

I would like to thank them for sharing their stories and the courage they have shown in the face of gut-wrenching tragedy.

As a mom of two kids, what happened to Daniel and Devon is beyond a mother's worst nightmare. It is a nightmare that unfortunately is playing out every day across the United States of America, and it is long past time for America to wake up. It is long past time for Congress to act and ensure that no other family has to experience losses like the ones that I have just discussed.

The CDC has, over the past few years, consistently shown that drug overdoses and poisonings are the No. 1 cause of death for Americans between the ages of 18 and 45. Nearly 70 percent of those overdose deaths in 2022 were from fentanyl or other synthetic opioids. Twenty-two thousand pounds of fentanyl was seized at America's ports of entry between October 2023 and October 2024. It is more than 1 billion lethal doses. It could kill everyone residing in this country three times over.

It is 5 to 10 percent of what they say is actually coming into our country. You heard me right. They think there is 90 to 95 percent of fentanyl that is entering our Nation every year and we have no idea. For reference—it may be hard to picture—but fentanyl is 100 times more potent than morphine and 50 times more potent than heroin. That means 2 milligrams of fentanyl, the size of 5 grains of sand, can be fatal. Meanwhile, it takes 250 milligrams of morphine or 200 milligrams of heroin for a fatal dose. Fentanyl is 100 times deadlier than heroin. That is the scope of what we are dealing with.

So why are we not doing something about it in this Chamber? According to the Department of Homeland Security's Office of Inspector General, our government has failed to prevent the flow of fentanyl in our country in far too many ways. According to the Homeland Security OIG, screening of participants in the Free and Secure Trade Program, which expedites processing for carriers and commercial drivers thought to be low risk, is far too lax.

In February 2021, the OIG reported, Customs and Border Protections had deployed just over a quarter of the surveillance and subterranean technology solutions President Trump ordered 4 years prior. And in 2023, a vast majority of CBP employees said their field locations, which means the points of entry into the United States, were not adequately prepared or staffed.

President Trump has worked to target the Mexican cartels and transnational narcotics trafficking. He directed Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth to present a plan assigning our Armed Forces to the mission of sealing our border and repelling the drug trade.

I heard Pete the other day discuss it. Secretary Hegseth said: My generation went and fought diligently to secure other countries' borders. This genera-

tion has the opportunity to secure ours.

Ultimately, President Trump reached an agreement with the Mexican President—10,000 Mexican soldiers placed at the U.S.-Mexico border to stop the flow of fentanyl and illegal migrants into our Nation. And President Trump pushed the Canadian Prime Minister to take significant action to stop the flow of fentanyl across our northern border.

These are all steps in the right direction. And as chair of the Homeland Security Appropriations Subcommittee, I will work to make sure the people tasked with protecting the public from this poison have the resources they need to help.

But what yesterday's hearing made clear is that we have more to do.

Last Congress, I cosponsored Senator JOHN KENNEDY's Fairness in Fentanyl Sentencing Act, and I am proud to be a cosponsor once again this Congress. That bill would change the quantity thresholds triggering mandatory minimum prison sentences for fentanyl distribution. It would also direct the U.S. Postal Service to increase its chemical screening and dedicate more personnel to the task of interdicting fentanyl and other illegal substances imported into our country.

Our children's lives are worth it. We must do more now.

Additionally, last Congress, the House passed the HALT Fentanyl Act. It passed in an overwhelmingly bipartisan fashion. I am proud to support it here in the Senate. Leading it is Senator CHUCK GRASSLEY, BILL CASSIDY, and MARTIN HEINRICH. While I cosponsored it last time, I am proud to cosponsor it again this Congress.

This bill takes the necessary steps of placing fentanyl-related substances under schedule I classification and ensuring law enforcement has the tools necessary to actually end this epidemic.

On January 20, it was a new day in America when President Trump was sworn in. It was a new day in the Senate when we passed the Laken Riley Act, which President Trump signed into law last week. Congress can get this done. Republican majorities in both Chambers have proven we can and will lead the way and are willing to work diligently with our colleagues across the aisle to ensure that happens.

No doubt, we have shown that we mean business. We made promises to the American people that we would work to protect them, and we will keep that promise. We delivered on our promise that we would not tolerate criminal illegal aliens roaming free in our country. Now we need to deliver for the American people once again.

Mr. President, the era of open borders is over. The era of allowing deadly fentanyl to flow into our country is over. The American people need us to act now, and that is exactly what we are doing. We are going to clean up our streets. We are going to protect our families. We are going to secure our

borders. And we are going to ensure that our children actually have the opportunity to live their American dream.

Let's make America safe again, and let's continue to talk about this issue. Our kids and their safety should come first.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Oregon.

NOMINATION OF RUSSELL VOUGHT

Mr. MERKLEY. Mr. President, our constituents, our country, and our Constitution are under attack by Donald Trump and Russell Vought.

Democrats are fighting back. Russell Vought—also pronounced “vote”—is the mastermind of Project 2025 and of all of the chaos and the lawlessness that Trump has unleashed across our country.

Today, my Republican colleagues are trying to jam through the confirmation of this man, Russell Vought, and it is our job to say “stop” because this man is incredibly dangerous to the foundations of our Republic, the system of laws and checks and balances of our Constitution. When you put into the Office of Management and Budget an individual who willfully avoids and rolls over the laws of the country and says he will not abide by the separation of powers, that is a fundamental danger that all of us, having taken an oath to the Constitution, must stop.

He is Donald Trump's most dangerous nominee. Oh, you may not have heard of him as much as you have heard of the nominee for the Secretary of Defense, Mr. Hegseth. You may not have heard about him in the same way you have heard about Tulsi Gabbard, who went to Syria without the permission of the State Department to consult with a dictator. But this man, who is the chief engineer—the chief engineer—of the Trump train—a train that plans to disregard the law and the Constitution—is a bigger danger to our Republic. That is why Democrats are taking the floor now and will continue to hold the floor over every minute allowed under our rules to say: This is a mistake.

To colleagues across the aisle, you, too, took an oath to the Constitution. You have a responsibility to defend it, and the only way to defend it at the end of this 30 hours is to vote no on Russell Vought.

The American people are watching us today, and I know they are feeling rage about what Trump and Vought are doing. I know this because, this last weekend, I had five townhalls in Oregon, and we had three to eight times the number of people turn out who turned out a year ago, which was an election year, which has a bigger turnout than a normal year.

They wondered: How is it possible to break the law in firing inspectors general? How is it possible to break the law in firing a member of the National Labor Relations Board in the middle of an 8-year term when the law doesn't allow you to do that? How is it possible

to break the law and proceed to dismantle USAID when the law doesn't allow you to dismantle an organization?

Yes, the President can ask Congress to write a new law, but to do it through Executive fiat? No, the Constitution does not allow that.

The impoundment of funds people asked about. It has been very clear since the time of Nixon—when Nixon impounded funds, Congress then stood together and said, “Hell no, you cannot do that,” and the courts said, “Hell no, you cannot do that,” and then Nixon followed the issue as the courts decided.

But Mr. Russell Vought—or “vote”—he doesn't care, he said. He says: The President doesn't agree that this should be the interpretation of the Constitution, and I don't agree. So we are just going to impound funds as we want.

That is a dangerous man to our Republic. So I encourage citizens across this country: It is your opportunity to be heard as you were this weekend at my townhalls. Take to the streets. Take to the phones. Let your message amplify and ring from the eastern coast to the western coast and the southern border to the northern border with Canada. Let your message ring that true patriots will stand with the Constitution of the United States of America, that true patriots will defend the separation of powers, that true patriots will defend the checks and balances inherent in our Constitution.

Well, just know we stand with you, America, and we are fighting back from the outside and the inside—patriots, together, patriots united—in defending our Constitution against this sweeping, authoritarian coup. That is what we are doing.

Now, I know you hear the word “coup,” and you think: Isn't it a coup when the military comes in and takes over in violation of the Constitution?

There is also a quieter kind of coup. When the President refuses to follow the laws of the Constitution, that is a coup as well, and that is what we are facing now. That is why every Member of this body should be standing up to say no to the architect of this coup—Russell Vought.

What we have now in President Trump is government by billionaires for billionaires. Our fight is to say that that is not the vision of our Constitution. Our vision of the Constitution is of a “we the people” Constitution or, as Abraham Lincoln said, “a government of the people, by the people, and for the people.” That is a very different vision—the vision embedded in our Constitution—than the vision being pursued by the President at this moment.

So you will hear from many Members of the Democratic caucus over the next 30 hours, and we ask of our colleagues: Listen to what is said. Don't mindlessly follow the dictates of an authoritarian President who is trying to vio-

late the Constitution, because that is not your responsibility, and recognize that what he is doing is trying to take away the legislative power of the House and Senate and replace it with Executive fiat.

Wasn't it strange to listen to an inaugural speech in which President Trump didn't talk about legislative initiatives? It was just one Executive order after the other. The message was clear. He was telling America: I am not going to be a President who executes the laws; I am going to be a President who overrides the laws with Executive orders.

Just within hours—mere hours—of taking the oath to the Constitution, he put forward an Executive order that violated the 14th Amendment on birth-right citizenship. Just days after taking the oath to the Constitution, he put forward a strategy of impoundment that violates the core of the Constitution, where the power of the purse is given to Congress, not to the President.

So here we are, going forward. We are in dangerous times for our Nation. We are in the midst of this unfolding authoritarian coup, and we have the responsibility to stop it.

Now, it is hard to focus on any one thing. The expression I have heard almost hourly is the President is “flooding the zone,” meaning he is doing so many things at once and so many Executive orders that it just creates, well, confusion and chaos, and it makes it hard to focus on any one action that is so diabolical that normally all of us would be focused on it and saying: No.

So this strategy is an effective one, but that is why we are taking the next 30 hours to not focus on 100 things but 1 thing: the danger Russell Vought presents to our Constitution and our responsibility—our responsibility—in advice and consent under the Constitution to vet that candidate, realize who he is, and say he is not fit to be the Director of OMB, the Office of Management and Budget. In fact, he is not fit to serve in any governmental capacity.

It was quite troubling to experience Donald Trump's dead-of-night directive a week ago Monday night to cut off funding for programs that families depend on—programs to feed children, programs to pay rent, programs to see the doctor—cutoffs that are cruel and indiscriminate and illegal because the President has the responsibility to execute the laws, not ignore them or violate them.

We saw so much happen in terms of disrespecting or breaking the law.

The inspectors general—17 and counting—are the watchdogs who say to the executive branch: You must obey the law. So, if you want to see what an authoritarian President does who is seeking an imperial Presidency where he can write the laws through fiat, one of the first things you do is tear down the watchdogs, and that is what he did. The watchdog for the Department of Labor, the watchdog for the Interior,

the watchdog for Housing and Urban Development, the watchdog for the Defense Department, the watchdog for the State Department, the watchdog for Agriculture, the watchdog for Health and Human Services, the watchdog for the Department of Education—all fired in violation of the law.

The law does give the President the ability to dismiss an inspector general under two conditions. The first condition—30-days' notice. The second condition is that it be for cause. Both were broken.

Why is no Member of the President's party standing up on the floor of the Senate and saying, “Respect the law, Mr. President”?

That is an obligation we all share. It isn't the responsibility of the minority party to say “defend the Constitution” alone; it is the responsibility of the majority party as well, of every individual Member here in the Senate.

Then we had the President fire a member of the National Labor Relations Board, but the law says you can't do that. They have a term. You get to put in and nominate a new person at the end of the term. But he was fired anyway. Why? Because it is part of the attack on families and the ability to enforce labor protections this President opposes.

He wants to give free rein to corporations to run over labor provisions embedded in the law. If there is no one to appeal to, then there is no constraint on the abuses put onto working people. That is what we are facing.

The President fired the head of the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau. I can tell you, protection of consumers from terrible financial products is incredibly important.

You know, when I was elected to the Senate, we had two types of loans that were predatory mortgage loans that were turning the dream of home ownership into a nightmare.

One was called the triple option loan. What that meant was that you could pay a smaller amount, and the amount you owed on your house would actually escalate over time. Then when you got to a certain point of escalation, then the loan would switch, and you would have to pay a different amount that many people couldn't afford. So it resulted in a lot of foreclosures.

Then we had another type of home mortgage with an exploding interest rate. You would get a subsidized interest rate for a couple of years, and then the interest rate explodes to 9 or 10 percent. People couldn't make those payments.

They had been steered into those loans by mortgage brokers who were getting kickbacks undisclosed to the person taking out the loan. They were being betrayed by kickbacks called steering payments.

That is the type of thing that hurt America terribly because the foreclosures then were a key factor driving the collapse of the economy in 2007, 2008, into 2009. Hundreds of thousands,

millions of homes were foreclosed on, all because there wasn't a Consumer Financial Protection Bureau to say those loans were not OK.

I was very pleased to lead the charge in Dodd-Frank to end those predatory loans. But for ongoing protection against scurrilous, scandalous scams, you need a watchdog for the consumer. The President, favoring billionaires and corporations over the American workers, proceeded to fire the watchdog that protects us against scandalous scams in financial products.

Then the President fired members of the FBI, experts who were focused on making sure the executive branch stays within the confines of the law. Well, if you don't want the FBI checking out the fact that you are breaking the law, you fire them so there is no one there to hold you accountable or do a report.

These are the acts of a President determined to rule by fiat and break the laws and break the Constitution.

Then Donald Trump gave Elon Musk unprecedented and unacceptable access to the U.S. Treasury's most sensitive payment systems. Those payment systems control over \$5 trillion a year in payments. Those payment systems have everyone's private information.

Do you like the fact that Elon Musk and his team of muskrats, with their laptops, has been in there downloading information on you? Don't you kind of worry about the type of Big Brother government that downloads your private information and sends in inexperienced people to take over the payments and take your private information: where you live, how much you earn, your tax returns, whether you get Medicare, whether you get Social Security, your Social Security number—everything within that world. That is a massive assault on the privacy of American citizens by a Big Brother government—the type of government that wants to be an authoritarian Presidency and control everything and have power over everything, and so they invade the Treasury and the system of payments.

Not only is it a huge risk to the privacy of Americans across this land, but it also is an invitation to exploitation. It is an invitation to extortion because now Big Brother government, in the form of Mr. Trump and Elon Musk and his muskrats, has your information that they can use against you should they so please.

Finally, there is the danger that this crew that invaded Treasury alters the codes and screws up the payments. Maybe they don't intend to, but they do because they don't know what they are doing. They are not experts on the code. Then suddenly the Medicare or Social Security payments or tax returns don't go out the way they are supposed to.

A whole lot of Americans aren't like billionaire Trump and his band of billionaire bros. They are living paycheck to paycheck. So screwing up a single

payment can put a family in a world of hurt, including missing a rent payment that gets them thrown out of their house.

That is not the only way that Team Trump is attacking ordinary families. There is also the big sales tax he wants to impose across the Nation in the form of tariffs.

Mr. Trump says: Huh, it will be the Ford companies that pay for tariffs.

Well, just factually, that is wrong. The importer pays the tariff bill, not the group that exports to the United States. The American company that imports pays the tariff. Then, in order to pay the tariff, they raise their prices. So it becomes a sales tax on the American people. So a 25-percent tariff on Mexico or Canada becomes a 25-percent tax more or less on working America.

You know, President Trump posted on Truth Social that tariffs should never have been ended in favor of the income tax system. Just recognize this: Tariffs that result in higher prices on Americans are incredibly regressive. They have a much bigger impact on those who are less well off who have to buy food and groceries. Unlike a sales tax that has an exemption for healthcare or food or groceries, there is no exemption from the higher prices driven by a tariff. So they are incredibly regressive. The tariffs are a strategy to attack working families across this land.

Trump was very clear. He said basically we should go back to the old system of funding our government by tariffs, the system we had before 1913, when America ratified the 16th Amendment and allowed the income tax. In other words, he wants to go from a tax system on income that can, if implemented carefully—and often it is not, and it has way too many loopholes—it can be progressive; that is, the rich who can afford to pay more can pay a higher percent.

But the tariffs converted into a sales tax on Americans—that is, in fact, incredibly regressive, hurting the poor. It is why rich folks always want to have a sales tax replace an income tax, because they know they pay less. The rich pay less, and the working stiffs have to pay more because their paycheck has to go directly to consumption because that is what they have, paycheck to paycheck. They have got to pay the rent, got to pay for food, got to pay the utility bill. But the well off are taking their extra funds and they are investing. So they don't have to spend every dime on consumption. That is the mechanics of how a tariff becomes a regressive sales tax.

Let's be crystal clear about what is happening. There is a three-part plan in Project 2025—again, the architect of which is up for confirmation right now—on the question of advice and consent by the Senate. So the architect of Project 2025 has a three-step plan.

Attack working families—that is step 1. That is what happens when you

cut the programs for healthcare and housing and education and children—you attack the families. Step 2, borrow trillions from the Treasury and run up the debt, currently estimated to be in the area of about \$3 trillion. Then take and deliver a massive tax giveaway to the billionaires. That is the plan: Attack families, borrow trillions, and give away trillions to the billionaires.

In fact, the current estimate for the amount given to the trillionaires is around \$4.6 trillion—or to the billionaires or mega millionaires, the richest Americans—\$4.6 trillion.

