

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 President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.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

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Democratic whip.

TRUMP EXECUTIVE ORDERS

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, last week, I came to the floor to talk about the chaos that has been created by the announced proposed freeze on Federal funding and loans. I want to share a few stories about what I have seen and heard since I spoke on the floor last week.

Sharpsburg is near my home town of Springfield, IL. It has a water system in Christian County. It is in phase 3 of construction of a rural water project. It contains 18 miles of pipeline providing water to 50 new rural customers. The work is underway. The project is nearly complete, and it will be in jeopardy if there is a freeze permitted to take effect.

What does it mean? It means that these 50 homes and families will be without clean, safe, and affordable water. That is unacceptable.

The freeze also means that scientists at universities across the State are worried about their jobs and research. Parents of children with disabilities are worried about losing resources for their kids. Adults are worried about losing access to healthcare and social services.

Since then, not one but two judges have issued temporary restraining orders blocking President Trump's measure. As of yesterday evening, that pause has been extended.

But let me remind you: This freeze is unconstitutional. The Constitution gives the power to Congress, not to the President—the power of the purse—and the President has no legal authority to withhold funding that was signed into law for Americans on a bipartisan basis.

In the 1970s, former President Nixon tried to impound or withhold funding appropriated by Congress, and, in response, Congress passed the Impoundment Control Act of 1974, or the ICA. The ICA is still the law of the land, and it prohibits Presidents from withholding funds unless Congress approves the decision through outlined procedures.

But consider this: The current administration, apparently, does not care. The President and his people are ignoring the law, creating chaos in hopes that amidst the confusion, some part of his power grab will stick. He is testing the limits of how much he can chip away at our system of checks and balances.

There are reports that unelected Elon Musk and his "government efficiency team" now have access to the payment systems of the U.S. Treasury, which is essentially the checkbook of the entire Federal Government. Elon Musk tweeted to say he is planning to cut \$4 billion in Federal spending every single day from now to September 30—\$4 billion a day.

I am appalled to see so many of my Senate Republican colleagues falling in line as President Trump and Mr. Musk

attempt to strip Congress of our constitutional authorities and cause this kind of pain to our constituents. I am disappointed to see so many of my Republican colleagues vote to advance the nomination of President Trump's pick to run the Office of Management and Budget, Russell Vought. If this funding stunt is any indication, he is not fit to run that office.

The damage from the freeze extends beyond our shores. Bipartisan, congressionally appropriated funds to provide lifesaving humanitarian aid and freedom in places like Venezuela, Iran, and North Korea have been ground to a halt. For example, programs like PEPFAR, started by President George W. Bush—and I give him credit for that—with the support of the evangelical community and its partner, the Global Fund, have dramatically curtailed the AIDS epidemic ravaging parts of the world. The program has saved more than 25 million lives. It has been so effective that some have forgotten just how devastating AIDS happened to be in that part of the world, killing more than 2 million a year globally and leaving 14 million—14 million—orphans in sub-Saharan Africa.

Further, USAID clean water and sanitation programs have provided more than 70 million people with first-time sustainable access to clean water in the last decade—programs that have a 6-to-1 return in dollars saved in health, economic, and educational returns.

Low-cost vaccination programs eradicated smallpox and almost eradicated polio from the face of the Earth—something that was unimaginable just a generation ago. Food grown by American farmers helps save millions of lives when war and natural disasters strike. Gutting such programs puts innocent lives and American influence across the globe at risk. It is senseless, counterproductive, ill-informed, and increases the likelihood of costlier interventions that don't respect borders, including pandemics, war, and failed states.

The United States cannot and should not stand alone in the world. We are a global leader, and we have an obligation to continue to act like it.

But over the weekend, in what sounded like a dystopian story from an otherworldly dictatorship, the Trump administration and Elon Musk tried to shutter the U.S. Agency for International Development without congressional approval. Try to imagine that disgraceful scene, as one of the world's richest men gleefully guts programs for some of the world's poorest people.

And don't be fooled—this isn't about reform, and the U.S. budget deficit won't be solved by gutting USAID. The foreign assistance budget is only 1 percent of our Federal spending—a small, powerful investment that is not only the right thing to do but the smart thing to do to prevent conflict and famine and failed states as well as to build alliances and friends around the

world. Gutting such programs is a betrayal of American values.

Already, nations like China sense a strategic opportunity under President Trump. When these programs go away, the Chinese will step in.

Are Republicans going to roll over and cede congressional power on these bipartisan programs? I sincerely hope not.

There is a lot at stake in the first few weeks of this new administration. I want to give the President a chance to show his values, but so far, I have to tell you, there is a lot of disappointment. This temporary freeze hurt a lot of innocent people, and this notion now of shutting down USAID—I can't imagine Elon Musk would have it on his conscience that so many helpless people would lose the basics of life for his budget plan. He wasn't elected to anything, and I think we should return to the Constitution, which still guides us today and should.

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.

Mr. SANDERS. 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. SANDERS. Mr. President, today, we find ourselves in a pivotal moment in American history, and millions of Americans, by their actions or lack of action, will determine the future of our country for decades.

In my view, the Trump administration is moving this country very aggressively into an oligarchic form of society where extraordinary power rests in the hands of a small number of unelected multibillionaires. The Trump administration is moving this country very aggressively into an authoritarian society, where the rule of law and our Constitution are being ignored and undermined in order to give more power to the White House and the billionaires who now control our government. The Trump administration is moving this country very rapidly toward a kleptocracy, where the function of government is not to serve the needs of ordinary people but to enrich those who are in power.

Mr. President, I think that today is a very good day to recall what one of our great Presidents said at Gettysburg in November of 1863. Looking out at a battlefield where thousands of Union soldiers had just sacrificed their lives in the defense of freedom and the ending of slavery, Abraham Lincoln famously stated:

The world will little note, nor long remember what we say here, but it can never forget what they did—

The soldiers did—

here. It is for us the living, rather, to be dedicated here to the unfinished work which they who fought here have thus far so nobly advanced. It is rather for us to be here dedicated to the great task remaining before us—