

from all around the Commonwealth of Virginia—that was taking place in Alexandria, VA. And, in each instance, I heard again and again the story of fear, confusion: Are our funds being cut off? Can we say anything about it? We are set up in such a way that we have served underserved populations. Are we allowed to do that now?

And, finally, Madam President, this morning, I came into work and I had an email from one of the largest federally qualified health centers in Virginia, located in the Hampton Roads—1.6 million people in the southeast portion of our State; Virginia Beach, Norfolk, Hampton, Portsmouth, Chesapeake, these communities—and they said: Look, we are the healthcare safety net of first resort for a lot of low- and moderate-income people, and we have done this for years, and we receive Federal funding. In fact, Federal funding for most of our FQHCs is about 20 to 25 percent of their budget.

They tend to get paid the last day of the month. Yesterday was the 3rd of February. They indicated they had not received their January payment and, when they were reaching out to determine whether they would receive the January payment—or the February payment, for that matter—they wouldn't even be given the courtesy of an answer.

There is grave, grave concern about the numerous efforts that this administration has taken with respect to Federal employees and with respect to the funding freeze. The funding freeze that was announced last week was partially retracted by the administration. It has been partially and temporarily enjoined in now multiple court cases. But as the email from this morning indicated, organizations that should be receiving funds, if the funding freeze is in fact enjoined, are still not receiving them.

Obviously, we have got a lot of work to do to get to the bottom of this. The administration has not shared with any of us what their plans are. The analogy that I have used is it is like somebody has taken a jigsaw puzzle and dumped the pieces upside down on a table in front of me. All I am seeing is the cardboard backside. I don't have the box with the picture on it.

Every time I talk to a constituent, a Federal employee, somebody who works at a domestic violence shelter, a mayor, I can turn over a piece of the puzzle based upon what they are telling me, and as I turn it over, I can start to assemble what is in fact happening. And we need to do more to assemble it.

I just want to pledge to Virginians: I will be doing all I can to make sure you are protected.

But what I want to do now is read a letter that I have written and that I am posting today on my website and disseminating publicly, specifically to Federal workers. It is a letter that tries to honor them and give them a pep talk and also direct them to resources that they can access in case they are concerned.

And, once again, Madam President, 140,000 of these workers live in my Commonwealth.

Dear Federal Workers:

As you are all too aware, we are in a dark time. The Trump administration has made plain that it wants to kick you around—by blocking your ability to administer federal resources, censoring your free speech, locking you out of your workplaces, demonizing you in the press, and sending you ominous, and at times threatening, messages. These actions are shameful and harmful not only to you, but to Americans across the country that you serve.

But especially in the darkest of times, we must stay focused on finding our guiding lights. I hope you will let the call to service that you answered when you first swore your oaths as federal employees serve as that light.

My advice to you today is simple, even if it's not easy: Don't give up. Keep serving everyday folks.

You are here because of your expertise. You are here because of your patriotism. You are here because you know the value in dedicating your life to serving your fellow Americans.

America needs you—that has never been clearer than in the wake of [the administration's] Federal funding freeze last week. I heard from folks in every corner of Virginia about the invaluable support they receive from Federal workers like you.

Across the country, Americans are counting on you to deliver crucial services—from inspecting our food to make sure it's safe, to protecting our national security. From administering Social Security benefits, to staffing air traffic control towers, to supporting our allies around the world and keeping the influence of China, Iran, and Russia at bay.

I know it has been—and will continue to be—tough. Donald Trump and his cronies are determined to do anything they can to knock you off course. They've even dangled a phony buyout in your face. But make no mistake: that buyout is a trap. Donald Trump has no authority to offer you a resignation buyout. Don't trust a guy with a long history of stiffing contractors by taking him up on a sham deal that he won't follow through on.

You aren't alone. I'm going to be here with you, every day, working alongside you in service.

I want to share with you some specific ways in which I want to be a resource to you. On my website, [kaine.senate.gov](http://kaine.senate.gov), I am collecting stories from federal workers about what you are experiencing. Under no circumstances will I publicly share any information you send me without your consent. You can also choose to submit your [information] anonymously if you prefer.

I will also be updating my webpage with information that may be helpful to you, including summaries of your rights, recourse you can seek if you believe you are being illegally terminated, and answers to other frequently asked questions my office is receiving.

Please know, that I'm going to do everything I can to stand up for you—just like you're standing up for [and serving] the American people. Thank you for [all that you do].

With that, Madam President, I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The assistant bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

U.S. TRADE

Ms. CANTWELL. Madam President, I come to the floor to talk about export strategies, collaboration, and American principles.

