

spending part, but I can't wait to read the book. I hope he finds all of it and compiles it. I hope Marco Rubio, the new Secretary of State, takes USAID and shakes them by the shoulder and lifts up the good people there and fires the bad people—the people that wasted taxpayer money like this, giving money to terrorist organizations, giving money to organizations that support Hamas. I hope he gets rid of every single one of them.

I think, if we listen to Mr. Musk, we can save a lot of money. And I hope he does come over and explain what he is doing.

CHAGOS ISLANDS

Mr. President, I want to talk about one other subject real quick. I talked about it before. I am not going to repeat it.

This is India. This is China, which wants to run the whole world. China is already trying to take over the shipping lanes in the South China Sea. This is the Chagos Islands, right down here.

Years ago, the Chagos Islands were owned by France. France ceded the Chagos Islands to our friends in Great Britain.

A number of years ago, the United Kingdom and America got together and we built—mostly with American dollars, by the way—we built a military base in the Chagos Islands, on one particular island called Diego Garcia.

This is a really important military base. For one thing, it is very close to the Bay of Bengal and the Indian Ocean and China, so we can watch it. For another thing, it is one of the only bases where our nuclear submarines can dock—hugely important.

Well, the United Nations got mad at the United Kingdom. They said: Great Britain, you are bad people. You used to be colonialists. You acquired other countries, sometimes freely, sometimes by force.

Every country I know of in the world of any strength has done that. It doesn't mean we ought to be proud of it, but it is part of our history.

But the United Nations said: Shame on you, UK. Shame on you—bad, bad, bad, bad. You have to give back the Chagos Islands and the military base there.

The U.N. doesn't have any jurisdiction over the United Kingdom. But the U.N. said: Not only do you have to give it back, but you don't give it back to the people of the Chagos Islands; you give it back to another group of islands way down here called Mauritius. Mauritius used to own the Chagos Islands when France ceded them to Great Britain. They were run by Mauritius. But the people of the two island groups—archipelagos—the people don't have any affinity.

What does Mauritius say? Of course, we will take it.

But they want to start charging the United States and the UK 9 billion for a 99-year lease. So we can lease our own military base all because the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom

feels guilty because somebody, some tofu-eating “wokerati” at the United Nations, says they are bad people—bad, bad, bad colonialists.

And the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, he is going along with it, but he says: I am negotiating with Mauritius. And the leader of Mauritius just issued a press release saying: Yes, he is negotiating. He increased the price and shortened the leash.

Do you know who is loving all of this? China, because China has a close relationship with Mauritius. And do you know what? It is going to get a lot closer.

This is insane. This is cell-deep stupid. This is bone-deep, down-to-the-marrow stupid, because the United Nations wants the United Kingdom to feel guilty, they want to give our military base and their military base to Mauritius.

Now, the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom can stop this, and Marco Rubio, our new Secretary of State, is against it. I haven't talked to him directly, but I think President Trump is against it. The United Kingdom is our friend. I went to school there for a while. I love it.

I want to see the Prime Minister do well, but he needs to put down the bong. He needs to put down the bong.

This makes absolutely no sense, and it is going to be a big part of his legacy if he gives away this island and our military base to, in effect, what will eventually be China.

I would say to the Prime Minister tonight—I don't mean any disrespect. I want to say this respectfully. I shouldn't have said the “bong” part. I take it back.

Please, Mr. Prime Minister, don't do this. Don't do this. We will stand with you in telling the United Nations, who is upset with you, to go fill out a hurt feelings report because we are not doing it. We will stand with you. Please say no. Don't give our military base away. It is going to really hurt the relationship between the United States of America and the United Kingdom.

I know Donald Trump pretty well. I know Marco Rubio pretty well. They will forgive, but they will never, ever forget. Don't do it, Mr. Prime Minister.

I have taken too much time. I am sorry.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Virginia.

Mr. WARNER. Mr. President, I know my time has been squeezed a little bit. I have other colleagues. I want to mention one thing to my friend from Louisiana. I love to listen to him talk. There are a lot of things he says that I tend to agree with, a lot of things I tend to disagree with.

I do want to make sure folks know what I have some concern about. You want a debate about any of these programs; that is fair cooking. If there are ways to save spending, count me in. In fact, you are a former Governor; I am

a former Governor. Virginia got named best managed State in the country when I was Governor. And you know how we got that information about line item programs? Because about a decade ago—maybe 12 years ago—Rob Portman and I did something called the DATA Act, which gives you that line-by-line information.

We can debate about the validity of these programs. What you don't need to do is to put two—I have the name of one person, maybe not the name of the other—into the Treasury with, to my knowledge, at least for one of them, we are not sure if they have any security clearances at all—to look at \$1.3 billion of checks being written out by the U.S. Treasury.

You want to debate about USAID; have at it, if the programs can't be defended.

But why would you give someone—a coder—the potential keys to the kingdom of the U.S. Treasury? Why does this coder—or Mr. Musk's DOGE bros—need to know how much the U.S. Government paid the Senator from Louisiana on a tax refund or the Senator from Virginia or anyone? I will make it a simple question to ask. Come in and explain yourself.

I would love to go through more, but I know I have colleagues waiting too.

NOMINATION OF RUSSELL VOUGHT

Mr. President, I want to get back to what we are talking about here, which is how strongly I oppose the President's nomination of Russ Vought to be Director of the Management and Budget, OMB.

I have gotten a lot of grief. I supported a number of President Trump's earlier nominees. I believe the President and a Governor ought to mostly get their choices. But the remarkable thing about Mr. Vought is—and why I so strongly oppose him—this man is the author of Project 2025. Remember that?

Again, let's go back, as my friend said, to the campaign. I remember Donald Trump saying: I am going to lower inflation. I am going to bring down grocery prices. And he also said: As a matter of fact, this Project 2025, I don't know what you are talking about.

He claims to have never read it. Instead, he is putting the lead author in charge of OMB. And this manifesto, this doctrine, this author, Mr. Vought—and I quote—said he wants our Federal workforce to be “traumatized.” He wants them to be seen as villains.

Well, I have run a business or two. I am proud of that. I know the Presiding Officer has, as well. If you want to get more out of your workforce, you don't go in with a plan: Let's traumatize the workforce or let's arbitrarily cut here, cut there, fire the good people, let the folks maybe not so good stay on.

But that is what I believe is going on.

Mr. Vought's vision of a traumatized workforce—a group of folks that nobody elected and may not even have appropriate security clearances go into

the Treasury and get access to the files that never have been subject to this kind of thing. If you want to decide about a funding program, fight it at the Agency that authorizes it, not at the folks who write the checks.

The only reason you want to find out who the government is paying beyond what you can find on USAspending, which is something we created more than a decade ago—I would have to say: Why is it somebody no one has elected? This file has never been examined in Trump 1, Bush, Obama—unless you want to get in and potentially manipulate this file. I don't know if that is the case. But I do know you don't put a coder who is 25 in to look at all this information.

How many of those \$1.3 billion line items will he be able to look at? I fear there may be something inappropriate here. And these nonelected officials—and I hear my Republican friends talking about nonelected bureaucrats. These aren't even bureaucrats; these are special government employees.

I can tell you from a national security standpoint, this information—I know I am not surprising anyone, but the U.S. Government does some things through the CIA and other entities that, for the most part, stays classified. You give up that information, and programs will be destroyed. Potentially, lives will be put in jeopardy.

I know, as former chairman of the Intelligence Committee—the reason I like this job, I am vice chairman of the Intelligence Committee. What these men and women do often in the shadows but never get thanked the way our men and women in uniform do—they have to do that. We need to make sure this remains classified information, and unfortunately, we are seeing a careless attitude from this administration that is stunning.

I will point out from earlier today that the CIA sent over a nonclassified form with a series of names and the letter of the last names, which could be discovered, of new CIA hires. It takes a year and a half sometimes to get a clearance at the CIA, and it takes another year to train them. We don't know if those names that were so carelessly thrown around are burned at this point.

But to come back to what we were talking about here with Mr. Vought, this is the agenda: Take everybody in the workforce and make them traumatized—his words, not mine. Again, it is this idea that Mr. Vought and now the folks he has at least indirectly deputized or Mr. Trump has deputized—Mr. Elon Musk and the DOGE bros, whose names we don't know, whose backgrounds we don't know, whose security classifications we don't know—are now going Agency by Agency.

I am particularly concerned about what is going on at Treasury. And I have great respect for the new Secretary of the Treasury—I think he is a good man—but I worry about what has happened right now.

If it were just Treasury and these sometimes potential accesses to classified information, that might be one thing, but you know, we have had for over 150 years almost the idea that our Federal workforce ought to be above politics. We call it the civil service. I already mentioned the fact that Mr. Vought wants not to treat those workers with respect, but he really wants to go ahead and just simply say: We want you traumatized. That person shouldn't be the head of OMB.

More recently, we have seen an offer put out to say to the Federal workforce: Here, if you take this offer to quit, we are going to give you 8 months of free salary. Well, I have got a bridge in Brooklyn that we will give you as well if you take that offer.

If you believe either one of those things, it is true, then, that you are operating in a different universe than reality because—first, have you ever seen our President ever pay any of his contractors on time or fully? Let me assure you that there is no money in the budget to do all of these payouts. Frankly, even the basis of the offer—and I will let the lawyers litigate it—is, I believe, illegal.

We have seen this pushback at AID, but it is not just AID. We heard yesterday that the CIA put out an offer to all of their employees. It didn't say: No, we don't want the spies to quit. It didn't say: No, we don't want our best analysts to quit. It said: Anybody who wants to quit.

I hope the folks at the CIA who know a little bit about deception will realize this phony kind of offer and that, at the end of the day, if our best people quit, who is going to do those jobs? You can't just slot in a new coder to discover how we identify bad guys around the world.

That then got extended today to the other intelligence Agencies. It takes years and years and years. We have some of the best people in the world who work at the NSA who are in the cyber domain. They could all make 10X in the private sector. Yet, we are offering this fantasy 8-month buyout with no guarantee of being paid. I hope they will be smart enough and understand that this is not a real offer. This is a sham. But, God forbid, if they do take it, how are we going to protect our national security?

The FBI. We finally got the information on the eight individuals—senior leaders at the FBI—who got RIF'd. Is it really the time to get rid of the top person at the FBI in cyber or in anti-terrorism or in counterespionage? How does that make us safer in any form?

Then we have the funding freeze. First, it was on; then it was off. I can tell you some people might say: Well, the FBI and the CIA and even those government workers—how does that affect my life? Well, we don't know what the real status is, but I can tell you, in Virginia, I have had firefighters in Southwest Virginia who are saying they are not getting the money to re-

place their—or fix their tanker trucks. I had an affordable housing organization in Northern Virginia say that they don't know whether they have to stop operations entirely. I have law enforcement that actually gets funded from Federal funding that has not been unfrozen, and they are saying: Maybe we have to lay off cops. We are already seeing community health centers, which I saw today, that are shutting down and not serving some people.

So I appeal to my friends, many with whom I have worked together on so many of these items: Do you want this mastermind of 2025 who wants to traumatize our workforce and calls them villains? Do you want our best people at the FBI, CIA, and NSA to take an imaginary offer, which probably wouldn't be fulfilled, and then be actually set up to be fired later? Is that going to make us safer?

I know I have gone on a bit long—not as long as my colleague from Louisiana—but I will urge my colleagues to oppose Russell Vought.

I believe I will then offer the balance of my time—postcloture debate time—to oppose Mr. Vought's nomination to Senator MERKLEY.

I yield the floor to my friend from Arizona.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator has that right.

The Senator from Arizona.

Mr. KELLY. Mr. President, I will bet a lot of folks watching tonight cannot believe that we are here, talking about the Office of Management and Budget. The Office of Management and Budget—there is nothing more bureaucratic sounding in this whole city, and that says something. It is not an office Arizonans should really have to think about, let alone see their Senators debate for hours.

Think of this: Think of this office as our government's financial planner. They keep track of spending for everything from veterans' benefits to disaster relief for communities. When Flagstaff gets hit by flooding or North Scottsdale gets hit by a major wildfire, this is the office that signs off on Federal relief. Every single Federal Agency must go through the Office of Management and Budget to access the dollars that Congress writes into law for the work they do for the American people.

When it is working right, this is the office that helps build the Federal budget and then makes sure it gets executed according to the law, but that is the problem. Under this administration, it is not working right, and it is not following the law.

We saw this a week ago when this office tried to illegally freeze all Federal grants. In the most reckless, incompetent action we have seen yet from this administration, they issued a two-page memo—two pages—that said:

Federal agencies must temporarily pause all activities related to the obligation or disbursement of all federal financial assistance.

This effort is now temporarily blocked by the courts, but it created a

mess all over the country, and it still isn't fixed.

We had Head Start Programs in Arizona that nearly had to lay off staff and turn families away because they didn't get the payments they were promised. I had Arizona community health centers in my office today that just had a frozen payment come through, but it was more than a week late.

Are there places where we need to make Federal spending more efficient and effective? Of course there are, and I am willing to get together with anyone who wants to make our government work better, who wants to save taxpayer dollars, and who wants to improve people's lives. But that is not what the Trump administration is trying to do here because their endgame is not efficiency; it is not being more responsible with taxpayer dollars. The endgame of all of this is giving rich people another massive tax break on the backs of hard-working Americans.

The endgame of all of this—and, folks, we have heard a lot about this from Elon Musk over the last few weeks, about unelected, unaccountable Federal bureaucrats. Elon Musk is himself a billionaire and an unelected, unaccountable bureaucrat who is illegally shutting down Federal Agencies that make Americans safer and more prosperous.

Today, we are debating someone whose very reason for getting picked for this job is that he wants to break the law and be an unaccountable bureaucrat. We know this because Russell Vought has had this job before. When he was picked for this the last time, he told Congress he would follow the law. He said he wouldn't delay or refuse to spend money that was appropriated by Congress. He said he would follow a law that was passed by Republicans and Democrats in 1974 in response to Richard Nixon trying to abuse the powers of his office. He said he would follow that law. He lied.

He held up critical funds to support Ukraine. This was in 2019, before Russia invaded Ukraine. An independent government watchdog found that this broke the law.

Then again, after Hurricanes Irma and Maria ravaged Puerto Rico and Congress passed aid to help communities recover, Vought broke the law again by blocking the funds. Congress passed them again, but do you know what he did? Russell Vought blocked those funds once again.

This is what an unelected, unaccountable bureaucrat looks like—Russell Vought.

Agree with these programs or disagree with them—Congress, Republicans and Democrats, voted for them. If folks don't like it, they can vote out their Members of Congress. That is what accountability means. It is not up to this guy to decide. But now it is very clear what he believes because after he left this job the last time, he went a step further. He has said plainly

that the law he broke was unconstitutional and that the next time he gets in there, he doesn't think he has to follow it.

He wrote about this in his playbook, Project 2025. Do you remember that?

Now, I evaluate each and every nominee based on whether they have the experience and are committed to doing the job. Nothing disqualifies someone faster, in my mind, than when they say ahead of time that they plan to break the law. He has said that. That means he will try to singlehandedly gut the programs he and President Trump disagree with.

But what are they? Well, he spelled it out himself in budgets he has written.

He wants to cut housing support by 43 percent, including completely eliminating the largest source of housing assistance for Arizonans, and that is going to put working families on the streets.

He wants to end the expansion of Medicaid that has extended coverage to 600,000 Arizonans through a program called AHCCCS. That means more Arizonans without health insurance and unable to get the care they need. Also on the list are student loans, food assistance, and so much more.

Russell Vought wants to make it harder to afford a place to live, harder to afford health insurance, harder to afford college, and harder to afford to put food on your table. For anybody listening, do any of those things matter to you?

If he gets this job, there won't be any debate on the Senate floor about these cuts. We won't be able to have a conversation about how to make housing assistance more effective for working families. There won't be bipartisan hearings about where we can cut waste and fraud out of programs to save money and focus where it is needed. Nope. He is just going to try to stop funding these things on his own. He said he would do that. He said he is going to break the law. He has told everybody that.

That is why President Trump picked him for the job in the first place because, remember, none of this is about efficiency. None of this is about looking out for everyday Americans. This is about billionaires paving the way to get another tax cut for themselves and for their corporations and to do so on the backs of you, hard-working Americans.

Folks, we have been here before. The first time around, President Trump signed a tax giveaway that he said was going to grow the economy and help working people, but that is not what happened. In the years since that tax bill was passed, we have seen a massive transfer of wealth to the richest Americans. That is part of the reason why Elon Musk is now worth more than \$400 billion. More big profitable corporations are now paying nothing in Federal income tax. Zero.

The plan is to double down on tax breaks for the rich while, behind closed

doors, unelected and unaccountable bureaucrats like Russell Vought and Elon Musk, they gut programs that help working families. I couldn't think of a more backward way for the Federal Government to operate.

We are supposed to be here to make government work for the American people. And I will sit down with anybody to make that happen. But the plan seems to be to break the Federal Government in order to help rich people, and I can't get on board with that.

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

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator has that right.

The Senator from Hawaii.

Ms. HIRONO. Mr. President, we are less than 3 weeks into the Trump administration, and already, Americans across the country are reeling from the chaos.

Donald Trump ran on lowering costs for working Americans—an admirable goal, but one he clearly had no intention of making good on. Instead, he is hellbent on sowing chaos and making life harder for the American people while he pushes through massive tax cuts for his billionaire buddies.

In just the last 2 weeks, here is what Trump did. He threatened tariffs on Canada and Mexico that will do nothing but raise costs on everyday essentials like food and gasoline, estimated to increase costs for the average household by nearly \$1,200 a year. So much for lowering costs for the American people.

He put a freeze on all Federal funds, creating such uncertainty that seniors in Hawaii were calling my office asking if they needed to prepare for homelessness.

He tried to scam 2 million Federal employees, including more than 23,000 in Hawaii, into taking an unauthorized, unfunded buyout. Whoever heard of such a thing?

And he has given an unelected, unaccountable billionaire free rein to raid the Treasury, to root around in the Treasury and any other Federal Agency he sees fit, enabling him to get his hands on all of our data. If this isn't a data breach, frankly, I don't know what is—right in front of our faces.

In case there was any doubt, the last few weeks have shown that Trump never gave a rip about working people and has no interest in doing anything to help make our lives better. The chaos is dizzying. But behind this chaos is a detailed, methodical plan: Project 2025. While campaigning, Trump swore he had nothing to do with Project 2025—a big fat lie, like so much of what comes out of Trump's mouth.

As soon as he was elected, guess what, Trump began appointing many of the people behind Project 2025. His handpicked choice to lead the Office of Management and Budget, or OMB, is Russell Vought, the architect of Project 2025. Mr. Vought is dangerous, and he has a total disregard for the

Constitution, Congress, and the millions of hard-working Americans impacted by decisions he will make at OMB.

Americans need to know that OMB is extremely powerful, with oversight over the President's budget and, functionally, all Federal Agency actions, including regulatory decisions. With such responsibility, the person leading this office needs to be levelheaded and impartial. They need to put loyalty to the Constitution above loyalty to the President. Mr. Vought, however, is the ultimate yes-man.

In Trump's first term as acting OMB Director, Vought wrote a budget that, among other things, would have cut nearly \$1 trillion from Medicaid; slashed nearly \$300 billion from social safety-net programs, like food assistance; eliminated \$170 billion from student loans; and zeroed out programs, like LIHEAP and community development block grants to help with housing assistance and building community infrastructure.

Just like for families, where we spend our money reflects our priorities and our values. Mr. Vought's 2021 budget demonstrated that he sees no value in helping the American people. This time, we know it will be even worse because he is going to be in charge at OMB. Like Trump, Mr. Vought will do whatever he wants, regardless of the law or the Constitution, from forcing out civil servants to withholding funds appropriated by Congress.

We know the story of Robin Hood, who stole from the rich to help the poor. With Mr. Vought, on the other hand, he is a robber baron, who wants to steal the tax dollars of hard-working Americans to line the pocket of Trump's billionaire buddies—a robber baron.

At the end of the day, Trump, Vought, and all their cronies have just won gold, giving huge tax cuts to billionaires on the backs of working people. We have been repeating this. Why? Because how the heck are they going to do this otherwise, except on the backs of working people?

Their plan to do so is so simple. First, they will gut programs working families rely on—things like nutrition assistance, education funding, and Medicare and Medicaid. Then they will borrow trillions of dollars and run our country deeper into debt, just like they did the last time.

Finally, they will give massive tax breaks to billionaires, leaving the American people to foot the bill. Their plan is clear. They wrote it all down. This is Project 2025—Project 2025, the 900-page plan Russell Vought helped to mastermind, filled with all sorts of terrible ideas for our country and the American people. That is why I call it the plan to screw the American people. They call it the mandate for leadership; I call it the 900-page plan to screw over the American people.

I thank Democracy Forward for summarizing some of the worst proposals

in Project 2025 in a report that I am going to read parts of.

Democracy Forward said:

Project 2025 is among the most profound threats to the American people.

What is Project 2025?

