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Senate

EXECUTIVE CALENDAR—Continued

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Minnesota.

Ms. KLOBUCHAR. Mr. President, along with my colleague from California and so many others tonight, I rise in opposition to the President's nomination of Russell Vought to lead the Office of Management and Budget.

My colleagues and I are here—it is now shortly before midnight—to go through the night to make this case because this nominee has already demonstrated exactly how dangerous he would be if confirmed. We know that from the last time he worked in the Office of Management and Budget, and we know it because of his work in the last few years. And despite not even being in the office yet, he has already, through his work on Project 2025, driven a reckless budget decision that created immediate chaos and uncertainty across the country.

The duty of the Office of Management and Budget Director is to assist the President of the United States in faithfully executing the laws passed by Congress. Notably, this does not include singlehandedly turning off Federal funding.

It was just a few weeks ago that Donald Trump was inaugurated. And that day, as chair of the yearlong Inaugural Committee, I made the point that there are three branches of government. Otherwise, we would have had the inauguration—as in some countries—in a Presidential palace or in some gilded executive office building. In fact, that inauguration was in the Capitol for a reason, and that is because in our country we have three branches of government—three equal branches of government. And article I of the Constitution makes it clear that the Congress makes decisions about funding—the Congress.

And in this case, on a bipartisan basis, year after year after year—and it is not easy, and it can be a mess to the end, but we come together, Democrats

and Republicans, and make a decision about funding. And it is the job of the executive branch—in addition, of course, to the President of the United States, signing off on this—but the executive branch then implements it.

But in this case, things are backward and upside down when the Office of Management and Budget comes in with a plan that had actually been devised by this nominee to freeze the funds. Millions of Americans awoke to find that vital Federal funding had been frozen—not by Congress, not by a confirmed official in an administration, but by an unelected adviser acting from the shadows. And, yes, it was chaos—big surprise.

People lost access to essential services. Agencies scrambled to interpret conflicting statements. It was in, and 24 hours later, it was rescinded. And then the Press Secretary to the President of the United States put out a post that—no, no, no—all the funds were still frozen. Even the administration itself had to walk back its decision after a Federal judge ruled it unconstitutional, this whole mess that hurt regular people.

And I still wake up every day and say to myself: Has Donald Trump brought down costs for housing or childcare? Has he created more housing or childcare that a number of people who voted for him thought they were going to get? Has he brought down the cost of prescription drugs?

Instead, what do we see? We see this chaos. This wasn't an accident. It wasn't even a decision made by an official with legal authority. Let's be clear about exactly what happened. Russell Vought was not in the administration. He is before the Senate right now. That is why we are here tonight. He was not in the administration, but his fingerprints were all over this scheme.

According to reports, he was a driving force behind the administration's decision to freeze Federal funding. Stephen Miller, someone very close to

Donald Trump, even publicly credited Vought with coming up with the idea. It was Vought's plan that led the administration to take an action that hurt millions of Americans.

Now, I have heard from constituent after constituent, terrified about: Is this Federal funding freeze, that clearly the administration wanted to do and then a court stepped in—and it is only temporarily paused. But I have heard from my constituents because, for some of them, their funding is still in trouble. Others don't know what is going to happen next.

So here are some Minnesotans, regular people, and what they had to say following the decision to unilaterally, unconstitutionally cut off support that families across the country rely on. One wrote to me saying:

The late-night decisions, the freezing of Federal funds already appropriated by Congress from an undisclosed group of entities is outrageous, illegal, and gross mismanagement. It is the throwing of the lives of your constituents into fear and chaos.

She continued:

The administration is offering conflicting information and no real answers as to what is going on. Even more money will need to be spent. This is going to be challenged in court. It is going to be a mess instead of just working it out. What a waste.

That is right. There is a budget coming up. There are decisions to be made about taxes. There is time to debate this and decide, even if I don't agree with what the President wants to do. But there is a very clear way that this should happen, and this is for the upcoming budget. But instead, they want to make a big scene; they want to hurt a lot of people. That is what happened.

Another constituent wrote in, concerned about her client, someone who works in the area of mental health, and she talked about how her clients rely on some of this funding. She said:

Executive branch interference with this funding not only creates massive economic harms but also directly violates the Constitution's delegation of spending powers to Congress.

● This “buller” symbol identifies statements or insertions which are not spoken by a Member of the Senate on the floor.



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I will say, there is a silver lining here. Regular people are actually looking at the Constitution. They are saying: How can this happen? How can someone—an unelected billionaire—come in and try to get data? How can you just stop funding in the middle of one day, with one single memo from someone who is not even elected?

So they are like: Hmm, maybe I should go look at the Constitution. What does it say in article I? What is my role in this as a citizen in electing people?

Another Minnesotan wrote:

I am a parent of a pediatric cancer survivor, and our family relied on the Katie Beckett Program to survive before we moved to Minnesota. This program runs through State Medicaid—

She explained—

and it affords all families whose children have life-threatening diagnoses financial assistance as a secondary coverage, regardless of income, while they make their way through treatment and while recovering from the significant impacts of these treatments.

She asks:

Without access to this, what will happen to these kids?

But then again, acting in this way does seem to be a pattern, and people are figuring it out. And believe me, there are a number of people in my State who voted for Donald Trump and voted for me. OK? And why did they vote for Donald Trump? Well, they wanted change. They were worried about their costs. They thought: OK, maybe he is going to do what he says he is going to do. Maybe, he is actually going to do something and work with people to try to bring costs down.

And now they are seeing this chaos, in my mind, which we will be leading to, which we have already seen with the firing of the inspector general—just corruption, these constitutional grabs at power—unconstitutional.

One constituent who teaches a class on cancer research at the University of Minnesota wrote about this research funding. Our State has a lot of research, between Mayo and the University of Minnesota—cutting-edge research. She says:

The students I am teaching are dependent on National Institutes of Health support. The patients I am seeing are helped by the National Institutes of Health-funded clinical trials, our cancer center trial organization and the core facilities at the U of M that help conduct these trials. Cancer patients on clinical trials may die because of pausing of Federal support for these trials.

Another cancer patient:

Please do everything you can to restore National Cancer Institute funding immediately. I am in treatment for four different cancers. It is the fifth time. Why would you stop the funding? It is even impossible to contemplate.

They are referring, of course, to this memo that was sent out with the blessing of the Trump administration, under their administration, sat out there for 24 hours, and then gets repealed. But then the White House says: No, no, no. We still want to freeze all the funding.

And then a Federal judge has to come in. But, of course, that is only temporary.

A different Minnesotan worried about her niece, who is being treated for triple-negative breast cancer in an NIH-funded trial:

To have the funding cut off could have deadly consequences for my niece.