Kind of ironic, isn't it, that a President who campaigned on helping families is actually driving a plan, in partnership with Russell Vought, to attack families and deliver for the billionaires? Campaign on government for families, get elected, and immediately pivot to attacking families and delivering for billionaires—that is what we are facing.

This is the great betrayal, a betrayal of all the voters who believed Donald Trump when he said "I am for you," who believed him when he said he wants to protect and help working families, and yet he attacks the ability of workers to organize and get a fair day's pay for an honest day's work. That is the great betrayal.

The architect of this is up for confirmation right now. The architect for this is advocating for the President to violate the laws and has already demonstrated that these last 2 weeks. The architect of this is arguing that we cut programs, run up the debt, and give it all to the richest Americans. That is the plan.

So over the next 30 hours, Democrats are coming to the floor united, determined to stand with the families of the United States of America. Mr. Trump is standing with the billionaires.

My colleagues who have indicated they want to confirm Russell Vought, confirm the architect of Project 2025, confirm the person who inspired the attacks on family programs a week ago Monday night—they are standing with the billionaires.

I invite them, come join us. Do not stand for government by and for billionaires. Come join us and fight for families. Come join us and honor the responsibility of the executive branch to obey the laws. Come join us and protect the constitutional separation of powers.

After all, the President's effort to move the power of the purse from Congress—the power of Congress is to say: Here are the instructions. We want you to fund this program and this program and this program. The President wants to say: It doesn't matter; those are just suggestions.

I have news for you: Read the Constitution. The President is not a king, and a law is not a suggestion.

So come join us united in support of the law and the Constitution.

Russell Vought is a leading proponent of the impoundment theory

that says a President can decide how much to spend on programs that Congress has written into the law; in other words, that the appropriations bills are simply suggestions, not the law.

No. We had this conversation back in the Nixon era. Remember President Nixon, along with Watergate? Remember that other unconstitutional thing he did? That was to say: I as President can stop the funding of programs that the law says I am supposed to fund. Well, the Court said otherwise. It said, in fact: No way. That is unconstitutional.

Then in 1974, in the Budget and Impoundment Control Act, Congress said: Hey, Mr. President, we will give you a mechanism by which you can present the idea of changing current law. You don't think we need to spend money on, say, that weapon program because the technology is outdated or maybe you don't need to spend money on some feeding program because it is duplicative of another feeding program or food program or you don't need to spend money on X, Y, or Z. Maybe a nuclear warhead was being rebuilt to be on a certain missile, but we are not building the missile anymore.

So the President could proceed to say: Here is a letter that comes to Congress saying: I know these are in the law. I know I have to fund them. But we shouldn't fund them, so, please, over the next 45 days, debate and vote on changing the current law so that we save this money.

It is called a rescission. It is in the 1974 Budget and Impoundment Control Act. We gave the President a tool by which he could follow the Constitution and ask for reductions in programs already passed into law.

Now, I am quite sure that not a single Senator here, not a single Senator wandering around the Capitol somewhere, has received a rescission letter from President Trump or one on behalf of President Trump from the Office of Management and Budget.

If you want to cut programs that are already in the law, there is a mechanism to do it lawfully. You ask Congress to do so in a letter for a rescission. It is a fancy word. We don't talk about it much. Presidents don't very often ask us to undo programs we have just passed because we budget on an annual basis; we pass those laws on an annual basis. So they are rarely so out of date that a President says: OK, undo that program. But they have the power to do so because we gave the President the ability to ask in the 1974 Budget and Impoundment Control Act.

And by the way, the lower court rescissions that preceded that 1974 law, those were then reviewed and made it to the Supreme Court, and the Supreme Court said, absolutely, the President cannot impound funds. It is a violation of the Constitution.

So to my colleagues, if you are saying: I don't know if Senator MERKLEY from Oregon is right about this, read the Supreme Court case. And you have

a responsibility to defend the Constitution, and that is why you have a responsibility to vote no on Russell Vought, who wants to violate the Constitution.

Another piece that I am concerned about with Mr. Vought is that he didn't wait to be confirmed to start being, essentially, the shadow director of the Office of Management and Budget. I can't count how many nominees have come through and said: Well, actually, I can't go near that office until I am confirmed because that would be a violation of the intent of the Constitution that people have to be confirmed before they take a role.

But what did we hear from the White House after all these illegal Executive orders were put out? Press Secretary Karoline Leavitt said: Russell Vought told me to tell all of you the line to his office is open.

So here is Mr. Vought basically saying: I am really the power already at OMB. My line is open; call me.

Well, Mr. Vought, if you would quit breaking the law and advocating for breaking the law, you would know you shouldn't be in the Office of Management and Budget essentially acting as if you have been confirmed when you haven't been confirmed yet.

Again, it is a confirmation of the inclination of this individual to say: The laws don't matter; I will do what I want no matter how much damage it does to the law or the Constitution.

So we did send a letter to Mr. Vought saying: Are you on the payroll currently? Do you have a title? Have you been hired as a senior assistant? Is that legal given you are up for nomination to run the place? Is it legal for you to be hired as an adviser and then act as if you are running the place? Is that legal?

We didn't get any answers.

Another reason to vote no: The file is not complete. He hasn't answered. Why does he not want to answer? Because you wouldn't like the answer. The American people wouldn't like the answer that he is over there running OMB at a time he hasn't even been confirmed by the Senate. So he doesn't answer. That, too, should bother colleagues on both sides of the aisle.

Because we didn't have answers, the Democrats on the Budget Committee wrote to the chair of the Budget Committee and said: Delay this vote. Delay it for 2 weeks so we can get answers to questions and get a complete file.

Well, that is a reasonable request in this situation because both sides of the aisle have often worked together to say nominees have to complete their paperwork, they have to answer the questions raised by the committee. But we were told: No. This position is so urgent. The President so desperately needs the architect of Project 2025 to be the engineer on the train that we can't actually wait and get answers and have the file completed.

I certainly disagree with that answer. I think it disrespects the entire membership of the Budget Committee.

And then, the vote in committee was scheduled without the file complete, and it was scheduled to be done in a little room off the floor over here where the public cannot attend and where members would not be allowed to talk to each other and share their observations or concerns, which basically violates the whole premise of members on a committee sharing their observations to try to get to a better answer.

Now, I was told that, as the ranking Democrat, I can make a few comments, but the rest of my committee—other Democrats or even the other members of the Republican side—were told they couldn't make any comments or attempt to influence each other. So we said: No, that is not right. This is such an important nomination and his background is so troubling and his current actions are so troubling, hold that conversation about the vote in a public forum.

Just that morning, we had held just such a public conversation on the Ambassador to the United Nations in the Foreign Relations room. Each member was asked: Do you want to add anything as we consider whether or not to send this nomination to the floor?

Well, the Ambassador to the United Nations is a pretty important role. But, you know, the chief engineer of the Office of Management and Budget, the architect of this entire strategy that Trump has laid out, that is very important as well. So we asked for a public hearing or discussion so that members could talk to each other, share their concerns, maybe persuade each other—though not often enough do we listen to each other—and the result was, from the chair of the Budget Committee: No, we are not holding a public dialogue about whether people think he should be confirmed.

So the vote was held in a tiny room. I think one reporter was allowed in. No public was allowed in, no expanded press corps, no dialogue between the members. We asked a reasonable request that this be done publicly, and that was denied.

I am sorry to the American public that you were excluded because you would have heard then what you are hearing from me now and what you will hear from Members of the Democrats over the next 30 hours: how fabulously unfit this individual is to serve in any government role.

So we are here tonight, on through now, through the night, into the morning—we are here for the next 30 hours to raise the alarm about how dangerously unfit this nominee is to serve in the role of chief engineer because he doesn't respect the law, he doesn't respect the Constitution. He has already demonstrated that by stepping into the role and coordinating the dark-of-night decisions to cut programs to working families all across this land.

Now, I would say: Hmm, but does he really believe in this whole impoundment thing? Is he really an advocate of breaking the law? Well, we saw it Monday night, but we also saw it during

the first Trump administration when Russell Vought was the architect of impoundment of the funds destined by law to go to Ukraine. So this isn't some empty theory. It is already in the historical record. Russell Vought coordinated a strategy of refusing to send the funds required by law to go to Ukraine.

Now, there was another element of this, which was President Trump, during his first term, was trying to use those funds and the impoundment of those funds to get the President of Ukraine to say bad things about a member of the Biden family. That combination of impoundment, which was illegal, and then essentially using that to extort a statement from the President of Ukraine—which the President of Ukraine refused to do—led to Trump's first impeachment trial.

So Russell Vought's illegal, unconstitutional strategy of impoundment and using it as a tool of extortion to try to attack a political opponent led to Trump's first impeachment and first trial here in the Senate. So have no doubt that the man who advocated for impoundment and the extortion of a statement from the President of Ukraine back in the first Trump administration is certainly very honest when he says he is still for impoundment right now.

That is the one thing I will say. He didn't try to disguise this fact. He said: The President doesn't like what the Supreme Court decided on the Constitution. I don't like it. So we are going to ignore it.

He ignored it before. He intends to ignore it again.

I will tell you something else that I think is deeply disturbing, and that is Russell Vought's absolute disdain for the nonpartisan professionals who work for the American people as civil servants. He wants to take folks who are members of the civil service and make them at-will employees of the President so the President can sweep out of position tens of thousands—fire tens of thousands of servants to the American people who use their professional skills to deliver services as efficiently and as effectively as possible and replace them with loyalist lackeys.

I don't want a loyalist lackey in the control tower deciding when planes land. I want a nonpartisan professional.

I don't want a loyalist lackey having access to the Treasury payment system and trying to use that to extort favors from people around the country or disclosing the private information of individuals or actually screwing up the computer code and causing payments not to be delivered effectively. I want a nonpartisan professional.

I don't want a loyalist lackey deciding on how to transport vaccines across the country, who doesn't know a damn thing about whether they have to be refrigerated or not or how long they can sit on the shelf or how to get them effectively delivered. I want a nonpartisan professional.

But not Russell Vought. In fact, Russell Vought called for Federal workers to be traumatized so that they would consider themselves to be villains and would leave public service and could be replaced by loyalist lackeys. That should concern everyone.

And, listen, I understand the pressure my colleagues are under. We all become, as part of our party, essentially part of a team, and the inclination is to support the member of your team who is now President. But there is a higher responsibility here. It is a responsibility to the law, and it is a responsibility to the Constitution that you took an oath to.

And, certainly, supporting the firing of tens of thousands of nonpartisan professionals and replacing them with loyalist lackeys is a huge disservice to the families of America who depend upon all of those core programs in healthcare, housing, education, programs for children, standing on their feet so they can thrive and move into the middle class. It is part of the attack on families embedded in Trump and Russell Vought's Project 2025.

I will tell you what else I don't like about Russell Vought. He wants to weaponize the justice system to prosecute officials who investigated President Trump's crime. Weaponizing the justice system is absolutely wrong. That is what happens in third-world countries with dictators.

And I realize, as an advocate of the imperial Presidency, Vought wants to use every tool available, like a dictator does. But that is wrong. We are a republic; we are not a monarchy. We are not an authoritarian state—unless we become one by refusing to stand up against violations of laws and the Constitution.

You know, Ben Franklin, when he was leaving the Constitutional Convention, was asked by a bystander, because they had met and worked on this crafting of the Constitution: Ben Franklin, what do we have? What type of government do we have?

And he responded: A republic, if we can keep it.

But what are the fundamental elements of a republic?

The integrity of the voting booth is one—the ballot box, the integrity of an election—and that integrity is under assault across this country.

Second, the peaceful transfer of power—and President Trump, at the end of his first term, did everything possible, including incentivizing a riot that stormed through these doors and took over this Chamber, to prevent the peaceful transfer of power. They were calling for the Vice President, who was fulfilling his constitutional role, just down the hallway through those doors—down the hallway—to count the electoral votes. They were calling for him to be hung.

What else is critical to a republic? Well, it is a foundation of laws that will be respected by the Executive branch. That is being violated. And it

is the separation of powers that Trump is violating right now. So every piece of our Republic is under attack by Russell Vought and Donald Trump.

Ben Franklin, right now, is turning over in his grave, fearing, perhaps for the first time since he was buried 6 feet under, that we might lose our Republic.

Russell Vought also supports the use of the military to quell domestic unrest. That is an absolute violation of the law, but he supports doing it.

Russell Vought has called for an end to any drugs that provide medical abortions. He wants them banned. He wants to interfere with the right of every family, every woman in America, to exercise her judgment in partnership with her spiritual adviser and her family and her doctor. He wants Big Brother government to be in the exam room of every woman in America, dictating whether or not they can use drugs as part of an abortion process. And he also doubles down on this saying there should be no exceptions to a law banning abortions, for rape or for incest or to save the life of the mother.

You know, I was absolutely struck by the recent memo from the new Secretary of Transportation that said: We are going to prioritize giving our grants to communities that have the highest birthrate and highest marriage rate.

What? Big Brother, socially programming, using transportation grants to determine who gets to repair their bridges or repair their roads or expand their metro system or build bike lanes, or whatever, depending on your marriage rate and your childbirth rate? That is in the memo from the Department of Transportation.

Well, here is Russell Vought. His social programming is he wants his view of reproductive healthcare to be imposed across America with Big Brother, Big Government, in the exam room of every American woman. That is who this man is. Those are his dangerous views.

Presidents are not kings. Laws are not suggestions—unless Russell Vought is confirmed and makes it so. If he is confirmed and makes it so, we have failed to defend our democracy. We have failed to defend our Republic.

We were elected by our citizens of our respective States to be here with the vision of government by and for the people, not the vision of government by billionaires, for billionaires; not the vision of Big Brother government going into our living rooms and into our exam rooms, telling us to have children in order to get a transportation grant. But that is the type of social programming we are facing.

To my colleagues across the aisle, you all have pointed out quite accurately that you are threatened with a primary funded by Elon Musk if you don't loyally follow step by step, move by move, everything Trump wants to do, including confirming Russell Vought.

I say to you: Stop trembling in your boots. You are being threatened. You are being pressed. You are being extorted. Stand up and say: I am a Senator of the United States of America. I was not elected by President Trump. I was not elected by Russell Vought. I was not elected by Elon Musk and the billionaires. I was elected by the people of my State, and I am going to fight for them.

That is your responsibility. That is your path to escape the dilemma we have heard you express. I don't believe, at any other time in our history, the President of the United States has threatened to sic the billionaires against Members of the U.S. Senate, and we need to stand together and say: Hell no.

That is what it means to defend the Constitution. That is what it means to be a Senator, this privileged position, elected by the citizens of our State in order to pursue what the people are asking us to do to build a stronger Union and better opportunity for every, every citizen.

Donald Trump and Russell Vought are trying to use their Executive orders to break the spirit of the American people, to break the will of Congress, to break the back of the Constitution. Such plans are evil, and every one of us, Democrat or Republican, should say: We will not be intimidated. We will not cower. And we will not bend to fear of Donald Trump and Elon Musk. Trump may inflict his worst, but we must awaken our best.

President Franklin Roosevelt said: We won't let them "clip the wings of the American eagle to feather their own nests."

Colleagues, stand with me. Stand together. Stand as Senators united to stop the President from clipping the wings of the American eagle to feather the nest of the billionaires. To protect our constituents, to protect the Constitution, to oppose this sweeping authoritarian coup, to stand with American families and against the betrayal of those same families, we are coming to the floor united to say: We must not confirm the nomination of the most unfit man to be considered as Director of the Office of Management and Budget.

You all have heard me say a few words about impoundments. It is a big word, but it is a big word for a simple action. It means that the President refuses to spend the money that he is required to spend by law on a program.

Oh, I don't like healthcare programs that we are doing. And the law says here is what you must spend for this particular program in the coming year, and the President says: No, not doing it.

Yes, well, that is illegal, and it is unconstitutional. It is not up for debate.

In the 1970s, President Nixon did exactly this action, impoundment, to stop funds for the Environmental Protection Agency for individual programs that he didn't like. He told his EPA

Administrator, Russell Train, to withhold the funding. A recipient of those funds was the city of New York, and the city sued. And in that case, Train vs. City of New York, the Supreme Court ruled that the White House did not have the power to impound funds and refuse to do what the law says you are supposed to do.

And, furthermore, the Supreme Court said: This is inherent in the Constitution. The Executive is to execute the laws, not to make the laws, not to remake the laws, not to ignore the laws, not to treat the laws as a suggestion.

The Executive must faithfully implement the laws of the United States of America. That is the responsibility.

Congress, in the 1974 Budget and Impoundment Control Act, did create a way for the President to say: I am not just waiting on the budget next year. I am not just weighing in on what programs I want for the next year. I want to change the ones this year.

And we gave him—Congress did—a tool to do so. That is the tool of rescission that I mentioned before.

Well, let's fast forward from 1974 and the battle with Nixon to 1996. In 1996, there was a very interesting debate over the balanced budget amendment. And you needed 67 Senators to approve, in both bodies, this constitutional amendment. The House easily passed it. Here, in the Senate, the Republican chair of the Appropriations Committee said: No, every year, through our revenue bills and through our spending bills—appropriations bills—we decide what the deficit will be, and we can decide, in a year, it shall be zero.