The Project 2025 Presidential Transition Project is a well-funded . . . effort of the Heritage Foundation and more than 100 organizations—

More than 100 organizations—

to enable a future anti-democratic presidential administration—

That would be this administration—

to take swift, far-right action that would cut wages for working people, dismantle social safety net programs, reverse decades of progress for civil rights, redefine the way our society operates, and undermine our economy.

A central pillar of Project 2025 is the "Mandate for Leadership," a 900+ page policy playbook authored by former Trump administration officials and other extremists"—

Like Russell Vought—

that provides a radical vision for our nation and a roadmap to implement it.

Democracy Forward noted:

We—

They—

read Project 2025's entire 900+ page "Mandate for Leadership" so that you—

We—

don't have to.

They said:

What we discovered was a systemic, ruthless plan to undermine the quality of life of millions of Americans, remove critical protections and dismantle programs for communities across the nation, and prioritize special interests and ideological extremism over people.

From attacking overtime pay, student loans, and reproductive rights to allowing more discrimination, pollution, and price gouging, those behind Project 2025 are preparing to go to incredible lengths to create a country only for some, not for all of us.

If these plans are enacted—

Even without congressional approval—

4.3 million people could lose overtime protections, 40 million people could have their food assistance reduced, 220,000 American jobs could be lost, and much, much more. The stakes are higher than ever for democracy and for people.

These threats aren't hypothetical. These are their real plans.

The Heritage Foundation and the 100+ organizations that make up the Project 2025 Advisory Board have mapped out exactly how they will achieve their extreme ends. They aim to carry out many of the most troubling proposals through an anti-democratic president—

Trump—

and political loyalists—

Vought—

loyalists installed in the executive branch, without waiting for congressional action. And, while many of these plans are unlawful, winning in court is not guaranteed given that the same far-right movement that is behind Project 2025 has shaped our current [judicial] system.

Proposals from Project 2025, discussed in detail throughout this guide, that could be implemented through executive branch action alone include:—

And I am going to repeat—

Cutting American Rescue Plan programs that have created or saved 220,000 jobs

Limiting access to food assistance, which an average of more than 40 million people rely on monthly

Rolling back civil rights protections across multiple fronts, including cutting diversity, equity, and inclusion-related, or DEI programs and LGBTQ+ rights in health care, education, and workplaces

Eliminating the Head Start early education program, which serves over 1 million children

Stopping efforts to lower prescription drug prices

Cutting overtime protections for 4.3 million workers

Pushing more people towards Medicare Advantage and other worse, private options, that's 33 million people

Restricting access to medication abortion

Denying students in 25 states and Washington, D.C. access to student loans because their schools provide in-state tuition to undocumented immigrants

Exposing the 368,000 children in foster care to risk of increased discrimination.

Again, I thank Democracy Forward for this summary.

Mr. President, these are just some of the countless proposals in Project 2025 that will make our country and the American people less free, less safe, and less prosperous.

Behind it all is Russell Vought. If confirmed, he will move to implement Project 2025 without delay to line the pockets of billionaires at the expense of working Americans.

You know, we have got to repeat this time and again because, guess what, this is exactly what happened during Trump's first term. Their goal was to give trillions in tax cuts to their billionaire buddies, and they are going to do it again. Trust me. That is what they are going to do.

Project 2025 is dangerous. Mr. Vought is dangerous. I urge my colleagues to oppose this nomination.

I yield the balance of my postclosure debate time to Senator MERKLEY, up to the 2-hour limit.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Oregon.

Mr. MERKLEY. Mr. President, I yield 10 minutes of my postclosure debate time on the Vought nomination to Senator VAN HOLLEN, and I yield 60 minutes of my postclosure debate time on the Vought nomination to Senator SCHATZ.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator has that right.

The Senator from Georgia.

Mr. WARNOCK. Mr. President, I rise today in strong opposition to the nomination of Russell Vought to be the head of the Office of Management and Budget. His leadership will only continue the disruption that is hurting Georgians in every corner of my State even as I speak.

Over the past 2½ weeks, my State has been plagued by chaos and by confusion that has harmed Georgia families and Georgia workers and organizations serving their communities.

We are witnessing right now a careless and heartless assault on Federal investments and a freeze of government funding that has already been appropriated by Congress to help Georgia

seniors, veterans, students, and so many more.

Let's be clear. These are funds that have already been appropriated. We have already gone through the legislative process. And somehow the President has created this new process in which he says: I don't care what Congress has done. I don't care what laws have been passed. It has to come back by me, through the OMB manager.

This cannot stand. And I am afraid that these undemocratic antics will only continue if the Senate confirms Russell Vought to be head of the Office of Management and Budget.

Vought is one of the architects of Project 2025, which initially President Trump ran away from. You know a politician's program is really bad when he won't even admit that it is his program but, as soon as he is elected, surrounds himself by the very architects of the program he denied during the election was his.

He has now nominated the very people who wrote the playbook for reshaping our entire democratic Republic into their dystopian image. This is radical. This is extreme. This is undemocratic.

I dare say that the people of Georgia who elected me and the people of Georgia who elected Donald Trump did not vote for this. But, just as we warned, his dangerous plans are playing out in real time. This is exactly what they said they were going to do. Some didn't believe them. Even after they attempted to gaslight the American people into thinking otherwise, here we are in no time flat.

Now, I believe in democracy. I often say that democracy is the political enactment of the spiritual idea, the notion that each of us has within us a spark of the divine. And if we have a spark of the divine, if we were created in what theologians called the *imago dei*, the image of God, we all ought to have a voice in the direction of the country and our destiny within it.

So I respect elections. They have consequences. I know, as a result of what happened on November 5, things will happen that I don't agree with. I am not mad about that. I will push and stand and speak about the direction I think the country should go in, but elections do have consequences.

But people are tired of what happens here in Washington, DC. What all of us ought to be able to agree on is that once we have gone through the legislative process, that process of three co-equal branches of government ought to be respected—I don't care if the President is a Republican or a Democrat.

So there is no question that there is a lot of pain out there. The status quo was not and is not working for Americans, and that has been the case for a long time. Folks have seen wealth trickle up and pain trickle down, and they have seen an increasing disconnect between what they need from their government and what they are able to get from their government. We

can't even get movement on the things that Americans on the left and the right agree on in this country.

A FOX News poll reported—and you don't often hear me quote FOX News polls. A FOX News poll said that Americans on both sides of the aisle believe we ought to have background checks, but after one school shooting after another, after another, we can't get any movement on that in this Chamber. It suggests that somebody other than the people is trying to own the democracy, squeezing the voices of the people out of their own democracy.

That is why what is happening right now is so deeply concerning, and if you are not concerned, you are not paying attention. Billionaires surrounding Donald Trump are trying to own the democracy. They are trying to move the vision of this country away from citizenship to ownership.

Vought as OMB Director would be a disaster. He would be a disaster for the people who rely on crucial government programs to make life more affordable.

I am thinking right now about the veterans that I serve in a military State. They are the best among us. They deserve the best from us. They have been imperiled by the actions of the last 2 weeks. I am thinking about families who need accessible childcare.

This stunt that was pulled a few days ago is a disaster for communities who want well-funded law enforcement, thriving businesses, safe roads and bridges. And as they attack Federal workers, attack the government, they are trying to convince you that the government is some third entity outside of us. No. This is government for the people, by the people, of the people. Our democracy represents the highest of our aspirations, what we are trying to achieve together, and as we witness this assault, it is hitting Democrats and Republicans, blue States and red States, as the people's voices are being squeezed out of their democracy.

Just last week, without even being confirmed, Vought orchestrated the effort to freeze Federal spending—as if this money is his money rather than our money, the people's money—throwing programs, from infrastructure upgrades, to Medicaid, to free school lunches, to support for homeless, veterans, into chaos. How dare you take funds that are needed by the veterans of Georgia and all across this State. Those who fight for us should not have to fight with us to get what they deserve.

With the power of the OMB, he would enact even more harmful policies. If he is behaving with this kind of reckless disregard for the law right now, what do you think he will do if we confirm him?

This is a dangerous disregard for the separation of powers that keeps our government in check and gives the people a voice through the people's House—a check on those who would recklessly exercise power.

Vought has made it clear that he feels the OMB, the Office of Manage-

ment and Budget, can turn on and turn off any spending by the Federal Government, ignoring the requirement that Congress, being directly elected by the people, decide where your tax dollars can go.

In 2024—listen, in 2024, he even published an article stating, “We are living in a post-Constitutional time.” That is dangerous rhetoric from a dangerous man.

I beg to differ. I believe in my Constitution—hard fought and hard won. It is not a perfect document. We have had to amend it. Thank God for the 13th, 14th and 15th Amendments, the First Amendment.

But he should explain what he means when he says we are living in a post-constitutional time. The Trump administration and its architects, including the nominee before us today, have a very simple playbook to shrink the Federal Government and to enrich themselves, even at the expense of the American people and their financial security. You are witnessing the unfolding of the kleptocratic designs that they have on our Republic.

And God help us if we just stand by and allow it to happen.

So what is their first step in getting that done? The Trump administration is telling civil servants like the people who inspect your food or monitor diseases like bird flu or care for veterans at the VA to accept a meager buyout or risk being fired, all while an unelected billionaire posing as co-President accesses your private data at the Treasury Department.

Russell Vought said in 2023 that he wanted Federal workers “to be traumatically affected.” That is what he said about your neighbors, that he wants them to be traumatically affected. And “when they wake up in the morning,” he said, “we want them to not want to go to work because they are increasingly viewed as the villains.”

They are saying the quiet part out loud. Well, I got news for Mr. Vought. The people who staff our VA hospitals are not villains. The people who keep our food safe—so much that we Americans don't even think about it—are not villains. The people who keep our water clean are not villains. The people who keep our military bases operating are not villains.

A couple of days ago, my office started to receive a flood of calls from Federal employees. Friends of mine who do great work at the CDC and other places called me directly. Folks who do noble work every single day, out of a deep sense of patriotism, certainly not pay; out of a deep sense of commitment to the covenant we have with one another, in the wake of this assault, they began to call.

These are folks who, in their moment of finding themselves attacked by dangerous and dystopian designs on our country—folks demanding that the workers just quit—well, to all the Federal workers listening right now, let

me say to you that not only do they want you to quit, more importantly, they want you to surrender. And you must never, ever surrender. You must never give in to the forces that would weaponize despair so that they can have their way and create a country that we will not even recognize.

This is the people's house. This is the people's democracy. And the people have to stand up and say: It belongs to us—even the people with whom we disagree—this is our house.

Democracy is the framework in which we get to fight, in which we get to have the great arguments about guns and butter, about how to spend the budget. We get to have these robust family arguments, and they get ram-bunctious, from time to time, in order to avoid violence. That is the American way.

What we are seeing over the last 2 weeks is its own kind of violence: the pardoning of those who attacked this house on January 6, the permission structure to do it again, the gaslighting, telling Federal workers who are working hard for you on one day: Don't come to work the next day. That is its own kind of violence, and it must be condemned by all Americans who believe in the covenant we have with one another.

And so when we are talking about Federal workers, we are talking about hard-working folks I know. Don't allow them to turn these people into some vague and nebulous dark picture of somebody you don't recognize. These are your neighbors. These are the folks who are practicing medicine and nursing care in our VA hospitals. These are those who manage our Social Security payments. These are the folks who are keeping our military bases operating safely and efficiently, ensuring folks get their tax returns on time, helping Georgians navigate their student loans, keeping our airports operating safely, providing critical support for our children, assisting farmers with loans, protecting our public health system and our public schools, eradicating diseases that know no borders, protecting our clean air and water.

These are your neighbors. These are your family members. These are not villains.

Always be wary of politicians who tell us to be afraid of each other. They are the ones you should fear and be concerned about.

These are people throughout Georgia, our Nation's Capital, and scattered across the country, dedicated to healthy and safe communities, helping to build that more perfect Union we claim to aspire to.

And so to these public servants who quietly and nobly do the people's work day by day, know this: I appreciate you. We appreciate you. And we have got your back because, in so many ways, you have had ours.

But these tens of thousands of Georgians are now living in fear that their ability to support themselves and their

families are at risk. Just today, dozens of Georgians visited my Atlanta office, some of whom have already lost their jobs through the abrupt dismantling of USAID, and they are worried about how they will keep their lights on and take care of their children.

A young woman came to my office yesterday, a single mother who works for USAID, doing noble work. It is indeed a humanitarian cause to care for the sick, the poor, the most marginalized members of the human family.

It is that, to be sure, but it is national security.

It is keeping us safe as Americans, and it is a smart investment. It is less than 1 percent of the budget—one-half of 1 percent. And for that we get programs like PEPFAR, a program that is perhaps the greatest humanitarian relief program in human history, saving millions of lives on the African continent, which pays dividends for us. These diseases know no borders.

This young woman that I met yesterday came to my office, a single mother. She was doing her work one day, and then she went to the doctor, and the doctor saw something in her test that was concerning and said: I need you to come back in a couple of days and get some more tests. And in between those days, she got notice and lost her job and her health insurance.

She deserves better than that. My mama taught me to treat people with respect, with human dignity, to know that when you look in the face of your neighbor, you see the image of God. Surely, people who have been working for us deserve better than that.

So people are anxious. People are concerned. Know that you are valued, and that we will continue to stand and fight on your behalf. But not only are the careers of these Federal workers on the chopping block, so too is the Federal funding that helps all of our communities and local economies run smoothly.

My constituents were deeply shaken by last week's Federal funding freeze. I received thousands of calls and emails, folks afraid of the freeze's unknown harm to their community.

So let's peel back the curtain even more on what happened over the last few days. The Trump administration froze trillions of dollars in government spending to enact massive and disruptive funding cuts. These cuts are being orchestrated in part by Russell Vought, in partnership with the world's richest man, Elon Musk, the co-President—this unelected, unvetted bureaucrat who, by my best guess, appears to think that the livelihood of Georgians and Americans is some kind of startup he can tear apart.

So if you want to get a sense of who President Trump is looking out for, look at who he is surrounding himself with. On that stage, when he was inaugurated, you saw them, some of the richest people in the world. They were the ones who had proximity.

Well, proximity matters. You can tell a whole lot about the character of a person's public service based on the people who can get close to them, the folks who get to speak into their ear.

If you want to know who Donald Trump is working for, look at who he is surrounding himself with, the likes of Elon Musk, the billionaire, the richest man in the world, who is now telling us—the rest of us—that we need to tighten our belts—how quaint.

President Trump isn't serving you; he is serving them. He is serving those in our country who are well-off and who don't play by the rules, and putting at risk basic programs that help folks send their kids to school, keep food affordable, and lower their energy bills.

In fact, the other day, as a member of the Banking Committee, I asked President Trump's nominee for Treasury Secretary, who manages the finances for the entire U.S. Government, if in the administration's supposed quest to cut Federal spending and give it back to the American people, would he agree with allowing the Trump tax cuts to expire for the wealthiest Americans. If you are concerned about the Federal deficit, are you willing to let the tax cuts put in place by Trump during his first term to expire for the wealthiest of Americans? Perhaps, we can return to the tax policies that we had during the Bush administration, even if just by a dollar.

And when I asked the nominee that question, now-Secretary Bessent, he said: No, we can't afford to allow those tax cuts to expire.

I said: What about folks making over \$400,000 a year?

He said: No.

I said: What about millionaires?

He said: No.

I said: Well, what about billionaires? No.

So when Elon Musk and his billionaire buddies go looking for spending cuts, and they are focused on cutting government waste, they start by targeting the working class. They target the people who work the hardest and play by the rules. He said he couldn't cut taxes for billionaires because they are the job creators. What about the folks who just work on the job day-to-day? What about the folks who clean hospitals? who mop floors? who pick up our garbage? who do a day's work for an honest pay?

Why is it that those at the top deserve so much more than those who are working at the bottom? those in the middle? hard-working Americans who play by the rules?

Already we have seen Secretary Bessent give the world's richest man the keys to the kingdom, allowing him to prowl around in the sensitive data and systems of the Treasury Department. Whoever heard of any such thing as this? What is a billionaire doing with access to the system that handles Grandma's Social Security check?

Look, I will work with anyone who is able to have a serious bipartisan conversation about how to best utilize

government resources and taxpayer dollars. Working across the aisle to get good things done for Georgia has been a cornerstone of my service in the Senate over the past 4 years. I am listed as one of the most bipartisan Senators in the Senate. I have worked with Republicans many, many times.

But right now, the playbook is obvious: Cut programs that you rely on and give the richest of the rich the money. Robin Hood in reverse: Steal from the poor; give to the rich.

And as this plan unfolds at a breakneck pace, I think it is important that we remind people that Project 2025 aims, again, to shift our democracy from citizenship to ownership, to shift the President from citizen to owner. Donald Trump the real estate developer and his billionaire friends want to own the country.

Last night, he suggested that we should own Gaza as well. Imagine that.

Here is what else they have in store under Project 2025 and its leader Russell Vought: Increase costs for families by \$4,000 a year by slapping a Trump sales tax on goods that families rely on like gas, food, clothing, medicine; cuts to Social Security and Medicare—hurting hundreds of thousands of Georgia seniors; elimination of Federal funding for K-12 education, impacting Georgians from the heart of Atlanta to our rural counties, all across our State; tax breaks for billionaires and big corporations while making working families foot the bill; gutting the Affordable Care Act, which will raise healthcare premiums and threaten coverage for hundreds and thousands of Georgians and millions across the country.

Their program would end student debt relief that assures their student loan payments don't consume the entirety of their paychecks. Their plan would reverse provisions of a law I secured that is capping insulin at \$35 for seniors and lowering prescription drug costs.

And their program would eliminate Head Start, which provided me with an early childhood education when I was growing up in public housing in Savannah, GA. I stand tonight on the floor of the U.S. Senate, but I want you to know that you are looking at a Head Start kid. I know it works. This program that gives poor children a chance, which exposes them as preschoolers to literacy and a love of learning, which narrows the word gap between poor children and well-off children, and which puts them on the road to success. Head Start is a worthwhile investment. It is a recognition that God is an equal opportunity employer, that God creates genius and talent and possibility on all sides of the town, on both sides of the track, and you never know where the very person we need to do the work that needs to be done—we never know what ZIP code that kid will grow up in. And so we have to invest in Head Start. To cut it is shortsighted.

But not only that, we have to invest in all of these programs that provide a

childcare safety net. So mamas and daddies can go to work and children can be safe and thrive and be exposed to learning and literacy.

And so I was deeply moved when I began to get calls from folks involved in providing childcare to our kids all across our State, childcare centers in neighborhoods—some forgotten—where people get up every day and go to work, and they do their best. I heard from Sweetie Pie's Learning Center in Macon, GA. They rely on Federal funding for childcare services, but this freeze meant that they missed their regular check that covers food costs, which left employees scrambling to make plans on how they could make ends meet while still caring for children in this community.

I am thinking now about the folks I heard from at Learning Hive in Lawrenceville, another childcare center navigating this chaos—delayed payments for childcare and parent services. And if the freeze remained in effect, they would only have enough money to make payroll for 2 weeks—2 weeks until your child is without care.

Think about that. As myself, a working father of two young children, I cannot imagine the stress and the confusion that that would bring to put food on the table, keep a roof over your heads, and make sure that your kids have a safe place to learn and play while you make it happen.

I am thinking about the folks at Easterseals childcare center in Clarkston, who are counting on this funding also for fresh meals for children living at 100 percent below the Federal poverty level. These kids risk going hungry in the wealthiest nation on the planet.

So let me be clear. Project 2025 is no longer theoretical. It is unfolding right before our very eyes in real time. We are seeing these policies implemented every day, and the President, who claimed to disavow Project 2025, is putting its chief architect in charge of administering the Federal budget.

But we must not give in. We must not give up. We must not let those who would weaponize despair win. For many, it is dark right now. But my faith teaches me that a light shines in the darkness, and the darkness overcomes it not. And so let me say that even in a time like this, I am incredibly and immeasurably blessed because I get to do this work. I get to wake up every single day thinking about what I can do for the people who gave me the great honor of representing them in the Nation's Capital.

It is a great honor when the people of your State say: Since all of us can't go to that crazy place called Washington, DC, we are going to send you. And we are going to trust that in rooms of power where decisions are being made and deals are cut, you are always going to center the concerns of ordinary people. You are not going to forget about us.

And so I am honored that people all across the State of Georgia, from

Bartow to Brantley County, when they took stock in the hopes for their families and their children and their grandmothers and grandfathers, they said again and again: We want you to go to Washington to fight for us.

I will tell you that, for me, that is a sacred covenant, not much unlike my first job: pastor. A promise to walk with the people even as you work for the people. And part of the reason that Georgians have again and again voted to send me to Washington is that they know that I will fight for them, but they also know why I will fight for them.

As a pastor in the Senate, Georgians know that I bring the moral lessons from my pastoral work with me to the Capitol every single day.

And so I am going to keep fighting. I am not going to stand by and allow folks to undo what we did to cap the costs of insulin. Why? Because as a pastor, I have spent countless days in hospital rooms. I have seen up close what diabetes untreated can do. I have seen the amputations. I have been there when folks have gotten the news that they have got to go on dialysis. When you need your insulin, you need your insulin. It is not a luxury; it is a requirement.