Madam President, no one likes to be left behind. I know somewhere people think there is this, "I win, you lose," mentality. But what happened to "let's grow the pie" instead of just hoarding a few pieces that are left. Growth, not contraction, is the right solution.

The world is more connected, not necessarily just because of globalization. We are now more connected because of technology, and nothing we are doing is going to stop that. The speed of information is empowering anyone with an internet connection aided by the brain of an AI app to get answers and ideas hundreds of times faster than ever before.

Do we need new principles for the information age? Rules the world and we should strive to adhere to? I definitely agree that the answer is yes.

But, Madam President, I thought we were for capitalism.

Yes, capitalism in the information age needs better rules so markets aren't distorted because markets need to be properly policed and they aren't right now. And I believe that the U.S. should aggressively define the rules in the information age.

I believe in a technology NATO—a model of key democracies and key sophisticated technology countries, defining the rules of the information age and telling anybody who wants to follow that, we will give you a discount on our technology, instead of those who are advocating to buy from people who have a government backdoor. Or even in today's analogy, where you allow somebody to have a government backdoor to your technology.

Madam President, capitalism is still the largest, smartest export America wants to export. We want open markets, and we want more people to sell to 95 percent of consumers who live outside the United States.

Now, it is clear not all the world community is down with capitalism, especially places like China or North Korea. But that doesn't mean that we shouldn't continue to advocate for it.

What has U.S. advocacy for capitalism done to grow and stabilize the world? I would say immeasurable, immeasurable, immeasurable progress. In fact, the period from the end of World War II to the early 1970s is considered one of the greatest eras of economic expansion in world history. In the U.S., gross domestic product increased from \$228 billion to just under \$1.7 trillion in 1975. So whether it was Germany, Japan, South Korea—we have brought about a world economy because the shiny American dream was worth chasing. So whether

it was setting market rules, growing exports, investing in innovation—this is the poster child of what the United States of America has been about. It has not been a story about contraction; it has been a story about growth.

The impacts of the U.S. economy can't be ignored, but to out compete our adversaries, we need coalitions, not go-it-alone strategies.

Why do we fear this if we think our principles are correct? But somehow, the current administration thinks that we have been hurt more than we have been helped in this global equation, and they want us to believe that somehow there is a win-win situation on tariffs that they can deliver on.

The American people are demanding leadership here in Washington. They want us to work together. They want us to have the best interest of the country at hand. My guess is they think that on a global basis, too. I know my farmers do. Farmers, always the big potential loser in a trade war, want us to work out better economic opportunities for their future. But there are those in this administration who think we can close our borders, chill trade with tariffs, and somehow make time stand still.

Well, I got news for people, the information age has blown a hole in that theory, even if there was justification for the time stand still theory before the information age. You just cannot drop anchor in the middle of this storm. You need to get to a stable harbor and create an opportunity for the future. And trade, Madam President, not only grows economic opportunity, it helps change culture, and there are some cultures that are worth affecting.

It is better to have a job than be attracted to join a terrorist organization. It is better to create economic stability than fueling poverty and migration. And tariffs are a distortion of markets. Tariffs mean we disagree. It very rarely means the disagreement will be resolved quickly. It usually means people will retaliate, and the escalation of that retaliation will hurt consumers so much so that eventually someone will blink.

The payers in this dispute, though, are never the government leaders. No, it is the workers who lose their job. It is the family that pay higher costs. It is the community that loses their economic activity and tax revenue. And that is why it is so important in this day and age that we talk more about the three Cs: collaboration, coalitions, and capacity building.

Capacity building gives us the ability to accelerate innovation. Trust me, one thing I know about traveling in my State—I am sure it is true in other places, too—innovation is not only in the DNA of Americans, it is the history of our country. Whether electricity, aviation, or the internet, credit goes to the United States of America for innovation and inventing future economic opportunities, not just for us, but for the entire world.

But now, we are in an innovation race defined by AI and quantum. And according to the World Economic Forum, the U.S. generative AI may increase gross domestic product between \$2 and \$4 trillion per decade. Boston Consulting estimates that quantum computing could generate \$850 billion in annual revenue by 2040.

So are we going to focus on those things? Winning the races? Or are we going to allow a contraction that hurts everyone?

Obviously, going all in on AI and quantum can help ensure that our country maintains both economic and military advantages, but we definitely have to collaborate with like-minded nations who also want to grow AI and set the rules, if you want to beat China's ultimate Belt and Road Initiative—DeepSeek.

So what do we do about the domestic impacts of trade? Well, I can tell you some sure don't's right away. You don't abolish the Trade Adjustment Assistance Program, designed to protect impacted workers from trade, which is what has happened with the other side of the aisle. We need to be intentionally upskilling workers to help them in impacted sectors. I have met and talked to so many Americans. They are smart, talented, hard-working, striving, and they only ask for one thing: opportunity.