But we shouldn't be so constrained to address national emergencies, whether it be a famine from drought or whether it be war or whether it be COVID—of course, COVID or some disease—that we shouldn't be so constrained as to be unable to meet the moment.

So Senator Hatfield from Oregon said no, he would not be the 67th vote. And then he offered to resign. And what the history books rarely record is that in Oregon the Governor does not have the power to appoint an individual to the Senate seat, which meant there would have been 99 Senators, and 66 would have been enough to pass that constitutional change, and it would have gone out to the States for ratification.

Well, the majority leader, Robert Dole, turned down Hatfield's offer to resign. So the 67 standard was not met.

Well, then the Republican leadership said: Let's give the President line-item veto—essentially, give the President impoundment power, impoundment power that the Courts said the President doesn't have.

And so they passed a law and gave the President impoundment power—line-item veto—and it went to the Supreme Court. And the Supreme Court said: Hey, Congress, the Constitution charges you with the responsibility to lay out what will be funded for what programming. You can't simply delegate to that President. If you could,

you could have a majority in the two Chambers that says: We give the power to make up any law the President wants and then to enforce it.

In other words, it would be a pathway toward an authoritarian takeover of our country, if Congress abandoned its constitutional role to set the parameters for what programs are funded. And so the Supreme Court struck it down.

Well, here we have, again, Russell Vought ignoring the Supreme Court in Train vs. City of New York, ignoring the Supreme Court when it struck down the line-item veto, and once again threatening to so undermine the law and the Constitution.

Colleagues, my fellow caucus members will be coming through the night to share their perspectives and why Russell Vought is untrustworthy, unelected, and unfit to serve as the Director of Office of Management and Budget.

I believe that my colleague from Hawaii is going to carry the train of this conversation forward, and, therefore, I am wrapping up my comments while he figures out some issue at the counter. But I want you to all go forward into this long 30 hours knowing just a core fact: that we only have a republic if we can keep it, and we can't keep it if we put a man at the head of OMB who is determined to break the law and violate the Constitution.

I yield the floor.

**THE PRESIDING OFFICER.** The Senator from Hawaii.

**Mr. SCHATZ.** Mr. President, thank you to the ranking member of the Budget Committee for his leadership.

We are doing something a little unusual. First of all, every Democrat is united on the vote that will occur 26 or 27 hours from now. Second of all, almost every U.S. Senator on the Democratic side is going to come to the floor to articulate why we are united and why we think this moment is so important.

If confirmed, the Director of OMB, Russ Vought, may well be the most important man that no one has ever heard of. Under normal circumstances, the OMB Directors are powerful but kind of anonymous because they are responsible for technical things, nerdy things—developing and implementing the entire Federal budget, and they advance the priorities of the President, whomever—Democrat or Republican.

But Russ Vought wants to go way beyond that. He wants to take an Agency that people outside of Washington haven't even heard of and turn it into the nerve center and power center of the Federal Government. He wants to consolidate power at OMB in such a stark and sometimes illegal way that he alone will get to decide who deserves the government's help and who doesn't.

You do not have to take my word for it. I am a Democrat. I always want to make the case for our side. But I want you to understand these are his words,



because he is one of the authors of Project 2025.

Let me just say what he says about this job:

The Director must view his job as the best, most comprehensive approximation of the President's mind as it pertains to the policy agenda while always being ready with actual opinions to effect that agenda within . . . legal authorities and resources. This role cannot be performed adequately if the Director acts instead as the ambassador of the institutional interests. . . . Once its reputation as the keeper of the "commander's intent" is established—

This is like—everybody has watched "Game of Thrones." He wants to be the king's hand. He wants to be able to say: I represent the President in any and all things: foreign policy, domestic policy, tax policy, spending policy, all of it. That is actually not what an OMB Director is supposed to do.

He then talks about a practice called apportionment to essentially get around the bills that we passed, the appropriations bills.

He wrote:

No Director should be chosen who is unwilling to restore apportionment decision-making to the PAD's—

Program associate directors, who are political appointees, not career officials.

—personal review, who is not aggressive in wielding the tool on behalf of the President's agenda, or who is unable to defend the power against attacks from Congress.

Look, the door swings both ways in Washington, and this attempt to consolidate power and basically make the legislature irrelevant is going to bite us all in the butt. There is going to be a progressive President, and if this is allowed to stand, they are going to reach in and defund stuff you like. That is the creature of a dually enacted law.

I get that this is nerdy. I am not saying anybody should make this their primary point of opposition to the President, but we are on the floor of the U.S. Senate, so let's be a little serious for a moment and say that we swore an oath to uphold the law and Constitution of the United States.

The Constitution is actually—it is ambiguous about a couple of things, but it is not ambiguous about this. We hold the purse strings. We are the article I branch, and our power, besides confirming or rejecting nominees, is substantially that we set the parameters for a spending bill.

I get that there are 53 Members on the other side of the aisle that have a different view of spending than I do, and I get that we just lost, and so we are in for some outcomes that we don't like. I am not complaining about outcomes that I don't like; I am complaining about an unlawful view of the separation of powers.

We saw it last week when they just literally froze all Federal funding—not even with a pretext of like "Hey, we are just going to review this and make sure everything—you know, no fraud, waste, or abuse." They just shut down

the Medicaid portal. They shut down Head Start. They froze construction projects.

So I want everybody to understand that what is at stake here is literally the American system of government because these guys view this branch of government—the one that is plural; not just 1 person elected but 535 people elected from their States and their districts to represent all of the people in the United States of America. It is supposed to be messy, and it is supposed to be contentious. And do you know what? It is also sometimes supposed to be slow. It is supposed to be slow. It is supposed to be hard.

We have the best document underlining any country that has ever existed in human history, and what it does is it says: We don't want any branch of government to be too powerful. So this is not some trivial little partisan dispute about particular programs; this is the ability for the executive branch to literally seize power, storm into the offices of an Agency that they hate and shut it down operationally and use a bunch of white-shoe law firm fancy-pants words to develop a pretext for eviscerating the U.S. Constitution, which clearly gives us the authority to establish spending laws, right?

And can we spare ourselves the punditocracies? "Well, Democrats should be focusing on something else." I understand. I understand that some of the stuff that we are going to say to each other on the Senate floor is not necessarily compelling to people outside of this building, but people outside of this building understand on a very basic level that there are three branches of government, and they are supposed to be roughly equal, and stealing power from the legislative branch is inherently bad even if you agree with the outcome, even if you think: Well, I kind of agree with them. I don't like this program.

If you don't like a program, introduce a bill. If you want to defund something, there is an actual process for that.

There is a lot of stuff I don't like in the Federal budget, and I usually propose cuts to those things I don't like. Sometimes I prevail, and sometimes I don't. But I have no illusions that I am a monarch.

It is true that this President of the United States won a free and fair election to be at the helm of the executive branch, but he did not win a free and fair election to be the monarch of the United States or the CEO of the United States.

I think one of the conceptual problems with bringing in all these billionaires is they really are the monarchs of their companies. That is like how the private sector works. You are the CEO and you want something to happen, you tell them: This is what is going to happen. This is not a democracy. I am the boss. Do it.

That is literally not our constitutional system.

So Russ Vought has ideas that I disagree with about the size and the scope of the Federal Government, and that is part of this, right? He really does want to cut Medicaid, cut Medicare, cut the Affordable Care Act, eliminate programs that I think are essential for people in Hawaii and people across country. But there really is something bigger at stake right now. We, all of us—Democrats, Republicans, Independents, the media, which is so damn casual about what is happening—we have to understand that when you are in the middle of the fight, you are not sure if this is a historic moment. When you read about it in the past, you can identify that historic moment. When you observe it in a faraway place with a hard-to-pronounce name, you can identify what is happening—creeping fascism. When it happens and you are in the middle of it, you are not so sure if it is your moment to display any sense of independence or courage.

If this is going to be stopped, we only have 47 votes. Three people, at some point—I have no illusions that it will be in the next 30 hours, but three people at some point have to say: I like conservative outcomes, I like conservative justices, I like tax cuts, but I don't like unlawfulness, and those are my parameters.

I am an adult. I have been here for 13 years. I have been in the majority, and I have been in the minority. I have been in sort of every iteration of whatever elections bring. That is OK. That is the way this process works.

What is happening right now is an attempt to reorder the whole damn system in a way that is going to make every individual citizen across the country less powerful, because when you elect someone—and I will yield to the Senator from Minnesota in just a moment—when you elect someone and you tell them your spending priorities and they come home and say "Good news; I got this" or "Good news; I cut this" and then you realize that is only a recommendation, it is the OMB Director whose name you have never heard of—his name is Russ Vought—who gets to decide. That is not our system of government, and that is why we are going to be fighting all night about this issue.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Minnesota.

Ms. SMITH. Mr. President, I rise today—I just want to thank my colleague Senator SCHATZ for his clear-eyed description of what is happening right now and how that connects to this nomination that is before the Senate right now, the nomination for Mr. Vought.

So I rise today to join my colleagues in calling out the threat that Russell Vought poses to our system of government. As Senator SCHATZ says, this is not about liking or not liking what Mr. Vought has written, what he stands for, what he has tried to do, what his policy positions are, although I clearly

disagree with those; this is about whether or not we are going to abide by the systems of law in this country that say that we have a separation of powers and that the power of the Senate and Congress, the power of the purse that rests in the Senate and the Congress—that we keep that power.

That is an institutional prerogative that I think is on the line today with this vote, and that is why my colleagues and I are going to be using the full 30 hours of debate in order to really make this point clearer to the American people.

But I will tell you, Mr. President, that Minnesotans are waking up to this, and they are not happy. In the last week, thousands of Minnesotans have called or written my office about the unprecedented chaos that is occurring at Federal Agencies and programs in Minnesota—and they can see it as well across the country—which has come from Elon Musk and from President Trump but is rooted in Russell Vought's dangerous Project 2025—Donald Trump and Russell Vought's dangerous Project 2025. These ideas are dangerous, they are unconstitutional, and they are already hurting real people.

The funding freeze that was announced last week is straight from Russell Vought's 2025 plans, and that is one of the many reasons I am going to be opposing him when we vote on this ultimately tomorrow.

Whether this freeze is frozen, whether it is temporarily blocked in court, or whether it is still in effect is in some ways beside the point because I think that the point here is to create chaos. The real point right now is that people are feeling this pain. They are concerned. They are scared. And for what? Why is this happening? It is to test out Russell Vought's extreme and dangerous ideas and see how far they can take it.

That is what we will be voting on. We are going to be voting on the man who is behind all of this chaos.

I know my colleague Senator SCHUMER is going to be speaking in just a couple of minutes, but let me just go for a second about what this means for Minnesotans.

For Minnesotans, a Federal funding freeze means life or death, seriously. The administration's list of frozen programs covers people's most basic needs—food, shelter, medicine, safe drinking water.

I have heard from thousands of Minnesotans who are terrified of what this means for their families. The Senate phone lines—colleagues, I think we all know this—have been overwhelmed to a breaking point this week because of people who have been so outraged by Elon Musk and Trump's actions. This is creating torment and real concern and real pain for real families and leaving them wondering what this is all going to mean for them tomorrow.

The scope of Vought's Project 2025 and the funding freeze that it inspired

is so broad that I don't think there is a single person in this country who won't be impacted in some way, direct or indirect. This is not going to be good for anyone. Americans, it is true to say, are less safe today than they were last Monday before this funding freeze.

The freeze has put our most fundamental and essential services in this country in limbo. What does this look like in Minnesota? It means that counterterrorism programs, programs to combat human and drug trafficking, programs to fight child sex trafficking—all of those were covered by this freeze. LIHEAP, which is a program that helps keep heat on for low-income families in Minnesota, that is what has been at stake. It was minus 12 degrees in International Falls last night, to give you an idea what this means in the whole North Country of Minnesota.

I also want to just acknowledge that what it means for food assistance and clean water projects is also a real and specific impact and pain that people in Minnesota are feeling.

I have a few letters I am ready to receive, but I am going to yield to the Senate minority leader, Senator SCHUMER from New York, so he can tell us what this means for the people of New York and the whole country.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Democratic leader.

Mr. SCHUMER. I want to thank my colleague from Minnesota for her passion for representing the people of Minnesota and showing how terrible this nominee is.

We are going to be speaking all night. We want Americans, every hour—whether it is 8 p.m. or 3 a.m.—to hear how bad Russell Vought is and the danger he poses to them in their daily lives if he were put as head of OMB. We want to sound the alarm—sound the alarm—on the reckless and lawless things that Russell Vought will do to American families; to sound the alarm on the chief architect of Project 2025; to sound the alarm on Russell Vought because Russell Vought—sadly, alarmingly, outrageously—stands on the brink of confirmation as Director of OMB, thanks to Senate Republicans who have fallen in line one right after the other behind Donald Trump and have rubberstamped his nominees, no matter how unqualified, no matter how harmful to the American people.

And of all of the nominees, of all of the extremists that Donald Trump elevated, of all the hard right ideologues who have come before the Senate, none of them hold a candle to Russell Vought. He is far and away the one most dangerous to the American people.

Most people have never heard of Russell Vought before. But make no mistake about it, my fellow Americans, he is the most important piece of the puzzle in Donald Trump's second term. He will be the quarterback of White House policy.

For all intents, he will run the command center of the Trump administra-

tion. And his decisions will reverberate from one end of America to the other, every city and every town and every household and every rural area.

And of all the people—of all the people—Donald Trump could have picked to lead the White House policy, he chose the godfather of the ultraright. And make no mistake about it, Russell Vought is Project 2025 incarnate. Russell Vought is the chief architect of 2025, its intellectual inspiration. And now he will have the ability, as head of OMB, to put these awful ideas into effect. And who will suffer? Not the billionaires who seem to be running the Trump administration, but the average American—the tens of millions, the hundreds of millions of average Americans.

Let me say this: There can be no worse proposal for the American people than Project 2025. There can be no position more able to implement this terrible proposal than Director of OMB, and there could be no person who would be worse for running 2025 from OMB than Russell Vought.

It is a triple loser—the worst program, the worst place to put it because it does the most danger, and the worst person to run it all rolled up into one in this vote.

Remember during the campaign, Russell Vought put together 2025 with a bunch of other rightwing ideologues. Their goal: slash the government, smash the government, break the government—not just eliminate waste. Oh, no, that is not what they wanted to do. They are so, so deeply anti-anything government does—whether it is Social Security or helping our veterans or defending our country—that they are against it.

Why? Well, their ideas really started with this small group of hard-right people who felt they didn't want to pay any taxes and they didn't want any regulation: We don't need a government. And they gained strength on the hard-right side of the Republican Party that became the MAGA part of the Republican Party. And Donald Trump embraced it.

He hid it during the campaign. When Project 2025 became public, Donald Trump said “I don't know anything about it” because he knew that he would lose the election if he embraced 2025; that an overwhelming majority of Americans would be against 2025. He knew that, and so he said he knew nothing about it. But the minute he won the election, Russell Vought started to take over and the pieces of Project 2025, already, we have seen, are begun to be implemented.

It is such hypocrisy for Donald Trump to say he didn't know what 2025 was during the campaign and now is putting its chief architect in the most important position where it can be implemented to the great harm of America and the American people.

Americans don't want to see Social Security or Medicare cut. They certainly don't want to see Medicaid cut.



They certainly don't want to see help to veterans and hospitals and to help people pay for healthcare and to afford housing—there are so many bad things in 2025. Some of them are pretty obvious—just slash government programs. Some are a little less obvious.

One that really bugs me: We have so many people who need housing in America. It is one of the greatest needs. And over the years, the wisdom of the American people, administrations—Democratic and Republican—said: Let's give a little help by having the Federal Government back mortgage loans, Fannie and Freddie. And it made interest rates be lower than they normally would have been for a young family that is looking to buy their first home. They are having their second little baby and they are so happy and they can have a home for their children.

And they want to get rid of it—in part, maybe, so some private sector people can make some money doing it themselves. But mainly because they just are so viciously anti-government that they will just slash anything no matter the consequence, no matter who is hurt. That is what we are on the brink of happening here.

We had hoped on this side of the aisle—because we know how our colleagues feel. If you asked the 53 Senators on that side of the aisle to vote yes or no on Project 2025, my guess is of the 53, probably 50—at least 45—would vote no. But they are actually voting to implement Project 2025 when they vote yes for Russell Vought.

Remember, he is the architect, and they are putting him in a position where he can take that plan and implement it—basically, shove it down America's throat.

So here we are. We have already begun to see the chaos that the Russell Vought philosophy, the Project 2025 philosophy, engenders: A freeze—freeze—on funding of all programs.

They didn't look at which programs were good, which programs were bad. No, no, no. They froze them all. Chaos erupted. Daycare centers were not funded, Medicaid hospitals were not funded, veterans' programs were not funded, mental health—so much that they had to back off, at least for a period of time.

But that is Project 2025 at work.

And now, the Treasury payment system—which in one sense is a lifeblood of how government works, of how we help people because we are giving money to things that people need—is being infiltrated by DOGE.

What is DOGE's view? Let's cut \$2.5 trillion. They don't say how. They don't really care, as long as they can just slash government and hurt Americans so that their billionaire friends can pay even less taxes than they do now, despite the fact that income inequality in America is getting worse and worse. That is one of the main things that bothers average working-class Americans.