And so that informs my fight. When I cast my vote to fund programs that range from supporting law enforcement to veterans, from making food and housing more affordable to ensuring every kid has a fair shot at making it on a college campus or a technical college—I see these votes as an extension of my pastoral work, my work to create what Dr. King called "the Beloved Community," a world where everyone is cared for and all of God's children can thrive. It is an honor when the people send you here to represent ordinary people.

And that is why I take such great offense to the illegal and immoral actions that I have seen over the last few days—to try and freeze Federal funds that center the needs of ordinary people for the purpose of enriching our country's wealthiest individuals. I am a Matthew 25 Christian: I was hungry, and you didn't feed me. I was sick and I was in prison, and you didn't visit me. I was a stranger, and you did not welcome me.

And then there are those who will ask the Master: Master, when were you hungry? When were you thirsty? When were you sick with a preexisting condition and nobody came to see about you? When were you in prison? When were you a stranger, an immigrant?

The answer? Matthew 25 says: Inasmuch as you have done it to the least of these, you have done it also unto me.

Representing the people is holy work. It is noble work.

I return home to Georgia every weekend. I return to my pulpit every Sunday because I don't want to forget why I came here in the first place—to stand up for the very people Mr. Vought says are villains.

We all know that Donald Trump has a history of bailing on debts and shorting people of what they are owed, but our government is supposed to step in to protect hard-working individuals from bad actors who seek to take advantage of people. Yet we are seeing those bad actors fill our government's most powerful positions, playing fast and loose with taxpayer dollars at the expense of ordinary people. This is not how the most powerful government in the world ought to serve its people.

The reality is, this new level of Washington's dysfunction has real-world consequences that extend beyond Washington politicians. Georgia's economy does not stop just because Washington is exercising a kind of chaos. While we are trying to get our act together up here, guess what, farmers still need crop insurance, childcare workers and community health centers still need to make payroll, and our roads and our bridges and pipes still need repairs. When Federal investments are put in limbo, the stability of our States and local communities is also put in jeopardy.

Let me be clear. The Trump administration has demonstrated that it will try this again and again and again. When they do, the business community will suffer and Georgians will be out of their jobs unless we stand up and say no.

If this Federal funding freeze continues, as Russell Vought hopes, the impact will be felt hardest by those who can least afford it. It is easy in all the bluster of the beltway to forget who is actually bearing the brunt of Donald Trump's actions. Delays in funding are not just inconvenient; they create anxiety, instability, and they cost the jobs of our friends, our families, and our neighbors.

To be very clear, this is all unconstitutional. So why are so many of our colleagues across the aisle surrendering their constitutional responsibility that their voters elected them to carry out? While my colleagues remain silent while this new administration breaks the law, they are sacrificing their duty to their constituents in service to one man occupying 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue.

Well, I don't work for him, and I don't work for some oligarch threatening to run for my seat or run somebody for my seat. I work for the people of Georgia. It is this obsession with power, it is this obsession with the next election that has left us in this place in which we find ourselves tonight.

So it is up to us in this moment to stand up. I am listening to the people who sent me to represent them. I am thinking about those who do the work every single day. It is our job to respond to the call and the urgency of this moment. History will not treat us kindly if we are silent at a time like this.

In closing—and nobody believes a preacher when he says “in closing,”

but I think my colleague is ready—in closing, Senator, I was thinking the other day about the dark challenges that your people have been through.

During the era of the Third Reich—and I am never quick to raise the specter of that ugly time—there was a pastor by the name of Martin Niemöller who, in the midst of the ugliness of that dark time, said:

First they came for the Communists and I didn't speak out because I was not a Communist.

Then they came for the socialists and I did not speak out because I was not a socialist.

Then they came for the trade unionists and I did not speak out because I was not a trade unionist.

Then they came for the Jews and I did not speak out because I was not a Jew.

Then they came for me and there was no one left to speak out for me.

When they come for one of us, they come for all of us.

Dr. King said:

We are tied . . . in the single garment of destiny, caught in an inescapable network of mutuality. And whatever affects one directly affects all indirectly.

Ironically and tragically, we learned from COVID-19—a deadly pandemic, airborne—that if my neighbor is sick, not only is she sick, I potentially am imperiled. That doesn't make my neighbor my enemy; that means that in my enlightened self-interest, I ought to be concerned about her healthcare, that I ought to want her to be covered so I can be covered.

We are all in this together, so we must stand up in this defining moment and resist those who would have us be afraid of one another because of our differences, because of our diversity, and know that we are one people. That is the American way.

I yield the floor.

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

Mr. BLUMENTHAL. Mr. President, I have the bad fortune and audacity to follow one of our greatest speakers, one of the Nation's greatest orators and a preacher. I know we all appreciate the old wisdom: Never follow a preacher.

I want to thank Reverend WARNOCK, my great colleague and friend, for that eloquent and powerful speech and particularly the ending of his speech, which evoked a time in our history that many would like to forget. A lot of Americans are forgetting. The world is trying to erase it from its memory. But it is a time evoked by Senator WARNOCK that couldn't be more relevant to this moment in America's history because we face a crisis in governance. It is a moral crisis, not just a political or legal crisis. It is a challenge to us, to our better angels, to our sense of mutual respect and caring, and, as he said so well, quoting Martin Luther King, that web of mutuality that binds us as a nation.

Ultimately, it isn't our wealth, the number of dollars we have in bank accounts, or the economic strength of our corporations. It isn't our might mili-

tarily. We have the strongest and best military in the world. It is our common values and our commitment to our faith and our family and to each other, respect for each other even when we differ.

When we come to this body, we all take an oath. I have taken that oath a number of times in my life—when I became a private in the U.S. Marine Corps Reserve, when I became a U.S. attorney in Connecticut, when I became a State legislator, and then when I became attorney general. Now, as a Senator, I raised my right hand, as did all of us, and we took an oath. It wasn't to a President; it wasn't to a government; it wasn't to a monarch; it was to the Constitution and the laws of this country.

The Constitution stands for something that binds us together, and it is at the core of this great experiment that we call America. The Constitution will be around, I hope—and I am knocking on wood—when these young pages become our age and stand here, perhaps, but it will be around only if we fight to sustain it. It doesn't happen by magic or by inaction; it happens because we come together and we say: Whatever else happens, whatever divides us, whatever natural disasters—tornadoes, floods, hurricanes—befall our great country, we are going to stand together for the rule of law and for each other. We will come to each other's aid, and we will respect each other's rights.

A wonderful professor and friend of mine at Yale, Tim Snyder, wrote a little book, “On Tyranny.” That is the name of the book. It is “On Tyranny: Twenty Lessons from the Twentieth Century.” The first lesson is, do not obey in advance, which is to say, do not anticipate what a dictator wants and accede to it in advance. Do not acquiesce. Do not obey in advance.

Today, we have to take a stand against a group of people who want to shred our Constitution. They want to light it on fire because they feel there is a higher good. They want to save money or they think we are in the midst of some religious movement or they simply want to get power.

Whatever their motive, and I don't pretend to fully understand it, they have unleashed on our government a group of DOGE technocrats—I use that word advisedly—young people, maybe older people, who think they can simply slash government spending, but more to the point, that they have a right to access information which Americans have been providing in trust to the Department of Treasury, the Labor Department, the Department of Education—private, confidential information about bank accounts, checks that are paid, and veterans' benefits.

That information is supposed to be held in trust, secretly, confidentially, and yet, right now, it is being scanned by Elon Musk and his crew. His henchmen are busy not just reading and

scanning that information but collecting it. That actually serves, potentially, many of Elon Musk's business interests, because on X, for example, he could profit mightily from knowing more information about people who might use Musk in Tesla or SpaceX. Who knows what he might do with that information? And some of his billionaire friends, some of the people who may be provided access to that information could profit even more.

Here is what I have done today as the ranking member of the Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations. I have written to every one of Elon Musk's companies—SpaceX, Tesla, all of them, including his AI company—demanding information about the workings of that company that might benefit from access to that private information.

Now, remember, his access is as a citizen. I am not sure what his status is. The White House says he is a special government employee. He has no security clearance that would entitle him to take that information and use it for his own personal benefits. No security clearance could give him that right to profit from financial information that belongs to you, the taxpayers. It is your data.

And we have nothing that I have seen in writing from the President of the United States that gives him authority to seize and exploit that information. He certainly has nothing under law that would justify his monetizing after purloining that information, the use of it.

I think the American people have a right to know all about the workings of those companies that would be benefited from seizing and exploiting this information. I have written to those companies today, and I am very hopeful that they will explain to me what the facts are, because the American people deserve those facts.

In a sense, what you need to know about this administration and about DOGE and about Elon Musk is to follow the money. Now, he says he is following money that may be wasted or abused. I want to follow the money that will come to him and other billionaires in the government and others who may be made privy to this information and use it for personal benefit and who may profit from it. I want to follow their money, and I want to follow any of the money that comes to other officials in emoluments.

Now, "emoluments" is a term in the Constitution, and the reason it is in the Constitution is that our Founders most feared, in addition to tyranny, that leaders of this country—people in public office—would take benefits, gifts, cash from foreign governments. We were a struggling, small country at our very beginning. We were nascent in our weakness. And their fear was that leaders of that small, struggling country might be tempted by one of those big monarchies in Europe—that had the glittering palaces and jewels and

riches and colonies around the world—that they could be bought. So they said: No gifts, no benefits—nothing from any foreign source. And they had a domestic emoluments clause, as well, that, in effect, prohibited foreign bribery and that kind of domestic misappropriation as well.

I want to know whether any of these officials in our government are benefiting in any way from advantages, benefits, payments from foreign governments, because we have become a global economy. We know that—just to take one example that comes to mind—one of the President's relatives is planning developments—hotels—all around the world. The President has said he wants to make Gaza into a Middle Eastern Riviera. Who is going to build the hotels? Who benefits? Who is going to be paid? We need the facts. So I believe we need to be watchful, vigilant, and wary. Follow the money.

We are here tonight before a vote on someone who is going to be following a lot of money. Russell Vought, if he were to be confirmed as Director of the Office of Management and Budget, would be in charge of all the money spent by the U.S. Government—or almost all of it.

I know most Americans have no clue as to what OMB does. OMB is the Office of Management and Budget, not to be confused with PMB, the Office of Policy, Management and Budget. In the State of Connecticut, we call a similar body the office of policy and management. I suspect that the Presiding Officer's State and all of our States have something equivalent to OMB or to PMB. It is kind of the brain central of the financial nervous system in the government. It controls the flow, the disbursement, and then also the projections for the future about what the government does. It administers the Federal budget, and it is the entity that actually gets that money out the door. After Congress appropriates it, it puts the money into use by portioning it out to various Federal Agencies and programs.

Mr. Vought is no stranger to the OMB because, for 4 years, in the first Trump administration, as both Acting Director and Director, he served that Agency. Unfortunately, for us and for him, his record there ought to be disqualifying. He slashed budgets. He obstructed oversight efforts. He repeatedly violated the law by withholding funding Congress had already appropriated—all of it harming American families, farmers, working people, communities, and in violation of the law.

The OMB Director is very powerful, but do you know? There is this thing—and I keep coming back to it—the Constitution, the Constitution of the United States, which says we have separate branches of government. The Congress is the one that has the power of the purse strings. It authorizes and appropriates money. The executive implements that budget. It executes—as the term "executive" implies—on that

budget and many other laws. It enforces criminal laws. It implements other statutes. Of course, the judiciary calls them both in to account if they violate the Constitution.

The Congress actually believes maybe there ought to be an additional guarantee of its power to appropriate and the President to faithfully execute laws. So, in addition to the Constitution, it passed a statute known as the Impoundment Control Act, which says—you know, when the Constitution requires that money appropriated by Congress be spent faithfully by the executive branch, the Constitution really means it, and the Impoundment Control Act implements it by saying it must be spent in exactly that way. But in his first service in the Office of Management and Budget, OMB, Mr. Vought really didn't think it was his duty to follow the law and the Constitution, and so he impounded money.

Now, you would think: Well, maybe it was an error. Maybe, it was an oversight. Maybe, it was just, you know, kind of an innocent mistake.

But he came before us in a hearing at the Committee on Homeland Security, and I asked him specifically whether he would follow the law and the Impoundment Control Act. He said that the act was unconstitutional. His theory was that the Constitution doesn't really mean what it says; that the Framers didn't really think that the President had to spend money if he felt it was against the public interest; and that if his intention was good, he didn't have to follow the Constitution.

Well, the Supreme Court has affirmed and lower courts have followed that law again and again and again. So Mr. Vought thinks he is, in effect, above the Supreme Court, above the law, and above the norms that others in his position followed faithfully in executing appropriations bills.

I joined my Democratic colleagues in voting no on Mr. Vought's two previous nominations, and I join my Democratic colleagues in voting no on Mr. Vought's current nomination. In fact, Mr. Vought's record and views are so troubling, he has never received a Democratic vote—never.

I am here to tell you that, if confirmed again, Mr. Vought will be even worse than he was the first time around. He has had practice. He told this body that the one lesson he learned from his previous tenure was the need to act faster. During the confirmation process, he told us that he "does not intend to do the job differently" than he did the first time around, and he would apply his experience "from day one." He said he would be acting and taking the helm of OMB at a time when President Trump has thrown that Agency and the country into chaos and confusion with his unconstitutional, illegal funding freeze.

With Mr. Vought in charge, there will be more of the same. He has already proven that he is willing to break the law on behalf of President Trump.

As I mentioned, one of his most concerning beliefs is that the executive branch—the President—in acting through OMB, has the authority to withhold funding that Congress has legally appropriated. Now, this point is fundamental because, if he believes the President doesn't agree with funding already enacted into law, he doesn't need to release that funding, and the President is above the law.

Let's be clear on appropriations bills. As the Presiding Officer and all of our colleagues know, budgets in the U.S. Government are the result of extensive negotiation, leading to compromise and agreements that are then put into writing and incorporated into drafts and then finally into the bills that are voted on in this Chamber and then approved in the House of Representatives. If they are approved, they go to the President of the United States, and he signs them into law. That is kind of high school civics; everybody should know it.

And it becomes a law. The President signs it. These funding withholding decisions that President Trump made during his first term, on the recommendation of Mr. Vought, were a violation of laws that a President—either he or a predecessor—signed. That is why I want to focus on the devastating effects of this wrongheaded, misguided philosophy and approach to law.

As a member of the Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs, when I questioned him on this very topic, he was clear that he disagreed with it, which is his right to do. He can disagree with the Constitution. Nobody says you have to think the Constitution is perfect. But if you take that oath—it is that oath we all take—it is to follow the Constitution, so help me God.

When he fails to spend money appropriated by Congress, he will be violating that oath, and he has indicated he is ready, able, and willing to do it.

He is unqualified. He is unprepared. He lacks the character and confidence to be OMB Director.

These issues—I know they appear abstract, hypothetical, but they have real consequences for real people in their everyday lives.

As wildfires raged across California, I asked Mr. Vought if he would commit to releasing disaster relief funding promptly and fully—disaster relief funding for the people of California but also for the people of North Carolina, Texas, Florida, and Connecticut. We had floods recently.

My colleagues and I came together in the closing days of the last session to overwhelmingly approve this funding: \$110 billion, the disaster supplemental. That is \$29 billion for FEMA—the Federal Emergency Management Agency—to help North Carolina to recover from Hurricane Helene, California to recover from wildfires, and my own State of Connecticut to recover from the devastating flooding that occurred last

August. That is \$21 billion to the Department of Agriculture to support farmers recovering from disasters, and billions of dollars for countless other programs, from small business loans, to fisheries assistance, to roads that have to be repaired, to other kinds of effects of disasters that are the result of the new normal—climate change. The people who are victims of it, who suffered financial losses or the loss of their homes, injury, are not to be blamed simply because they were in the wrong place or their house was in the wrong place at the wrong time.

There are things we can do now in rebuilding that make those homes more resilient, rebuild them in a different place where the risk is lower. But many lack the insurance because they were told they didn't need it by banks that gave them mortgages, because there had never been a storm of any real magnitude before that happened in Connecticut. They were victims of rains or floods or earthquakes or other natural disasters that were not their fault.

That is why we come together. We help people, as I mentioned earlier. We support each other. That is part of the fabric. That is not the legal fabric; it is the social and moral fabric.

But Mr. Vought told me that he was not “going to get ahead of the policy process of the incoming administration.” He never committed that he would release the disaster funding. He left himself an out. He might violate the law. And we now know, because of his testimony, that he will likely violate the law.

We also have his past experience to inform our judgment. Under Mr. Vought's past leadership, OMB delayed community development block grant disaster mitigation funding to Puerto Rico that Congress had provided for recovery from Hurricane Maria.

I visited Puerto Rico in the wake of Hurricane Maria. I saw the devastating destruction to that island—to roads and bridges, to electricity and utilities, to hospitals and clinics, to agricultural areas that were completely isolated, some of them. I flew over them by helicopter and saw the homes that had been leveled or rendered roofless and now isolated, people unable to find food and water without it being dropped from the air sometimes by FEMA. But he withheld the community development block grant disaster mitigation funding provided by Congress for recovery from Hurricane Maria.

The symbol, the visual symbol of that time became President Trump throwing rolls of paper napkins or towels at people in the crowd waiting for food and water. It became emblematic because Mr. Vought withheld that money.

My constituents and all Americans should not have to worry that when disaster next strikes, they may not receive the aid that they need and deserve and that should be forthcoming because of actions by Congress only be-

cause a single man, Russell Vought, has taken it on himself to make a decision that it should be withheld, as he did with Puerto Rico.

Natural disasters—all the more frequent and damaging because of climate change—don't discriminate between red States and blue States. Florida, North Carolina, Texas, Connecticut, Oklahoma, California—they have all suffered these natural disasters recently. It doesn't matter whether they are red or blue; they need and deserve help. No administration should withhold it.

Just as troubling is Mr. Vought's track record on Ukraine aid. This issue is especially close to my heart. I am wearing a pin at this very moment that has both the American and Ukraine flags. I wear it always. I have been to Ukraine six times since the beginning of the war. I believe fervently that their fight is our fight and that we have a moral obligation but also a self-interest in supporting them because Vladimir Putin will keep rolling. If he conquers Ukraine, he will keep going.

The first law, first lesson from “20th century tyranny”: Do not obey in advance.

Tyranny starts abroad sometimes, but it comes for us. Vladimir Putin will come for others if he succeeds in Ukraine, and we will have an obligation under article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization to put American soldiers and troops on the ground: airmen, sailors, marines—all of our military. So it is in our interest to stop him where he is right now.

During his first term, Mr. Vought was instrumental in delaying security assistance to Ukraine. We all remember—those who served in this Chamber during those years—that first impeachment of Donald Trump because of that withholding of money and the circumstances surrounding it.

In 2019, under Mr. Vought's leadership, OMB withheld \$250 million appropriated to the Department of Defense for security assistance to Ukraine. The Government Accountability Office found that OMB's actions to withhold this funding violated the law. GAO also concluded that OMB's withholding of an additional \$141.5 million appropriated to the State Department for Ukraine might be a violation of the law. That is the Government Accountability Office—nonpartisan, impartial, objective, and independent; violated the law by withholding that money. Ultimately, Congress had to pass another law to ensure that our allies in Ukraine receive the funding they needed.

When I asked Mr. Vought if he would release the remaining security assistance now that has been authorized and appropriated for Ukraine, Mr. Vought said that he, again, was not “going to get ahead of the President on a foreign policy issue of the magnitude of the situation with regard to Ukraine.”

That is astonishing. That is a yes-or-no question. Will I obey the law? Yes.

But he ducked it. He dodged it. It is astonishing. Time and again, Congress has come together on a bipartisan basis and passed vitally needed security assistance to support our allies in Ukraine, and Mr. Vought could not commit to following the law and honoring that promised funding.

I was and remain astonished and aghast that someone in a position of such responsibility that we are considering Mr. Vought to have would, in effect, say: Well, maybe the President would be above the law, so I am going to wait and see whether he chooses to follow it.

Saying he is going to not get ahead of the President on a foreign policy issue—that is not a foreign policy issue; that is an integrity issue. That is whether or not the President is above the law and whether he will follow it.

Legal scholars at the Department of Justice's Office of Legal Counsel and even the Supreme Court have all found again and again and again that the President doesn't have the authority to withhold congressionally appropriated funding, but here we have a nominee in Mr. Vought saying in effect the Supreme Court is entitled to their opinion, but he could still proceed.

It is baffling to me that this man is now before the Senate for a nomination to a post that is one of the most critical in our government at an unprecedented moment of crisis in our history.

I think my colleagues ought to be equally aghast—both Republicans and Democrats—because this issue of the Constitution—I keep coming back to the Constitution—is bigger than any of us here, bigger than Mr. Vought, even bigger than President Trump. It is what sustains us through constitutional crises, as we face right now.