If you bet on them, they will do the rest. I often think of two major shifts in workforce policy in the United States. World War II, where we didn't have a workforce, and the women showed up in the factories and delivered production. And when the men returned from World War II, and everybody wondered what the economy of the future would be, and we gave them the GI Bill, and they created it.

So we don't cut workforce training. We invest in 2-year skill training programs at our high schools. We make sure that we turn to apprenticeships. We return to the skilling of the jobs that are needed today. You also don't cut export programs like the State Trade Expansion Program (STEP) or the Export-Import Bank.

But what do you do? Well, let's go back to those three Cs: collaboration, coalition building, and capacity building.

We will bring more high-wage manufacturing jobs back to the United States, fostering the investment landscape by continuing on the path of the CHIPS and Science Act and the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, those have put real investments in the United States of America and have started us on the path towards growing the middle class again. But we need to continue to invest in science.

We need a robust R&D tax policy for inventors and manufacturers, and we need to help our manufacturers with capital investment, equipment modernizations, to help them with their factories. I have seen this in places like Madison, ME, or Longview, WA, where

we helped revitalize a longstanding paper industry into new opportunities for the future.

So how do we deal with China? Well, they aren't playing by the rules. They are manipulating and flooding markets, but I guarantee you that just a fear of China is not the answer, and solutions like collaboration and coalition building are critical, particularly in the information age. China does have the largest gross domestic product, about 19 percent of global GDP.

In the global economy, the U.S. represents about 15 percent. But if the United States works to create markets with like-minded partners like Japan, Europe, and the UK and builds a coalition of like-minded democracies grounded in the rule of law, we can flip the script and have a market representative 34 percent of global GDP.

And if we take the next step and expand coalitions to include partners like Canada, South Korea, Australia, New Zealand, and India, then we are looking at a market that, instead of China's 19 percent accounts for almost half, 47 percent of global GDP.

So why aren't we focusing on that economic opportunity? A lot of people say, Well, that is not the America of today, but I am pretty sure Ben Franklin, about the time he was focusing on electricity, also went to France and helped to build a coalition essential for the founding and continuation of our country. So don't tell me it is not in our DNA to do this. There is so much more we could and should do working with our allies.

Obviously, I mentioned a few—research and development in artificial intelligence, commercializing quantum, scaling, safe, affordable fusion technology. And there are many Members of Congress who were working on these bipartisan ideas. But we have to remain competitive, and we cannot allow this debate about tariffs to take us off our historical course as a nation.

As I mentioned, we mapped out how to get investment in the United States of America, and now, we need to follow that with the training and skilling of American workers. As the AFL-CIO President Liz Shuler and Microsoft President Brad Smith at a recent meeting in Seattle agreed, we need to train and skill 500,000 electricians for the United States. Why can't we here agree and accelerate that? I am not even sure we can agree on the acceleration of air traffic controllers, and we have every reason to get that done.

Last week, I spoke about additional investments the United States needs to make in Panama, Latin America, and others to link and modernize bilateral agreements that help us counter China. And as I mentioned, I believe in an aggressive EXIM Bank investment to counter China's Belt and Road Initiative.

Free trade agreements are a way for us, not tariffs, to gain the leverage we want. South Asia could play an important role in this coalition building,

particularly in the Indo-Pacific region. But I want us to go further. I want us to understand that U.S.-led negotiations in a Middle East free trade agreement to build on the momentum of a cease-fire in Gaza could further stabilize that region, along with making investments in other programs. It is tragic that the administration fails to understand the important role USAID plays in global capacity building.

How will we know that strategy works? Well, I suggest we will know when we are growing the middle class in the United States of America again. The bills we have passed in investing and allowing us to innovate faster are on their way to doing that. Let us not have a trade war disrupt that and dismantle what has been history after history lesson of economic success of this Nation, fighting for open markets, capital opportunities, and investing in the ingenuity of America.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. BANKS). The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

#### CHANGE OF VOTE

Mr. PADILLA. Mr. President, on roll-call vote 26, I voted nay. It was my intention to vote aye.

I ask unanimous consent that I be permitted to change my vote since it will not affect the outcome.

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

#### EXECUTIVE CALENDAR

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Missouri.

##### NOMINATION OF PAMELA BONDI

Mr. SCHMITT. Mr. President, I stand here to amplify my support that I was able to give in the Judiciary Committee of Pam Bondi, who will hopefully, in a few short hours here, be confirmed as the next Attorney General of the United States of America.