His fingerprints are all over this past week's disaster—whether it is at Treasury, whether it is with Federal workers, whether it is at AID, whether it is hurting Justice Department people, prosecutors—all of that is Russell Vought at work. He is working to hurt you, Mr. and Mrs. America, even before he gets into office. Imagine how much more harm he will do should he become the head of OMB.

I want to ask Mr. Vought some questions.

Mr. Vought, how is freezing all these funds supposed to lower people's costs?

Yeah, it may lower the taxes on your wealthy friends, but how is it going to help the average American? You never explained it. The fanatical hatred of government without rhyme or reason, without looking at its effect, without distinguishing between programs just permeates everything.

So, Mr. Vought, explain how freezing all these funds is going to lower people's costs? How is privatizing Fannie and Freddie going to lower their housing costs? How is getting rid of—I mean an example we talked about, it is small but it is indicative, it is knowledge—cutting the programs that help us eliminate bird flu and lower the price of eggs. They raised it. People hate that. The price of eggs are so high, I don't blame them—6 bucks, 5 bucks—wow.

So imagine this, folks. Imagine a world where Russell Vought and the DOGE team, team up, and it is a team that can do such, such harm and pain for America. They team up to eradicate the funding they allege is wasteful.

What would it mean for kids at school who struggle to get a good meal? They will say it is wasteful. Or parents who struggle to pay for groceries and the things we do to try to keep food costs down? They will say it is wasteful. A couple seeking a loan to build a starter home; they will say it is wasteful.

Getting rid of Head Start. Right now—right now—in my State, even though the funding freeze has been rescinded, there are Head Start programs that are getting no money. Two hundred kids in rural Cattaraugus and Wyoming Counties had to be left out of Head Start; 200 families struggling during the week because so many of them have either one parent who is working or two parents who are working. What are they going to do? Who is going to watch the kids? Will they have to quit work for a few days? Will they get fired? Will they get demoted?

All painful, really painful.

Head Start provides dental and medical care for little kids. What a waste, Vought would say. When we know that when kids have bad teeth at a young age, it hurts their learning, it hurts their ability to become productive citizens. There is nothing more cost-effective than something like that.

Folks, bad news—bad news. What we saw this past week with the beginning of Russell Vought's ideas and programs

and philosophy and ideology to be implemented is just the beginning, just a preview. I hate to say this, but, unfortunately, we ain't seen nothing yet should Vought get into office in this powerful OMB position.

Let me just say it again so people hear it: Why does Vought want to do this, the average person would ask? Why does he want to hurt so many people? Why is he being so mean and cruel and heartless and uncaring?

Very simple: So Republicans can give tax cuts to Donald Trump's billionaire friends and supporters. Of course, it is cloaked in some kind of ridiculous ideology that was paid for by the hard right. They set up think tanks for 30 years to come up with this libertarian-type philosophy. But it has no basis in reality. Where it comes from is not what would make America better but, rather, would make a few rich people richer. And the harm is amazing. Everything we see happening today—the flurry of Executive orders, all of the awful things happening at the Treasury Department and at OMB and elsewhere—all boils down to one endgame: a broken, paralyzed government that breeds corruption and self-dealing and self-interest; that ignores the public and caters to the ultra-ultra-wealthy. That is the entire ball game of Trump 2.0.

The only solace I can take is we are a democracy, and it will catch up with them all—with President Trump, with Russell Vought, with all of the Republicans who vote for these things. That happens. The roots of democracy are deep. We saw little sprouts of it this week when President Trump had to back off tariffs and back off a funding freeze because so many people were going to be hurt.

But it will—it will—be rejected by the American people, and I am confident that it will change the political fortunes of both parties as it is implemented. For those who support it on the Republican side, the American people will like them a lot less. And for those who oppose it on our side, the American people will understand we are on their side.

But the damage—the damage—that will be done in the interim is enormous. The number of the millions—of the tens of millions, probably of the hundreds of millions—of people who will be hurt and hurt in real, severe ways will be horrible. So there is no solace.

I do believe that the political system, with all its infirmities—with all the big money, with having so much power with Donald Trump and his Republican friends—that even with all of that, I believe, ultimately, our democracy's roots are deep. Ultimately, I believe those who support Russell Vought—he himself, the President, who put him in, the Republicans who voted for him—will be rejected by the American people for doing it. But the damage in the interim will be enormous—worse than almost anything we have seen.

So I say to my colleagues on the Republican side: Maybe, it is not too late. Maybe, somehow, you will realize how damaging Russell Vought is. Maybe, you will say to yourselves: Despite the fact that I might have Trump angry with me, I am doing the best thing for him by voting down Russell Vought, ultimately—ultimately politically. Maybe. Unlikely. A forlorn hope. I always try to be an optimist—but maybe.

This is a very, very important vote. The way it is looking now, it is a very awful and sad vote—one of the worst, if it passes, that I will have seen in this body in the many years I have been here.

For those who think Russell Vought won't be so bad, read his book. See what he has done. I mean, read his *Project 2025*. It is a project, not a book, I don't think. Maybe, maybe, maybe we will realize—it is unlikely, highly unlikely; it is a forlorn wish—when things are so bad if Vought gets in, and we will cling to that forlorn, highly unlikely hope.

Twenty years ago, it would be hard to believe that somebody as hard right, as narrow-minded, as vicious in his philosophy as Vought would get a single vote on the floor of the Senate. But, now, he may get a majority.

We are warning the American people how bad this is. We will see the consequences in the weeks and months ahead. There are very few votes I have cast with greater fervor than this “no” vote for Russell Vought.

He is, as I said, a danger to working people, a danger to America's beliefs and ideals, and a danger to the unity, cohesiveness, and beauty of this great America. I proudly, strongly, and with complete conviction will vote no on this awful, awful nominee.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Democratic whip.

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, it is not unusual in this job of ours in the U.S. Senate to run into a reporter in the hallway. It happens all the time. They are trying to write a story, and they want to ask a question or two to get a quote, possibly, for the story.

Today, I came out of one of our hearing rooms on the Committee on Agriculture, and one of the more prominent reporters for one of the cable news networks said to me: Can you give me a reaction to the suggestion by President Trump, yesterday, that, somehow or another, the United States of America is going to take over control of the Gaza Strip and develop it?

Well, I had read that in the morning papers, that assertion, and all I could say to him was, if you follow his suggestion to let Canada become the 51st State; that we take over the Panama Canal—if necessary, by force—that somehow or another we come into ownership of Greenland, then the notion of developing hotels on the ocean on the Gaza Strip is just one of the Trump suggestions we are dealing with.

For those who argue, “Well, the American people voted for it,” were they voting for those things?

The point I am trying to make was made earlier by Senator SCHUMER. There are efforts afoot that go way beyond the issues of this last Presidential campaign, where the American people, I believe, said: We want a change. We are going to vote in the majority for Donald Trump because we want to see a better lifestyle for ourselves and our kids. Those things make sense to me, and I will tell you, in my life, as I reflect on things that have happened to me, there were times when the government played a very important role in my life.

I recall when my father passed away when I was in high school. There was a Social Security Disability assistance check that helped me go to college. Then, of course, there was something called the National Defense Education Act, where I could borrow money from the Federal Government. That had to be paid back, but I could borrow the money to pay for my school expenses.

Had the government not been there in those two instances, I am not sure if I could have completed college or where I would be today. I didn't start off with a litmus test of whether I love the government or don't. I needed a helping hand, and there was a program created by this government, by this Senate, that came to my rescue.

What we are discussing now is the nomination of Russell Vought. I don't know the man personally, but I have read plenty of what his philosophy consists of. I believe he is being offered one of the most powerful jobs that most Americans don't even know—the Office of Management and Budget. One of the essential powers of the Senate, under our Constitution, is advice and consent, which means the Founding Fathers said the President can pick his team, but the Senate has to approve that team. It has to advise and consent when it comes to that person. The constitutional authority gives the Senate the power to review and approve Presidential nominations and, with it, the responsibility to ask hard questions.

Well, that has been the case, in the last several weeks, as the nominees for the President's Cabinet have all come forward to be reviewed by Members of the Senate. Our Nation's Founders viewed this as a check on the power of the President, ensuring that the country's most important leadership posts are filled by truly trustworthy, qualified, law-abiding Americans. I take that responsibility seriously.

I probably, as I reflected on running for the Senate, did not reflect on how many times I would be called to judge a person as part of my job. As a member of the Senate Judiciary Committee—the ranking member at this point—I have had to review the resumes and interview literally hundreds—sometimes thousands—of applicants for lifetime positions with the Federal Government. When I reflect on it, it is an awesome responsibility, but you have to project as to what that person will do once they have the

power of office, and that is what we are doing today.

I join with my colleagues in opposing the nomination of Russell Vought to be the Director of the Office of Management and Budget. He has been nominated by President Trump to run this Agency. It is the largest office within the executive branch of the government. Its job is to oversee Federal Agencies and administer the Federal budget.

Now, most of the time when we are called on to evaluate nominations, we do our best to take a look and review the nominee's qualifications and experience. We meet with the candidates—I have done that today several times with several nominees—and ask them questions to determine their fitness for the roles. Sometimes, you can tell this is the first time they have ever really, seriously, considered serving in government in their lives. We try to imagine what they will do with that power. But for Mr. Vought, there is no need for imagination. He already served as Director of OMB during the last half of President Trump's first term in office, and I believe he proved who he was in that period of time.

When he served as the Director of the Office of Management and Budget during President Trump's first term, Mr. Vought illegally refused to release hundreds of millions of dollars in security assistance to Ukraine, and he delayed \$20 billion of disaster aid for Puerto Rico. If that sounds like a lot of power, it is. There was literally a question as to whether Ukraine would survive the invasion of Vladimir Putin. Our government had committed to helping, but Mr. Vought decided, in his capacity as the head of OMB, to withhold the funds, and there was a serious question as to whether Ukraine—in fighting for its life—would survive. The \$20 billion in disaster aid for Puerto Rico after the hurricanes that struck and that did such great damage to that nation was a life-and-death proposition, and he decided that he would withhold these funds.

When he left that role, Mr. Vought went on to become a key architect of what has been referred to many, many times as *Project 2025*—a policy proposal written by a conservative think tank, outlining a sweeping, extreme vision of America's future. *Project 2025* included policies to consolidate power in the executive branch and to undermine critical services the Federal Government provides to American families. If that sounds familiar, perhaps you are following the President's ongoing attempts to freeze Federal funds legally appropriated by Congress. That is no coincidence. Mr. Vought is the MAGA puppet master in this administration, and, 2 weeks ago, we saw it at its worst.

I see Senator MURRAY of Washington is here on the floor. She is our Democratic leader when it comes to Appropriations. I sit on that committee and respect her judgment. I am sure she remembers, as I do, when the word came

out that there was a pronouncement from OMB that they were going to put a freeze on Federal spending. It didn't sound real to think that they would stop spending across the board. They made a few exceptions—but to stop spending in so many areas?

Then the phone started ringing from the State of Illinois. They started calling Senator DUCKWORTH's office and my own office, and we were telling people exactly what was involved.

This involves programs like Head Start. Head Start is a critical program that began in the 1960s. It is for kids who are prekindergarten to spend a day under supervision in a learning experience and in a socialization experience that can make all the difference in their lives. For their parents, it is a great opportunity.

Last Friday, I visited one of these Head Start facilities in the city of Chicago. It is known as El Valor. It is remarkable. Seeing those kids and the experiences they are going through is heartwarming. These kids are from working families. They are not from families who have a lot of wealth. But they have an opportunity in Head Start to have a good, clean, positive classroom experience that prepares them for school and prepares them for life.

One of the parents made a point of coming in and telling me his story. He talked about what a transformation it was that took place in his little boy when he became part of this Head Start Program.

I have such positive feelings about that because I can't think of a better investment of my tax dollars and anybody's tax dollars than in making sure those kids—that next generation—have a fighting chance, and Head Start gives them that chance.

Well, when OMB announced the freeze, some of the first agencies that felt it were the Head Start Programs. They started realizing they couldn't keep their doors open because they don't have a lot of money to turn to if they didn't get the regular infusion of Federal funds that had been guaranteed to them over the years. Some of them actually thought "Maybe we could last a day or two without that Federal funding," but most of them realized they couldn't last at all without it.

So why in the world would OMB turn to a program like Head Start and say: That is where we want to freeze Federal spending. For goodness' sake, I will be the first to admit that there is waste in our government. There is waste in corporations. There is waste in many directions. But to start with kids, struggling kids from working families, and to say: We are going to cut off their program—that is your first priority for cuts?

Meals on Wheels. What is Meals on Wheels? Well, it is something most people with an elderly parent or grandparent know full well. It is that one time each day when someone knocks on the door and brings literally a hot

meal to someone who is living alone usually and has to depend on that—not just for food but for socialization and that friendly smile once a day that they just dream of and live for. To cut that program, along with Head Start—come on. But that is what I learned. I learned that this freeze from OMB that started with the Trump administration involved Meals on Wheels.

It isn't just these programs that touch my heart and I hope touch yours; we had calls from medical researchers, from hospitals across the city of Chicago. And I am proud of those hospitals. We have some of the best in the world. They do key research, critical research—cancer, heart disease, and so many other things. They work with the National Institutes of Health, the premier medical research Agency in the world.

Well, it turns out that when the OMB of President Trump wanted to start turning out the lights, they decided to do it on medical research as well. What were they thinking?

If you have ever been in a terrible moment in your life where someone you love is seriously ill and you are wondering if they can survive, one of the first things you are going to ask that doctor: Is there a medicine? Is there a process? Is there a surgery? Is there some breakthrough that maybe can save the life of somebody I love?

That is one of the first questions you ask when you face that awful moment.

So what did this OMB decide to do under President Trump? They decided to cut off funding for medical research. These are researchers who literally said: We were told at 5 o'clock to go home. That means walking away from an experiment which I have been working on for a long time and losing all the progress I have made.

Really? That is your priority? I don't think the American people thought that was what they were voting for when they voted for Donald Trump in this last election.

Mr. Vought has made his beliefs perfectly clear. He believes the President can refuse to spend money that Congress has appropriated for the American people despite this being in direct violation of the law. The law is known as the Impoundment Control Act.

Some have naively claimed that Project 2025 is nothing but a thought and an expert. It is clear that since the President took office, it has been a blueprint for a radical rewrite of the principle of the balance of power in our Constitution.

It is no surprise that as a key author of Project 2025, Mr. Vought continues to lead that charge. Knowing this as we do, placing him in charge of OMB would be irresponsible—you saw what they did initially with the freeze just a few weeks ago—and it would entirely undermine the role of the Senate Appropriations Committee and the U.S. Senate itself.

What I find disappointing and discouraging is that so many of my Re-

publican friends who worked so hard to be elected to this Chamber are willing to give away our constitutional rights and our constitutional authority. This idea of impoundment gives away the power of Congress to appropriate.

This latest attempt to put a sweeping freeze on Federal funds is far from the first time Mr. Vought has broken the law and undermined Congress's power of the purse that is set forth in the Constitution. It is clear from Mr. Vought's comments and actions that he has contempt for Congress as a co-equal branch of government.

It is appalling that so many of my Republican Senate friends voted to advance his nomination as he actively attempts to strip Congress of our congressional authority.

We are not opposing Mr. Vought solely because he poses a threat to our ability to do our jobs in Congress. Mr. Vought has made it clear that he is targeting working families across the country.

Both in his previous tenure as OMB Director and in policy proposals, Mr. Vought has proposed budget cuts that slash the social safety net resources for tax cuts for the wealthy.

It is being reported today that representatives of Elon Musk's so-called Department of Government Efficiency are now inside the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services, where they have gained access to key payment and contracting systems.

I know Elon Musk. I have met him on two or three occasions one on one. We had conversations. I respect him in many respects for achievements with his car, as well as with SpaceX and solar energy projects. He has done some remarkable things, making him the wealthiest person in the world.

Having said that, I don't believe he has any qualification to sit here in judgment of our government and its future. He has been given an outsized role in the Trump administration although he has no authority from the American people. He hasn't been elected to a damn thing, but he has currently won over the heart of the President and is making decisions which affect people's lives every day.

Each representative of DOGE—the Department of Government Efficiency, which isn't even a Department—is looking at the systems technology in Medicare and Medicaid, as well as the spending that flows through them. That means every hospital, every senior in a nursing home, and every child with a serious health condition is at the mercy of what Elon Musk's minions consider to be worthwhile spending.

The Director of OMB should manage funds that serve everyday Americans, not billionaires.

Moreover, Mr. Vought clearly intends to politicize the Federal workforce. While serving as OMB Director during President Trump's first term, he was the architect of "schedule F," a plan which would allow the President to fire

nonpartisan civil servants and replace them with partisan loyalists.

On January 20, President Trump signed an Executive order reviving schedule F—another move right out of Mr. Vought's Project 2025 playbook—effectively stripping thousands of career civil servants of job protections.

Mr. Vought has called civil servants “villains,” and he has advocated for their mass termination. But more than 70 percent of the Federal workforce serves in national security roles. His plan—Vought's plan—would jeopardize American security.

To my Republican colleagues, for the sake of the institution in which we work for, the constituents we were elected to serve, and the constitutional foundations of our Nation, please don't vote for Mr. Vought.