It is bigger than this administration or any other. It is whether the law of the land should prevail, whether it is up for grabs depending on what the President thinks or what Mr. Vought recommends the President should think. It is about the power of the purse being usurped from Congress and put in the hands of unelected bureaucrats, special government employees like Elon Musk. The Constitution provides for nothing like it—nothing close to it. This issue goes to the foundation of our country.

Again, I know these issues seems esoteric and legalistic. I am a lawyer. I understand that making the law real for people is a challenge, and a lot of what I have said, even when it concerns natural disasters, might seem abstract.

But the person who appropriates the money—Congress—makes judgments about where it should go, who it should benefit: childcare; community health centers; the SNAP program, providing aid for the hungry; the military; new weapons platforms; our intelligence community; our national security; all the domestic needs; all of the challenges from abroad. They are not hypotheticals.

And we saw last week how real the threat is, how damaging the effect

would be on every single American if Mr. Vought's views prevailed. Last week, the Trump administration swept the country into chaos and confusion. And all of us in this Chamber heard from our constituents loud and clear: What in God's name are you doing? You are disrupting the payrolls of community health centers that provide basic services to patients who need them, children who use them; childcare; Head Start; Medicare; Medicaid—the basic nuts and bolts of our government disrupted.

I know the President wants to be a change agent; he shouldn't be a chaos agent. Disruption shouldn't mean destruction of those basic services, but that is what a delay in funding could mean—or a suspension of financial support.

And that move wasn't approved by Congress. To be clear, it was against the law. They made the unconstitutional and unilateral decision to halt congressionally mandated funding, as a result of that order—chaos and confusion—halted Federal payments to food bank programs, healthcare and nutrition assistance programs, Head Start and childcare programs, housing programs, energy assistance programs, and so much more we heard about.

And throughout the chaos, the administration was utterly unable to communicate to the public. First, there was a vague memo which claimed there were exceptions to the Trump funding freeze, but many of those programs like Medicaid and Head Start remained unable to access funding for extensive periods of time. A Federal court had to step in and halt the order and stop the chaos. And then, in another one-sentence memo, President Trump caved to the public outcry and allegedly rescinded the funding freeze entirely, 24 hours after it went into effect.

Of course, it didn't end there because, right after the funding freeze was supposedly halted, it was put back into place by a tweet. That is the way we govern these days, in the Trump administration, by a tweet from the White House.

Agencies and organizations on the ground were still in chaos solely because of President Trump's incompetence but also advice that he received from people like Mr. Vought who contended he was above the law and he could unilaterally freeze that funding.

But here is where things really get scary. Mr. Vought shares President Trump's ludicrous and unconstitutional views about the executive power over Federal funding; but he, unlike President Trump, is not incompetent. He knows what he is doing. He spent 4 years at OMB carrying out this agenda of withholding funding, and he is primed and ready to continue that mission with all of that experience behind him, as he put it, on day one.

Make no mistake, even though courts have intervened to halt Trump's Fed-

eral funding freeze, this fight is not over. It is not even the beginning of the end. It is not even the end of the beginning. We are in the first 2 weeks—or now maybe 3 weeks—of the Trump administration, and I am hearing from constituents that funding has yet to be unlocked, especially from the Inflation Reduction Act.

And even if all the Federal funding taps are turned back on, this administration is not done wreaking havoc in our communities. The President will try again. Only this time, if we let him, he will have Mr. Vought on his side, with all that experience, breaking the law at OMB on the President's behalf. It won't be a vague, several-line memo from OMB imposing the freeze; it will be a well-articulated set of falsehoods designed to confuse and obstruct but still order a freeze in funding.

Let me give you some examples from Connecticut about what the ramifications are in real life. Given the magnitude of the danger facing us, I want to take some time to highlight again the harms that result from a funding freeze.

I have spent the last couple of weeks—the last week particularly—fielding concerns from constituents who are understandably worried and confused and scared about the devastating effects that the freeze has imposed on services they provide to people who need and deserve them.

Let me be clear that congressionally mandated aid this administration has illegally withheld helps families put food on the table and keep their homes heated in the winter. It helps our communities, and particularly farmers, recover from extreme natural disasters. It provides needed support for infrastructure updates in every State across the country.

To every American who is listening: It is your money that President Trump is playing games with. It is your taxpayer dollars that are owed back as investments in your communities. It is not Donald Trump's money. It is not Russell Vought's money. It is your money, taxpayer money.

Let's call the funding freeze what it is: theft. President Trump is stealing money from American taxpayers and citizens and threatening their ability to pay rent, heat homes, and much more. And that money, stolen by Donald Trump, will be used to finance tax cuts for billionaires and the ultrawealthy like himself.

Follow the money. Follow the money when it is illegally impounded to be used to finance tax cuts for the benefit of a tiny slice of the American public: the ultrawealthy, billionaires. There is nothing wrong with being a billionaire. We all can aspire to be a billionaire. It is the favoritism and discriminatory use and effect of our laws benefiting them at the illegal expense of everyday Americans whose taxpayer money has been stolen, gifted, thieved.

I have no doubt that every single one of my colleagues, even on the other

side of the aisle, who have remained silent or complicit have been inundated with requests for help from their constituents. And my Republican colleagues know well, red States and blue States receive funding from the Federal Government.

In fact, I saw a statistic in the New York Times that something like 80 percent of all the infrastructure money has gone to congressional districts represented by Republicans. Don't hold me to the 80 percent number, but that is approximately what it was—which is not to say they shouldn't receive that money. If they are entitled to it under the formula that Congress establishes based on need or other factors, it doesn't matter whether they are red or blue; the law ought to be executed fairly and faithfully, implemented properly.

But then to turn around and say, well, we should impound money that has been lawfully appropriated, affects them as well as the congressional districts represented by Democrats. It is not about Republican or Democrat.

Here are some real stories. During the chaos that overwhelmed Federal Agencies, community health centers were unable to access the Federal funding they rely on to provide critical health services. Many of them were weighing furloughs of their doctors, their nurses, their counselors, their essential providers.

A nonprofit in Connecticut that provides critical mental health services was terrified that they may not be able to pay their staff if the funding freeze continued.

I spoke to the head of the Alliance or Association of Community Health Centers. He told me about one in the northeastern part of the State that had to close its dental services. Medicaid payments are now seemingly back online, but this administration put 1 million Connecticut residents who rely on Medicaid and the Connecticut Children's Health Insurance Program at risk with these needless and reckless theatrics.

Childcare, similarly: Connecticut Head Start was unable to access payments. President Trump jeopardized childcare and early childhood education for 5,000 families in Connecticut.

Connecticut farmers, who just over a week ago were celebrating—and I was there with them—millions of dollars in much-needed disaster assistance from extreme weather events—they weren't sure whether they would ever see that money, or when. You know, farmers really can't wait a few months to plant the seeds or feed their livestock. There are seasons, there are days when obligations have to be met. And they deserved the aid that was coming to them, and they should not be forced to wait for it.

Millions of dollars to the hard-working farmers of Connecticut withheld potentially on that day. We still are unclear whether that freeze for that aid has been unequivocally lifted.

At the outset of the freeze, I spoke to the CEO of Connecticut Foodshare. He expressed to me his deep fears about the potential impact to food assistance like SNAP, the emergency food assistance program. Freezes to these funds could push hundreds of families into poverty and hunger.

Any more politically motivated funding games from the Trump administration would have potentially life-threatening impacts on survivors of domestic violence because they depend on VAWA—Violence Against Women Act—and the money that is appropriated under it for the domestic violence shelters, for the counseling, for the hotlines—all necessary to provide survivors with options rather than just stay in homes where they are victims of abuse. They are survivors if they can get away, and they deserve these services.

The operation of Connecticut's 24/7 domestic violence hotline could be severely impacted by another suspension. Court-based and community-based services for survivors and their children are also on the chopping block. This funding freeze was terrifying to these women and children and potentially tragic—not just for Connecticut but for the whole country—on domestic violence.

Housing: Connecticut organizations that rely on Federal funding from HUD to help families at risk of homelessness, also in jeopardy. Mr. President, 150,000 Connecticut residents depend on federally funded housing programs.

Even a temporary pause puts them at risk because, potentially, it puts them out of their homes. I heard from one organization that can provide permanent supportive housing to over 40 households in Waterbury and Meriden with the help of HUD funding. This housing is for people with disabilities and their families during this chaos and confusion.

They reported that the payment system for HUD was down, and they were unable to access these funds just days before the rent was due on the first of the month.

While the system now seems to be back online, that organization had to live through potentially tragic trauma, and the stress was debilitating for them, and the trauma has lasting effect. It increases the sense of insecurity for people who already feel an anxiety about their future.

The Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program, known as LIHEAP—we all know it because it heats the homes of people on days like this one—cold—here in the District of Columbia, a lot colder in Connecticut and the Northeast and in many of our States. And people need this critical program that provides energy assistance to low-income individuals and households. It was in jeopardy too; over 100,000 households in Connecticut that rely on heat were told: The money has stopped.

Again, it may be back online, but no one knows whether that is for sure be-

cause Russell Vought and Donald Trump think they may be above the law. Funding to support critical water infrastructure, brownfields mediation, and clean drinking water also frozen. That move threatened the health of communities everywhere. And I am still hearing from constituents that grants they received under the Inflation Reduction Act are continuing to be frozen.

The city of New Haven received over \$10 million from EPA for two grants under the IRA that they say have been blocked, severely disrupting work. Recipients of EPA's Solar for All program, which enables households in low-income and disadvantaged communities to benefit from solar power, are similarly still frozen, including recipients in Connecticut. Make no mistake, the Trump funding freeze continues in effect today.

The courts need to block it, and then they will need to hold in contempt the officials who fail to obey it, whether it is Mr. Vought or the President of the United States, and lawyers will go to court to seek contempt motions to hold them in contempt.

Trump's funding freeze put the future of Connecticut and our Nation's roads and bridges and rail at risk. Amtrak's state of repair backlog for the Northeast corridor is tens of billions of dollars alone. It was estimated at \$78.7 billion in 2023. This funding is critical for safety repairs along Amtrak rail lines.

Funding the Connecticut River Bridge Replacement Project and the Gateway Hudson Tunnel replacement project, it will ensure rail passengers can safely enter and move through all of New England. And without this funding from the Federal-State Partnership for Intercity Passenger Rail and the Consolidated Rail Infrastructure and Safety Improvements Programs—just naming a few—all of these investments will be at risk because they are all connected. You can't stop work on one part of the line and expect the trains to magically go in the air over that break.

And transportation costs will escalate because construction costs will rise. The interruption itself could be devastating financially.

Last week, I was proud to join the mayor of New Haven and Representative ROSA DELAUNO to announce that the city of New Haven was awarded \$2 million under the Reconnecting Communities Pilot Program to study reuniting the city of New Haven, which was divided by Interstate 91. When that road was built, it split the city. It created a physical barrier. It isolated residents from social and economic opportunities that are critical to thrive. It destroyed city blocks and dozens of homes. And now this grant will help reunite neighborhoods, bring communities closer together, incentivize housing and other important assets.

But right before we made our announcement, DOT pulled down meetings it was supposed to have with grant

recipients because they didn't know whether the award would be granted. This funding freeze means that New Haven will no longer be able to identify ways to make roads safer or safeguard against disaster or encourage construction of new affordable homes and promote new businesses and more for its residents. Just one example of around \$1 billion Federal funding—\$1 billion—for Connecticut alone that is in jeopardy.

The longer the Trump administration's reckless agenda causes chaos and confusion, the clearer it will become that everyday Americans are suffering from this ill-conceived, wrongly implemented, reckless, and heartless program.

I talk about all these stories concerning my constituents, but every Member of this body could tell the same kinds of stories across our Nation. It bears repeating because the trauma and the hurt and the harm are to our neighbors and communities.

With Russell Vought as Director of OMB, if he is confirmed, he will have President Trump as his leader, who has apparently indicated he will follow recommendations that put him above the law. Russell Vought is the perfect person to help Donald Trump rob the American people—

THE PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. RICKETTS). The Senator's time has expired.

Mr. BLUMENTHAL.—and carry out his agenda of theft. He has proven he is willing and able to break the law for President Trump in his first term, illegally withholding disaster aid—

THE PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator's time is expired.

Mr. BLUMENTHAL.—and security assistance, and he will do it again. I recommend that my colleagues say no to this nomination.

THE PRESIDING OFFICER. The Democratic leader.

Mr. SCHUMER. I yield 120 minutes of my postcloture debate time on the vote nomination to Senator MURPHY.

THE PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator has that right.

Mr. SCHUMER. Thank you, Mr. President.

THE PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Rhode Island.

Mr. WHITEHOUSE. Mr. President, well, we are in interesting times, and we are beginning to see the corporate and billionaire takeover of the U.S. Government.

And in that corporate and billionaire takeover of the U.S. Government, the nominee Russ Vought to run OMB has a key role, and that key role—to do the work for the billionaires and the big corporations—is what makes him unfit and dangerous and what compels us to come to the floor tonight to warn the American people of what this guy will do and who he is.

Let's start with a little history. This is the guy who violated the Impoundment Control Act by withholding 214 million appropriated dollars from the

soldiers fighting and dying in the trenches of Ukraine against Putin's thug army. It was that stunt that led to the impeachment of President Trump.

This is the guy who caused lives to be lost in those Ukrainian trenches by withholding funding they needed desperately, withholding the funding they desperately needed illegally, and withholding that desperately needed funding illegally in order to support a scheme by President Trump to put pressure on the Ukrainians to give him dirt on his political opponent. That is a little bit of history of where this guy will go.

The OMB is the nerve center of the Federal Government, and to have someone there of that character is dangerous.

Vought is also lawless. The Impoundment Control Act that he violated, the Government Accountability Office said this:

Faithful execution of the law does not permit the President to substitute his own policy priorities for those that Congress has enacted into law.

He violated that, and they specifically find:

... therefore, we conclude that OMB violated the [Impoundment Control] Act.

Is he repentant about that now that the Government Accountability Office has called it out as being illegal? Never mind the Ukrainian lives that he caused to be lost. No. He continues to say the Impoundment Control Act is unconstitutional, even though no court has ever said so.

He was pressed on this question in the Budget Committee and answering the Appropriations Ranking Member Senator MURRAY's questions about this, he said:

President Trump has stated that the [Impoundment Control Act] is unconstitutional ... I agree with the President's position.

Again, no court has said this. He said:

If I am confirmed as the Director of OMB, I will follow the advice of legal counsel, and ultimately the President, with respect to the implementation of the [Impoundment Control Act].

Pay attention.

I will follow the advice of legal counsel, and ultimately the President.

Not "I will follow the law," not "I will follow court decisions that say what the law is." No. "I will follow the advice of legal counsel, and ultimately the President."

So let's just have a quick look at who his legal counsel is. People may remember this. This is a painting that was commissioned by this guy, the billionaire Harlan Crow. As you may remember, the billionaire Harlan Crow has been funding the lifestyle of the next person over—Justice Clarence Thomas. Millions of dollars in secret gifts to the Thomas family.

And the next guy over in the painting—by the way, if you saw Kristi Noem sworn in by Justice Thomas, he has a picture of this right behind them.

He is so pleased with it that he has got his own version of it, him with his billionaire sugar daddy, and with Mark Paoletta. This is the guy who is going to be the legal counsel whose advice Vought is going to listen to.

This guy is neck-deep in the billionaire court capture scheme; of course, his advice is going to be what the billionaires say.

The next guy over is Leonard Leo, the court-fixer. This is basically a panorama of the corruption of the Supreme Court: the billionaire who funds it, the Justice who secretly accepts millions of dollars in billionaire gifts, the guy who cooks up the whole scheme and travels with Justices on these billionaire-funded trips and is here at the billionaire's estate in the Adirondacks with them, and, of course, Mark Paoletta.

That is whose advice he is going to take. Again, he was careful to say: not the courts, not the law—the billionaire court-fixer guy who is now his counsel and the President, who has already said he thinks the law is unconstitutional.

This guy, on this question of the Impoundment Control Act, he hasn't said he is going to follow the law either. In fact, he said the Impoundment Control Act is a stupid law, and he tweeted at Russell Vought: "Impound, baby, impound."

Yes, you are going to get sober legal advice from a guy who says, "Impound, baby, impound," and hangs out with billionaires who fund the capture of the Supreme Court as part of Leonard Leo's scheme.

This is an illustration of how this guy, Russell Vought, is a creature of the far-right, billionaire dark money world. Before he went to OMB the first time, he worked as vice president of Heritage Action.

What is Heritage Action? Heritage Action is a billionaire-funded dark money group that advocates for the things that dark money billionaires want, and he, for years, worked for them.

Then he went into OMB. And I submit, he still worked for them, although they weren't paying his paycheck at the time.

He gets back out after Trump won, and he sets up something called the Center for Renewing America—again, a billionaire-funded, dark money enterprise whose purpose is to advocate for the things that the dark money billionaires want.

It also, by the way, took care of the refugees from the first Trump administration—that creepy character Jeffrey Clark, who was in the Department of Justice and tried to wrangle his way into the Attorney Generalship by proposing that he would put the Department of Justice into the election fixing scheme that President Trump was running down in Georgia—that guy? Where did he land? Right, at the Center for Renewing America, courtesy of Russ Vought.

Who else is a senior fellow there, funded by the billionaires? Oh, Mark Paoletta, the guy who is going to be his legal counsel and was chumming it up with the billionaire and the Justice.

Who else? Kash Patel, the guy who has threatened publicly, over and over again, to turn the FBI into a political weapon for Donald Trump against his adversaries. He went so far as to repost a tweet of himself chainsawing the heads off members of his enemies list.

Yes, this is the guy who published an enemies list of who he was going to get in what he called a manhunt. "The manhunt begins now," he said, of his enemies list.

And Trump wants to put him in charge of the FBI so it becomes his personal, political weapon. And Kash Patel has shown, time after time, instance after instance, that he is all too willing to do that.

And where did he land? Yes, right, at Vought's Center for Renewing America.

So this guy Vought is neck deep in the billionaire, dark money operation that is working right now to take over the U.S. Government and run it its own way.

The way it wanted to do this is through a plan that it cooked up and paid for called Project 2025. And if you look at the first couple of weeks of the Trump administration, you see Project 2025 playing out again and again and again and again. And who was the central architect of the Heritage Foundation's Project 2025? Oh, yes, Russell Vought. Paid for with \$120 million—you know, in Rhode Island, that is still a pretty big number—\$120 million from a couple of rightwing billionaire families to cook up a scheme to run the government. And Vought both writes it and now goes in to implement Project 2025.

If you want to look at the guy's lawlessness from another angle, he doesn't believe in independent government Agencies. So the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission, for instance, that is an independent government Agency because it adjudicates disputes in the energy sector and because it makes policy and has to do a number of things, but it has to be independent to have this adjudicative function, or the Securities and Exchange Commission or the Federal Reserve—he doesn't believe that any of them should be independent. He says:

What we're trying to do is identify the pockets of independence and seize them—

"Seize them"—for the corporate and billionaire takeover, they want to seize the independent Agencies in government so that they are under the control of the big donors who put this administration in.

He said specifically about the Federal Reserve:

It's very hard to square the Fed's independence with the Constitution.

Except that the Supreme Court of the United States has squared the Fed's independence with the Constitu-

tion for decades. The decisions of the U.S. Supreme Court supporting the existence of independent Agencies goes back to the Humphrey's Executor case in 1935. This has been a long run of Supreme Court precedent in which literally dozens of cases involving independent Agencies have come before the Court, and it has never said that it is hard to square the independence of Agencies Congress has deemed to be independent with the Constitution.

This is an eccentric and illegal lawless view, and they intend to impose it, notwithstanding the law.

There are—"Number one" he says, "is going after this whole notion of independence. There are no independent agencies. . . . [The] SEC, or the FCC, CFPB . . . that is not something that the Constitution understands."

Oh, yes, except for those 90 years of Supreme Court precedent interpreting the Constitution to understand exactly that.

In addition to the billionaire "stoogery" that he has been involved in for decades, in addition to his penchant for lawlessness where there is clear Supreme Court precedent, he is just a little bit strange. Here is what he has said about the men and women who work in the Federal Government. "We want" them, he said, "to be traumatically affected. When they wake up in the morning, we want them to not want to go to work because they are increasingly viewed as the villains"—your postman, the villain; the meat inspector who makes your steak safe at the USDA, the villain; the health inspector; the people who do the tests on pharmaceutical drugs; the people who do brain cancer research—yes, we definitely want them to be viewed as the villains and to not want to go to work.

He goes on. "We want their funding to be shut down so that"—and, of course, he picks the EPA because we are dealing with mostly polluter billionaires—"so that the EPA can't do all of the rules against our energy industry because they have no bandwidth financially to do so. We want to put them in trauma."

If you think that is normal, you might want to go have just a little look in the mirror.

He wants mass firings, which we are already seeing threatened. He wants to eliminate the civil service, fire staffers so that they can be replaced with loyal partisans.