She wrote:

This is her second round with this very aggressive cancer, and she is getting results from the clinical trial. She has three small children at home and is fighting as hard as she can, but without this trial, I am not sure what her physicians would do.

Someone else from my State:

The havoc that the administration is causing with the “on again off again” freezing of Federal aid and the freeze on the work of essential public health agencies like the NIH and the CDC will have devastating consequences for our economy and citizens if allowed to stand.

She continued:

I know you will do your best to protect and stand up for Congress’s constitutional rights.

Again, my constituents—I do see this as a silver lining—are looking at what is the role of Congress? What did our Founding Fathers want? What is the role of the courts? Can the Executive just stand in there and do anything he wants?

And, of course, the answer is no, which is why you have seen litigation, which is why I have urged my constituents to write emails to me with these stories because, actually, we will create a record of exactly what is going on as these court cases continue in States all over the country, because, right now, we have an administration, a President, that took the oath to follow the Constitution, to support and defend the Constitution, but doesn’t seem to be reading it.

So she writes this:

I know you will do your best to protect and stand up for Congress’s constitutional rights. My family and I appreciate the work you do as our Senator, and I like that you work across the aisle.

She says:

During this critical time, however, we urge you to do everything you can to be in Congress to thwart these illegal acts. The extraconstitutional games need to stop, and the rule of law must stand. The President is not a king and cannot be treated as one.

Another constituent, like many others, is worried about what this freeze will mean for seniors.

As you know, our adult day center relies on Federal funding to provide essential services to seniors in our community—specifically, title III caregiver respite. These funds support a wide range of programs, including healthcare, social activities, nutritional support, all of which are crucial for the well-being of our participants. The sudden pause in Federal funding has put these vital services at risk, and we are worried about the impact on our seniors.

She continued:

Many of our participants depend on our center for daily care and support, and any disruption in our services could have severe consequences for their health and quality of

life. We are particularly concerned about the lack of clarity regarding which programs will be affected and the timeline for resolving this issue.

She concluded:

We urge you to advocate on our behalf and work with your colleagues to ensure that Federal funding for programs supporting seniors is restored as quickly as possible. Our seniors deserve stability and continuity in their care.

More on seniors from another woman:

My next-door neighbor is 81 years old. She has to get injections into both of her eyes every 13 weeks. Without the injections, she will go blind. Good Day Foundation has helped pay for the injections. As of yesterday, they are broke. My neighbor had to pay \$1,028 out of pocket yesterday. She is on a fixed income. How can Good Day Foundation get their funding back? My friend can’t afford these shots.

Another constituent, a senior herself, wrote:

I am 73 years old, and I live in housing that is covered by a voucher. I eat with SNAP funds. I am disabled and dependent on my CADI waiver to keep myself going. I can’t be homeless at my age.

Another Minnesota senior:

I am currently enrolled in the Senior Community Service Employment Program through National Able Network. National Able is a nonprofit organization that helps job seekers learn new skills and connect with area employers to fill their job openings. Each year, they help hundreds of seniors like me get a job, and I want to make sure this program continues. I know age discrimination and not having the necessary skills have been a problem for me in getting a job in the past.

He went on to say:

The funding freeze would stop the payments that this program needs to operate, and that would negatively impact me and the organization I am training with. The wages I earn while in training help me pay for bills that I otherwise wouldn’t be able to afford.

And, you know, this is part of a pattern. When the President ran for office this time, he talked about bringing healthcare costs down. He told us how beautiful it would be. Yet what do we see when they come into office? One of the first Executive orders—different than this funding freeze—was stopping one of the key programs, a pilot for generic drugs at \$2 a pop, to try to encourage more generic drugs.

And when the nominee for HHS Secretary was before our Senate committees, he would not commit to actually implementing the prescription drug negotiation bill that I had spent years trying to get passed. And we finally passed it. We finally ended the sweetheart deal that Big Pharma had because of congressional action that locked them into high prices and high profits at the expense of regular people, where Americans were paying, in many cases, twice as much as people in other countries.

It is part of the reasons why there were bus trips from Minnesota to Canada to get less expensive drugs.

My colleagues here all know that bringing down the cost of prescription

drugs has always been a top priority, because in the United States of America, no one should be forced to choose between filling their prescriptions or filling their grocery cart.

Taking on these big drug companies was not easy, they had three lobbyists—and still have three lobbyists—for every Member of Congress and spent hundreds of millions of dollars trying to stop us. AARP with us in the fight; so many seniors with us in the fight. What they didn't have was the power of 50 million American seniors who came together to say: Enough is enough.

We passed our bill. There is a \$35 cap on insulin per month, which the companies now, because of competitive pressures, have had to offer to nonseniors. There is a \$2,000 cap for Medicare for people that are paying for services, a \$2,000 cap on prescription drugs, and then we have the first 10 drugs that have been negotiated with the prices taking effect in a bit over a year.

Those first 10 drugs are done, but this administration—as the torch was handed over by the American people—this new administration is going to have to implement it. What was the result of the drug negotiations in the last administration? They picked the first 10 drugs, and they picked blockbusters. I would have done a lot more than 10, but that was the compromise that had been reached.

What are the first 10 drugs? They are drugs like Eliquis and Xarelto and Jardiance and Januvia—blockbuster drugs. The negotiated prices for those drugs, the Pharma companies agreed, even though they were suing in court—and still are and losing every single case they have brought to question the underpinnings of this bill. Republican-appointed judges, Democratic-appointed judges said: No, Congress has the right to make that change.

Those 10 drugs, the prices down 60, 70 percent—and this is my favorite number—it is going to save 9 million seniors in one year in out-of-pocket \$1.5 billion—\$1.5 billion, with a B. That is not even counting what it saves for taxpayers.

But now this program, this change in the law is in the hands of this new administration. This new administration is going to have to make sure those 10 drugs, with the negotiated prices, that that happens. But now the Biden administration, at the end of this year, as they were on schedule for 15 drugs—that is what our law that was passed in this Chamber says, 15 new drugs—they are going to have to now negotiate that with the Pharma companies.

Well, that is going to go real well when they are already talking about getting rid of some of the other drug programs that take on pharma when their nominee for HHS won't even commit to doing it. And those drugs are blockbusters too: diabetes, weight loss drugs like Ozempic, Rybelsus, Wegovy, all those drugs, they are on the line for negotiation. Mr. President, 2.3 million Medicare part D enrollees take those drugs alone.

In his confirmation hearings, as I noted, the President's Health and Human Service Secretary nominee Robert F. Kennedy, Jr., did not give a clear answer on whether or not he would uphold drug price negotiations. That is unacceptable.

Make no mistake, these actions aren't going to lower costs. They are going to raise costs. And, instead, what do we see? The chaos and confusion of all of these reasons.