Maya Angelo once said:

When someone shows you who they are, believe them the first time.

Well, from his tenure running OMB to his authorship of Project 2025, Mr. Vought has shown us exactly who he is and what he believes. He is a man with little respect for the Constitution and limited understanding of the plight of real working Americans. Giving Mr. Vought the reins of OMB is an invitation to a policy battle at the expense of our Constitution.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. SCHMITT). The Senator from Washington.

Mrs. MURRAY. Mr. President, I rise today to join my colleagues in urging all of our colleagues to vote against Russ Vought's nomination to lead the Office of Management and Budget.

The Senate should not vote to confirm as the head of OMB or to any important role, for that matter, someone who does not respect the constitutional authority of the Senate and thus the people we represent.

We should not entrust someone to implement our laws who made clear time and again through his past actions in this same role during President Trump's first term, through his work as the head architect of Project 2025, and through his own words in hearings and meetings that he will not follow the laws and that he will not send our communities the funding we all work together to pass.

Why on Earth would any one of us confirm someone whose entire game plan is to break the law and then dare the world to stop him? That is it. That is how Russ Vought plans to run the OMB. It is not a secret. It is a very public fact. He has put this on the record time and again.

Just look at what happened last time Russ Vought served as Director of the OMB. He tried to break the law to give President Trump unilateral authority he does not possess to hold up security assistance to Ukraine and override the spending decisions of Congress. And he has not given up on that idea. He has written about it many, many times in the years since.

As a chief architect of Project 2025, Vought doubled down on lawlessness and charted a blatantly unconstitutional plan for the President to ignore the will of Congress, which led him to being named in the first Articles of Impeachment against President Trump.

He mapped out a lawless path that, as I will detail shortly, President Trump is already barreling down at full speed.

But if you still aren't convinced that Russ Vought will trample all over the separation of powers, will ignore the authority of Congress, and will hurt the American people by holding back funds they rely on, well, you are in luck because at our hearing with him, I asked Vought directly, point blank, “Will you follow the law?” That should not be a hard question. Even if you disagree with the law, you don't ignore it. Maybe you don't like the 25-mile-an-hour speed limit in a school zone, but unless it is changed or struck down, you still have to follow it. It is true for speed limits, and it is certainly true for the Constitution.

That is something that almost every single American understands—except, apparently, Russ Vought and Donald Trump, because today, the Impoundment Control Act is the law of the land. Despite Vought's own wishes and his own feelings, it has not been changed, and it has not been struck down in court.

Despite what Vought pretends is true, the reality is, the Constitution gives Congress, not the President, the power of the purse, and yet Russ Vought will not say he will follow the law.

Look, Vought is not just lawless; he is extreme. Let me drive that home for a second. Let's take abortion for example. Project 2025 already calls for ripping away birth control, allowing States to deny women lifesaving emergency care, and effectively banning all abortion nationwide. That is already a dangerous Republican fever dream—far out of line, by the way, with the American people—but Vought wants to go further.

On abortion, he is for “abolition.” “Abolition.” Do you know what that means? It means a national abortion ban without any exceptions even in the case of rape or when a woman's life is at risk. That is as far right as it gets.

Of course, abortion is not the only issue where Vought has made statements that are deeply alarming. He has stated that he believes the 2020 election was “rigged.” That is just not out of touch with America, that is dangerously out of touch with reality.

He has said he wants to traumatize our Federal workers. That means all the people who work really hard to help in our communities, whether they are inspecting food or reviewing the safety of drugs or keeping our travel safe; maybe they are strengthening our infrastructure, fostering innovation and small business or getting care to veterans or supporting our Tribes and so much more.

Vought has said we live in a “post-constitutional time.” It doesn't get any clearer than that. A post-constitutional time? That is what he believes we are in. Do my colleagues agree with that? Do they think it is time to shred the Constitution? That is what is at stake with this confirmation vote because Vought has made it all too clear that as OMB Director, he will put everything on the chopping block, from programs that people rely on to the checks and balances our democracy is founded on. Again, he has put it down on paper in black and white.

We know he wants to cut Medicare and, in particular, Medicaid, by hundreds of billions of dollars. We know he wants to find significant savings from eligibility changes to veterans' healthcare and disability benefits. We don't even need Project 2025 to see that. He laid some of that out in his budgets from Trump's first term.

Vought's goals are not secret, nor are they subtle. We do not have to decipher anything here. There is no mystery. We know he is planning for cuts beyond anything this country has ever seen. And we know, if Russ Vought gets his way and gets his hands on the Nation's funding again, he will not just draw blood; he will cut programs families rely on—families rely on—down to the bone: SNAP cuts that leave families hungry, policies to cut people off from their healthcare, cuts to disability benefits that veterans have earned through their service to America, thousands of public servants forced out of roles serving the American people—all while he works with Trump to dole out more tax breaks to billionaires and the biggest corporations.

And here is another thing. We don't have to imagine just how painful and chaotic Vought's lawless ideas would be in practice because Vought is actually already putting his agenda in place, which, frankly, raises another question: Why should the Senate vote to confirm someone who is already secretly doing the job behind our backs?

Because—guess what—those Executive orders that Trump still has in effect, those orders which are right now illegally blocking money our communities need—that is right out of the Project 2025 playbook. Or the effort, now, to get rid of thousands of Federal workers through illegal firings; and, now, scam buyout offers that have no basis in law to carry out; or trying to illegally abolish entire Agencies with the stroke of a pen—that has Project 2025 written all over it.

And it is not just a parallel in ideas here. When OMB issued its blatantly illegal guidance and attempted to block trillions in Federal dollars Congress—all of us—passed, there were digital fingerprints all over that document linking right back to Project 2025.

And in the chaos that followed, do you know who reportedly met with OMB staffers about how to respond? Russ Vought.

So let's not pretend we have no idea just how lawless this guy is. Let's not

pretend we have no idea what sort of damage he will cause if he is put back in power. The chaos that Vought and Trump caused last week alone was unlike anything I can recall. Never in my time in the Senate have I seen a President cause as much chaos, panic, and damage in 48 short hours—chaos, panic, and damage which continues even now. President Trump inflicted serious harm when he implemented Vought's reckless vision to brazenly and illegally freeze Federal grants across the government and across the country.

My phone has been ringing off the hook because, unlike billionaires like Trump and Musk, unlike hyperpartisans like Vought, the American people actually have a painfully clear sense of how this will hurt our communities. After all, they are the ones who would actually suffer the consequences of the reckless policies like this.

And let's remember that the Trump administration's first half-hearted attempt to clean up the massive mess they made with this new guidance essentially boiled down to: We will let some funding go, but we are still going to hold up everything else. And while, later, they finally admitted they were disastrously wrong and revoked the entire guidance, they are now, still today, illegally holding up other funds, which I will say more about later.

And the chaos alone they caused with their cruelty and incompetence is utterly unacceptable. The explanations the Trump administration offered throughout that saga last week—freezing seemingly trillions of dollars that families rely on—created no clarity or certainty for many panicked families and businesses and nonprofits and towns and States. And nothing they said changes the basic fact that Trump was and is still holding up funding that our communities need, funding that is the law.

But let's talk about the effect. Let's talk about the chaos and alarm they caused, the damage done to communities and families that all of us represent, and the collision course we were on before Americans spoke out and forced Trump to retreat—because, in terms of chaos, the Trump administration was trying to say a lot of programs were not affected even when we had firsthand accounts making clear that was not what organizations across the country were experiencing.

I will give you one example. Head Start providers were locked out of their reimbursement portal, meaning folks taking care of our youngest kids were suddenly not sure how they were going to keep their doors open or pay their teachers and staff. And, by the way, some providers in my State are still locked out, not getting the funding.

Let's talk about rental assistance. That is the payment system for housing providers. It was down for over a day, with rents that were due at the end of the week.

Seniors who count on Meals on Wheels were left wondering whether they would have dinner last week.

Grant programs to combat the fentanyl crisis, to get families healthcare, and so much more were, in an instant, put at risk of evaporating into thin air.

The panic and confusion were absolutely widespread because there was a long, long list of programs President Trump tried to put on the chopping block here—programs that, by the way, help red States and blue States alike.

Funding to address the opioid use epidemic could have been paused. This is a longstanding bipartisan priority, and Trump wanted funding frozen for an indefinite period that would absolutely upend prevention efforts and cut people off from the treatment that is helping them beat addiction.

COPS hiring grants, which help our States and communities hire career law enforcement officers—Trump was freezing those too. These investments increase community policing capacity, and they prevent crime. Without this money, our streets and our neighborhoods would be less safe.

And let's not forget about other crucial DOJ grants: funding for the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children, for AMBER Alert, for safe havens that support victims of human trafficking. Or, in my State, there are 25 child advocacy centers that were trying to figure out how they would be affected by the freeze. Think about that.

Funding for firefighters. You know what doesn't stop when Federal funding stops? Fires. And speaking of fires, Trump's move also threw funding for recovery and relief efforts into uncertainty. In Eastern Washington, in my State, \$44 million was announced weeks ago to help Spokane County rebuild from wildfires. We were left with big questions about the future of that badly needed funding last week.

And while it was just 2 weeks ago that Trump visited communities in both North Carolina and California that are still reeling from disaster, the very next week, he sent them reeling himself, throwing funds that they were counting on into limbo with his initial OMB guidance because, for a while there, the system that all of our States use to get disaster relief funding was shut down.

And let's not forget grants from the Violence Against Women Act. I heard from organizations in Washington State that support survivors of violence that they were trying to figure out what to do because their Federal payment site went down. Without that vital funding, survivors would be left with no way to access the legal aid and services they deserve. Like so many other organizations, they were ringing the alarm bells because they were not going to be able to pay their staff or pay their bills.

This illegal freeze left domestic violence centers wondering how long they

could keep their doors open and pay their staffs.

And our Tribes were thrown in chaos as well. The Puyallup Tribe was told they couldn't move forward with a critical road project, and our Tribes in general were all concerned that housing and healthcare and education and so much else was getting caught up in this funding freeze. One told me they were left trying to determine if they were going to have to lay off 400 people because of this. Causing layoffs with an illegal funding freeze would be a profound breach of the Federal trust responsibility to our Tribes.

Here is another alarming one: One of Trump's Executive orders was set to cut funding used to help detain nearly 10,000 ISIS militants in Syria—to detain them in Syria. That funding was about to be cut off altogether, potentially leading to prison guards leaving the job and risking ISIS militants getting out of jail, until this administration was alerted to how reckless that would be and they carved out that funding.

But trust me when I say there are many other funding streams that help keep us safe that are still at risk, especially because of the illegal Executive orders that are, today, still blocking foreign assistance—and the absolutely lawless effort to dismantle USAID, which does lifesaving relief work around the world. I will have more to say on that in just a bit.

And, by the way, how does undermining health, which will mean diseases run rampant, particularly at a time when bird flu is on the uptick and impacting many of our producers and workers and States—how does that make any sense? Because when it comes to healthcare, this attempted freeze posed a huge threat to our families.

Set aside the fact that the Medicaid payment portal went down in my State and in every State—something we are told was a coincidence. That doesn't change the fact that all Federal healthcare grant reimbursements stopped. It doesn't change the fact that community health centers were blocked from getting the funds they needed to pay their staff and continue providing care in our communities, including rural areas where they are often the only option for miles. It doesn't change the fact that title X providers who support care like family planning services and cancer screenings and more couldn't draw down their funds.

I also heard from HopeSparks. It is a healthcare provider in my State. They warned that, without Federal support, kids in the South Puget Sound would lose access to mental healthcare and crisis services.

Biomedical researchers were suddenly left dealing with questions not about how to save lives but about grant freezes and how these vague, broad actions might stop research programs and clinical trials across the country.

Chaos alone presents a huge risk of derailing crucial studies. Scientists at the University of Washington and Washington State University told my office they were deeply alarmed. A freeze like Trump ordered would have meant research projects collapsing and staff being furloughed or laid off.

The Fred Hutchinson Cancer Center moved to bridge the gap to keep research from being derailed, but not getting this fixed would have meant putting them in the hole to the tune of over \$1 million a day. That sort of unexpected burden would have had a huge impact on lifesaving cancer research.

And agricultural research was faced with uncertainty as well. WSU is a national leader in this important work: research to help our farmers grow more crops, grow more resilient crops, fight challenges like pests and plant diseases. WSU was deeply concerned funding for that research could be cut off, undermining important work supporting our Nation's farmers.

And the threats didn't stop there for those who are in food and agriculture. One organization which works alongside our local growers told me losing funding would mean a reduced capacity to grow and distribute fresh local food to our communities. Now, that would hurt both the farmers and the families who rely on those programs to put food on the table.

Meanwhile, a group in Washington who are addressing youth homelessness warned it would have to kick kids out if the funding issue wasn't resolved.

Let me repeat that. A homeless youth group was pushed to the brink of having to kick kids onto the street because of President Trump's illegal freeze.

I was also deeply concerned about how the freeze might halt an important diaper pilot program, as well as the reports I got from multiple housing providers in my State, worried that tens of thousands of people would be at risk of homelessness thanks to this illegal freeze.

And don't let me get started on infrastructure. These are projects that take years—years—to plan, to build, to complete, and do an awful lot of good for our communities.

In my State alone, there were big questions about what was going to happen to electrical grid upgrades that are happening in Okanogan and Pierce County, improvements that were planned at the Ports of Seattle and Everett and Whitman County, or Sea-Tac Airport's plan to deploy new trucks.

And, by the way, some of those questions remain till today, because, as I will detail in a minute, there are still many other ways programs are being put at risk by Trump illegally blocking funds with his Executive orders.

I will continue fighting for the Federal funding Congress already provided to keep all of those projects on track, but that can only get us so far if President Trump illegally blocks it all, and

our Republican colleagues could let that happen.

The list goes on and on; the calls keep coming in. Even now that OMB has reversed course, the chaos has not died down. The questions, the uncertainty, the fear, from families and communities that Trump will pull the rug out from under them is still there, because even though after the intense outcry from the American public, Trump has now admitted this was a colossal mistake because he rescinded the guidance; but the threat, the chaos, the panic, cannot just be wiped away—especially while some funds are still today being blocked.

No one feels any sense of calm after this. People aren't feeling lasting relief. They are wondering: How could something like that ever happen, and what in the world is going to happen next?

The Trump administration, through a combination of sheer incompetence, cruel intentions, and a willful disregard of the law, caused—and is still causing—real harm and chaos for millions of people over the span of just a mere 48 hours.

But we did learn something extremely important: When the American people speak out with one voice, when regular people stand up, it makes a difference. That victory belonged to everyone who raised their voice. But I want everyone to know—make no mistake—this fight is not over.

As I said before, we still have a lot of work to do right now to make sure all that funding actually does get moving again. This is not like turning on a light switch. We just saw through the chaotic rollout this is complicated stuff. So I want you to know I will be watching closely to make sure funds get where they belong as soon as possible. I already know that in many cases, this has not been what is happening at all, so this is a very serious concern.

I actually spoke with a constituent last week—Mike. He runs a nonprofit supporting military families and helping servicemembers transition back to civilian life. And even days after the OMB guidance was reversed, he was still unable to access Federal funding, so he used his own line of credit to pay his staff in the meantime. And if this didn't get fixed, his organization wouldn't have been able to help military families or pay its employees.

The homeless shelter that I mentioned a few minutes ago, short \$5.1 million—\$5.1 million because of Trump. They still have their funds frozen. They are still looking at reducing beds and facing layoffs. And as I mentioned earlier, some Head Start programs are still not able to get their grant funding.

So the chaos of this OMB saga is far, far from over.

And let me make one thing perfectly clear, even before this latest whirl of chaos, President Trump was already—already—illegally blocking billions of

dollars. And even after that OMB guidance was reversed, he is still holding back all of those funds through his illegal Executive orders. You don't have to take it from me, you can take it directly from the White House press secretary.

This is NOT a rescission of the federal funding freeze. . . . The President's [Executive orders] on federal funding remain in full force and effect, and will be rigorously implemented.

So that was the chaos of last week. I want to talk about how that chaos remains, what we are still seeing this week, and what it means for folks back home and across the country, because there is still significant confusion. And the remaining freezes are still causing significant pain.

For example, I have heard from cities in my State and from the Washington State Department of Transportation—now, it is still hard to get a clear picture, given the chaotic rollback and more, but they are telling me they are concerned about infrastructure projects all over my State that are already getting delayed now and could get derailed entirely because President Trump is still illegally blocking funding we passed with his Executive orders.

If this illegal freeze continues, people will lose jobs, communities will lose out on projects that have been in the works for years. Trump is blocking money to repair electric chargers, to install heavy-duty chargers for trucks, to make critical repairs to bridges in order to protect the safety of millions of drivers, and to install new chargers along major roads in my State, like I-90, US-97, US-2, US-195, and US-395.

Stopping these projects is just pointlessly—pointlessly—hurting commuters and businesses. It is costing construction workers; it is killing jobs. Trump is holding up road projects to make streets safer for pedestrians, bicyclists, and drivers, like a safer streets project in Richland, WA, and critical safety barriers in Spokane, not to mention the Liberty Park Land Bridge in Spokane—which would reconnect communities and provide more green space for families to enjoy, or funds for the City of Lakewood—they are planning to revitalize their downtown and bring in more retail space and restaurants and healthcare services and financial services and make upgrades to roads and provide a new festival area and park areas and more.