So let's say you are a big polluter. Let's say you are a big oil company. Let's say you are not cleaning up your methane leaks. You are spewing waste methane into the atmosphere for everybody else to breathe, and the Environmental Protection Agency or perhaps the Department of the Interior, who may be your landlord, comes to you and says: You know, you have got to clean up your mess here. You are spilling methane into the atmosphere. It is poisoning people. You have got to knock it off.

Nope. Out you go. Bring in the sycophants. Bring in the loyal partisans. Bring in people who will tell the corporate and billionaire takeover artists that are at work now: Never mind. We got your back here. You just keep leaking that methane.

And here is one that kind of stunned me, a pretty simple question. I ask him:

Did Joe Biden win the 2020 Presidential election?

What was his answer?

I believe that the 2020 election was rigged.

No court has ever believed that. People got their bar ticket removed for telling courts falsehoods that the election was rigged. This was the first big lie of the Trump administration, and he is not over it, and he wants to go and run the nerve center of OMB.

He even wants to invoke The Insurrection Act, bring in the U.S. military onto domestic soil, to break up people who are protesting the Trump administration.

This is not a normal guy. This is not a guy who respects the law and the Constitution. This is a tool of a very small, rightwing billionaire elite, and he has proven himself with his participation in the Trump scheme to hold back urgently needed money from Ukrainian warriors trying to defend their country against Putin so that he could put pressure on Zelenskyy to develop dirt on Trump's political opponent. He was part of that scheme—what a guy.

The last thing that I will mention is that he has described Joe Biden and his administration as having engaged in climate fanaticism—climate fanaticism—this from the slow, cautious, temperate, noncombative Biden administration. I wish they had been a little bit more fanatic, but they sure weren't. They were slow. They were cautious. They were temperate. They were noncombative. And he found that to be fanatic.

Well, I will close with what is coming because what is coming from climate change is a beginning meltdown in property insurance markets all around the country, which is going to cascade into a problem in mortgage markets around the country because you can't get a mortgage if you can't get property insurance. And unless you are selling billionaire-to-billionaire Palm Beach estates, if you want to sell your home, you have got to find somebody who can get a mortgage. If your home can't get a mortgage because it can't get insurance, you can't find a buyer, and so your property values crash.

And the chief economist for Freddie Mac has warned that this "insurance to mortgage to property values" crash is going to happen, and it is going to hit the U.S. economy as hard as the 2008 mortgage meltdown. So somebody who takes this not seriously at all is the wrong person to lead us as we head toward disaster.

Here is some of the work that we have been doing on this out of the

Budget Committee. Here is where we are seeing massive non-renewal rate increases. That is the insurance companies telling people who have paid their premiums for years: You are fired. We don't want you anymore; we are not going to insure your property any longer; you are done—or jacking up the rates. You can see where the high-percentage places are; they are in coastal and wildfire areas.

Here is another one. This followed our Budget Committee report that I just referenced. This is where home insurance premiums are predicted to go because of climate change—up to a 300-percent increase. That is quadrupling. If you have a \$6,000 home insurance policy, that is \$24,000.

It is all over. It is in the hot spots for wildfire, and it is in the hot spots for coastal property damage from storms and sea level rise.

When you raise home insurance premiums by that much, what do you do? You knock down the value of the home because when you buy a home, if you are buying into a let's say \$24,000 expense every year, the present value of \$24,000 out of your pocket year after year after year comes off the value of the house. So it will knock down property values.

Indeed, it is predicted that in many of these areas, homes are going to lose as much as 100 percent of their value. A home that people have invested in—purchased, loved, raised their children in—will lose its value in some places completely because you can't get insurance, you can't get a mortgage, and you can't find a buyer. The place is going to burn. The place is going to flood.

It is not just me warning of these things. Here is an article from *The Economist* magazine—not exactly a liberal, green publication—predicting globally that the next housing disaster is going to come from climate change.

Severe weather brought about by greenhouse gas emissions is shaking the foundations of the world's most important asset class . . . real estate.

The world is facing roughly a \$25 trillion—trillion—hit.

The impending bill is so huge, in fact, that it will have grim applications, not just for personal prosperity, but also for the financial system. Climate change [in short] could prompt the next global property crash.

If you look back here to Florida, you see how acute the trouble is as that insurance market melts down. Home insurance in Florida—the average annual premium for a typical single-family home in the State is likely to hit nearly \$12,000 this year, says *The Economist* magazine.

Citizens Property Insurance Corporation has become Florida's largest home insurer. Its exposure is now \$423 billion, much more than the state's public debt.

This is a high-risk situation.

The *Financial Times* report says that billion dollar-plus disasters occur once every 3 weeks now on average, compared with every 4 months for equiva-

lent events in the eighties. As insuring high-risk homes becomes increasingly hard and costly, cracks in the U.S. housing market will widen.

This danger of housing value collapse is already underway. Residential properties in the United States are overvalued by \$121 billion to \$237 billion for flood risks alone—not for wildfire risks out West, the flood risks alone. That is the *Financial Times*.

The *New York Times*:

Without insurance, [it is impossible] to get a mortgage; without a mortgage, most Americans can't buy a home.

Headline: "Insurers Are Deserting Homeowners as Climate Shocks Worsen."

Bloomberg News: "US Home Insurance, Real Estate markets Teeter on Financial Crisis."

Here is what they say: It is hard to overstate the role that insurance plays in the modern economy. Banks won't make mortgage loans for uninsurable properties. Without those loans, the real estate market slows to a crawl, which in turn eats away household wealth and the tax revenue that State and local governments rely on. For insurers to play their part, they have to feel confident predicting how much damage they might have to cover. To do that, they build models of the future based on what has happened in the past. They don't have to be right all the time, just enough to win by more than they lose.

Climate change has made that much harder. A warming world is more dangerous and unpredictable. In the eighties, the United States experienced roughly three disasters a year that did at least \$1 billion in damage. Now the annual occurrence is closer to 18.

It is not just news reports. Here is the Congressional Budget Office analysis:

The Risks of Climate Change to the United States in the 21st Century.

As emissions of greenhouse gases of human activities accumulate in the atmosphere and oceans, climate conditions are changing throughout the world. In the United States, those changes will have consequences for economic activity, real estate, and financial markets.

Here is the Financial Stability Board. It is the global board that advises banks on how to stay sound.

Climate-related vulnerabilities in the financial system, when triggered by climate shocks, could threaten financial stability. . . . Climate shocks can interact with existing [financial] vulnerabilities in the real economy or in the financial system . . . [and lead to financial losses]. Climate shocks could also affect the real economy through damage to real assets or the creation of stranded assets or disruption to economic activity that can feed back to the financial system.

I will cut to one of the end points here: The projected physical risk impact from climate change could cause global GDP to decline versus the baseline by 5.3 percent by 2030 and by up to 15 percent by 2050.

That is a global recession, folks, driven by climate change, pounding insur-

ance markets, which pound mortgage markets. And this guy thinks that taking climate science seriously is fanaticism.

Here is what the American people think about some of this stuff. Penalties on high-pollution imports—letting high-pollution Chinese products into our country, putting a penalty on that: 12 percent oppose, 74 percent support—a 62-percent positive swing.

Carbon pollution limits on big companies: 12 percent disapprove, 72 percent support.

Impose a fee on big polluters: 10 percent oppose, 74 percent support—a 64-percent swing.

The American public wants to solve this climate problem, which is why the billionaires need to come in and take over the government from the inside with people like Russell Vought, so they can defeat the American people, continue to pollute, and let the economic mayhem ensue.

I will close with this last image just because I really love it. Here are the MAGA guys standing outside the wall of Trump's Mar-a-Lago palace:

We sure showed those elites who's in charge.

Meantime, inside are the helicopters from Wall Street, Big Tech, Bezos, pharma, Big Ag, Musk, coal, Big Oil, crypto bros.

This is what is happening. MAGA may have thought it won the election, but here is who really won the election: the looters and the polluters; the Musks, who are running into our information systems, looting data out of them for their own purposes; and the polluters, who want to pretend that this climate change threat is not real.

Russ Vought is dangerous because he won't face the facts on these things because he belongs to the billionaire looters and polluters.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Virginia.

Mr. KAINE. Mr. President, I rise to continue the discussion about Russell Vought, the President's nominee to be Director of the Office of Management and Budget. Before I do, I thought I would just share with my colleagues and all who are in the Chamber a vigil that I just attended.

There was a vigil at a riverfront park in Alexandria near the site where the flight went down a week ago, killing 67 people on the American Airlines flight and the Army helicopter that had deployed out of Fort Belvoir.

It was a simple, moving candlelight vigil that was organized by my friend DON BEYER in the House of Representatives. It was attended by a few hundred people, mostly residents of Alexandria and Arlington, nearby communities. There was a heavy representation of law enforcement there because the Alexandria Police and Fire Departments were very integral to the rescue and recovery operations that were ongoing.

It was somber. It was somber. You struggle for words at a time like that.

I couldn't think of any of my own that really were that enlightening, so I fell back on Psalm 90:

Teach us how short our lives are, so that we may become wise.

Thinking about the children, the ice skaters and their friends and families who were killed, but, frankly, all of us have short lives, even the oldest of those who died that day. The mother who was celebrating her birthday, a wife who was on her way home whose husband was waiting for her in the airport, these coaches, folks who were in Wichita doing a pipefitter training program, and, frankly, all of the attendees—our lives are all short.

So what is the wisdom if you follow the logic in Psalm 90, "Teach us how short our lives are, so that we may become wise"? What is the wisdom we are to gain if we understand our lives are short?

Well, the Psalm doesn't really say. The Psalm kind of leads us to conclude for ourselves what is the wisdom we are to gain out of such situations and out of the realization of the temporal nature of human life.

But what I said to people there is, if there is one bit of wisdom you should gain when you realize how mortal we all are, it is probably wisdom about the value of community, that we link arms and we support each other. Certainly, if we are celebrating positives, we ought to do that, but particularly when we are mourning and we are thinking about lives lost and lives and futures cut short, our wisdom should compel us to find solace and comfort in each other's company.

This vigil lasted about half an hour. We had candles. After Representative BEYER spoke and I spoke and the mayor of Alexandria, Alyia Gaskins, spoke, the chaplain of the Alexandria Police Department gave a prayer, and the vigil was over. But we stayed. We stayed to visit each other and comfort one another.

I was struck because I was coming here to speak tonight. I met a guy from DHS who was involved in the recovery effort in frigid waters out on the Potomac. I met a key official from Fort Belvoir, where the three soldiers had deployed from in the training flight who were killed that night. I met other people who are part of the Federal family, you know, who work in air traffic control, who work in the FAA.

Alexandria is pretty close to the Pentagon. I met people who work at the Pentagon or whose family members do. I met some folks who weren't Federal employees, but they talked to me about—one woman talked about her son, who is a Federal employee currently stationed in Tennessee. I took that to mean a member of the armed services.

This was the random community that gathered to commemorate the 67 lost lives and comfort one another.

While we were there to focus on the tragic accident, most wanted to talk to me about their own fears for their ca-

reers and for their families and for others who are feeling confused and afraid right now because of actions that are being taken against Federal employees.

That brings me to Russell Vought. My colleagues have spoken on the floor about a particular statement of Mr. Vought's that I examined him about fairly aggressively during the Budget Committee hearing. In the course of a speech, he said: I want Federal employees to be traumatized. I want to put them in trauma. I want them to not want to come to work because they know that they are increasingly viewed as the villain.

Now, who talks like that? I mean, who talks like that? Is there a single manager or leader or organizational chief that we admire who believes that their mission, their happiness, their glee, their purpose is to make their workforce feel traumatized? No. We would never celebrate a leader of that kind. Yet that is precisely what Russell Vought said.

I asked him: Do you really mean that? Do you really want air traffic controllers to come to work traumatized?

Well, no, no, I didn't mean that.

Do you want people who inspect our food to come to work traumatized?

No, I didn't mean that.

Well, how about people at OMB? You ran it before, and you are running it again. A lot of folks might call OMB staffers—do you want them to come in to work traumatized?

No, I don't like that.

But that is what he said.

When he was not in front of the Senate Budget panel and he was speaking candidly—and there is a beautiful Biblical phrase that, I think, is from the Gospel of Luke that says: From the fullness of the heart, the mouth speaks.

When he was speaking directly from the heart, what he said is, I want Federal employees to be traumatized.

What I want to do in my time on the floor tonight is talk a little bit about these Federal employees and what having a traumatized workforce means. Then, for a few minutes, I want to focus upon not the Federal workforce but on others who were affected by the Russell Vought strategy on the Federal budget.

This is what I have heard from Virginians just in the week since the funding pause order went into place, which I will agree was something that was masterminded by Russell Vought.

Federal employees: Yesterday, I decided, after hearing stories from Federal employees, to launch on the website a resource where Federal employees could share their stories if they chose to, with anonymity guaranteed, because so many are afraid.

Some will remember that I took to the floor yesterday, and I read an open letter to Federal employees. There are 140,000, give or take, in Virginia. I read an open letter, offering them a bit of a

pep talk, encouraging them to keep doing what you are doing—serving your fellow Americans. Just do that. You signed up for the job to do that. Don't pay attention to all of these things and all of this trauma. I know that is such hard advice to give to somebody. Just keep serving your fellow Americans every day, and if you have a problem, call our office, and we will try to be helpful if we can. There is no guarantee that we will be able to avert this, but just do what you have a passion to do, and we will try to help you if we can.

But also, in delivering that letter to Federal employees, we launched a website in my office, and we encouraged people to share their stories. Within 3 hours, we had about 400 stories of Federal employees who had reached out and shared, and those stories keep coming in. Some are asking us to give them a call and probe further details. Some are giving us their names and the Agencies where they work, and some are too afraid to give us those.

What I thought I would do tonight is I would just take 18 of these stories from the Federal employees—that had just come in, in less than 24 hours—of the hundreds that have been submitted, and I just want to read some to you to tell you about who these people are who Mr. Vought believes need to be traumatized, who these people are that Mr. Vought wants to personally make feel as if they are the villains.

The first is a Federal employee who works at USAID:

After two extremely painful miscarriages, I am now 34-weeks pregnant with my first child. Since my husband works as a lawyer for the EPA, what should have been a joyful time in our life now feels like a dystopian hellscape, and we are very afraid for our future and our financial security. We are just hoping to have health insurance at this point for when I give birth, but . . . that feels uncertain. I swore an oath, and [I] believe in the work that USAID does. I believe that it makes America stronger, safer, and more prosperous [just] as Secretary Rubio is calling for, and I will support the Agency until they boot me from the system. God help us all.

She is 34-weeks pregnant after two extremely painful miscarriages and is just hoping that she will not lose her job and her health insurance.

The second story is of a Federal employee working for the National Science Foundation, headquartered in Virginia:

NSF funding supported my undergraduate summer research experiences, my Ph.D. project, and my previous job. The opportunity to give back and support the next generation of U.S.-based scientists was a dream fulfilled, and I am terrified that I will be fired as soon as Friday, with no protections or severance. The fair compensation and flexible schedule let's my spouse work as a teacher, and she is so great at her job. But that will not pay [our] mortgage. We simply never accounted for a scenario like this.

A third story from a Federal employee working at USAID:

I have worked for USAID for 12 years, including in Bosnia, Rwanda, and now Washington . . . Our work is and has always been

critical to advancing democracy, American interests, and the prosperity, safety, and strength of Americans. We will continue this work. The attack on USAID lacks intelligence and foresight. China and Russia are filling the vacuum, outpacing the U.S. and deepening partnerships with our allies, who feel abandoned. This is creating permanent damage and undoing decades of progress in a few days. This does the opposite of making America stronger, safer, and more prosperous.

These are the direct words of Virginians who have shared their stories with me.

A fourth story is of a Federal employee working at the U.S. Department of Agriculture:

I'm a young person working in the federal government. I graduated from college 4 years ago, and since then, I have committed my time to serving the public and helping the environment. I've served two AmeriCorps terms and worked two seasonal federal jobs before finally landing a permanent federal job last November. These last few weeks have been a hell for us federal workers. I come to work with a pit in my stomach. I am a probationary employee, so will probably be the first to go during a RIF. They have left us in the dark while constantly terrorizing us with threatening, passive-aggressive messages, and half legal deals to resign. I fear for my job, but I fear more for my country.

A Federal employee who works for the Department of Transportation:

I am frightened about my position. I'm a single-income household, and [I] am convinced no one has my back. Congress has been pretty much silent, and the news has gained very little traction nationwide. We need people to tell the story about what government workers do. Thank you for providing the platform to connect. We are [only] in this to serve the American public.

A Federal employee working for the Department of Defense:

It's hard to even know where to start. As soon as this administration took office, it felt like federal workers were under siege. They began with their flurry of executive orders and memos. They put Elon Musk (whom no one elected, who is not a Federal employee but yet has huge contracts for other areas with the government) in charge of "handling" the potential mass layoffs of federal workers. His fingerprints were all over these actions, from insecure servers being jammed into OPM to poorly crafted mass emails meant to stir chaos and bypass all chains of command, to then bragging about it on social media and insulting and belittling every one of the millions of federal workers as "unproductive," also laughing at people in his giant social media platform who mock us and call us stupid. No one knows what their job security looks like. No one trusts anything these people are saying to us, especially with these "deferred resignation" mass emails. The entirety of OPM, once a solid standard for human resources in the United States, is now a total joke. Agencies are left scrambling because they've been given zero guidance and have no serious leadership coming from the administration. . . . All of this is frightening, anxiety-inducing, depressing, and wrong. It's so difficult to fight the misinformation because, if you "out" yourself as a fed, you'll be piled upon. . . . We're middle-class workers with burdens and families and debt just like everyone else. We need our jobs, and we will fight for them. I take my oath to the Constitution seriously. . . . Please, anyone with power, exercise [that power] and serve justice.

A Federal employee at the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office, headquartered in Alexandria:

I have served the American [public] for the last 10 years at different positions at the USPTO. The USPTO's mission is [actually] outlined in the Constitution: "to promote the progress of science and the useful arts." To that end, the USPTO uses telework to attract and retain highly qualified people. These people work hard [every day in and out] to serve the American people. As a result, the United States has been the beacon of innovation for much of the world. In fact, so many inventors come to the U.S. to secure intellectual property. Let me be clear: The people at the USPTO are incredibly talented, hard-working people. They are not the "opposing team" or "low productivity." The constant harassment from the current administration underscores the diligent efforts of over 14,000 people that keep this economy moving forward.

Another story from a Federal employee working for the General Services Administration:

[Thanks] for the opportunity to share my story. The ongoing threats of job losses due to a reduction in force have been deeply demoralizing. As you know, federal employees already earn, on average, 25 percent less than our private sector counterparts . . . The disregard for union contracts is deeply concerning and undermines the commitments made to the workforce.

Many of my talented and hard-working colleagues have been living in fear for weeks, facing uncertainty they [don't] deserve. This unlawful [treatment] not only undermines their dedication but also creates an environment of instability and anxiety that no employee should have to endure.

Here is a story from a Virginia Federal employee working for the Department of Homeland Security, and this is a pretty common one:

My husband and I are both federal employees, and we are both on probation.

Meaning they are relatively new employees.

We also have student loan debts and under the Public Service Loan Forgiveness program.

If we lose our jobs because we are on probation, we will lose the ability to have our payments to Public Service Loan Forgiveness counted. We will not be able to pay for childcare, and we will lose our apartment. Furthermore, the [DC area] will be flooded with [fired] federal workers, and we won't be able to find jobs easily. Our future is [increasingly] bleak. Please [please] stop them.

Another employee working for the Department of Homeland Security:

I have worked for DHS for 15 years . . . I truly believe a strong, healthy workforce of civilian servants is vital for a strong, healthy America. Our government has a duty to protect its citizens. This, to me, includes making sure people's basic needs are met, be it healthcare, food, housing, education. . . . The private sector [isn't] taking on this obligation.

The federal government [isn't] profit-driven, which is partly why our jobs are . . . secure. . . . My worth as an employee is not tied up in how much product I sell. . . . My worth depends on doing my best to improve the lives of the American people.

A Federal employee who didn't feel comfortable even sharing the Agency that he or she works for:

[It is] impossible to get our . . . work done under these conditions. It has been a con-

stant assault on us federal workers, who are all serving our country faithfully and to the best of our abilities. I've served under different administrations—Republican and Democrat—and [have] been proud to do so. As a family, we are canceling our vacations for the year, any unnecessary subscription or expense, and tightening [our] belt because I don't know if I will have a job by the end of the year. While I could be comfortably making double my salary in the private sector, I chose the federal service out of a sense of duty to my country and to use my skills to better the lives of my fellow Americans. Now it feels as if the federal government is not holding [its] end of the bargain. The last 2 weeks have been a nightmare.

A Federal employee who works for the Defense Health Agency:

Senator Kaine, I am a DHA healthcare civilian worker. I worked for 12 years for the Army at Keller Army Community Hospital at the U.S. [Military Academy] in New York, and for the last 4-plus years at the medical clinic on the Dahlgren Base in Virginia—

Which is a little bit east of Fredericksburg.