So what else? Talked about healthcare; next on to education. Here is what a Minnesotan wrote me after the memo came out that was later rescinded, but then the White House said: No, no, no, we want to freeze all these funds.

A Minnesotan wrote:

I am reaching out as a constituent and a proud advocate for TRIO programs, which serve thousands of students across Minnesota and Wisconsin by providing academic, financial, and personal support.

I am concerned about the recent directive from the Office of Management and Budget to temporarily pause all activities related to Federal financial assistance.

He went on to say:

This action could significantly impact TRIO programs' ability to serve low-income, first-generation students and students with disability who rely on our services.

Please work with your colleagues in Congress to ensure that these programs continue.

Another Minnesotan called the funding freeze "extremely upsetting for me as I am someone who works in this field and spends my time working to help students, to help those less privileged than me."

He said:

One of those programs includes TRIO. Each summer I teach students, I help them, they are extremely bright, and they don't have enough support.

"I write to you," he says, "as a frustrated citizen and instructor to air my grievances as I am no longer sure what to do or how to proceed."

Yeah, I don't really blame him, because one bureaucrat can just write a memo with a plan that was laid out by Russell Vought, laid out by that guy, laid out and consistent with what was in Project 2025, and now we are actually debating him, putting him back in the Office of Management and Budget again.

One, again, of the things that I am quite astounded by is how much American citizens are looking at the Constitution.

Listen to this letter—all these in just the last few days:

I am writing to express my deep concern regarding the White House's recent decision to unilaterally freeze congressionally approved Federal funding.

So let's look at that sentence. Very clear this constituent understands that it is Congress—Democrats and Republicans—that agreed on the funding, that agreed on the funding amount, and that, unilaterally, this administration thinks they can just come in, they can just come in and take it away. That is not true. That is illegal.

"This action," the writer says, "not only disrupts essential services and institutions that rely on Federal grants and loans but also represents a troubling overreach of Executive power that directly violates our Constitution. This practice is an abuse of power that must be met with swift congressional action."

So that is why we asked our colleagues on the other side of the aisle to listen to this constituent from the State of Minnesota, who is not a constitutional law professor, but all you have to do is open up the Constitution, and this constituent is wondering, why won't everyone stand up and say: No, we are willing to work with you, Donald Trump, on efficiency measures, on making government work better, but we are willing to do it only if it is consistent with the Constitution.

She continues:

I urge you to take immediate steps to hold the administration accountable. I appreciate your leadership and look forward to your response on how you plan to address this pressing issue. Please stand firm in upholding the Constitution.

A different Minnesotan:

I am writing to you to express concern over the pause of Federal loans, grants, and foreign aid and ask you to take all possible action to block the confirmation of the nominated OMB Director Russell Vought.

She continued:

Russell Vought stated in his confirmation hearing that he would not guarantee that we would follow the laws.

Now, they are even watching the confirmation hearings. I think this is good for democracy when people realize this is serious, that it is not just a campaign commercial; it is not just something you say at a rally; it is not just something you put on X. This is real.

She says:

Russell Vought stated in his confirmation hearing that he would not guarantee he would follow the law in expending funds Congress appropriated; and, in other words, he seems to believe he and the President have authority to selectively decide to make these pauses permanent, regardless of what Congress has appropriated. This is a grave violation of the constitutional authority granted to Congress and shows brazen disrespect for the American people's elected representative.

I actually couldn't write it better, I like that, "brazen disrespect." And what I want to see is people understanding that this is brazen disrespect. It is brazen disrespect of the people that work in the U.S. Senate and in the House. But, OK, put that aside—it is brazen disrespect of the people who sent us here.

As I said on the day of Donald Trump's inauguration, in that beautiful Rotunda, when he brought that inauguration inside, that there was some pretty powerful people in that room. I think people saw the photos of the oligarchs and the like. But when it comes to the elected officials in that room—whether they are Representatives, Senators, or the President or the Vice President—their power actually

didn't come from the people in that room. Their power comes from the people outside of that room.

So when this constituent says that this was brazen disrespect in freezing the funds or devising this plan that Russell Vought had, she gets it, she gets it; this is brazen disrespect of our democracy, no matter what party you are in.

She goes on to say:

Please begin educating constituents on the severity of this issue.

I am trying to do it tonight. Hopefully, some people are watching on C-SPAN.

Please also tell them how they can reach out to their representatives in the White House to voice their disapproval. Most people do not understand the power and leverage that the Office of Management and Budget Director has.

I think that is true. Most people don't understand it. That is why we are here tonight.

They need to understand the direct impact these actions will have on day-to-day life for them and their neighbors and what their options are for making their voices heard.

So this chaos and corruption and this just assault on our constitutional powers, we have been seeing this since day one. Chaos is up, corruption is up, and, yes, egg prices are up. Because none of this is going to help people with their bills.

One great example of this when you look at everything that has been going and say how do I tie this together, we know it is distraction, talking about things that aren't really going to help people, one of the things that was also hard to understand, but is all connected when you connect the dots was the firing—the illegal firings—of the nonpartisan inspectors general.

This was, remember—it was just about 10 days ago—the middle-of-the-night purge of government watchdogs, and it was a serious abuse of power. These are the people that are watching over the taxpayer money. These are the ones, no matter if the President is a Democrat or Republican, they go in, they look at what is going on in the Agency, they often discover things like fraud. They discover things like paybacks. They discover things like bribes, because they are looking at all the books, and they are not just people sitting inside the Agency. Those were the people who were purged; those were the people who were fired; those are the people who have been appointed during both Democratic and Republican administrations.

What is it that Shakespeare said?

The first thing you do is kill all the lawyers.

Well, with this administration, the first thing they did was kill off the inspectors general. Congress passed the Inspector General Act in 1978 to establish independent, nonpartisan inspectors general in each Agency to investigate waste, fraud, and abuse, and prevent improper political influence and favoritism.

Inspectors general also save taxpayer money. They investigate corruption—as I just mentioned—and waste under administrations, regardless of party.

And studies have shown that for every dollar invested in Federal inspectors general, Americans saved approximately \$13. That is what they discover; they discover problems. To protect inspectors general from political interference, Congress has passed safeguards into law, including specific requirements that must be followed if they are going to be removed from their positions by a President.

The law, which can be found—I am doing this for my very informed constituents who have been writing the office. Now they can look at a new law. We care about the laws; that is what we are supposed to do here, we pass laws.

The law, which can be found at title V, section 403(b), states:

If an inspector general is removed from office or is transferred to another position or location within an establishment, the President shall communicate in writing the substantive rationale, including detailed and case specific reasons for any such removal or transfer to both Houses of Congress, including the appropriate congressional committees, not later than 30 days before the removal or transfer.

Congress wrote these requirements into law to provide inspectors general protection from political interference, to let Congress know what was going on.