Trump's freezes are also a concern for the Samish Indian Nation as it works to improve safety and access to their land at the Campbell Lake Road intersection, which has seen growing traffic in recent years, and for a project led by the Tulalip Tribe to improve the interchanges along I-5 exits; the congestions on these ramps can get so bad it backs all the way up to the main highway.

We want to get those projects done. We want to get them done, and the last thing we need is uncertainty about these stalled funds.



There is also a project underway to upgrade the technology at our border with Canada, replacing and improving the outdated wait-time system to improve accuracy and help our inspection and our transportation Agencies.

This will help travelers who are headed to Canada avoid long wait times at the border and help fans from around the world, by the way, who are traveling between Seattle and Vancouver for next year's World Cup move quickly—but not if Trump's Executive orders stop all of this funding.

Same for the efforts to update our statewide planning with a new electronic system that would make the process for planning and specifications and estimates more efficient. And, of course, in Washington State, we can never forget about fish, which are crucial to our culture and our economy in many ways.

Trump's ongoing funding freeze is putting projects to improve fish habitats on ice: replacing the culvert at Thornton Creek; replacing the failing culvert at Wapato Creek, which is right underneath the Pierce County terminal at the port of Tacoma; or removing the fish barrier culverts at Johnson Creek, which will open up nearly 3,000 meters of upstream habitat; not to mention other wildlife preservation work like an undercrossing structure and wildlife barriers east of Winthrop and work on our waterways. Funding from the bipartisan infrastructure law is still not restored, still not restored today for some projects on the Lower Columbia River, projects like a stormwater infrastructure that will help keep toxins out of our water and restore our wetlands and protect our ecosystems.

Our ports, our ports, so critical for not only Washington State's economy but for the entire country, are caught up in this too. There are port projects now on hold across my State, including for electrical infrastructure and shore power for vessels.

These impacts are being felt from Anacortes to Port Angeles to Vancouver, frozen funding is hurting working families in Washington and across the country, and it is making our economy less competitive.

And we cannot forget our ferries, which are so crucial to many commuters in my State. Washington State ferries are looking to improve their data with a better system for collecting and analyzing and reporting wait times at all of our terminals. That would help give them some information so they can improve their efficiency and make life better for the people they serve.

Losing that funding means more people will miss ferries, and it means long waits in line for Washington State commuters who cross the water for everything from work to school to medical appointments.

We also have absolutely essential electric transmission and distribution projects that are on hold now, and they are in jeopardy. These are projects that

are necessary, helping reduce our wildfire risks, ensuring grid reliability, improving resilience to natural disasters, and lowering costs for ratepayers across my State of Washington.

Those are all funded under the bipartisan infrastructure law; that is a bipartisan infrastructure law that Members of Republicans and Democrats worked on and passed. It is a program that Republicans thought was important enough to provide \$10.5 billion. After what we have seen in recent months and years, I don't know how you could say with a straight face that modernizing our grid isn't absolutely vital to the future of our country.

You don't have to listen to me; Secretary Burgum and Secretary Wright said as much in their confirmation hearings.

But this project, all of these projects and many more, have been thrown into complete uncertainty because of President Trump's Executive orders.

It is completely unclear when or if those projects are going to get the funding they were counting on and that they were owed from bills that Congress passed and signed into law.

And that is not just causing chaos, it is causing delays. It is causing harm and alarm, because it could mean construction grinds to a halt, workers lose jobs. It means the work will go unstarted or, perhaps, in some cases, unfinished. Plus, it would mean increasing costs, increasing costs for our cities and counties and States and Tribes for those projects that somehow make it through all of this.

And while there are many more infrastructure projects in my State I haven't touched on, not to mention the other projects across the entire country, there are so many other projects and organizations and people who are being harmed right now by President Trump's reckless funding freeze.

I know there are medical researchers still worried their work will somehow be considered woke, when, in reality, it is actually pretty darn important that we do understand the risk of health disparities, things like why the maternal death rate is so much higher for Black or Native American women. Yet now researchers are being told that their research is at risk of being defunded if they are examining issues of equity or barriers to care, or even if they are specifically studying females.

And there are hospitals in my State and across the country who are worried that some of these programs, which are appropriately focused on someone's gender or race, are in jeopardy.

For example—give you a good example—we know that pulse oximeters are less accurate for people with darker skin tones. Making sure that these clinical measurements are accurate will save life, and it has life-and-death consequences for patients.

We know women have much higher rates of autoimmune disorders than men. We need to look at why that is. We need to invest in training the next

generation of scientists, including from diverse backgrounds. Studies actually show us that diversity in the scientific workforce leads to greater innovation and productivity, but there is a serious concern that lifesaving work is going to get caught up in President Trump's sweeping, illegal Executive orders.

Another impact of Trump's actions: The National Park Service has rescinded all of its employment offers for our summer seasonal staff. Now, that doesn't just mean people are going to be facing longer wait lines or dirtier bathrooms—though they will—it could mean park closures throughout this entire summer. It will mean delayed responses to emergencies, making people less safe. And outside our national parks, Trump is also freezing regional cleanup efforts, things like stopping illegal dumping and improving air quality in our communities.

And let's talk about foreign assistance, because for decades now, there has been widespread, bipartisan understanding that promoting stability abroad, promoting democracy, improving health, strengthening trade, building partnerships, is crucial to U.S. leadership.

But Trump's Executive orders put all of that at risk by illegally freezing funds.

I have heard from organizations that operate all over the world about how they were unable to deliver the lifesaving aid that millions of people rely on due to the stop-work orders. That meant millions of doses of lifesaving drugs sat unused on shelves; time-sensitive prevention methods against diseases like malaria were not carried out, putting millions at risk; training for more than 64,000 healthcare workers was put on hold; and hundreds of millions of metric tons of U.S.-grown commodities are sitting, at the risk of spoiling, in transport instead of reaching their final destinations across the world to feed people in need.

Despite a so-called waiver from the U.S. State Department to resume work, much of this lifesaving aid is still today on hold. Without a start-work order, those organizations fear they are taking on significant risk now in continuing operations.

Put simply, this was already unacceptable, and now over the weekend, President Trump and Elon Musk have decided—against all reason, against all evidence, and against the law, mind you—to completely dismantle USAID, and that is on top of the illegal funding freeze that has already been pushing U.S. businesses and nonprofits and international aid groups to make tough choices for truly pointless reasons.

It should be obvious that these cuts will hurt people across the world. These cuts are going to mean that people starve. These cuts will mean that people don't get clean water. These cuts will mean more disease outbreaks with higher death counts. These cuts will mean less help for victims of violence and higher death rates for pregnant women.

Anyone with an ounce of humanity can see this freeze will get devastating fast. It is important to note that it will get devastating in ways you cannot just make up with more money later once that damage is done. That is just not how it works. When people are starving, you cannot just feed them money; you need to have already made the investments to grow food. When democracies are in crisis, you can't just cut them a check; you need to have helped them build strong institutions. When a deadly disease outbreak strikes, you are going to learn very quickly that an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure.

These are not lessons we need to learn the hard way by letting people die. We know it all painfully well right now. So to freeze that funding is asking for disaster, and not just for other countries across the world but for us, for the United States and for our families here at home.

Freezing foreign assistance is not putting America first; it is guaranteeing America comes in last because every funding gap we leave is an opportunity for our adversaries to step in, fill that gap, and play the hero while casting us as the villain.

How are we supposed to lead the world if we are unwilling to invest in it? I will tell you right now, China is not holding back. They are investing constantly because they know they aren't just building infrastructure across the world, they are building stronger partnerships. We just counted ourselves out of that competition.

You want to end U.S. global dominance? You want to tell the world the United States is done being a leader? You want to tell other countries we cannot be trusted to keep our word? Because that is exactly what we are doing if we let Trump get away with illegally cutting off global aid with the stroke of a pen and let the richest man in the world cut off help from some of the poorest people in the world.

Let's be clear. It is not just U.S. leadership on the line here; there are U.S. jobs at stake. That reality is hitting home hard this week. Back in my home State of Washington, there are some world-class organizations that I know may have to lay off people this week, hundreds of people, all because of President Trump's funding freeze. It is a scene that is not isolated to Washington State. I know it is playing out across the country as well with thousands of layoffs across 38 States and Canada. I know that so long as President Trump's lawless war on foreign aid continues, so will those layoffs. We will see hundreds, if not thousands, more every week.

International aid organizations may make a difference around the world, but they support American jobs too, people who have a paycheck and a family, people who work incredibly hard and who are incredibly proud of the work they do to make the world a better place and reaffirm U.S. global lead-

ership. But they are being sent packing, not because they have done anything wrong, not because this work is not important, but because President Trump and Elon Musk are listening to wacko conspiracists and ultra-isolationists while ignoring the experts, ignoring the obvious realities, and, again, ignoring the law. We should all stand against this.

I know we are here tonight to discuss the Vought nomination, but I want to talk about someone who has not been nominated to anything. He has not been elected to anything. Yet he is serving as de facto co-President—Elon Musk. Arguably, he is more important and more influential than the elected, sitting President, and he has proven himself in lockstep with Russ Vought—whom we are voting on tomorrow—when it comes to slashing programs that matter to American families and ignoring the laws of our Nation.

In recent days, Musk has been busy illegally shuttering USAID, cutting off foreign assistant programs, which I said will lose jobs for Americans, lose lives in countries around the world, and lose leadership as adversaries like China fill that gap. Shockingly, Musk has even had people fired—fired—for denying his lackeys classified resources that they had no authority to access.

Last weekend, we all learned that Elon Musk essentially commandeered access to the Treasury Department's most sensitive payment system, handling \$6 trillion every year and managing nearly all of our Federal reimbursements. It is a system that contains extremely sensitive personal and commercial information.

I have been hearing from people across my State who are truly alarmed about what Musk and his associations having access to this system could mean for their data and for funding they count on.

Let's not mince words here. An unelected, unaccountable billionaire with expansive conflicts of interest, deep ties to China, and an indiscreet ax to grind against perceived enemies is highjacking our Nation's most sensitive financial data system and its checkbook so that he can illegally block funds to our constituents based on the slightest whim or wildest conspiracy—funds, mind you, that Congress on a bipartisan basis passed.

Some Republicans are trying to suggest that Musk only has viewing access to Treasury's highly sensitive payment system—as if that is acceptable either—but why on Earth should we believe that, particularly when Musk himself is saying the exact opposite loudly and repeatedly for everyone to hear?

What funds will Elon target next? Lifesaving medical research? Homelessness assistance? Food banks? We already know he has falsely attacked faith-based organizations that help folks and is promising to cut off funds based off conspiracy theories. In other

words, the world's richest man has vowed to cut off funding that helps the least among us. Think about that.

Next, think about how many dollars he himself makes from government contracts. I mean, seriously. The richest man in the world, with countless government contracts, ties to our adversaries, is taking over the Treasury in the name of fighting corruption? The irony is almost as rich as Musk himself.

Let me underscore just how dangerous this is because now that Trump has handed over Treasury's checkbook, what if Elon decides he doesn't like how Rivian is getting Federal funds to build an EV manufacturing facility? So what next? All Elon has to do is say "Oh, they are woke," and he can convince Trump to illegally cut off those funds. Is that how this works now?

Maybe Elon will decide he doesn't like Blue Origin and not SpaceX getting a contract, so he wants to gum up the works on their payments. Is that how this works?

Maybe Elon decides he wants to get into electronic healthcare systems, and maybe he wants to punish hospital systems that don't take him up on whatever he is selling.

Private corporations and competitors need to take note. The potential for abuse and corruption by Elon—especially considering his track record—is pretty much limitless.

And it is not just Treasury. Musk and his henchmen are launching a full-scale invasion of sensitive data systems across government. We are talking about the Small Business Administration. We are talking about NOAA. We are talking about Medicare. The reporting is now clear. They are not just looking either; they are directly making changes to some of those critical systems.

This is not Silicon Valley, where you can just move fast and break things. When you break things here, people don't get their healthcare; they don't get their Social Security check; they don't get crucial warnings and life-saving information.

Anyone who thinks "Well, that surely won't happen" has not been paying attention because just this week, Elon Musk and Donald Trump put Americans in danger. We have citizens in dangerous corners of the world who were suddenly locked out of their emails, and they were cut off from an app that is meant to help address threats like kidnapping.

So no one should be shrugging this off and just saying "Well, what is the worst that could happen?" because this can get really, really bad, really, really fast.

If anyone is thinking "Well, it is OK. We have guardrails. We have laws," make no mistake, even though Trump and Musk have absolutely zero legal authority to hold up any Federal payments that are law, this has not stopped them so far. As we have seen,

they are already halting other funds illegally. They are already firing government watchdogs and officials left and right regardless of our laws. They are already putting forward blatantly unconstitutional Executive orders.

The fact of the matter is, Trump and Musk have yet to find a law they think applies to them. They think because they are rich and powerful, they get to call all the shots regardless of the courts and regardless of Congress. That is not how things work in this country. Billionaires are not above the law, and neither are Presidents. We do not have a monarchy where a President is king. We do not have an oligarchy where the richest people get the largest say. We in this country have a democracy—if we can keep it—where each citizen has a vote. We have checks and balances where the President is accountable to the Congress and to the people, where he has to follow the laws we pass.

But some of my colleagues across the aisle seem to be forgetting that our democracy doesn't work by magic. We have to do our part—our part—here to hold Presidents accountable. Our job is not to say yes to everything the President does, no matter how lawless or harmful. Our job is not to shrug our shoulders or cover our eyes. It is to fight for the people who sent us here and to defend the Constitution.

So Democrats will be pushing back with the tools we have. We will speak out. We will press this administration. We will open investigations, and we will demand accountability. But one tool we do not have is the majority in this Congress. So that means our Republican colleagues have to say: Enough. We need them to join us. We need them to stand up to the corruption and the lawlessness and stand up for the people they represent.

While I am on the subject, I want to talk about another scheme Elon Musk cooked up. We are approaching the deadline that is set in the Trump administration's "Fork in the Road" message, which claims—and I have to emphasize that it merely claims—to give Federal workers the option of a deferred resignation that would allegedly allow workers to retain all pay and benefits regardless of your daily workload and be exempted from all applicable in-person work requirements until September 30.

I want to speak directly to all of our Federal workers about this because they deserve better than to be pushed out the door with a 9-day pressure tactic that comes with no clarity, no details, and a lot of questions left unanswered.

So here is what is important for everyone to know. First, there is no guarantee workers who accept that offer will get paid through September 30, as they have been promised. Not only is there no funding for that timeframe right now, but I personally am deeply skeptical of any offer from a President like Donald Trump, who has so consistently shown he will try to stiff workers at every opportunity.

Being given only 9 days to decide something like this should set off alarm bells. That is a short amount of time to consider all of the financial impacts of potentially accepting this offer—including, if you were able to find another job, how would this impact your benefits like health insurance, retirement, and a lot more.

And we all know, scammers often pressure people: Act immediately.

Additionally, information being provided continues to change and includes a lot of caveats. It claims you can rescind your resignation if you change your mind. But your job may no longer exist if that happens—tough luck.

It claims you aren't expected to work if you accept this offer, except in cases determined by each individual Agency.

It claims you can stay in your current role. However, there is no guarantee your position will be needed.

The lack of clear information and research about exactly what will be allowed is rightfully creating confusion for the more than 56,000 Federal workers in my State alone. To me, this leaves a lot of questions unanswered.

Finally, I want to express a real gratitude for our Federal workers who power so many essential services provided by our government. The American Government is not Twitter. People rely on our Federal workers, and sometimes their work can be the difference between life and death.

Federal workers help inspect meat processing facilities. They make sure baby formula is safe. They approve lifesaving drugs and treatments. They manage air traffic. They help ensure clean drinking water. And there is so much more.

Where this administration continues to show outright hostility toward many of our Federal workers, I want you to know I will continue to fight for our Federal workers—everyone from Hanford workers, scientists at the Pacific Northwest National Lab, to the people making sure you get your Social Security check.

Mr. President, I got a letter this week from a Hanford worker. They started last year, hoping it would be a stable job that would let them provide for their family while making a difference in their community. This employee has already been recognized several times for hard work. And then Elon Musk tried to push them out the door with this scammy buyout, and now they are on the list of employees who are at the threat of being terminated for no good reason.

That is an utter betrayal. It is a betrayal of a hard-working parent who did nothing wrong and a betrayal of my Hanford community, where Trump is undermining important environmental cleanup work, because at Hanford alone, which is already understaffed, there are nearly 30 people now on the chopping block. They are nuclear safety engineers. They are facility safety representatives. They are procurement and contracting personnel. They are

attorneys. They are labor relations staff. They are accountants.

How is firing nuclear safety engineers supposed to make anyone safer or better off?

Mr. President, there are so many stories like this already happening or just around the corner. I have heard that Musk and Trump plan to cut workers at the Department of Energy in half. These are Federal employees who put in long hours to support their families and to strengthen our country. And for all their years of service, for all their sacrifice, Elon Musk is showing them the door and saying: Don't let it hit you on the way out.

This is wrong, and it is ungrateful. And for God's sake, we are talking about nuclear security here. Why on Earth would anyone think it is a good idea to cut corners?