I am so upset. Our local commander, my supervising commander, and the lieutenant general heading DHA have all emailed us since the famous HR/OPM "Fork in the Road" email came out. They all said the same thing. They don't have any information or clarification for us but will reach out to us when they do. I check daily and, to date, no information.

Stop and think about that for a minute. This DHA employee received a "Fork in the Road" letter, drafted by Elon Musk. This is somebody who has worked for the DHA for many, many years.

The DHA employee reaches out to their own direct supervisor. "We don't have any information for you. We can't clarify what this letter means."

They reach out to the base commander. "We don't have any information. We can't clarify what the letter means."

He even reaches out to the very head—the lieutenant general, the head of the Defense Health Agency, asking: What does this mean?

"We don't have any information for you. We can't clarify what this letter means."

Just imagine that. The entire chain of command in this Agency, responsible for providing healthcare to our troops, is unable to tell the medical professionals who are providing service to our Active-Duty military every day what this "Fork in the Road" letter even means. It is shocking.

I check daily and, to date, no information.

Another Federal employee who did not feel comfortable sharing the Agency where he or she works:

Since inauguration, times have been hell for us because every day is loaded with uncertainty regarding the future state of our contract work and our Federal counterparts we work with daily. To this day, every work day is filled with dread and anxiety. Our firm has begun cutting staff already because there is simply no funding. This is also becoming the norm across other areas within our company.

This, clearly, must be from an individual who works with a Federal contractor. I suspect probably with USAID.

It is unfortunate because many are new or young people just trying to earn a living—

And starting off public service careers and now—

Getting stuck dealing with the mess everything is in now.

Here is another letter from a Federal contractor working for USAID:

I work as a USAID contractor. In the past week, I have experienced near everyone in my company getting placed on furlough. Beyond the fact that we are all working to make international development more impactful, and the fact that the US Company we have invested so much time in may never come back from this, we are all without salary and uncertain for the future. We are applying for jobs but acknowledge that with so many also furloughed or terminated, there is extremely [challenging] competition. Do we move away from [our home in] DC? [Do we] leave the industry which we made our careers, [so] that we could see making the world a better place and the US a better place?

Here is a Federal employee working for a small independent Agency. Again, the employee didn't feel comfortable identifying it.

It has always been my dream to be a federal employee. Ever since civics class in grade school, I saw what the government and feds could do for people and realized I wanted to pour my heart and soul into doing just that.

But the wind has been taken out of my sails. I am a probationary employee, meaning my name is on the short list to fire. I was hired under Schedule A—persons with disabilities, so my name is on [that] list [too]. I feel like I am being threatened by the very institutions that were created to safeguard the principles of truth, compassion, and respect . . .

I have lived my life placing others' needs . . . in front of mine. Trying to practice what I preach, but I am being forced to remove protected classes from our website, take down reports on DEIA—

It is interesting. The Trump Executive order tried to kill DEI—diversity, equity, inclusion—but in many of the documents that are being sent to Agencies, they are adding an "A" at the end. I never had seen that before, DEIA. What is the "A"? "Accessibility." Even though the Executive order signed by the President did not specifically attack accessibility programs for those with disabilities, the implementation documents that are going out from the administration are adding accessibility as a negative that needs to be rooted out of the Federal workplace. Could anybody be crueller than that?

Being forced to take down these reports on things, including accessibility, the writer says:

I feel as though there is blood on my hands [doing this]. It breaks my heart.

Finally, one last story, and then I will say a word about Federal funding to programs around Virginia, moving on from just sharing the stories of Federal employees.

This is another Federal employee who doesn't feel comfortable—actually, not one less story. I have three more. This is from a Federal employee who doesn't feel comfortable revealing the Agency where he or she works.

Today, I woke up to an email saying we had a restraining order, tied to Trump's [Executive orders], that would limit how we'd disperse our grants. Since the EOs were [so] vaguely defined to begin with, this could be a witch hunt for all kinds of programs and grants we give out.

A Federal employee from an Agency:

I'm a senior human resource professional in the Department of the Interior. I'm on daily calls with Departmental HR leaders who receive direction from OPM. Today leadership mentioned that their coordination was with DOGE "employees" rather than with actual OPM employees. These DOGE employees have full access to our USA Staffing hiring system, which includes personally identifiable information for ALL applicants—

Not all employees, for all applicants—

To any position in the [Federal Government]. It is unclear what kind of clearance these individuals have, if any, and what authority they even have to access this system.

Finally, we are beginning to work on identifying employees for transfer to Schedule F with short response times of less than 90 days. STOPPING SCHEDULE F MUST BE YOUR TOP PRIORITY.

Finally, the last story I will read before saying a word about Federal funding, this is from a Federal employee who works for HHS, Health and Human Services.

After working first as a contractor, I transitioned to a Competitive Career Permanent Position [that has taken me] years to get to this point. After graduating with my bachelors and masters degree, I faced competition from people returning to work after having been laid off during the recession.

I am married and pregnant. I am the breadwinner. A woman. . . . a homeowner. I pay taxes. I took an oath and I love my job. The daily fear tactics and targeting of federal employees has uprooted my life. I no longer feel safe going on [a] vacation, making . . . big purchases or doing anything because everyday I wonder [if I will] have a job.

What is happening is wrong. I am pregnant with my first child. I didn't do anything wrong. I . . . would have to separate from my husband weekly to keep my job if forced into [a particular location]. I can't make long drives due to sickness . . .

What did I do wrong to deserve this? Working for the federal government is [a] dream. I was sold an American dream! Graduate from high school, go to college, get an advanced degree, get married, buy a home . . . have a baby. All in that order. I did everything I was supposed to do and now myself and over a million other people are caught up in a political firestorm that we didn't ask for.

Tell me, why am I being punished? What did I do wrong? When will they be satisfied? When we kill ourselves from [depression for] not being able to provide for our families? I suffer from anxiety and depression already. I can tell you, this is enough to push a regular person over the edge. What more for someone who battles with their mental health? Why does no one care? Why should what I earned be ripped away from me? Why do millions deserve for our worlds to fall apart? Everyday my mind goes through what is happening and all the consequences that could fall upon me. It's unsafe for my health, my baby's [health] and my family. I ask for compassion and I want people to know that we are hardworkers. We are regular people. We are humans [who are] employed by the Federal Government. Please. Do something!

An intentional strategy of traumatizing Federal workers produces stories just like these, now in the hundreds. And by tomorrow, I will have hundreds more. And that is just one State. That is just Virginia. I know my colleagues are receiving these as well.

I see my colleague Senator BALDWIN is here and will take the floor in just a few minutes, but I do want to turn to not just Federal employees but the Federal funding that is coming to Virginia and Virginia organizations. It has been hard to get the sense of this because, of course, the administration didn't share anything with us. They didn't tell us what they were going to do. And my Governor, frankly, hasn't been sharing with us either.

The analogy I have been using is this funding order. When it came out, I feel like a jigsaw puzzle was dumped in front of me on a desk upside down, and all I could see was the cardboard on the back of all the pieces. Nobody gave me the box with the picture on it, so I didn't even know what the jigsaw puzzle was supposed to be.

I am getting no information from the Trump administration. I am getting no information from my Governor about what this plan is, what is going on. But every time somebody shares a story like these and every time someone calls me office and every time a mayor talks to me about an infrastructure project or something, I turn over one of those pieces. I have been turning over pieces for the last 10 days, and the picture is starting to emerge.

Let me tell you what people in Virginia are telling me. I met today with the—"today." My days are running together. I met yesterday with the Virginia Association of Community Health Centers.

Mr. President, you know these. Senator BALDWIN from Wisconsin has been very active in this space on the HELP Committee. These are the federally qualified health centers, chartered and funded pursuant to congressional appropriations to be the safety net for Americans' primary care.

In Virginia, there are 29 federally qualified health centers that serve hundreds of thousands of individuals. They are talented and focused in their localities and regions. These centers are particularly important in rural America that tends to have a shortage of primary healthcare providers.

On Monday, when I came into the office, I had an outreach from one of our largest FQHCs in the Hampton Roads area, the second largest metro area in Virginia, 1.6 million people.

Here is what they said. They are used to getting a payment for their congressional appropriation at the end of every month. It would have come in on January 29. President Trump's Executive order paused Federal funding that happened a few days before, but that order was enjoined.

The Trump administration was ordered to continue to make payments and not pause Federal payments. But

this very large health clinic in Hampton Roads had not received their monthly payment on January 29. And when they called to ask at their Federal contact what about the payment, they weren't given any answer about the January payment or about the February payment or about any payment. They couldn't get an answer.

I had the entire association, coincidentally, in my office yesterday with representatives from virtually all of these, and I asked them what was going on. They said, well, more than half of the FQHCs in Virginia had not received their January payment. They had submitted to receive it under normal course of business at the end of January but hadn't gotten it and couldn't get an answer about when or whether they could get it.

This is frontline healthcare for low-income people. If they are not getting primary healthcare, they are still going to get sick, and then they are going to be in emergency rooms, which is the worst place to get healthcare, creating long lines and congestion that will make it harder for everybody else to get the treatment they need in emergency rooms. It will make people sicker. It will make hospitals more crowded for everybody who needs hospitals.

You know, the thing about it is Russell Vought was not only the architect of the funding freeze, but now he and others are responsible for following the court order, for God's sake. The court order said they had to resume payments.

My FQHCs are not getting paid. They are not getting paid. My Commonwealth attorneys, my prosecutors around Virginia, they all get funding through various programs that come to our State's department of criminal justice services. They use that Federal grant funding to hire victim witness coordinators.

I had the organization of prosecutors from Virginia in my office today. They talked about how they rely on Federal funding to hire victim witness advocates in their offices. That is not funded by the State. It is funded through the Federal grant program. They don't know whether they are going to get the funding for that.

So compounding these concerns from Federal employees, I have Head Start programs, I have healthcare clinics, I have Commonwealth attorneys, I have sheriff's offices who get Federal funding to provide mental health services for people who need mental health services in jails and in the community—they are not sure they are going to get them.

The compounding of confusion and fear is sharp and unnecessary and illegal. These are appropriated funds. I don't need to repeat everything that Senator WHITEHOUSE said. Congress has appropriated these funds. A Democrat and Republican House reached budgets together, signed by the President. The President is under an obligation to im-

plement those funds. There is no legal authority for him to hold them back. Why is he holding them back? What did the patients at the health clinic in Hampton Roads do to get punished?

One of the health clinics is called the Capital Area Health clinic in Richmond. They have six clinics around the Richmond metropolitan area. They have closed three of them. They have closed three of the six. Other of the health clinics around the State are reducing the services, trying to keep the doors open but reducing services.

There is a court order that says they are supposed to be paid, but they are shutting the doors of their clinics, and they are reducing services because the administration won't even follow a court order. It is my hope that they will.

I don't think this is a glitch. I think this is an intentional effort to thwart a court order in order to hurt people who don't deserve to be hurt.

So under these circumstances, there is no way that I or any of my colleagues can stand here and cast a "yes" vote for somebody who has declared their intention is to traumatize Federal employees.

I will finish as I started: Who talks like that? Who talks like that? That is the professed goal of this individual who has been nominated for this most important post, and there is no circumstance under which I could cast a "yes" vote for someone harboring that kind of resentment.

Finally, I asked Mr. Vought in the confirmation hearing to tell me who his favorite Presidents are. He is a Republican, so I felt like I had a pretty good sense of it. I asked him, Do you admire Abraham Lincoln? He said very much. I said, I do too. I do too.

"With malice toward none, with charity toward all"—that is what Lincoln said to a divided nation during the Civil War. He spoke to the South. He spoke to Confederates. He spoke to those who were waging war to try to destroy the Union.

What he said to them was:

With malice toward none, with charity toward all.

Mr. Vought told me he admires Abraham Lincoln. Abraham Lincoln would never have thought to say: I want to traumatize you. I want you to not want to go to work because you are viewed as the villain.

How far this Grand Old Party has come from the lofty and noble sentiments of its founder when it is putting at the head of the Federal workforce somebody whose desire is to traumatize Federal workers.

With that, Mr. President, I yield the floor.

THE PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. CURTIS). The Senator from Wisconsin.

Ms. BALDWIN. Mr. President, like my colleague Senator KAINE, I will be uplifting the words of some of my constituents who have been contacting me in a panic, really, over the last several days. But I want to remind folks why

we come here at this hour to speak on the floor of the U.S. Senate.

We are here today to consider President Trump's nominee for the Office of Management and Budget, Russell Vought. Many Americans may not be familiar with Mr. Vought; however, you may be familiar with his most infamous work: Project 2025. That is right. President Trump's nominee for the Office of Management and Budget was one of the lead authors of Project 2025. It is a document which President Trump repeatedly denied having anything to do with during his campaign.

First, I think it is important to break down the responsibilities of the Office of Management and Budget, or OMB. What does it really do? OMB oversees the preparation of the President's budget request. This is a budget proposal that they send to Congress. OMB evaluates the effectiveness of Agency programs, policies, and procedures. OMB oversees and implements the appropriations bills and mandatory spending programs enacted by laws we pass in Congress.

The Office does not have a magic wand that allows it to create new laws, fund only programs they want and slash others that they don't, except through specific authorities that Congress provides. The Director of OMB is not, in fact, the 101st Senator, nor the 436th Member of the House of Representatives or even a second President. The operative word here is "implement."

A second stated mission of OMB is called the open government directive, which emphasizes the importance of disclosing information that the public can readily find and use.

Folks, the good news about Mr. Vought is that he has been clear from the start on his goals. Case in point: Project 2025. For those who didn't read that 922-page document, I can share some of the lowlights.

For economic policy, Project 2025 further shifts the tax burden from the wealthy onto the middle class, while giving American households with \$10 million in annual income an average tax cut of \$1.5 million per year.

It seeks to raise the retirement age, when Americans can receive Social Security benefits, from 67 to 69.

It also proposes limits or lifetime caps on Medicaid benefits. In Wisconsin, 595,300 Medicaid enrollees would be at risk of losing coverage because they are low-income and lack access to alternative affordable coverage.

Project 2025 aims to further impede on a woman's right to make her own decisions about her body, calling to eliminate emergency contraception and safe, effective abortion medications like mifepristone. Mr. Vought himself called on Congress to outlaw that medication.

The document also calls for the Department of Education to be abolished, which can only, by the way, be done by the Congress of the United States. But

the Department of Education is already clearly a target of this administration.

Important for our discussion here today with regard to education is that Project 2025 outlined a plan to take a hacksaw to the services and programs that families rely on the Federal Government to provide, slashing essential programs like title I grants that go to more than 80 percent of public school districts around the Nation. That includes sending about \$227 million to Wisconsin in the current school year.

These chapters in Project 2025 were primarily authored by none other than OMB nominee Russell Vought.

Now, I would be the last to say that our Federal Government is perfect. It is not. But the career civil servants who have served under Republicans and Democrats are essential to ensuring that services Americans rely on run smoothly—from Medicare and Social Security, to Head Start and childcare, to making sure that folks get their tax refunds from the IRS. These are essential services that hundreds of millions of Americans rely on every year.

Getting rid of the people who are working for working families will not fix our Federal Government. The doctors of the VA and staff sending out Social Security checks—they are not the enemy.

By confirming Russell Vought as Director of OMB, we would be putting one of the chief architects of Project 2025 in charge of an Agency that is tasked with getting critical funding out the door that our communities depend upon. And I hate to use this idiom, but we are, in fact, asking the fox to guard the henhouse.

We don't need to guess whether Russell Vought will turn to his Project 2025 playbook if confirmed as OMB Director. We are already seeing the destruction of his extreme views and how they are causing problems with allocation of Federal funding.

Before last week, I am sure that most Americans had never heard of the Office of Management and Budget, OMB, let alone what role it played in their lives, but all that changed last Monday night when OMB sent a 2-page memo on the President's plan to cut virtually all Federal grants and loans. This is tantamount to stopping Wisconsin taxpayer money from going back into the very services they rely on. The Trump administration is trying to steal from Wisconsinites to implement its own agenda. More on that later.

This messy, haphazard, and frankly illegal action immediately started causing chaos and confusion in my home State. Our phones were ringing off the hook from constituents and organizations worried about what this would mean for them. Was the funding for childcare centers impacted? Was the Medicaid coverage they relied on in jeopardy? What about nutrition programs that keep food on the table? What about rental assistance or funding to help pay for heat in the winter?

Sadly, my office didn't have answers for these folks due to the chaos that President Trump has created. All these essential programs that they rely on for healthcare, safety, and food on the table—they were all on the chopping block.

I even had a constituent write in asking these exact questions. She wrote to my office:

Do what you can to stop this freeze because both short- and long-run impacts are dire. Will rural hospitals get Medicaid reimbursements for the services they provide? Will nursing homes receive payments for care they're providing to elders? Will schools bounce checks and be charged late fees because Title I grants that finance ongoing operations are disrupted? The long-term consequences would be catastrophic—causing a steep recession—the Federal government gives \$1 trillion in grants to State and local governments alone, and removing any significant portion out of local economies will create a huge economic shock, fatally harming the valuable resources these governments provide to citizens, many of whom voted for Trump.

With a 2-page memo, the Trump White House unleashed a wave of chaos as folks in my State and across the country worried whether this freeze would impact the programs that they rely on. I would like to share some of the stories I have heard from folks in my State about how these cuts impact real people in a very real way.

I heard from a single mom who lives paycheck to paycheck. She was laid off because Federal funding was paused for the National Science Foundation, a grant that pays her salary. She wrote to me to say:

I have enough money to pay February rent, but I'm going to stop paying credit card bills and other loans. I'm not sure I'll even be able to afford to pay my WiFi and phone bills—things crucial in finding a new job. But I can do without as long as I have rent, heat and electric paid, and groceries in the fridge.

I also heard from a deputy fire chief in Central Wisconsin. Without Federal grant funding, he would have to lay off as many as nine officers—nine firefighters. Would this mean a longer wait for a resident if their house was on fire?

Another fire chief in Northern Wisconsin called me to ask whether his volunteer department could go ahead with needed upgrades for their equipment. Without their Federal grant, which was more than half of their operating budget, they would not be able to purchase new equipment that the department desperately needed.

From Western Wisconsin, a local mayor reached out to share that a pause in Federal funding would be catastrophic for their ability to make timely payments on a loan they took out to make necessary renovations to their fire department.

I heard from an administrator at a women's shelter for survivors of domestic abuse based in Southwest Wisconsin. Without Federal funding, they would have to turn away women looking for a safe place away from their abusers for themselves and sometimes their children too.

As communities across Wisconsin continue to battle the opioid and fentanyl crisis, a community organization specializing in drug prevention told me that they would not be able to pay their staff and continue their vital work if funding was cut.

Another organization that provides supervised visitation and safe exchange services between kids and parents who are separated due to court orders reached out, worried about whether they would be able to continue to serve their community. They employ a staff of therapists who supervise the visitations and ensure that kids are able to safely see their parents again.

I heard from a community dental center in Southeastern Wisconsin that serves thousands of patients every year, the vast majority of whom are children. They told me that without their Federal funding, they would be at "significant risk of closing within a matter of a few short months, and as a result, thousands of children would have nowhere to go to receive dental care, and 45 individuals would be out of employment."

They wrote to me:

We understand with each administration comes change and different priorities, however, these orders to freeze federal funds have very real implications for communities we live, work, and play in.

I have heard from so many Wisconsinites confused by this chaos, wondering whether their childcare center is about to close, their Head Start—many did close.

So, Mr. Vought, will you be willing to fill in as a mentor for all the kids who lose their mentors from Big Brothers Big Sisters or will you help pitch in as a firefighter at some stations in Wisconsin that might have to lay people off? Will you be a substitute Head Start teacher in a classroom to ensure that parents have the childcare and early education they are counting on?

If there is one word we can use to describe the first 2 weeks of this administration, it would certainly be "chaos." While the White House seems to be contradicting itself and putting out mixed signals on these drastic cuts, the level of panic and chaos it has created should be upsetting to every American.

There are so many other programs where Americans are unsure if they should anticipate cuts.

Community health centers, which I am a proud champion of, were awarded \$48 million grants across Wisconsin in the year 2023, largely in the form of Federal grants designed to help these health centers provide medical care and other services to communities traditionally located in healthcare deserts.

Wisconsin has 17 federally qualified healthcare centers located around the State, whose funding could be in jeopardy. There is also funding for law enforcement that could face cuts, including community-oriented police grants that go towards Tribal law enforcement assistance, hiring mental health

training, school violence prevention training and technology and commitment upgrades.

Wisconsin receives \$17.5 million in funding for counties, Tribes, and cities across the State to fund community-oriented policing practices.

You know, small businesses could also be harmed if loans for entrepreneurs are impacted. In fiscal year 2024, small businesses received nearly \$237 million in small business loans for projects in Wisconsin. These are businesses that just need a little support to get their idea off the ground, or maybe they are loans for those impacted by a national disaster. Cutting off this funding would mean fewer businesses and fewer jobs.

President Trump's egregious overreach of his Presidential power is plainly unconstitutional and a power grab. It is illegal to withhold this funding from the American people. This is their money, and these are the programs they rely on. Period.