The President's decision, in which he just completely ignored these requirements and fired them in the middle of the night, is a violation of law.

Firing these critical watchdogs, just like freezing the funding from an unnamed bureaucrat with a plan that was put in place from Russell Vought, just like as my colleagues have been talking about tonight, firing Justice Department officials or asking for a list of people who work at the FBI just because they were assigned to a certain case—this is not consistent with democracy.

I am a former prosecutor. I always believed that my job was to do my job without fear or favor. No matter who we were prosecuting, no matter who was working with me, we followed the law. That is what has gone amok here.

And that is why Americans are reading the Constitution. That is why they are calling this Senate so much that they shut the phone lines down the other day. That is why they are writing e-mails—and, by the way, the benefit of that is we also have a record of the harm that is being caused.

More than ever, the responsibility will fall on Congress and the people that elect us to conduct oversight and to ensure that the people in our government are working for the American people—not their unelected billionaire friends.

More, Federal aid, now foreign aid. Why would people in my State care about that? Well, we actually do a lot with the world around us. We have a

number of businesses that do business all around the world. We have one of the highest rates of adoption from foreign countries. We have a number of refugees that have come to our State—Somali, Liberian, Hmong—that are a big part of the fabric of the State of Minnesota. We have one of the lowest unemployment rates in the Nation. We are a successful economy in our State, and a lot of that has to do with the fact that we didn't close down our doors, that we brought in people to work in the jobs, to work in the farms, to work in our manufacturing companies.

So that is one of the reasons we care about the world around us, but there is another. My constituents actually see that if you just shut off foreign aid—as what is happening right now in our country—in the world around you, you are going to have a less secure America. You are going to create this huge opening for countries like Russia and China—which have been expending money in developing nations—to come in and fill the void.

One Minnesotan wrote: The freeze on U.S. foreign aid will prevent many vulnerable people from accessing critical resources, including clean water for infants, help for farmers, to feed their families, medications for kids. People will needlessly suffer and die.

He continued: The freeze also risks irreparably damaging our country's reputation and credibility and gives opening to malign governments and terrorist groups. Further, it may increase irregular migration both in the Western Hemisphere and beyond. In short, a halt of programs will create instability, undermining the administration's important foreign policy goals to make the U.S. safer, stronger, and more prosperous.

And I should say a number of leading Republicans in my State have come out very strongly against what is going on with USAID for two reasons: One, they care about the world around them—maybe three—two, they understand the impact it has on America; and, three, they figure if he is going to start cherry-picking one Agency and just decide to shut it down in violation of article I and all of these things I have talked about of Congress's right to have the decision of funding, if he can do that, what Agency is he going to pick next? He can just cherry-pick anything.

Someone else said: I am deeply concerned that any cuts to U.S. foreign assistance programs that save lives, promote global stability, and keep Americans safe will be a bad thing.

She continued: U.S. foreign assistance is not only the right thing to do, it is the smart thing to do. At less than 1 percent of the Federal budget, it is a cheap and effective tool for improving global stability, gaining U.S. allies, and reducing the need for more U.S. aid in the future. Without this support, millions of people will face devastating and, in some cases, deadly consequences.

She is exactly right.

Yet yesterday, as our colleagues know, the administration announced its intent to end USAID. The decision to abruptly end this when it counters extremism, fights diseases, and creates more markets for U.S. exports—my State, for instance, is the fourth biggest ag exporting State in the Nation—that decision was reckless, and it was dangerous, just like the decision to suddenly assess our allies—our allies—of Canada and Mexico, 25 percent on tariffs—25 percent tariffs. It is just not good for our economy.

When I think about the importance of USAID, I always think about a story that former President Bill Clinton used to tell about how, at one point, he went to an African nation, and he toured some new factories that America had helped invest in, and they were making shirts, and he got a shirt, and he put that shirt in front of the closet so that every single time he opened the closet, he saw that shirt, and he thought, They don't hate us. They actually like us. They like our country.

And when they grow, as we have seen around the world, they are going to want to do business with America. They are going to want to buy American goods. They are going to stand with us when we have foreign enemies that attack us.

All that, just pluck all that out of there. That is exactly what the Trump administration is doing right now. When we turn our backs on our friends across the globe, they will look elsewhere for support when they need it, including countries like China and Russia. It isn't only about being there for countries in need. It is also about our national security.

Then other constituents—of thousands and thousands and thousands of emails and calls that we have gotten in just the last few days—are concerned about what this is going to do for jobs.

One Minnesotan wrote: I had a meeting with a nonprofit canceled this morning that is working on energy projects in southwest Minnesota. It was funded by a Department of Energy grant. At least half a dozen people will stop working on a project because of this. Due to the freeze on approvals, I could be laid off with thousands of other people I work with.

A different constituent who runs another nonprofit was shocked: This grant was only a drop in the budget bucket, but this is just a tiny example of the ripple effect that this pause in funding will have throughout Minnesota where no doubt hundreds, if not thousands, rely on some funding. This pause will not harm us as an organization, but I can imagine how services will be impacted.

Other Minnesotans fear that the freeze could upend their entire family's livelihood just to have this happen so suddenly.

As of today, they write: My wife and I will both lose our jobs. I will be unable to make phone calls as a deaf per-

son using the video relay phone systems. We will lose our house and be unable to care for our disabled son. It will also affect the hundreds of thousands of disabled people my small U.S. Department of Education grant serves.

Another constituent, a reverend, wrote: We are a family that has a disabled son. He is 15 years old, a freshman in high school, and is active in the community.

She continued: We urge all leaders to protect programs essential to individuals who are often excluded. We especially want people with Down's Syndrome, autism, or other developmental disabilities and their families to be recognized as valuable and important for their role in the world.

So what this is, is chaos, and people are starting to think of, How will this work in my own family? Just today, we had a hearing of the Agriculture Committee. As you think about jobs and you think about the effect on people, we had the witnesses of the head of the National Farm Bureau and the head of the National Farmers Union there as our first witnesses. Both of them had submitted pretty pointed letters that completely set out the alarms on this administration's plan to put in these tariffs.

And I am a fan of targeted tariffs. I think you can do it. I have seen it with steel dumping from China. I have seen that once we did that and fought back, we were able to keep the iron ore mines in northern Minnesota, and I have supported other tariffs as well. But that is not what this is. This is an across the board—across the board—tariff.

The day after imposing these tariffs—again, more chaos just like we saw with the funding freeze—the administration decided to delay them. It created more uncertainty for Americans. But one thing is certain: These tariffs aren't going to lower the price of groceries, like the President promised in his campaign. They are going to raise the price of groceries.

They are not going to lower the price of gas; they are going to raise it. They are not going to lower the price of housing; in fact, the Builders Association came out against them. They are going to raise it. Tariffs are taxes, and the new tariffs would be a tax increase on families of over \$1,000 a year.

