaving right now about the wildfires in California. All of a sudden, Republicans are talking about applying conditions to saving people's lives and saving people's property in California.

California is going to have to comply with an unknown set of conditions designed by Donald Trump and Republicans, conditions that were never even contemplated by Republicans when there was a hurricane in Louisiana or in Florida, when there were floods or devastating tornadoes in the Midwest.

People aren't dumb; people know what is going on. There is a different standard if you are a friend of President Trump than if you aren't. There is a different standard applied to aid that goes to States represented by Republicans than aid that goes to States represented by Democrats.

And if we hand the unilateral decisions about where to spend money and where not to spend money to the Chief Executive, there is no going back. This is unconstitutional because the Founders and the Framers thought about this. We are article I, not article II for a reason. We have the spending power for a reason.

Our Founding Fathers were scared to death about the second coming of a monarchy. They were scared to death about putting too much power in the hands of the Executive. So they said that Congress decides the big questions: where and how to spend money; the conditions applied to how that money is spent; whether or not the country goes to war or not. Those decisions are made by us, and when you hand them to any Executive without check, it is a violation of the Framers' intent, it is a violation of the letter of the law of the Constitution, and it is a recipe for corruption.

And so I am angry that a lot of my Republican colleagues that I believe in, that I have worked with, that I have sat and negotiated tough bipartisan pieces of legislation with, aren't raising alarm over what President Trump has done, and what he is continuing to try to do. If you believe that this pause is good for 90 days, then I have a handful of bridges to sell you.

If it is for projects in Democratic States or projects that don't align with the President's personal political priorities, I mean, nobody should believe that that pause is just going to last 90 days.

This is a constitutional crisis, and, yes, the courts have stepped in and put a stay on the President's order, but, ultimately, we should stand up for ourselves. We should stand up for congressional prerogatives—Democrats and Republicans.

And what pains me even more is that my Republican colleagues don't see the story and the broader danger to our democracy, to our country, that is posed by the actions of this President in the first week. There was a handful—a small handful—of my Republican friends who stood up and said it was wrong for Donald Trump to pardon the most violent of the January 6 rioters.

Now, it was wrong for him to have pardoned any of the rioters, the people who sought to do violence to us. I hear a lot of Republicans claiming that, you know, these were just tourists. Yes, there were a couple of bad apples in the bunch, but most everybody just kind of got pushed into the building by accident. They thought they were coming for a tour of the place.

I was here that day. I don't remember a single one of my Republican colleagues staying in the Chamber, after