I want to thank, before I do that, the leadership and the hard work of Leader THUNE and Senate Majority Whip BARRASSO in this entire confirmation process, working at a clip that I think is responsible and one that honors the mandate that President Trump got to shake things up here in Washington, DC.

I think what you saw in November was a dynamic where people weren't particularly happy with what was going on in this town. They voted for reform. President Trump is putting together a team of reformers. Look no further for an ideal place for that reform than the Department of Justice.

Before I get there, I do want to point out on a personal note that when Presi-

dent Trump announced that he was supporting Pam Bondi, I think I had said to somebody that this was a home run. Many of us in this Chamber are often outdone by Senator GRAHAM. He described it as a "grand slam touch-down, hole in one, ace, hat trick, slam dunk, Olympic gold medal pick." And he was right.

I have known Pam Bondi for years from the AG world. That was my job before I had this job. I was attorney general of Missouri. Pam was always known as a leader and somebody who has this really rare combination of a steel backbone and a heart of gold. She is in it for the right reasons. She cares about the rule of law.

She started her career from humble beginnings in a small town in Florida. She wanted to be a prosecutor. We heard it in her testimony in the Judiciary Committee, that that was her goal. It was to be a prosecutor. She spent hours and years in those courtrooms prosecuting the bad guys. She later became the attorney general of one of our bigger States.

As I mentioned, she was a leader. She defended the Constitution. She took on the opioid epidemic. She was relentless in taking on human trafficking and is somebody, I think, that everybody can look up to, not just from a personal perspective and her personal story but also in the way that she took on her job and had accolades from both sides of the aisle. There was actually somebody in the Senate committee, who was on the other side of the aisle in Florida, who ran for attorney general at the same time Pam Bondi was running for attorney general and testified to her character.

There is just no question that she is supremely qualified for this job, and we are really going to need somebody as the Attorney General to lead the Department of Justice who has that kind of integrity, who believes in the Constitution, and believes in individual rights and getting that Department back to where it always should have been, which is fighting crime.

Sadly, over the last 4 years, we have seen a Department of Justice gone astray—one that has made headlines, of course, for going after parents who showed up to school board meetings, under the auspices of the PATRIOT Act, treating moms and dads as terrorists who went to a school board open-forum meeting and had concerns about things like critical race theory or forced masking.

The full weight of the Federal Government honed in on parents and Catholics, who were treated the same way because they were traditional Catholics, literally setting up informant networks in an effort to spy on them because of their religious affiliation.

I am not talking about the Soviet Union in the 1980s. I am talking about the United States of America in 2021.

What Merrick Garland did to this Agency and the Department of Justice is a tragedy.

Kash Patel, hopefully, will move out of the Judiciary Committee here soon and be the next leader of the FBI and restore integrity to that Agency as well. But, of course, the Department of Justice that Pam Bondi, hopefully, in a few short hours, will be confirmed and then sworn in to lead, will restore integrity.

In addition to going after Catholics and in addition to going after families who showed up to school board meetings, the very coordinated effort of lawfare by the past administration to take out their chief political rival under the moniker of "show me the man, and I will show you the crime" can't be dismissed. They are not going to want to talk about that, but the effort to financially ruin President Trump, to literally throw him in jail for the rest of his life, deserves the scorn of the history books.

Joe Biden gave a speech in the fall of 2022 calling half of America a threat to democracy; that President Trump would never make it back to the Oval Office. And guess what happened: A series of zombie cases—with, at best, novel legal theories—was resurrected.

In New York, the No. 3 person at DOJ left the Department of Justice to join the DA's office in New York. Why would that person want to do that? Well, guess what. President Trump was prosecuted in a Manhattan courtroom not long after that.

In State cases, the No. 2 person in the DA's office in Atlanta was coordinating with the White House Counsel's Office on the prosecution of President Trump in Georgia.

And then Jack Smith—Jack Smith—was brought in, who was notorious among legal circles for being overzealous with overprosecutions, overcharging—was brought in specifically to take out President Trump. And it was only the Supreme Court, ultimately, that prevented that.

But this was all a scheme devised by the Biden administration to make sure President Trump never got back into office. Well, guess what. He stared it all down, and he won. And we have a real opportunity now to have a level set.

I don't think it is right that we have people pursued because of their politics from a criminal perspective. Nothing was out of bounds in the last 4 years by the Biden administration and Merrick Garland.

So Pam Bondi is just the kind of person to come in to restore integrity, to make sure that our Department of Justice is fighting on behalf of the American people and not in an attempt, ironically, to undermine our Republic, the accusation—the very accusation—that was leveled at Joe Biden's political opponent.

With that, I look forward to voting yes on Pam Bondi and having a real leader, somebody we can look up to, to lead that very important Department of Justice.

I yield the floor.