Beyond the higher costs, these tariffs would threaten our critical trade partnerships with our neighbors, Canada and Mexico. The U.S.-Canada relationship is particularly important for my State. President Harry Truman once said Canada's relationship with the United States was "compounded of one part proximity and nine parts good will and common sense."

I couldn't agree more. Our two countries share the world's largest, longest land border, more than 5,500 miles; and almost 400,000 people and about \$3 billion in goods and services cross it every day.

Minnesota exports more goods to Canada—ranging from ag products to

machinery to medical devices—than we sell to our second and third largest markets combined. Minnesota exports about \$7 billion worth of goods to Canada each year, and overall, Canada imported over \$354 billion in American goods in 2023 alone.

That trade relationship with an ally—an ally that at one point on their Embassy draped their Embassy with banners that said "friend, ally, partner"—that strengthens our economy and our national security, it supports our manufacturers, farmers, and ranchers. It creates jobs. But the administration's announcement unravels these ties.

When you look at the groups that came out against the new tariffs within 24 hours of the announcement, you can see why the President had to scramble back and hit a pause. But again, damage done. Because if you are a business in another country and you think, I don't know if I am going to—there might be a tariff on that. If you are in Canada, you are like: Maybe I should get my next shipment from somewhere else because I don't know if I am going to be able to depend on the United States as a trading partner.

The U.S. Chamber of Commerce said the tariffs will only raise prices for American families and upend supply chains. Then you have both the National Association of Manufacturers and the International Association of Machinists saying they will put American manufacturing jobs at risk.

The American Farm Bureau, as just noted, warns that these tariffs threaten to deliver another blow to the finances of farm families. And the National Association of Home Builders said they would increase the cost of construction and consumers will end up paying in the form of higher home prices.

So you have complaints from the workers' side; you have complaints from the business side, and you have complaints from the farm side. I would say you are in trouble.

And it is not only these groups, which do represent thousands and thousands and thousands of businesses and workers; it is people right in this building.

And it is not just the Democrats who are here speaking tonight about what this chaos is doing to American families. Senator MCCONNELL put it pretty well when he talked today about this at the Agriculture hearing, but he said, "It will be paid for by American consumers." He is absolutely right.

Slapping new taxes on American families while planning more massive tax cuts for billionaires is not how you strengthen our economy. Lives and livelihoods are at stake.

When I look at these constituent letters—and I literally have only read a fraction of them—I see that people are waking up. They are energized. They are starting to see that, you know, I don't feel like I have much control over my life, and maybe that is why I voted

for change in this election—but I actually wanted it to happen. And the other thing they say is I actually wanted Democrats and Republicans to work across the aisle, like we do so much in this Senate.

But what they didn't vote for, what they didn't vote for was chaos. What they didn't vote for was corruption. What they didn't vote for was an unelected billionaire deciding he is just going to come in and run the government.

They actually said, OK, I want to tip the scales a little. I want to see what can happen. Someone else in there.

And then they thought we were going to work it out. They thought we were going to work on how to make government more efficient. They thought we were going to work on how to get more housing with all these things that are incredible around my State with incentives for private entities to work to do things like expand childcare.

Or a bunch of businesses get together, we can do some things to create more incentives to make that happen, to expand existing private childcare or this idea of creating more smaller childcare facilities so that they are all ones in a row, apartment after apartment, so that they can bring in kids in the smaller businesses.

Or they thought maybe they are going to do something about consolidation, or maybe they are going to do something so my kids, when they look at the internet, they don't see pornography and they don't get fentanyl dealers online.

But instead, what do they see? Well, I guess talk about Panama and Greenland and talk about all kinds of things that really aren't relevant to their lives. They want us to do things that are relevant to their lives, and they do not want some unelected guy to come in and make all these decisions for them.

These Minnesotans are only some, but not all, of the lives that this administration is playing with. They deserve better. The people of this country deserve competence, not chaos. We have already seen what happens when Russell Vought's vision for the Office of Management and Budget is put into action. It leads to disorder. It leads to uncertainty. It leads to unconstitutional power grabs that hurt Americans. And that was even before he had the job because, you see, this was his plan from the very beginning.

I implore my colleagues on the other side of the aisle to vote no on this nomination; to stand up as our constituents have asked us to stand up, whether they are Democrats or Republicans—no to chaos, no to corruption. Uphold the values of our Constitution.

When you look at these nominees, fulfill your duties of advice and consent. Why rubberstamp every single one of these nominees? Why would you do that? Instead, look at what they plan to do. Are they truly qualified or do they actually have the interests of

the Agency they are supposed to run and the interests of the American people at heart? Then make your decision.

We cannot put someone in charge of the Office of Management and Budget—which, by the way, has now become a household word—an Agency that many people had never heard of in my State, but they are now writing letters in droves about the fact that they don't understand why an unelected bureaucrat could issue that memo and why we would put someone in place that devised this strategy, someone who has already demonstrated that he will abuse his power.

Article I of our Constitution, which so many of my constituents are now reading up on, makes it clear that decisions about Federal funding belong to Congress, not the President, and certainly not the Director of the Office of Management and Budget.

Russell Vought has shown blatant disrespect for the Constitution and the American people. He is not the man for this job.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. CRAMER). The Senator from New Jersey.

Mr. KIM. Mr. President, I rise today because we have a crisis of confidence in our government. It is a crisis that is being driven by the Trump administration with one goal in mind: to let the well-off and the well-connected play by their own set of rules while you, the American people, continue to scrape by.

It is a crisis that puts us at a crossroads. Will we take the steps necessary to address the corruption and restore trust or will we break our institutions even further and usher in a golden age of corruption?

In order to answer those questions, we need to have a real understanding of a few things. One, how deep is this crisis in confidence? Two, in what way is the Trump administration putting their thumb on the scale for the well-off and the well-connected? Three, how is that impacting the rest of us and how will it impact America's future? Four, and finally, how can we fight back?

Now, let's start with the crisis that we are in. When I talk about this crisis in confidence, what we are talking about is the belief that your government is working for you; that it is working for the American people—all of its people—a belief that, no matter the challenge you face or the ambitions that you have, that your government has your best interests at heart. That is the fundamental credence of our democracy. It is of, by, and for the people. And that belief is always important. But when times are tough, it is even more critical than ever.

Let's be clear: These are tough times. I don't think there is a single person in America that would disagree with that. We have challenges before us. We have challenges with the high cost of living and affordability problems. It is a top

issue that I hear about in my home State of New Jersey.

We have a lot of crises of confidence in this moment about whether or not we can step up as a nation and be able to rise through the challenges that we face. And the challenges we face are significant. We have to acknowledge that.