This funding was provided in bipartisan laws, and I remind my colleagues of that. On a bipartisan basis, we passed the laws and budgets and appropriation bills. And I hope my Republican colleagues are just as angry at President Trump for this confusion his administration has created as I am. But I fear they are not.

This directive has put real people in real distress, and it begs the question of why. I will tell you why: They want to claw back taxpayer money supporting programs that serve taxpayers to ensure that they can give their tax breaks to the biggest corporations and billionaire friends.

This is not the first time the Trump administration has done this. And this is their plan: cut programs Wisconsinites rely on and give tax breaks to billionaires and multinational corporations. It certainly doesn't help that while my constituents were wondering if they would be able to put food on the table, keep a roof over their heads, and drop their kids off at childcare, the richest man in the world—worth nearly \$500 billion—was handed access to our Nation's checkbook and to Americans' most sensitive information.

First, it was shutting the doors, literally, to the United States Agency for International Development, USAID, an Agency that keeps Americans safe, protects people worldwide from disease and famine, and stands up to our adversaries like China and Russia.

But their next target is reported to be a shutdown of the Department of Education, the very Agency that ensures all kids across America get a good public education and young people are set up with the skills to land a good-paying job. It ensures that schools serving low-income students receive the high-quality education they deserve and students with disabilities get the services that they are required to receive and have the opportunity to thrive.

And we are watching, before our very eyes, Russell Vought and Elon Musk il-

legally trying to shut it down. And if that wasn't enough, reporting today shows that the DOGE is coming after the Department of Labor, the Agency that supports apprenticeship programs so people can earn while they learn and land good-paying jobs. It is the Agency that makes sure that big corporations are held accountable for stealing wages from workers. It is the Agency that ensures workers on factory floors are safe on the job.

Again, this is what we are watching Russell Vought and his billionaire pals put in jeopardy.

Donald Trump has, apparently, given an unelected billionaire, Elon Musk, who is, again, literally the richest man in the world, free reign to run roughshod through Americans' most sensitive information. He has the ability to put programs people need on the chopping block with absolutely no transparency or accountability for what he is doing, much less any legal authority.

The President claimed he would lower prices for families on day one, if elected. But how does taking childcare away lower prices for families? Does taking away people's treatment for opioid use disorder help their lives? How about cutting firefighters, will that lower costs for families and keep them safe?

Raising costs on families all while Republicans work to jam through big tax breaks for billionaires is not what Wisconsinites want. Billions in tax cuts for the ultrawealthy in exchange for programs that my constituents need to feed their families, pay their rent, and stay healthy is not a good deal.

I have always said that I will work with anyone to deliver for Wisconsin and invest in the programs that my constituents rely on. But bipartisanship is a two-way street. We have to be able to trust one another that what gets signed into law is actually going to get implemented.

And right now, we are watching Elon Musk, Trump's billionaire Cabinet, and Donald Trump himself flout the law and cut funding from bipartisan programs that my constituents rely on.

And all this brings us back to President Trump's nominee to run OMB who has openly called for the President to defy Congress and take control of Federal funding decisions that are constitutionally vested in the legislative branch.

He said he supports the illegal practice of impoundment, a strategy to circumvent the checks and balances that are baked into the fabric of our Constitution. Mr. Vought even said during his confirmation hearing last week that President Trump believes the Impoundment Control Act is unconstitutional. And he agrees with that assessment.

What that means is he thinks the President is free to withhold appropriated funding without limitation. And let me be clear, everything that

we have seen in the last two weeks, including examples that I provided about the chaos and confusion across Wisconsin—this is just the first step. It is the tip of the iceberg. But in the future, Russell Vought will just withhold funding at the beginning for anything that he doesn't like or that Elon Musk posts about on X.

What this means is Congress could pass an annual funding bill that, maybe, increases funding for Head Start, which we actually pretty routinely do. Russell Vought thinks he can say to Congress: Thanks, but no thanks. I am going to eliminate Head Start and not allow any future grants to Head Start programs. Maybe Russell Vought will ignore Congress and the laws we pass and eliminate or significantly reduce funding for opioid treatment programs or the 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline or whatever he feels like opposing that day.

Even setting aside the very real impact I think cutting funding for programs like these would have on families and communities across the country, I hope my Republican colleagues will stand up against this blatant disregard for this body. How are we supposed to negotiate annual appropriations bills when an administration is saying it can just ignore what we do?

If confirmed, Russell Vought would be the tip of the spear in his fight to take away funding for programs families rely on and give it to billionaires as a tax cut.

We know that this administration intends to make every effort to override Congress's power of the purse. We have already seen Mr. Vought do it. During Mr. Vought's time as OMB director during President Trump's first term, the Agency withheld roughly \$214 million in security assistance to Ukraine, which the Government Accountability Office later found violated the Impoundment Control Act.

I know it can be difficult to flout the party line, but we are not just talking about party politics anymore; we are talking about our Constitution. So many of my Republican colleagues declare themselves to be originalists when it comes to our Constitution, sworn supporters of interpreting this document as our Founders intended when it was written.

Well, I can tell you, if there is one thing that was crystal clear when our Founders conceived this Nation, it is that no one person should have absolute power. The repeated brazen power grabs that we have seen by this administration could not be more out of step with the foundational checks and balances laid out in our Constitution.

And while my words might not matter to you, I hope the voices of your constituents, who I know are being adversely impacted by this administration's actions, will.

I, for one, will not sit idly by as President Trump forfeits control of our government to billionaires. I will stand up for Wisconsin workers and families,

and push back on policies that are hurting the people I represent. And I am calling on my colleagues to do the same and oppose Russell Vought's nomination.

Otherwise, we could be running headlong towards a constitutional crisis. And it is up to all of us to make sure that the people come out on top in that fight. In times of conflict and hardship, the Senate has served as the conscience of this Nation. Now is our chance to stand up to this administration and show that we are here to represent the American people and not billionaires.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from California.

Mr. SCHIFF. Mr. President, it is getting late, too late for some of the people we serve to even be awake—though I imagine many are. Not by choice, a mother in the Central Valley is awake, staring at her kitchen table, trying to work out where her sick child can receive the medical care that child needs now that a Federal grant supporting the only rural healthcare center in her community is in limbo.

A Federal employee is awake trying to figure out how they will make the rent next month if they are laid off. Maybe they spent a few decades serving this country overseas and were just called back home. Now what?

People around the world are awake watching humanitarian help that means their next meal or safe harbor from disease has disappeared, wondering why, in their time of most need, their longtime ally has decided to abandon them, because the Trump administration has turned their lives, turned so many of our lives, into a series of question marks, because this President and his cronies like Elon Musk and Russ Vought are putting politics and profits over people's lives, over people's livelihoods, over lives.

They are creating chaos, and then, somehow, worst of all, they are gloating about it. Imagine gloating about acts so callous. "Chaos" seems to be the watchword of this administration, but the chaos is not a consequence of this. The chaos is the goal. The chaos is the purpose. By throwing everything at the wall, they can create confusion. They hope to muddy the waters while opening the floodgates: unconstitutional Executive orders, illegal memos, illegally accessing private citizens' data. The scope and the speed of these actions are almost impossible to comprehend, and the impact is incalculable.

This is all part of a larger effort to consolidate power, every possible power, in the control of one man—well, maybe two men—so they can plunder the country to benefit themselves and their billionaire buddies.

What is this all about, what we have witnessed in the first couple weeks of this administration? What do these disparate acts have in common? What is the through line? What is it that the seizure of data belonging to millions

and millions of Americans by Elon Musk—what does that have in common with the efforts to shutter American development assistance around the world through USAID? What does that have in common with efforts to fire top prosecutors at the Justice Department and purge FBI agents at the Federal Bureau of Investigation? What does this have in common, too, with pardoning violent criminals who attacked this building? What does it have in common with a funding freeze and then a memorandum to implement the funding freeze and then the repeal of the memorandum and all the confusion that has caused? What does the mass deportation order have in common with all of this? What is the story of what they are doing here? How does this all fit together?

It fits together in this way: This is an effort to try to consolidate power—all of the power of this government—in the hands of Donald Trump and a few of his handpicked, very wealthy, billionaire friends. It is designed to consolidate that power to essentially take the resources of this country and enrich themselves and their friends—an effort to enrich themselves which would not be possible, will not be possible, if our system of checks and balances work. But if they can somehow take apart these institutions; if they can somehow persuade or demand or cow the people in this institution and the House of Representatives and the courts and the Supreme Court; if they can prevent us from playing our institutional role as a check and balance, then what is left between them and the Treasury? Nothing. Nothing.

So this is the goal: Discredit the government, dismember the government, dismember checks and balances so they can raid the till. Make government purposefully dysfunctional, discredit every institution so that all that is left is the power of the strongman, and the wealth of this country can be stripped away.

Checks and balances be damned. Congressional authority be damned. The President wants to steamroll all of that, and at the moment, it appears he is succeeding. But Donald Trump can't do this on his own. He needs enablers—enablers to subvert our laws, enablers to divert congressionally approved funds.

Sure, everyone knows Elon Musk, but it is not just Elon Musk. And today, we consider the nomination of the system's engineer to lead the Office of Management and Budget—probably the most important Agency no one has heard of. That engineer, that architect of this effort to strip the country of its resources so they can be plundered by the President and his wealthy friends; the architect, the engineer of this, the one who will make the trains run on time, the guy that stops the train to allow the highway robbery of that train, is a man named Russ Vought.

We all recall Project 2025. Project 2025—Russ Vought helped to write it.

That funding freeze? Vought helped orchestrate the plan for it. And the slew of outrageous, dangerous actions taken by this administration over the past several weeks were in many ways a direct result of Vought and his plan to dismantle and destroy the government in the service of Donald Trump and his wealthy friends.

One analysis found that two-thirds of the Executive orders that Trump has signed come from—that is right—Project 2025.

Russ Vought doesn't believe in government except as a vehicle to take from the poor and take from the middle class and give to the wealthy people, who should be running everything. He doesn't believe in the simple idea that we the people compose our institutions; we the people are the government—a government that is supposed to be for the people, not for a handful of very wealthy people. No, Russ Vought believes in dismantling that government of the people piece by piece, brick by brick, until what remains is a hollowed-out bureaucracy that serves the interests of the wealthy and abandons everyone else, to make it so small they can drown it in a bathtub, because that is what this is all about.

This is all about taking the Nation's resources for themselves. It is about using the infrastructure, the architecture of the government to enrich themselves. This is about plunder. That is what they are trying to do.

The last few weeks are not incompetence. It isn't mismanagement, although there is plenty of that. No. This is a deliberate effort to break the Federal Government so completely that people lose faith in its ability to function at all. When people lose faith in the government of the people, when they stop believing it is for the people, that is when the real damage begins. That is when they can dismantle the safety net program by program. That is when they can make the people beholden to the strongman. That is when Federal workers—scientists, economists, social workers, public health experts—are replaced by unqualified ideologues or driven out entirely. Turn the Federal workforce—or what is left of it—into an arm of the President, beholden only to the President. No more oath to the Constitution but an oath to the person of the President, a loyalty oath demanded of our Federal employees.

That is when the next disaster—whether it is a pandemic, a financial collapse, or a natural disaster—becomes unmanageable, because the very institutions designed to respond have been gutted, because that is their end goal—not just to shrink the government of the people but to sabotage it, to make it dysfunctional, to make it ineffective, to paralyze it, and then to turn around and say "Hey, see, it doesn't work. The government of the people doesn't work" because of course they don't want it to work except to

the degree that it can be used to take the resources of the American people and give them to their wealthy friends and to large corporations, to distribute every possible dime amongst the privileged few and not working families.

This is why they are elevating Russ Vought, because when you need someone to dismantle the very machinery of governance, to turn the government of the people into an engine of destruction rather than an agency of stewardship, Russ Vought is your guy. And now he has a second chance—a second chance to make sure that when that mother in the Central Valley reaches for help, there is nothing there.

We are seeing, of course, Head Starts around the country—the Head Start Program—wonder whether they are going to be able to open their doors the next day, wondering what is going to happen to—if they are supported. Of course, all the parents that have their kids in Head Start are wondering what the future holds for their kids. But the view of this administration is, hey, that Head Start is getting valuable money they would rather give to themselves and to their wealthy friends. If it means the sacrifice of those kids in the Head Start, well, that is just the price you have to pay for oligarchy.

Russ Vought is your guy.

A second chance—he has a second chance now to turn Social Security and Medicare into bargaining chips in a political game that none of us have agreed to play, keeping seniors up at night worrying whether a Social Security check might not make it to them after all.

He has a second chance to rewrite the rules in a way that ensures that the wealthy and well connected are taken care of while everyone else is left behind.

We should be clear about what this nomination represents. Russ Vought wants to oversee the erosion of the very services that millions of Americans rely on every day—every single day; to lead the charge to remake the United States into a country where people are left to fend for themselves, where the government doesn't work because they don't mean it to. They don't want it to. They don't want a government of the people or a government by the people or government for the people; they want a government of them, they want a government by them, and they want a government for them.

But let's be very clear. It does not have to be this way. We can reject this vision. We can reject this nominee. We can reject the idea that our government exists only to serve the powerful or to punish the vulnerable. And we will reject it because if we do nothing, if we simply sit back and let Russ Vought take the reins of OMB once again, then we will be complicit in the destruction that follows.

So let's take a closer look at the last few weeks. Let's take a closer look at Donald Trump and Elon Musk's hostile takeover of the Federal Government

and the targeting of our institutions one after another, over and over again. Let's take a closer look at this effort to gut critical programs to pay for their enormous tax breaks and what that means for all of us. Let's start with access to your personal data.

As of today, Elon Musk, an unelected billionaire—I think maybe the wealthiest man in the world—with a vested financial interest in this administration's success—you would think that being the wealthiest man in the world or one of the top wealthiest people in the world would be enough, but no. He has a vested interest in the administration's success and billions in government contracts—because apparently the billions he has already are not enough.

He has deployed a team of loyalists who infiltrate government Agencies to help with the plunder of the public fisc. So let's think about that for a moment. Let's try to take this in. The world's richest man has brought in his loyalists—some of them apparently just teenagers—to breach Federal Departments to access sensitive data, classified information, and who knows what. Are we supposed to think that is OK? Are we supposed to pretend this is normal, to have the wealthiest man in the world run roughshod over private data, over our Agencies? Are we supposed to act like this is anything other than what it is—a blatant and unconstitutional grab of power and our personal data, a takeover of government by a billionaire who has decided that the rules and laws don't apply to him and our national security doesn't matter?

But why? Why go to these lengths? Again, we have to follow the money. Trump's 2017 billionaire tax cuts—the ones that handed corporations and the ultrawealthy an unfathomable windfall while exploding the deficit—are set to expire this year, and Elon Musk and his buddies want to keep these tax cuts in place. If they are going to do that, then Donald Trump and Elon Musk—Donald and Elon—have to find \$4 trillion somewhere. So where do they look? Not to the billionaires who profited from these tax cuts, not to the corporations that benefited the most—no. They are going to go after money where the cuts will hurt the most. They are going to go after what they consider low-hanging fruit. After all, what is the power of the poor, what is the power of even the middle class compared to the power of the oligarchs?

They are going to go after where the money is easiest to grab. So they are going to go after Medicaid.

They are going to go after Medicaid. After all, it is just seniors or folks who are disabled or folks who are working class or struggling to get by and reliant on it for their healthcare. What is that weighed against more money for Elon Musk and his friends? What is that in the balance with Donald Trump and his desire to enrich himself?

There was a press conference about a week and a half ago. It kind of got lost in the blizzard of everything happening. But I found it very striking at this press conference. The President was asked by a reporter whether he was going to stop trading in his own personal interests and his meme coin.

What followed was this discussion between the President and this reporter while the cameras were rolling where the reporter says: You are making a lot of money.

And the President asked: How much money am I making from this meme coin?

Well, a lot.

I don't know what the exact language of this dialogue was, but it was blatant. It was so out in the open. I mean, it takes your breath away.

I remember, because it seems quaint, the beginning of the first Trump administration, when you remember he had that press conference and he was talking about how he was—I don't know—going to make sure that his business interests were somehow separated from his interest as President or the country's interest. And he had those stacks of—I don't know—binders or white paper. I don't think anybody knew what was in those stacks of paper or whether it was blank paper. But at least there was a superficial effort to suggest that he was going to have some walling off of his personal financial interests.

Of course, what we saw of those 4 years was there was none of that walling off. There were Gulf nations that were essentially paying tribute by staying in his hotels and all kinds of other graft going on.

But now, there is no effort to even hide the profit-taking with this meme coin or the distribution from his social media platform to people like Kash Patel. I mean, the grift is out there right in the open.

But that is really still small potatoes compared to the ability to raid the Treasury, compared to the ability to take all the money that goes into providing healthcare for sick people and Medicaid and using that to enrich yourself. Now, that is where the money is.

Part of what they are targeting is also USAID, and they are targeting Federal workers. They want Federal workers to resign. They sent Federal workers a letter that says, basically: Hey, you can reply to this message and say you quit and have basically a paid vacation until September.

Of course, there is no money to pay for that. It is unlawful what they are offering. But if people respond to that message, then they are on a list.

Why do Elon Musk and Donald Trump want all these Federal workers to quit? That is more money for them. That is more money for those tax cuts. They have to find those trillions somewhere. Let's see if we can push people who work for the government out the door.

Education of our kids—let's close down the Department of Education. OK, comparatively, you look at the Department of Education and you look at the Department of Defense. There is not a whole lot of money already in the Department of Education, but, hey, if it helps to pay for one more of those tax cuts, let's do away with the Department of Education.

Essential public services. OK, Federal grants for firefighters or firefighting equipment—what is that in the scale of things when we are talking about another tax cut for very wealthy folks? Take it from those who need it to fund giveaways for those who need it least.

It is kind of your reverse Robin Hood.

And who is leading the charge? A billionaire with billions in government contracts who stands to benefit financially if this administration stays in power and these cuts go through. That is what is happening.

That is what they are trying to do. That is what this is about. This is about consolidating power, doing away with the checks and the balances, consolidating power so that you can raid the Treasury. If we saw it during the financial collapse, banks that were too big to fail, this is a caper too big to stop—but only if we don't do our jobs in this building.

Strip government to the bone, funnel money to people who already have more than they could ever spend—how many lifetimes would it take to spend all those billions—and use the Federal Government as an instrument of personal gain, without accountability and without justice.

And, tragically, one of the things that makes this whole caper so possible now was something that took place in the building just across the street from here, when the Supreme Court of the United States said to the President of the United States: You can commit criminal acts while you are President and they can't touch you. If you use the Justice Department, you have absolute immunity. If you use other Departments, your immunity is so strong, you can argue the presumption is pretty much irrebuttable. They gave the President immunity to commit crimes.

His pardoning of all these violent criminals that attacked this building is a message that says: Hey, can't hold the President accountable—not anymore, not after this Supreme Court gave him that “get out of jail free” card. You do things for me that are unlawful; you do things for me that are unethical—I have your back. There is a pardon waiting for you at the end of all this.

Let's turn to USAID. What is the deal with USAID? USAID has been kind of a favorite issue Agency—idea, theme—that conservatives have loved to attack for a long time. And why? Because I think, reflexively, the idea of providing assistance around the world isn't the highest priority for many people. I totally get that. Of course, what we don't realize, unless we dig into

what that money goes for, is a couple of things.

One, the money we invest in development around the world ultimately helps the United States a great deal. If we are looking at this just from a fairly selfish point of view, the money we invest in USAID helps us a great deal. Why is that? Well, if there are diseases halfway around the world like Ebola, like other potential dangers to the United States if they were to get to our shores, if we can work with our friends overseas and we can stop these viruses where they are, it means we don't have to deal with them here. If we can stop the instability in places around the world, it means less fertile soil for terrorism and terrorists who might attack us here. It improves our security. It improves our health. It wins friends for the United States around the world.

Now, I realize the administration has an America-first policy, which I think the way they are executing it means everyone else last. Of course, not a policy “everyone else last” that is doubly endearing to your allies, but this administration doesn't seem to think we need any friends around the world.

But even as we, through this administration, decide, well, we are done with development around the world, guess who stands to benefit. Certainly not the people around the world, not the people fighting HIV/AIDS, not the people fighting malaria, not the people fighting poverty, not the people fighting starvation. No, our adversaries benefit. Probably the biggest beneficiary is China.

Why does China benefit from our abandoning the field? Because it opens the field for China. China is already around the world investing in other countries and doing so with strings attached. It is making debtor nations of other countries. It is making them obligated to China—countries that are rich in rare minerals. It is giving China the foothold or, even more explicitly, giving China military bases and naval bases. And they are using development systems to leverage other countries.

These other countries, so many of them will tell us: We don't want to work with China. They are not doing this for altruistic reasons. We know what China is all about. But if America is going to abandon the field, if we have no choice but to seek friends elsewhere, we will do what is necessary to feed our people. We will go to where we need to go to get help when we confront disease. And if America abandons the field, we will go to China.

China is winning so much in these last 2 weeks, it is getting tired of winning.