Here is my message to our Federal workers: You do so much for our communities. You deserve so much better than to have a billionaire with no understanding of what you do come in, belittle your work, suggest he can do it better, and push you out the door. I hope you will all keep up the good work for the American people. I want you to know we will keep fighting for you as well.

Mr. President, before I conclude, I just want to state once more what is at stake with Vought's nomination. We are talking about hundreds of billions of dollars in Federal spending that Congress—us—passed that our communities are counting on and that Mr. Vought has made painfully clear he will not think twice about illegally blocking it.

Giving this man the power to enact his illegal schemes will do real harm to folks back home. It will cut people off from getting groceries and making rent. It will cut our families off from childcare and healthcare. It will cut veterans and their survivors off from disability and education benefits they earned through their service to our country. It will cut off breakthrough medical research and help for people who are struggling with opioid addiction. It will cut off communities that are working to build bridges and improve roads and strengthen their energy infrastructure. That will have serious consequences we cannot overlook.

We are here to fight for our families, but there is also another serious consequence here, one that cuts to the heart of what makes this Senate work and what makes our democracy work. Confirming Russ Vought to OMB makes it that much harder to negotiate our spending bills. It is much harder to reach a bipartisan deal with my colleagues, whom I respect and trust and have worked with for years, if that deal is going to be implemented by someone in whom I have zero trust; someone who has made clear that despite our laws, he is going to block any funding we pass. Why should any Senator vote to confirm someone who has

made it perfectly clear he will undermine their authority to help their constituents?

Mr. President, as I have said, our system of checks and balances does not work on its own. We have to actually do our part here in Congress to be the check of Presidential abuse of power. And we have an opportunity—actually, it is an obligation—right now, to do just that. Before us right now is a nominee who has made it very clear he will not respect the authority of Congress—of all us and the people who voted us in—nominated by a President who is not respecting the authority of Congress and the people who voted us in.

We have to say we can't stand for that. We have to say from here that the law is the law. And a simple way we can send that message is by rejecting Russ Vought's nomination outright.

Mr. President, I am here today to strongly urge my colleagues to join me in doing just that.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. MORENO). The Senator from Massachusetts.

Ms. WARREN. Mr. President, I would like to start by thanking Senator MURRAY for her extraordinary leadership. She has been a stalwart in the Senate for many, many years and now is the ranking member of the Appropriations Committee and knows firsthand the importance of the process by which we make a law in the United States. And that includes that we pass those laws in Congress. We fund them in Congress. It is signed by the President of the United States. And people across this Nation can know, through that process, those are what the laws are. If you don't like those laws, then elect different people who will come up with different versions of the law.

But everyone—Democrat or Republican—sticks to the same version, and that is: A law is a law.

The President of the United States or his co-President, Elon Musk, do not have the right simply to go back on the laws and say: Oh, we pick that one, that one, and that one to enforce—and that one, no; that one, no; and, maybe, that one, half time.

That is not how the process works.

Senator MURRAY has been the leading voice in fighting back against this, and I want to say how much I appreciate all that she has done.

I want to talk for just a minute about Project 2025. During the 2024 election, the American people became familiar with this Republican document called Project 2025. The document laid out Republican plans to reshape our country if they gained control.

Now, Americans, a little at a time, got a chance to see the plan. People started to read it, and they were shocked. In no time, people from across the political spectrum—not just Democrats; Democrats, Republicans, Independents—made clear how much they

hated Project 2025 and that they wanted no part of it.

So what was in Project 2025 that made it so widely hated across the political spectrum?

A few things: firing civil servants, weaponizing the Department of Justice and the Federal Bureau of Investigations, unleashing force onto protesters and targeting political opponents, restricting abortion nationwide, ripping retirement and healthcare benefits from seniors, dismantling public education, and—biggest and best—funding tax cuts for the rich by raising taxes on America's middle class.

I want to be clear, it is a big document. Those are just the top lines.

So Donald Trump's response was to swear over and over and over again that he had nothing to do with those plans; he didn't know about them, didn't endorse them, didn't want anything to do with them.

Here are some of the things that Donald Trump said about Project 2025 back in 2024:

I know nothing about Project 2025.

I have nothing to do with Project 2025.

I disagree with some of the things they're saying and some of the things they're saying are absolutely ridiculous and abysmal.

And my personal favorite:

They've been told officially, legally, in every way, that we have nothing to do with Project 2025.

So think about that. During the 2024 election, Donald Trump claimed he didn't know anything about Project 2025. But he lied. Shortly after the election, he nominated one of the chief architects of Project 2025 in a key role with the government.

Donald Trump has named the lead architect of Project 2025, Russ Vought, to oversee the Federal Government's entire budget office. That is right. Listen to this one. He is putting the head writer of the plans that you had only read about in nightmares in a key government position.

Russ Vought wrote Project 2025, and now, Donald Trump is rewarding him by inviting him into the government in order to carry out the Republican blueprint to make our government force people to live in the image that Russ Vought and other extremist Republicans approve of. And he plans to rework our economy to benefit the wealthiest among us and make everybody else pay for it.

Here are just a few of the things that Russ Vought has called for. Russ Vought has called on Congress to outlaw medication abortion nationwide, restricting women's reproductive rights, even in States that protect abortion. Russ Vought has encouraged discrimination against transgender people in the workplace and in healthcare. In his first stint as OMB Director, Russ Vought decried the use of Federal funding for diversity and equity training in a letter to Federal Agencies.

The Project 2025 playbook calls for eliminating almost every civil rights

office in the Federal Government. And Russ Vought has said he intends to put Federal workers "in trauma" and destroy the merit-based system for civil servants so that he can fill the government with rightwing extremists.

I am going to pause here for a minute to see if Senator GILLIBRAND wants to speak.

Mrs. GILLIBRAND. Thank you so much, Senator WARREN, for your unbelievable tenacity and clear-eyed and thoughtful remarks.

I yield the balance of my postcloture debate time on the Vought nomination to Senator SCHUMER.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Duly noted.

Ms. WARREN. Let's keep in mind, Russ Vought has called for outlawing abortion—medication abortion—nationwide. It doesn't matter whether or not you live in a State that says, no, we are going to protect abortion. Russ Vought wants to find a way to make sure it is shut down everywhere.

He wants to encourage discrimination against transgender people.

He thinks that getting rid of civil rights is the way to go for the American Government.

And he says he wants to put Federal workers in trauma and destroy the merit-based system for civil servants so he can fill up our government with rightwing extremists.

Now, we are already seeing firsthand the devastating effects of Russ Vought's plan for America. Russ Vought was the puppet master behind the funding shutdown that threw this country into chaos last week. I saw this in Massachusetts. Parents didn't know if their toddlers' daycare would be open. Seniors didn't know if the hot meals they were expecting from Meals on Wheels would grind to a halt. No one knew if the nursing homes funded by Medicaid would be able to pay their workers.

That was just the tip of the iceberg for Russ Vought. If he is confirmed, you can absolutely bet on Russ Vought pulling out the rug from working people over and over and over again. Quite frankly, we don't know where he will stop. This is where they have started. Three weeks in, and this is where they have started.

Will Russ Vought, Elon Musk, and Donald Trump stop when they have ripped abortion rights away from every single woman in America?

Will they stop when he has abolished the Department of Education and fired 180,000 teachers from their jobs?

Will he stop when he has privatized Medicare and when seniors can't afford to go see the doctor?

Will he stop when he is done stealing from middle-class families in order to fund tax breaks for the wealthiest households? By the way, that is in his blueprint, too—tax hikes for the middle class and tax breaks for the rich.

Will he stop when he crashes the economy? Take it from me, with these kinds of plans, crashing the economy is

no longer a stretch. Russ Vought's Project 2025 proposals will lead to higher inflation, higher interest rates, and weaker economic growth. Project 2025 would seriously threaten another recession.

Look, already, families all across this country are feeling the pressure from high grocery prices while Donald Trump and his administration just turn their backs on working families.

American families cannot afford for Russ Vought to be in charge. We don't know how far Russ Vought's extremism will go, but we can't afford to wait and find out.

Americans voted for each and every one of us right here in the U.S. Senate to fight for them, and they do not expect us to roll over and play dead. It is our sworn duty to stop dangerous people like Russ Vought before he destroys our freedom, our economy, and the stability of every working family in this Nation. So I urge every Senator to vote no on his nomination.

I also want to take this chance to share some of the stories I have been hearing from my constituents, the people of Massachusetts. The impacts of Donald Trump's and Russ Vought's policies are affecting people in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts and all across this country. I am here to fight for the people of Massachusetts, and I am here to share their stories.

I want to start with a message I received from a family childcare center that cares for hundreds of children each day so that moms have the opportunity to succeed in their careers.

Here is how the message goes:

Our community of early educators and families is on edge. We work with a very diverse population, and the rumors and threats related to immigration activities are having an impact. We have begun having families question removing their children from much needed and valuable early education programs because they are scared to separate from one another or even to go outside. Ninety-nine percent of the families we are working with are receiving a subsidy for their care.

So, with current funding through the Department of Early Education and Care, I believe it breaks down to approximately 60 percent federal and 40 percent state funds.

We have also historically been recipients of CDBG funds to support our training program, which would only be possible with Federal support.

So think about that.

When Russ Vought and Donald Trump and Elon Musk just decide to start shutting programs down, we have childcare centers that are writing in, saying, in effect, they are not going to have the money to keep the doors open for the children and the mommas whom they serve.

This is from a small business owner in Lynnfield. Sadaf owns a small business that works to innovate new lab equipment to improve cancer and prenatal screenings. She gets money from the National Institutes of Health. This is exactly the kind of person we want to see doing work right here in the United States.

Here is what she writes:

My small business . . . is currently partially funded through an NIH-NHGRI grant. Today, the grant is frozen, and we are unable to access any funds. If this freeze lasts more than a month, we will have to lay off hard-working employees and shut our doors.

Think about that.

Here is someone who has built a small business around doing more effective cancer screenings and prenatal screenings, and she has been recognized by the National Institutes of Health as someone who is doing the kind of cutting-edge research and delivering the kind of services we need. Because Russ Vought, Donald Trump, and Elon Musk say, "No. We are just going to freeze funding here," the consequence is, she says: I am at risk of having to lay off employees and close my business.

I have heard this from many of my constituents.

Another in Worcester runs a small nonprofit to help communities vulnerable to the climate crisis. They have \$1.5 million in contracts that they now can't access, and soon they are going to have to lay off employees.

The impact of holding this money up is real. It is felt in our communities. It is felt household by household by household when people can't get to the money they need so that they can issue the paychecks and keep people working. Why and how is that making America any better off?

Take this story from the Boston Globe, entitled "Am I going to lose my husband?": The real price of Trump's budget freeze."

The freeze is harming real people. One of them is James, a Virginia resident who told his story to the editorial board but asked that his last name not be used because he fears retaliation.

Eight years ago, when James was 32, after years of health problems, he was diagnosed with neuroendocrine tumors (formerly called Carcinoid cancer), with accompanying severe Carcinoid syndrome. Tumors were in his intestines and liver, with nodules on his lungs. A doctor gave him 3 to 6 months to live.

Standard treatment for these tumors is shots with one of two drugs—

And I am going to do my best to pronounce them—

octreotide or lanreotide. The first couple of months after his diagnosis, James spent a total of around \$10,000 on shots and scans, [and that was in addition to his] insurance coverage.

So this is someone with health insurance.

He was working in a toy shop and studying graphic design, and the medical care [completely] drained his savings. Then James entered a National Institutes of Health research trial.

Because James was unusually young to get Carcinoid syndrome, NIH researchers wanted to study how he reacted to the disease and treatments. For the next 8 years, NIH provided and paid for his shots, scans, surgeries, medications, and procedures. "All I had to do was be a guinea pig," James said.

As of December, he was getting a shot of lanreotide, which can cost thousands of dollars.

He was getting the shot every 3 weeks to keep his tumors from growing.

"If I were to lose the medication, they'd likely ramp up, become more aggressive, and potentially spread to other organs. It could be a death sentence," James said.

The disruptions started when it became clear Donald Trump might win the Presidential election. In October and November, NIH began recommending that if patients could get some medications—anti-nausea medicine or painkillers—from other doctors, they should, because the federal agency feared budget cuts. In December, after Trump's election, James said his doctor told him NIH could no longer provide lanreotide. But he was still part of the research protocol, so he would get yearly scans, and the NIH would conduct and pay for any necessary surgeries.

In other words, they wanted to continue to be able to study him.

In December, James started experiencing aphasia and memory loss, and a scan found spots in his brain. He's still undergoing diagnostic tests. NIH had a treatment protocol prepared for if the cancer did spread to his brain. Once Trump took office in January, however, James was told the research was frozen indefinitely, and he won't be getting any NIH care until that changes.

James is continuing treatment with a Medicare insurance plan provided by Kaiser Permanente, and he qualified for a financial assistance grant through May. But he worries the Trump administration will end that financial assistance. James receives disability payments, and his wife is a teacher, so they can't afford high out-of-pocket payments. "When I heard about this, I thought, 'Am I going to lose my husband? Is he going to die?'" his wife, Becki, said.

Make no mistake, these are not one-off stories. Families everywhere, all across the country, in red States and blue States, are feeling the impacts of these policies—everyone.

Now, maybe you knew about this, maybe you didn't, but Trump is trying to keep you in the dark on some of these things while he distracts by renaming the Gulf of Mexico or dreaming about Canada as the 51st State. In just his first couple of weeks in office, Donald Trump has gone on a rampage against working people, signing hundreds of Executive orders—rolling the clock back on progress and reinstating harmful and unpopular policies from his first term. He signed many of these Executive orders in the middle of the night because he and his administration didn't want people to know about them.

So I just want to remind everybody, for all of those pictures of Donald Trump signing while everybody looked on and everybody smiled or with Donald Trump holding up an Executive order that he signed very proudly, those are not all of the Executive orders. There were a lot of his Executive orders that got signed late at night and then were just pushed out.

Here are some of the Executive orders that the American people may not know about, and they are right in lockstep with Project 2025:

In one Executive order, Donald Trump called for a Federal Government hiring freeze. Project 2025 proposed implementing a "hiring freeze for career officials." So Trump does the Executive order exactly to what Project 2025 was proposing.

Here is Donald Trump's Executive order:

I hereby order a freeze on the hiring of Federal civilian employees to be applied throughout the executive branch.

There it is—Project 2025 and Donald Trump's Executive order.

Another Executive order: He withdrew from the Paris Climate Accords. So let's start with Project 2025. It proposed that the "next conservative administration should withdraw the U.S. from the U.N. Framework Convention on Climate Change and the Paris Agreement."

Here is Donald Trump's Executive order that was signed late at night:

The United States Ambassador to the United Nations shall immediately submit formal written notification of the United States' withdrawal from the Paris Agreement under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change.

Project 2025 calls for it; Donald Trump delivers.

He paused the implementation of the Inflation Reduction Act and the bipartisan infrastructure law, which is fighting the climate crisis and helping cities and towns across America to upgrade their roads and bridges.

Project 2025 called to repeal "massive spending bills like the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act and Inflation Reduction Act, which established new programs and are providing hundreds of billions of dollars in subsidies to renewable energy developers, their investors, and special interests, and support the rescinding of all funds not already spent by these programs." In other words, Project 2025 is saying: Shut it down. Shut it down.

Here is Donald Trump's Executive order:

All agencies shall immediately pause the disbursement of funds appropriated through the Inflation Reduction Act of 2022 . . . or the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act.

So there we are. Project 2025 calls for it; Donald Trump delivers with an Executive order.

The fact that he cannot legally do that doesn't seem to have slowed him down at all. In fact, Project 2025 talks about repealing those laws. That means you come to Congress, and then Congress votes on it—the House and the Senate. And only if you get majorities in the House and Senate do you send it over to the President of the United States to sign it into law.

Donald Trump isn't doing it. Republicans are in charge of the House. Republicans are in charge of the Senate. But instead of saying we are going to amend the law that has already gone through the process and been signed in and the money has all been appropriated for it, nope—instead—Donald Trump says, with a middle-of-the-night Executive order, I am just going to say: Stop spending money.

That is impoundment, and it is clearly unlawful. He is in violation of the law.

Now, on abortion, Trump reinstated and expanded the global gag rule—a

heartless rule that makes women and girls across the world less safe by cutting funding for health centers that may provide abortion.

Planned Parenthood gave us an idea of just how bad this is. Here is their quote on this:

Also known as the Mexico City policy, the global gag rule prevents foreign organizations that receive certain U.S. assistance from providing, counseling, referring, or advocating for legal abortion in their country—even with their own money and [their own] resources. The global gag rule blocks health care access, disrupts coalitions and stifles local advocacy efforts, and undermines reproductive rights worldwide. [By the way,] it is also deeply unpopular with the American people.

In fact, here is what Alexis McGill Johnson, who is President and CEO of the Planned Parenthood Federation of America said:

President Trump is kicking off his second term exactly as anticipated: attacking sexual and reproductive health care. The global gag rule not only disrupts the delivery of health services in areas of the world that are most in need; it also rolls back progress in countries that have fought to advance access to health care and human rights. Elected officials should not be interfering in personal medical decisions, in this country or anywhere else in the world. We must reverse and end the global gag rule permanently, full stop.