Over the past couple of years, as we recover from a generationally defining pandemic, I have heard from so many families who just don't believe that they can get ahead. They don't believe or think that they will do better than their parents and that their kids won't do better than them.

I think about that in my own family situation—my parents coming here, emigrating to this Nation 50 years ago. And I remember asking them why they did it. And my parents said to me just one simple line. They said: We did it because we felt that here in America, we could guarantee that the family that we raise—that you and your sister—would have a better life and more opportunities than we do. That was it. It was that simple.

They weren't driven by greed. They weren't trying to take it all for themselves, as if this was some zero-sum, survival of the fittest. It was a sense of America and a sense of the opportunity that it can bring for everyone, including two immigrants from South Korea who were born during the Korean war into poverty and came to this Nation.

And now, as they get older, there are challenges that they face as being seniors, the elderly—the healthcare and other challenges that they face with their budget fixed. And now myself, as a father of a 7-year-old and 9-year-old, I wonder: What kind of America are my kids going to grow up in?

I know it is not just my family that worries about this. When the costs of basic goods go up, it makes it harder to save for everybody. And when families can't save, it makes it harder to achieve that crown jewel of the American dream—owning a home, something that my family has struggled with over the years, something that so many other families are facing right now as we see the cost of owning a home skyrocket. It puts that dream even more out of reach. And for those that can't own, even the cost of rental prices are going through the roof, demoralizing people.

I remember hearing from this young man, a recent college graduate, and he just came to me just feeling so deflated. He said: I don't think I am ever going to own a home. That is how he put it. I have to tell you, just hearing that from him, just how pessimistic he was, just how demoralized he was about his place in our society—but it wasn't just about his place. It was about this moment for this country and the fact that he doesn't see us moving in a trajectory where someone like himself and people in his generation are going to be able to have that opportunity and that chance that generations before had.

So you throw in that rising cost of higher education that he is struggling with, trying to pay off the bills, trying to keep up with student debt, and you have that general sense that we are losing that sense that we are part of something bigger than all of us.

It is easy to understand why people just don't think the system that should be working for them is working for them. That is the place that we are in right now—that in this moment we find ourselves living through the moment of the greatest amount of inequality in our Nation's history, even worse than the Robber Baron Age that we studied about in history books; that somehow we see just such extraordinary wealth but for just a few, whereas the vast majority of Americans are struggling paycheck to paycheck and won't be able to step up if they face some type of crisis, a car accident or something else that could just lead them into catastrophe.

That lack of trust is very clear in the numbers that we see from the American people. A Pew study from last summer showed that public trust in the Federal Government is at approximately 22 percent. And in 2023, only 16 percent said the government always or most of the time is something that you can trust. According to Pew, that was among the lowest tally in nearly 70 years.

That number was reflected in a survey conducted by the Partnership for Public Service in the spring of 2024. Their research shows that only 23 percent of Americans trust the Federal Government. That is down from 35 percent the year before. We are just seeing it go down and down. Only 15 percent think the government is transparent, down from 21 percent the year before.

This erosion that we are continuing to see in our country and in the public trust has to be at top of line, because how can a government function, how can a democracy function, with that much distrust?

Alarming in that group is trust among people age 18 to 34—that age group of that young man I told you about who had such pessimism about his future. And in that group, we saw trust decline by half of 30 percent to 15 percent.

Now, you might think this is just maybe a red State problem. But let me tell you, it is a massive issue in my home State of New Jersey, as well. In May of 2023, a poll by Fairleigh Dickinson University showed that over 80 percent of New Jersey residents—that is over 80 percent—believe that their State's politicians are corrupt. That shows you just such a devastating number, the distrust that is out there and how widespread it is.

We certainly have had our challenges of late in New Jersey. When you see the corruption, when you hear about the news of indictments and convictions—I remember one time I went to a neighbor of mine, asked him what he thought about the state of corruption

in New Jersey, and he just said: That is New Jersey. He threw up his hands.

This sense of helplessness, this sense of apathy, the sense that that is just how things are now; there is nothing we can do about it—there are a variety of reasons why this is a case in New Jersey, but it all comes back to the same thing, a singular question: Are the people in your government working for you or are they working for themselves? Are they trying to lift up their own personal wealth or to look out for their friends or their associates or their families or for special interests?

I always often felt like one of the most important questions you can get a sense from the people is this question of: Do your elected officials, do your government officials care about you? Because sometimes it just feels like we are in this moment in this country where we have this crisis of empathy right now; that we are losing touch with that idea that we are part of something bigger than all of us. We are having trouble. We are struggling to see the world through someone else's eyes and walk in their shoes.

In this Nation of over 330 million people, how can we continue if we continue to only think about ourselves and lose sight of that which is around us?

Obviously, this is all the more important in times like these when we need our government working to solve the problems that we face. As we said, we face significant challenges.

So what happens when we have a government where the people aren't working in the public interests, when those that are charged by the people to take up the public common good are not following through? What happens when we have a government where those people working to protect the public interests are fired or pushed out or marginalized?

Luckily for us, history may not repeat, but it certainly rhymes. The Founding Fathers established the Federal workforce to be one built on merit. It was something that they took quite seriously—so seriously, in fact, that during debate in the weeks after Washington's first inauguration, James Madison stated:

Wanton removal of a meritorious officer is an impeachable offense.

George Washington himself wrote that appointments into public service would be the most difficult and delicate part of his work.

In the history of the Federal service, in a report published by the Office of Personnel Management, the evolution of this debate from one of merit first to one of political gain becomes very apparent. As political parties grew, so did the pendulum swing over retaliation and actions that further politicized public servant positions, but the dam broke just a generation after the founding of the Republic.

The Tenure of Office Act of 1820—not exactly a household name—was one of the first dominoes to fall. It led to

what was eventually called the spoils system. By limiting the terms of many officials to 4 years, in corresponding to the President, it basically meant that public servants would come in and out with the tides of the Presidency and not be based on need or qualifications—just a pendulum swing of partisanship—the qualification being that of loyalty rather than skill or merit. The impact of the spoils system became very apparent, which was of wholesale patronage and corruption and a rejection of the status quo that looks very familiar to what we see today.

Senator Henry Clay, on the Senate floor, called it a “detestable system”—a “detestable system.”

George William Curtis, one of the leaders in the fight to reform the civil service, said that the spoils system “presents a most ridiculous, revolting, and disheartening spectacle.” He said that, through it, the United States seethes with intrigue and corruption.”

Over time, the pushback against the system and the damage it did to the U.S. Government and its people built a reform movement that eventually resulted in the passage and enactment of the Pendleton Act in 1883. In many ways, the Pendleton Act brought our public service back to its original roots—codifying it, protecting it—by calling for an open selection of government employees and creating a Civil Service Commission—our modern civil service—and it required that the applicants pass a civil service exam. The bill was the first domino of several to help to restore trust in government by ensuring that those who serve will serve the people and not themselves—will serve the people and not just some loyalty test.