Just today, we learned that, apparently, some list, according to public reports, of officers at the CIA was sent to the White House in an unclassified email. Now, I remember a time that seems very quaint, when Donald Trump was always talking about Hillary's emails. What about this email that potentially exposes the identity of people

who are working at the CIA, who want to work at the CIA, and according to public reports, the administration response is: Don't worry. That unclassified email only contained their first name and the first initial of their last name.

Well, I am sure that China, with all of its big data analytics will have no trouble with that at all. With an answer like that, the administration may think they can pull the wool over our eyes, but they can't. What is more, they cannot pull the wool over the prying eyes of our competitors, our adversaries around the world.

So USAID. First of all, let's start with a rather mundane point, it would appear, in this administration. What they are doing is illegal. I guess if you have absolute immunity, you don't worry about those things. But we in this body should worry about that. We should worry about whether the President and some wealthy billionaire are violating the law. We are in the business of making laws. We used to cherish our institutional prerogative. We used to think it was valuable in the scheme of things. We used to believe the Founders were quite brilliant in how they established each institution as a check on the other so none would have absolute power. But here we are faced with something which I think we have to acknowledge is plainly unlawful, and not a peep—not a peep—about that by those who could most strongly resist this.

It is harder for us in the minority. We don't control anything in the Senate. We don't control anything in the House. If this administration succeeds in neutering the Congress of the United States, there is little we in the minority alone can do without the help of others who cherish this institution. We just cannot do that alone.

We will do all that we can. We are here all night. We will be here as many nights as it takes. We will raise public awareness of this unlawful scheme. We will use litigation, and we are. We will use every tool at our disposal. But it shouldn't be just us. It shouldn't be just us.

I think a lot of Americans are wondering now whether the Constitution is so brilliant after all, whether it is adequate to meet this moment—a moment that our Founders really anticipated when we would have a demagogue who would ride the whirlwind of the confusion that he sows. Well, I think it is a brilliant Constitution. I think it is the best in the world, but it is not self-effectuating; it depends on all of us. To work, it depends on all of us.

The genius of the Constitution is not that we are today where we are, where we have a Supreme Court that said the President is above the law; where we have a President acting like he is above the law; where we have the administration bringing in unelected billionaires to take data and who knows what else; where we have terrible national security breaches and not a murmur of dissent about them. The genius

of the Constitution is not that this is happening but that it was forestalled until now; that we have gone through these more than two centuries without confronting this. But this is where we are, and this will be the real test of our Constitution—what it will mean in this moment when the President and a wealthy billionaire—the world's richest man—are engaged in things that are plainly unlawful. Doing away with an Agency like USAID is plainly unlawful.

Even if you don't care about what USAID does, even if you are content to let China take over development around the world and win over friends and mineral rights and turn our allies into debtor nations, even if you are OK ceding global leadership to China—which I am most certainly not—the moment you say it is OK for them to violate the law—to shut down this one Agency—you have said it is OK for them to violate the law and shut down anything—anything.

If they can do this with USAID, they can do this with the Department of Ed. If they can do it with the Department of Ed, they can do it with Head Start. If they can do it with Head Start, they can do it with Medicaid. If they can do it with Medicaid, they can do it with Social Security. They can do anything.

The USAID was established by the U.S. Congress. It cannot and should not be eliminated on the whims of a President or his unelected billionaire friend. Shutting down USAID or pausing its work will have devastating global and potentially irreversible consequences, but the biggest consequence will be to us. It is the world's largest provider of humanitarian aid, and through it, the United States saves countless lives every year.

I have to say, as I have had the opportunity as chair of the Intelligence Committee, and even prior to that position in the House, to travel to some of the most dangerous parts of the world—to Iraq, to Afghanistan, to Pakistan, to Yemen—you name it—I have met these USAID employees, the ones who just got this order: You need to get on a plane and come back. You are on leave whether you like it or not. I have met these folks. They are so patriotic and passionate about their work and such dedicated public servants.

I remember being in Afghanistan fairly early in the war, and I met this young man with USAID. He looked to me to be in his early twenties. His deployment was for 1 year in Afghanistan. He had only been there for a few months. These folks were operating without much of a safety net, and in order to be effective, they needed to be out in the villages. They couldn't just stay on their base. They had to be out, exposed. This USAID worker—this young man—had been there only for a few months of a 1-year deployment, and he told me he had already signed up for his second year.

I remember saying: Wow, that is pretty impressive. You like it here? You like your work that much where

you have only been here for a few months and you have already decided you are going to re-up for another year?

And he said: No. It is not that. We are in the development business. You really can't see the fruits of your labor in a single year. I want to be here long enough where I can see the results of the projects that I am working on, where I can see them come to fruition.

This was the kind of public servant who populates USAID all over the world. This is the kind of public servant—I don't know if this young man is still with the USAID, but if he is—wherever he is in whatever part of the world where he is doing God's work—he just got an email saying: You are on involuntary leave. Thank you for nothing. Don't let the door hit you on the backside on the way out. Sincerely, Uncle Sam.

What a hell of a way to treat people.

These folks at USAID are stopping diseases from spreading. They are helping to feed communities that are starving. They are showing the United States cares about people around the world; that it cares about others; that the most powerful Nation in the world hasn't forgotten about the most powerless communities in the world. USAID represents decades of soft power that the United States has built. It has shown allies in developing nations that we stand by them in crises; building partnerships that last; protecting our national security.

I remember visiting Pakistan. Now, Pakistan probably doesn't have a lot of great things to say about the United States much of the time, which I think and I recognize is frustrating—when you are trying to help and it doesn't seem like anything you do is enough. I get that. I totally get that. But I remember when an earthquake struck northwest Pakistan, and American helicopters were helicoptering in relief, and a toy became very popular in Pakistan. It was a replica of an American helicopter because we suddenly became associated with helping people in their time of need. It was probably the single most valuable diplomacy we had done in years. I guess we are not going to do that anymore.

All of that—all of that effort—to show that the United States is concerned about the well-being not just of ourselves but of others all over the world—all of that is at risk. Well, there are champagne bottles being popped right now in Beijing—and probably quite a few in Moscow—at the idea tonight that we are abandoning the field and that we are poised to confirm the architect of that abandonment—an otherwise obscure man named Russ Vought.

Alliances and decades of work are going out the window. Russia's and China's influence are on the rise. And for what? USAID represents less than 1 percent of the Federal budget, but that 1 percent gets Elon Musk and Donald Trump closer to the \$4 trillion hole

they need to fill to give another tax cut to the wealthy; so it is on the chopping block, plain and simple.

Let's look at some of the other events of the last couple of weeks and put them in perspective. Let's look at the firing of these top Department of Justice officials.

Within hours of Donald Trump's order, the Justice Department fired more than a dozen prosecutors—many career public servants—who had worked on criminal cases involving the people who attacked this building or maybe they worked on criminal cases involving the one who incited the attack on this building. They weren't removed for incompetence, and they weren't removed for corruption. They were removed because they did their jobs patriotically. They were removed because they had the audacity to try to hold a powerful man accountable.

The official justification for their firing was that these prosecutors—many of whom had worked under Special Counsel Jack Smith—could not be trusted to implement Trump's agenda.

Let's think about that.

A President of the United States who spent years railing against the so-called weaponization of the government, which is the expression he would use for holding him accountable for law-breaking—that President who railed against the Department for weaponizing government has now purged his own Justice Department of the very people who investigated his many crimes. This purge was a product of the White House. The order came from Donald Trump himself. The firings were executed by his appointed allies in the Justice Department.

When it was done, his administration made the end game clear: The Justice Department no longer represents the American people. It no longer enforces the law. It enforces Donald Trump's will. This is not a Department that can be counted on anymore to investigate corruption but to defend Donald Trump. It is a Justice Department that doesn't prosecute certain criminals. It protects them as long as they serve the President's interests or are the President himself. This is the new normal in Donald Trump's second term—a government that exists not as a check on his power but as an extension of it.

The message was unmistakable to prosecutors, to judges, and to anyone working in law enforcement who still believes in the rule of law or an idea now which seems quaint—that no one is above the law. Do your job. Protect the person of the President, not the people of the country or you and your job may be next because, in Trump's America, there is only loyalty—not to Constitution, not to country, but to the person of the President.

Now with the firings complete, the vacancies will be filled not with independent prosecutors but with loyalists; with lawyers who will spend the next 4 years reshaping the very foundation of the Justice Department, ensuring that

the next time Donald Trump or anyone like him breaks the law, there won't be anyone left to prosecute. They will be there to go after Trump's enemies whether they are real or just perceived.

We are not inevitably headed toward authoritarianism or one-man rule, but firing these top prosecutors takes us one step closer. If we don't stop it now, if we don't draw a line here, there will be little justice left in the Department to save.

I spent almost 6 years with that Department. I was an assistant U.S. attorney in Los Angeles—one of the best jobs I ever had. I worked with a cadre of prosecutors who was just top notch, some of the brightest lawyers in Los Angeles. They gravitated to that office. They were some of the most capable and idealistic young lawyers who wanted to do justice. The office was completely apolitical. I had no idea whether my fellow prosecutors were Democrats or Republicans. And, yes, when U.S. attorneys changed and Presidents changed, there might be different priorities in the office, but they were broad policy priorities. There might be more of an emphasis on drug cases or there might be more of an emphasis on white-collar crime cases, but it was a difference of policy; it was never about the politics of vengeance or retribution. No one in that office had any misunderstanding or misapprehension of what their role was, and their role was to do justice.

Now, I think the Department made a mistake after this building was attacked, after our police officers were savagely beaten, after our President—this President—sat in that White House dining room and watched that violence occur. I think the Department of Justice made a mistake—not by investigating that massive crime on this building, on our police, on the peaceful transfer of power, on our democracy, but in taking so long. I think they made a mistake in focusing on the foot soldiers of that attack who broke into this building rather than those who incited it and organized it.

But I understand why that mistake was made. That mistake was made because there was a desire, after the first 4 years of Donald Trump and the terrible politicization of that Department by Bill Barr, there was a desire to restore the independence of the Department. There was a reluctance to follow the evidence where it would lead. That reluctance, that desire to insulate the Department from criticism resulted in justice being delayed and ultimately justice being denied.

One of the biggest culprits in that failure of the justice system was that building across the street and, indeed, the entire court system because that court system, and most particularly the High Court, understood what was happening, understood the endless delays in bringing to justice the ones who incited those attacks. They understood exactly what was happening, and they permitted it to happen.

More than that, the High Court not only permitted it to happen, but by countenancing these endless delays by letting the President play rope-a-dope in the courts, they ensured that justice would be delayed so that justice might be denied. And in fact, it was denied. That was the mistake of the Department: excessive caution. And that mistake means that a court that has become a partisan court could use delay as a weapon to defeat justice, and it did.

But in this Alice in Wonderland world in which we live, Donald Trump would make that desire to move the Department away from the politicization of Bill Barr, restore a reputation for independence, that laudable goal, would turn that in some Alice in Wonderland way into a weaponization of the government.

Why? Because it believed that the rule of law applies to everyone, even the most powerful man in the world.

So why get rid of these prosecutors? Why purge the FBI agents? Why after promising in their nominees—Pam Bondi, Kash Patel—we have learned how much we can rely on the promises, the commitments they made in their confirmation: zero.

But why is this firing the FBI agents such an important piece of this whole effort by Donald Trump, Elon Musk, and their enablers? Because if they are going to take money from the public fisc, if they are going to enrich themselves with their meme coins, if they are going to raid the Treasury, if they are going to take people's private data, if they are going to try to illegally shut down Agencies, they don't want a Department, God forbid, to say no, that violates the law. They don't want an FBI that is going to examine anything they are doing. So stripping the Department of its independence, instilling fear in thousands and thousands of FBI agents, telling them you are just one wrong step away from being fired, this is the way to ensure that when they raid the Treasury, there is no one there to call out what they are doing.

This is also part and parcel of what these pardons were all about. What role did these pardons play in this effort to bring about one-man rule and to enable that one man to raid the public fisc?

So on his first day and with the stroke of a pen pardoning 1,550 people—people who violently beat law enforcement—the President wished to make something abundantly clear: If you use violence in my service, I will have your back.

So people who came in through these doors and bear-sprayed police officers and beat them with flagpoles, took apart metal barricades and beat them with that, crushed them in the doors—Officer Daniel Hodges, I will never forget the images of him being crushed in that revolving door.

The people who did that, they got a pardon. He pardoned the ring leaders or gave them clemency, leaders of the Proud Boys and the Oath Keepers, vio-

lent, unrepentant White nationalists who conspired to overthrow the peaceful transfer of power. I mean, how did we get here, where a President of the United States would pardon people for doing that?

Some were convicted of seditious conspiracy, one of the most serious crimes in our legal system. Others were convicted of dragging police officers into violent crowds and of beating them, of bear-spraying them, of crushing them. We witnessed it. We were here. I was here, not on this side of the Capitol, but on the other side. I was here. I was here when they were breaking windows to get in. I was here on the House floor with one of the floor managers that day, opposing the efforts to overturn the election. I was here when the Speaker was whisked out of her chair. I was here when the Capitol Police first informed us there were rioters in the building.

I was here when the Capitol Police told us that we needed to get our gas masks out. I was here when we struggled to open the damn things that were in these steel plastic pouches. I was here when those masks were deployed. It was a polyurethane bag you were supposed to pull over your head with an elastic band around your neck. I was here when the fan that circulates the air in those masks so that you don't asphyxiate, when the sound of those fans was everywhere on the House floor and in the Gallery.

I was here when the Capitol Police told us that we needed to get out, that they cleared an exit route and we needed to get out. I was here when some of my Republican colleagues in the House—as I waited on the House floor, we could really hear those people hanging on the doors to get in—said: You can't let them see you.

One of them said: I know these people. I can talk to these people. I can talk my way through these people. You are in a whole different category.

I have to say, at first, I was oddly touched by their evident concern for my safety. But my next impression was, if they hadn't been lying about the election, I wouldn't need to worry about my safety. None of us would.

Donald Trump pardoning the folks who were attacking police officers that day, this wasn't about mercy. This wasn't about justice. These people hadn't made restitution or shown any—far from it. This was about power. This was about a hope to erase the crimes that they committed in his name. This was a message to his supporters that the violence and illegal acts aren't just to be tolerated; they are to be rewarded because that is what this was.

This was a message—a message that if you fight for him, if you storm the Capitol, if you brutalize police officers, if you try to overthrow an election, you will be protected; you will be hailed, even. They will make chairs with you, like Kash Patel. You will be absolved because he, the President, so desperately wants to be absolved. He

wants to somehow remove the stain of his impeachments, of the violent attack in his name.

So what has happened to some of these criminals since they have been pardoned by Donald Trump? One of those pardoned was killed in a shoot-out with police in Indiana—a model citizen, I am sure.

One of them was arrested four times between storming the Capitol and being pardoned by Donald Trump. Another was rearrested for unlawfully possessing a gun as a felon. That was for his 2017 conviction for a domestic violence battery by strangulation. Seems like a worthy candidate for a pardon by Donald Trump.

One rioter who attacked police with bear spray and a metal whip on January 6 is now grappling with unresolved charges of soliciting a minor—a third-degree felony carrying up to 10 years in prison. Maybe he will be pardoned for that.

These are the people whom Donald Trump pardoned, that he celebrated because they showed loyalty to him; and in Trump's world, nothing else matters.

In order to carry out this plunder of the Treasury, to make the whole of government the vehicle for his self-enrichment and self-aggrandizement, he must have a loyal cadre willing to do even the most violent acts in his service.

“Stand back and stand by.”

So let's turn quickly to the funding freeze. How does that fit into this effort?

There was a memo, as we know, to freeze all Federal funding, Federal loans, and assistance. We saw the reports, the days of chaos. We saw hospitals wondering whether they would get funding to keep their clinic doors open. We saw parents wondering whether their childcare would be available, seniors wondering whether they would have the services that they needed. And for what?

Once again, this is an effort to prepare to raid the Treasury, to take the resources that belong to the American people and use them to fund a massive tax cut for those who don't need it.

I represent a State that has been battered by natural disaster, so I take this very personally, this freeze on Federal funding, because my constituents need the help of FEMA. They need the help of the SBA. They need to know that as the government has been there for every other State in a natural disaster, it will be there for us.

The idea of freezing that funding and inhibiting that recovery so that there can be just a bit more money for Donald Trump and Elon Musk and his allies is anathema to my constituents, and it should be unacceptable for all the rest of us.

I yield the floor.

MORNING BUSINESS

TRIBUTE TO MAJOR GENERAL WILLIAM D. COBETTO

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, there are some Americans who go above and beyond in service to our Nation. Major General William D. Cobetto, chief of staff for the Illinois Department of Military Affairs, is one of those individuals, and he recently retired after a decades-long career of dedicated service to Illinois. Our State and our Nation are better because of him.

General Cobetto is Illinois through and through, and he represents the very best of us. He was born in Hillsboro, IL; grew up in Taylor Springs, IL; attended Hillsboro High School; and holds a bachelor of science in aeronautical administration from Saint Louis University. In 1985, he received his commission from the Academy of Military Science in Knoxville, TN, but it did not take him long to return to serve the State he loves.

He spent the next 30 years with the Illinois Air National Guard, including serving as commander of the 183rd Mission Support Group from 2004 to 2007, and eventually providing leadership across the State as the Assistant Adjutant General-Air beginning in 2011. General Cobetto also attended the Air War College, and in 2003, he served at the Pentagon in support of the Air Force Crisis Action Team, as well as the Assistant Secretary of the Air Force for Financial Management and Comptroller.

In 2015, General Cobetto retired from military service with several awards and decorations under his belt, including the Meritorious Service Medal, the Air Force Commendation Medal, the National Defense Service Medal, the Global War on Terrorism Service Medal, and several Illinois National Guard awards.

Despite his military retirement, General Cobetto was not ready to stop serving Illinois. Seemingly not satisfied with only 30 years of service, he returned to the Illinois National Guard in a civilian capacity, serving first as legislative liaison and later as chief of staff for the Illinois Department of Military Affairs. In these roles, he continued to remain an incredible leader and advocate for our National Guardsmen and their families. He was always a reliable resource to my office and a trusted partner.

I know General Cobetto is now looking forward to spending more time with his family, including his wife Kelly, their children Ashley, Jacob, Adam, and Emily, and their two grandchildren Adeline and Mason.

I am forever grateful for General Cobetto's invaluable contributions to the great State of Illinois. My wife Loretta and I wish him all the best in this next, well-deserved chapter of his life.

U.S. SENATE COMMITTEE ON INDIAN AFFAIRS RULES OF PROCEDURE

Ms. MURKOWSKI. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate Committee on Indian Affairs Rules for the 119th Congress be printed in the RECORD.

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

SENATE COMMITTEE ON INDIAN AFFAIRS—119TH CONGRESS COMMITTEE RULES

COMMITTEE ON INDIAN AFFAIRS RULES OF PROCEDURE

Rule 1. The Standing Rules of the Senate, Senate Resolution 4, and the provisions of the Legislative Reorganization Act of 1946, as amended by the Legislative Reorganization Act of 1970, as supplemented by these rules, are adopted as the rules of the Committee to the extent the provisions of such Rules, Resolution, and Acts are applicable to the Committee on Indian Affairs.

MEETING OF THE COMMITTEE

Rule 2. The Committee shall meet on Wednesday while the Congress is in session for the purpose of conducting business, unless for the convenience of the Members, the Chairman shall set some other day for a meeting. Additional meetings may be called by the Chairman as he or she may deem necessary.

OPEN HEARINGS AND MEETINGS

Rule 3(a). Hearings and business meetings of the Committee shall be open to the public except when the Chairman by a majority vote orders a closed hearing or meeting.

(b). Except as otherwise provided in the Rules of the Senate, a transcript or electronic recording shall be kept of each hearing and business meeting of the Committee.

HEARING PROCEDURE

Rule 4(a). Public notice, including notice to Members of the Committee, shall be given of the date, place, and subject matter of any hearing to be held by the Committee at least one week in advance of such hearing unless the Chairman of the Committee, with the concurrence of the Vice Chairman, determines that holding the hearing would be non-controversial or that special circumstances require expedited procedures and a majority of the Committee Members attending concur. In no case shall a hearing be conducted within less than 24 hours' notice.

(b). Each witness who is to appear before the Committee shall submit his or her testimony by way of electronic mail, at least two (2) business days prior to a hearing, in a format determined by the Committee and sent to an electronic mail address specified by the Committee. In the event a federal witness fails to timely file the written statement in accordance with this rule, the federal witness shall testify as to the reason the testimony is late.

(c). Each Member shall be limited to five (5) minutes of questioning of any witness until such time as all Members attending who so desire have had an opportunity to question the witness unless the Committee shall decide otherwise.

(d) The Chairman, in consultation with the Vice Chairman, may authorize remote hearings via video conference.

BUSINESS MEETING AGENDA

Rule 5(a). A legislative measure or subject shall be included in the agenda of the next following business meeting of the Committee if a written request by a Member for consideration of such measure or subject has been filed with the Chairman of the Committee at