But Donald Trump just signed that Executive order in the middle of the night, and women—particularly poor women—all around the world will pay the price.

Here is more of what Donald Trump did to try to turn back the clock on women's bodies. This one comes from POLITICO:

President Trump's campaign-trail promise to leave abortion regulation to the states lasted just a few days into his presidency.

He issued executive orders . . . that revive some anti-abortion policies from his first administration—including restrictions on federal funding for family planning and other health programs abroad that discuss abortion as an option or provide referrals for the procedure.

So the President signed the Executive orders hours after addressing the annual anti-abortion March for Life in a prerecorded video.

A 2022 study by the National Academy of Sciences estimated that Trump's anti-abortion restrictions on foreign aid led to 108,000 deaths of women and children in poor countries over the 4 years of his first administration. How does that happen? Well, it is because that Executive order from the first time around slashed funding for groups like the nonprofit MSI Reproductive Choices, which operates clinics that provide contraception and testing for sexually transmitted infections with U.S. funds, and it uses separate revenues to fund and provide abortions.

MSI said, ahead of the policy being reinstated, that it wouldn't abide by it. This will lead to the organization losing \$14 million in U.S. Agency for International Development funding, an MSI spokesperson said. The organization estimates the financial loss could

result in an additional 2.4 million unintended pregnancies because the organization would have to stop providing contraception in several countries.

I am at a complete loss to explain how the United States is better off if more unintended pregnancies happen in poor countries and how we explain that, the last time around, when Trump did this, it resulted in 108,000 deaths of women and children in poor countries, and that we are headed straight into the same plan again.

Another study by Stanford University researchers found that the narrower version of the Mexico City policy that several GOP Presidents enacted prior to Trump caused the number of abortions to increase across Sub-Saharan Africa because so many women lost access to contraception.

Let me say that once again. For everyone who thinks that abortion should not occur, understand the consequence of the Trump Executive order, and that is that it increases the number of abortions across Sub-Saharan Africa because women lose their access to contraception.

Abortion rights advocates have also argued that the policy is overbroad because it imposes restrictions in countries where abortion is legal. One day earlier, in another move that thrilled abortion opponents, Trump issued pardons for roughly two dozen people convicted of forcibly entering and blocking access to abortion clinics. In fact, this has been an important part of the Trump Executive order stream in this area.

The idea that the Federal laws that protect women who are walking from where they have parked their car to an abortion clinic and also a place where they may get contraception, where they may get a mammogram, where they may get other health screenings, not to be interfered with; that they get a chance to walk without having people scream in their faces and spit on them, that has been taken away by the President of the United States. He has said: Move in a little closer. Bear down harder on those women.

And, still, the anti-abortion groups that helped Trump win reelection are looking beyond these actions and are pushing for more from the new administration.

For example, what are they asking for now? Well, they want to look at a ban on telehealth prescriptions and mail delivery of abortion pills. They want to do rules forcing States to provide more detailed information on all abortions within their borders, so they can see more about who is getting what treatments, and repeal of the Biden administration rules that expanded abortion access for some military members and veterans. It is all happening out in plain view.

Let us be clear: This is and always has been about controlling women's bodies. Donald Trump packed the Supreme Court with anti-abortion extremists to get Roe overturned, and he



bragged about it afterward. This is the latest in Trump's yearslong crusade against women's reproductive rights. And understand this: We will fight back.

As you probably have already seen in the news, Elon Musk has taken control of the government's critical payment systems, which include sensitive personal information for millions of Americans.

This is the system that makes sure that your grandpa gets his Social Security check. This is the system that makes sure that your mom's doctor gets the Medicare payment to cover her medical appointment. And this is the system that makes sure that you get the tax refund that you are owed. Now it has been taken over by Elon Musk.

Every organization—from your State government that uses Federal money on that bridge project to your local Head Start that takes care of little kids while their mommies and daddies go to work—is now at the mercy of Elon Musk.

Maybe you get paid, but, then again, maybe you don't. Elon just grabbed the controls of that whole payment system, demanding the power to turn it on for his friends and turn it off for anyone he declares he doesn't like—one guy deciding who gets paid and who doesn't. It is not the law, but it is the reality.

There is a second problem here. It is not just payments from the Federal Government that are now in Elon's control. Elon and his handful of friends now have access to your personal financial information, anything that is in the system. Your payment history, your Social Security number, your address, your bank account numbers—Elon now has the power to suck out all that information for his own use. And, now, whether it is to boost his personal finances or to expand his political power, it is all up to Elon.

Understand, in a world in which data is power, Elon has just increased his power.

There is a third kind of problem here. In order for this handful of programmers to gain access to our \$6 trillion payment system, we don't know what kind of safeguards were pulled down. Are the gates wide open now for hackers from China, from North Korea, from Iran, from Russia? Heck, who knows what black-hat hackers all around the world are finding out right now about each and every one of us, copying that information, and storing it for their own future criminal uses.

How many back doors are being installed right now in the system that is truly the financial guts of our economy—the one that makes sure that the payments go out? All of that information is now at risk.

This week, I wrote to the Secretary of the Department of the Treasury, Scott Bessent, with extreme concern following this reporting. Here is what I said:

I write regarding a disturbing report that—in one of your first acts after [you were confirmed] as Treasury Secretary—you have given Elon Musk and his surrogates “full access” to the federal government's critical payment systems, which includes the sensitive personal information of millions of Americans.

It is extraordinarily dangerous to meddle with the critical systems that process trillions of dollars of transactions each year, are essential to preventing a default on federal debt, and that ensure that tens of millions of Americans receive their Social Security checks, tax refunds, and Medicare benefits. I am also alarmed by reports that you personally sidelined the key official responsible for managing the extraordinary measures the Department of the Treasury is taking to avoid a default on U.S. debt, risking missteps that could result in a global financial meltdown that costs trillions of dollars and millions of jobs. I am writing to seek answers about your role in this security and management failure and about how you intend to protect the integrity of the federal government's financial operations after handing over the systems to Mr. Musk's team.

According to public reports, even before President Trump's inauguration, Mr. Musk's surrogates began demanding access to the sensitive payment systems that the federal government uses to disburse trillions of dollars every year. The public depends on the integrity of those systems, which control the flow of over \$6 trillion in payments to American families, businesses, and other recipients each year—with millions relying on them for Social Security checks and Medicare benefits, federal salaries, government contract payments, grants, and tax refunds this filing season. In just one year, for example, the Department's Bureau of Fiscal Service disbursed nearly 1.3 billion payments totaling \$5.4 trillion. It also collected nearly \$5.5 trillion in federal revenue. Given the highly sensitive nature of the information in these systems, control over them is typically limited to a small number of career officials.

The Musk team's unprecedented demand for total access to the system reportedly caused serious concern at the Department, particularly given that “the system has historically been closely held because it includes sensitive personal information” on millions of Americans and sends out virtually every federal payment—including payments that are critical for the economy and national security.

I just want to say off to the side, the Presiding Officer and I were both in a Banking hearing this morning, and one of the questions that Democrats put to our bankers who were present is, Would you let someone come in and see the personal banking records of your customers? And the bankers, of course, said no, there is no way they would permit that. Yet the Secretary of the Treasury opened the door and said Elon Musk and his designees could come in and look at anything they wanted to look at.

Controlling the system could allow the Trump administration to “unilaterally”—and illegally—cut off payments for millions of Americans, putting at risk the financial security of families and businesses based on political favoritism or the whims of Mr. Musk and those on his team who have [managed to work] their way inside. It could also give them access to millions of Americans' personal and financial information that is protected by law.

We would shut down a bank that did what the Secretary of the Treasury did in letting Elon Musk come in and root around in the personal financial information of Americans all across this country.

The Washington Post reported that the Department's top career official, David Lebryk—who had served in nonpolitical roles in the Department for decades—

Served Republicans, served Democrats—

including as Fiscal Assistant Secretary since 2014—resisted political pressure to cave to the Musk surrogates. The demands of those outsiders were especially concerning because Mr. Musk and the Trump Administration have tried to control spending in alarming and potentially unlawful ways—including through the chaotic announcement of a federal funding freeze last week that caused widespread harm and confusion. Mr. Musk was reportedly trying “to deploy his engineers to find ways to turn off the flow of money from the Treasury Department to things that Mr. Trump wants to defund.” In other words, a small group of insiders would suddenly be in a position to make decisions about whether to hold up payments to individual families or businesses—with absolutely no transparency or accountability. But rather than protecting the integrity and function of the payment system, [our Secretary of the Treasury] reportedly bent to pressure from the White House, suggested putting Mr. Lebryk on leave, and ultimately forced him out.

This astonishing mismanagement—turning over the federal government's entire payment system and sidelining the most senior career official responsible for managing it—also puts the country at greater risk of defaulting on our debt, which could trigger a global financial crisis. The Fiscal Assistant Secretary was “the government staffer perhaps most responsible for figuring out how the United States should handle the alarming prospect of running out of money, making him a pivotal, if lesser-known, player in [a] debt ceiling standoff.” The Fiscal Assistant Secretary is responsible for assessing when the country will exhaust its funds and ensuring that Congress has that information, for “coordinating and determining how much money the Treasury needs to borrow to finance the government,” and for “manag[ing] the ‘extraordinary measures’” that the Department uses to “delay a default for as long as possible.” The Fiscal Assistant Secretary—unlike the amateurs [that the Secretary of the Treasury has] empowered [when he forced them] out—was well-prepared to manage these kinds of crises. He had “moved through positions that gave him deep exposure to the plumbing of federal financing” and was a “scrupulously apolitical” civil servant who was “not angling for a political promotion.” That expertise is particularly critical at this moment, when the Department is already taking extraordinary measures to avoid a default that “would precipitate another financial crisis and threaten jobs and savings of everyday Americans.”

I sent this letter to Secretary of the Treasury, and I said:

I am alarmed that as one of your first acts as Secretary, you appear to have handed over a highly sensitive system responsible for millions of Americans' private data—and a key function of government—to an unelected billionaire and an unknown number of his unqualified flunkies. The American people deserve answers about your role in this mismanagement, which threatens the

privacy and economic security of every American.

It is no surprise that working families are paying the price for Donald Trump and Russ Vought's reckless actions. Just look at who is running the government: Donald Trump, billionaire; Elon Musk, billionaire; Scott Bessent, billionaire; Linda McMahon, billionaire; Howard Lutnick, billionaire; Charles Kushner, billionaire. And the list goes on. The total net worth of the billionaires in the Trump administration is at least \$382.2 billion. That is more than the GDP of 172 different countries.

Elon Musk, first buddy and head of the Department of Government Efficiency, himself is worth \$410 billion. He is \$150 billion richer than he was on election day. Linda McMahon, Secretary of the Department of Education, is worth \$3.2 billion. Howard Lutnick, nominated for the Secretary of the Department of Commerce, is worth more than \$1.5 billion but likely more. Kelly Loeffler, head of the Small Business Administration, is worth \$1.1 billion. Robert F. Kennedy, Jr., nominated for Secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services, is estimated to be worth about \$15 million. And he has refused to give up a lucrative arrangement with a law firm that will enable his family to make millions off vaccine-related lawsuits, even while he is heading up HHS. Steven Witkoff, Envoy to the Middle East, is worth a billion. Jared Isaacman, NASA Administrator, is worth \$2 billion.

Take this piece from CNN:

Elon Musk plowed at least \$260 million into efforts to send Donald Trump back to the White House, new filings show—a massive infusion that makes him one of the largest single political underwriters of a presidential campaign and underscores the outsized influence of the world's wealthiest person in this year's election.

Thursday's filings with the Federal Election Commission show that the Tesla and SpaceX executive gave a total of \$238 million to a super PAC that he founded this year, America PAC, which worked to turn out voters on Trump's behalf in key states.

But he also was the financial backer of other groups that cropped up in the final days of the election to support Trump, including one that spent millions on advertising to defend [Trump's] record on abortion. It had sought to link Trump's views on abortion to those of the late Supreme Court Justice and liberal icon Ruth Bader Ginsburg.

These people have no shame.

Musk, through a trust that bears his name, donated \$20.5 million to the group, named RBG PAC, on October 24, according to filings with the Federal Election Commission. He was the sole donor to the group, which was formed in mid-October. The donation's timing meant that Musk's involvement was not disclosed until—

After the election, after the inauguration, not until last—

Thursday's post-election filings with the federal regulators.

Ginsburg's granddaughter, Clara Spera, publicly denounced the ads—which sought to neutralize abortion as a liability for Trump in the campaign—as misleading and an “af-

front” to Ginsburg's legacy as a staunch defender of abortion rights.

So true.

According to the new filings, Musk also donated \$3 million to the MAHA Alliance, a super PAC that ran stark ads in key swing states urging supporters of Robert F. Kennedy Jr. to back Trump in the closing stretch of the campaign. Kennedy himself had ended his independent campaign over the summer and endorsed Trump.

MAHA stands for “Make America Healthy Again,” Kennedy's spin on Trump's MAGA catchphrase. Trump has now tapped Kennedy, one of the nation's most prominent anti-vaccine conspiracy theorists, to oversee the Health and Human Services Department. Trump has selected other big donors for roles in his incoming administration.

Howard Lutnick, the Cantor Fitzgerald investment bank chief whom Trump has tapped to head the Commerce Department, made a nearly \$3 million “in-kind” donation of stock on October 21 to a pro-Trump super PAC, MAGA Inc., according to the organization's filings Thursday night.

That's on top of the \$6 million that Lutnick previously donated to the super PAC over the course of the election cycle.

Other Trump supporters who have landed spots in his administration also donated to MAGA Inc. They include Linda McMahon, the former wrestling company executive tapped to serve as Education secretary. She donated more than \$20 million to the Trump-aligned super PAC this cycle.

McMahon and Lutnick also served as co-chairs of Trump's transition operation.

Other Trump picks who have made seven-figure donations to MAGA Inc. include former Georgia Sen. Kelly Loeffler, his choice to lead the Small Business Administration; Scott Bessent, whom Trump has selected as Treasury secretary; and two of his choices for plum diplomatic posts in Europe, Arkansas investor Warren Stephens and Charles Kushner, the father-in-law of Trump's daughter, Ivanka.

And look, don't get me wrong, if you made a fortune because you had a great idea and you built a terrific business, good for you. But I guarantee that any great fortune in America was built, at least in part, using workers that all of us helped pay to educate; built, at least in part, by getting your goods to market on roads and bridges that all of us helped to pay to build; built, at least in part, protected by police and firefighters that all of us help pay the salaries for.

And now, instead of creating a system that will help the next guy or gal that comes along build something, these guys want to pull up the ladder. They poured money into the 2024 election, and now, they expect a return on their investment at the expense of everyone else.

The Trump strategy is to flood the zone, partly so we don't see each of the horrible orders and pay attention to them, but partly to demoralize us. Trump and his Republican friends hope that we will be demoralized. They hope that we will give up, curl in a little ball, and let them do whatever they want to do. I get it. It is tough right now, but it is important that we get back up and fight, and that is exactly what I am doing.

I am challenging Elon Musk on his Department of Government Efficiency

efforts to take away help for seniors who are living in nursing homes and little kids who are hoping for their daycare. I am asking questions of every nominee and pointing out to other Senators and to the public where they pose a real danger to the American people.

Look at the fight over Secretary of Defense Pete Hegseth. He is a credibly accused rapist who has been falling down drunk at work events, and he has run not one but two nonprofits directly into the ground. Nonetheless, Republican Senators stood beside him. He made it through his confirmation, but it wasn't a freebie. Some Republicans broke ranks, and everyone in the country who was paying attention got to see up close and personal just how far the Republicans were willing to go to cower in front of Donald Trump.

Those are the fights we must keep fighting. We will not roll over and play dead. This is not business as usual. The No. 1 thing people can do right now is speak out. Speak out on social media about every one of these things. Talk about the threats these people pose. Speak out about what Donald Trump is doing.

In the middle of the night last Friday, Donald Trump issued a batch of Executive orders turning back the clock decades on women's reproductive rights. If people talk about that, then that is how we will begin to rebuild a movement to push out the Trump vision of America, in which billionaires are on top and everyone else is left in the dirt—and women don't get to make their own health decisions.

I have only got 24 hours a day, but I plan to spend as many of them as humanly possible fighting back against Trump, Musk, and the billionaires who have taken over our country to promote themselves at the expense of everyone else.

It is up to us. I am not lying down and playing dead, and I hope nobody else does either.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. JUSTICE). The Senator from Georgia.

Mr. OSSOFF. Mr. President, I yield 30 minutes of my postcloture debate time on the Vought nomination to Senator MERKLEY and 30 minutes of my postcloture debate time on the Vought nomination to Senator SCHUMER.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator has that right.

The Senator from Louisiana.

DEPARTMENT OF GOVERNMENT EFFICIENCY

Mr. KENNEDY. Mr. President, with me today is one of my colleagues from my Senate office, Mr. James Shea. He is one of my right-hand people and does great work. And I am honored that he could join me today.

Gosh, I don't know where to begin. I have been in the Senate for 8 years. In dog years, that is 56 years, and it feels like 56 years. I have learned a lot, met a lot of interesting people. You know, before I got here, everybody told me about the Washington bubble, and I said, you know, how serious could they be.