In so many ways, the battle that led to the passage of the Pendleton Act continues today and answers the first question I posed: How deep does our crisis and confidence in our government go?

In short, it goes back to a friction we have seen for most of our history. It is a friction between those who want to use power for their gain—to enrich themselves and their party—at the expense of other Americans. On the other side are those who seek only to swear an oath to the Constitution and to deliver on the promise of making the next American generation more prosperous and secure. To have that sense of progress as a nation, which we know we cannot take for granted, we have to work for it.

So, when you look at Donald Trump or look at Elon Musk, you are not seeing something new. You are not seeing the disruptors they tell you that they are. You are not seeing an innovator. You are seeing something that is very old, just another power-hungry politician—an elite figure—seeking to hoard power at the expense of real American families—in this moment right now, as I said, that is a moment of the greatest amount of inequality in our Nation's history—and doing that by attacking

the very people who work for the people, and they are not beholden to the well-off and the well-connected.

Another person leading the charge to bring us back to the golden age of corruption of the 1800s is a man named Russell Vought.

Now, Russell Vought was born to make corruption safe again. As a staffer in the House and the Senate, he worked for Members of both Chambers who attacked and demeaned civil servants in order to get them out of the way and let big corporate interests through. He worked for nearly a decade at the Heritage Foundation, taking dark corporate money and translating it into a systematic takedown of the same protections those corporations were lobbying against.

When the Trump administration came into office in 2017, Mr. Vought was one of the first in the building at the Office of Management and Budget, the OMB. Then, like now, Senators had serious concerns when he was nominated then for Deputy Director and, eventually, for Director of OMB.

Now this brings me to my second question: In what ways is the Trump administration putting the thumb on the scale for the well-off and well-connected?

Well, let's look at it. Let's look at Project 2025, Mr. Vought's guidebook for attacking the core of the very principles our Founders wrote into the Constitution.

Our Founding Fathers wanted to ensure checks and balances. They wanted to make sure we didn't swap one monarch for another. Vought believes that the President has a right to stop funds that Congress has approved from getting to the places we approved them to go. That means that, even if your elected officials approve of money to go toward building a road or investing in a school in your community or trying to get your kids childcare, Russell Vought believes that Donald Trump should be able to just stop it from getting to them—just because.

Now, I say "Donald Trump" because Russell Vought is a champion of something called the unitary executive theory. I know that may sound like a half-baked physics idea, but Vought believes that all of the power in the executive branch belongs to the President and to the President alone.

Mr. Vought even said in an interview, just a few months ago, that there are "no independent Agencies"—warping the power of the Presidency to supersede Congress and the independence of Agencies that have massive authorities—given to them, by the way, by Congress, to protect the American people. This is core in clearing the field for the well-off and the well-connected by warping that and trying to change the fundamental balance of our government across three branches.

Finally, by weakening the ability to fund the work that they do and to operate independently, it is Mr. Vought's attacks on civil servants—the very po-

sitions put into place more than 140 years ago to stop rampant corruption and patronage—it is his attacks that threaten to take us back in time.

In a speech last year, Mr. Vought said he wants civil servants to be "traumatically affected."

He said:

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.

He went on to say:

We want their funding to be shut down so that the EPA can't do all the rules against our energy industry because they have no bandwidth financially to do so. We want to put them—

our public servants—in trauma.

Trauma. He used that word "trauma." I want you to think about that for a second. This is an American—an American—who is asking for our vote here in the U.S. Senate to be confirmed as a senior government official, as someone who will lead an incredibly important part of our executive branch, and be a top adviser to the President; an American who will take an oath to support and defend the Constitution; an American who is actively saying he wants to traumatize his fellow Americans—other Americans—who have also sworn that oath to our Constitution.

Now, I may disagree with my colleagues on the other side of the aisle, but I don't wish to traumatize them. I don't wish them harm. How is it that we have found ourselves in this place where Americans call and see other Americans as the enemy? I talk with Democrats and Republicans across New Jersey. They may have disagreements, but they don't want to traumatize each other.

This is not who we are as Americans, but it is what Mr. Vought wants to inflict on the people who show up to work each and every day to serve you, the American people. These are people who are trying to serve you, not themselves, but they are being demonized; they are being attacked, disrespected. And for those he can't traumatize out of a job, he is going to try to change their status as employees of the Federal Government so that he can push them out.

Maybe you have heard of something called Schedule F. If you haven't, let me put it into simple terms: Russell Vought wants to, basically, bring back the same policies that started the chain of events that led to the spoils system. He wants to make it so that civil servants have their protections removed, giving partisan leaders the ability to fire them and put in their own political staff.

We are already hearing and seeing this. There are reports that those at the White House and elsewhere are asking civil servants—asking those in jobs or who are seeking jobs—who they voted for in the last election, about campaign donations, and about party

affiliation rather than just their commitment to the Constitution.

My colleagues on the other side of the aisle would say that a President should have the ability to appoint their own staff, and I have agreement with that in broad strokes, but there is a reason we have different kinds of government workers. It is because the government is meant to do the work of the people, not be completely bent to the will of a particular political party.

I speak from personal experience. I was proud to be a civil servant. I believe I am actually one of only a handful of the Members of Congress who currently serves who worked as a civil servant. I worked under President Bush and President Obama. I served a nation, not a party or a specific President, and that is the way it should be. Frankly, the oath that I swore as a civil servant is the same as what I recite here in this Chamber, and we could all be better off if we would take the mindset and approach of our civil servants.

If we just let President Trump fire civil servants and replace them with people like Mr. Vought or with people who Mr. Vought deems loyal enough to the President to bring on board, the protections our Founders envisioned to prevent the corrupting influence of power and the corrupting power of that influence will completely override any ability to make change for the rest of us, and we are seeing this in realtime right now.

(Mr. CASSIDY assumed the Chair.)

This leads me to my third question: What is the impact of this corruption and these attacks on our neighbors and our national security?

The number of calls and emails and visits to my office I have gotten over the past weeks has been overwhelming. First of all, I want to thank everybody who has reached out to express their opinions and their concerns. We would be better off if we had that kind of consistent engagement from the American people, paying attention to the work that is being done in government and having their voices heard. And I want to thank my team for their service in being responsive to those concerns.

Now, starting with a memo from OMB freezing Federal funding, there has been panic across New Jersey and, frankly, the country about the funds that we approve as Congress—funds that are your funds as taxpayers. And they have been taken away from you by the Trump administration.

I want to share a couple examples of the notes I have gotten from people in my State who are being hurt by the systematic attempt to fire civil servants and strip away programs that help working families to clear the way for the Trump administration to let the well-off and the well-connected take control, as they get ready to plan for their big tax giveaway to the wealthiest Americans and the biggest corporations, taking that away from the rest of the American people.

I got a letter from Julia, a community leader who runs an organization in central Jersey that helps kids and seniors and people just trying to get by. She said:

The new Administration's "pause on all activities related to obligation or disbursement" of funds for federal grants to non-governmental organizations would have had an immediate and negative effect on the low-income, working folks we all serve across New Jersey.

She went on to say:

Children in Head Start and Early Head Start, quality child care and after school services improve their physical and cognitive development while their parents pursue employment and training.

That these programs would struggle.

The WIC Nutrition Program provides essential access to healthy foods for pregnant women and young children leading to lifelong health benefits.

That this would be on the chopping block.

Pregnant women in our maternal health programs are less likely to have preterm or low-birth weight deliveries, with immediate and sustained health benefits and cost savings.

That that would be a detriment.

Medicare navigation services for seniors on fixed, low incomes are helpful and enable them to live independently and longer.

And that that is something they won't be able to count on.

For every child raised by a kinship caregiver, our state saves thousands in foster care payments it would otherwise incur with public dollars. It matters that these programs are delivered by nonprofit organizations that provide a continuum of services that support economic activity and make our whole community more resilient.

This is one organization helping tens of thousands in our State. And I want to share one quick figure that stuck out to me. Of the approximately \$13 million in grants they received, they estimate an economic benefit to New Jersey of around \$52 million saved.

So for my colleagues not convinced by our attempts to feed children and provide healthcare to seniors, you might be interested to hear that providing these services is the fiscally responsible thing to do as well.

Let's look at the other impacts these draconian cuts could have on New Jersey families. We should work to keep our communities safe. If these cuts persist, grants to law enforcement and homeland security activities will be cut off, putting us in danger.

We should work to be prepared for disasters like wildfires and hurricanes. Public assistance and hazard mitigation grants from the Disaster Relief Fund help communities quickly respond to, recover from, and prepare for major disasters that might not go to the many communities that are struggling after severe natural disasters.

As our neighbors in New Jersey continue to recover from storms from even more than a decade ago—as Superstorm Sandy shattered so many lives, continues to wreak havoc, and many of those families are still not

back in their homes—our government should never abandon them.

We should work to build the best infrastructure—roads and bridges and public transit and more—take it into the next generation with universal broadband and connectivity on so many fronts that are necessary for all families. We should be able to work together to build that infrastructure so that your families can get to work and your kids can get to school and our businesses can thrive. But that funding is at risk.

We should work to combat the fentanyl crisis and the mental health crisis by investing in proven programs that save lives, programs that could be on the chopping block if these cuts persist.

We should invest in lifesaving medical research so that this is the last generation that will have to suffer through cancer, Alzheimer's disease, diabetes. Cutting this funding means cutting clinical trials at NIH Clinical Centers all across the country. The American people deserve better than that.

We should work to provide the best education for our next generation. As a father of a 7-year-old and a 9-year-old, I see every day the impacts a good education has on them. I myself am a public school kid from New Jersey, something that we are proud of in New Jersey, but knowing that we still have so much more work to do to make that available to everyone. This is a process we have to continue. You cannot take it for granted.

Right now, Head Start programs that provide comprehensive early childhood education for more than 800,000 kids are being frozen. With teachers and staff not getting paid, programs may not be able to stay open. Childcare programs could also be next to close without funding being delivered. And our K-12 schools will lose critical funding from title I, IDEA, Impact Aid, and other programs that can keep their doors open and lights on in the middle of the school year.

From healthcare to small business support, to protecting our veterans and providing support to those suffering through hunger, the examples of the kinds of impacts and the people impacted by these cuts are almost endless, and they are a reminder of who is on the losing side when corruption and corporate greed win out.

And beyond the impacts on our communities, the impact on our national security is real. And these stories of Mr. Musk and his band of 20-some-things raiding government Agencies and making threats to workers isn't some example of brave tech disrupters innovating their way to efficiency and better results. In fact, what we are seeing from this administration is quite the opposite: stories of dangerous incompetence.

Late yesterday, the New York Times reported that the White House ordered the CIA to send an unclassified email

listing all the employees hired over the past 2 years. Many of these new employees were hired to help us deal with the rising challenges of China and Russia and of other threats that we face out there. Now, they are effectively being exposed, made vulnerable to our adversaries, because the Trump administration simply wants to traumatize public servants.

We are doing the work of our adversaries for them. One example of this is the attacks that we see against USAID. And as I have seen what has unfolded this week at USAID, it actually reminded me of my first moments in public service. A little over 20 years ago, I started my very first day working for the U.S. Government. I remember walking up to the doors of the Ronald Reagan building because I was starting my first day at USAID.

I had just graduated college, and I was proud to have a chance to serve this Nation and proud to serve at a place like USAID. And it was the public servants there that showed me what community meant, showed me that someone like me has every bit as much right to represent and to work and serve our country—because it was something I wasn't sure about when I first showed up to this town.

I remember stepping out at Union Station and seeing the beautiful dome of the Capitol, and I was simultaneously inspired but also terrified. I felt imposter syndrome: Who am I to be able to represent and serve this country? I am a son of immigrants, from a family of political nobodies, and I thought serving this country, working in government wasn't for me.

I worked alongside public servants at USAID who helped with the rehabilitation of ex-child soldiers in Uganda, others that worked on combating malaria and helping save millions of lives. I was working at USAID around the time of the Indian Ocean tsunami, if you remember that catastrophe, a 9.1-magnitude earthquake killing an estimated 240,000 people in 14 nations across two continents.

And USAID stepped up, helping support those families living in dire conditions, having faced a catastrophe unlike anything we had seen in generations—but also building toward the future, creating early warning systems across the world. It was USAID that helped deliver that to countries all across this world to help better prepare for the next disaster.

Later in my career, I worked at the White House National Security Council. I was working on helping coordinate the counter-ISIS fight about a decade ago. I remember one particular moment in August 2014 where we saw ISIS going and attacking a religious minority of a people called the Yazidi people. And the Yazidis were forced out from their communities. And they fled up on top of a mountain called Sinjar Mountain, tried to take refuge there, while they were surrounded by ISIS terrorists who were hell-bent on committing genocide and a mass atrocity.

And we in the U.S. Government were trying to figure out: What can we do? What can we do to try to help save these people, tens of thousands of people, trapped on a mountain, deep in enemy territory on the other side of the world? Can we help them with humanitarian airdrops? Is there a way we can build a humanitarian corridor off that mountain? Are there ways in which we can try to protect them from being annihilated?

And you want to know who the first Americans were that went there under dangerous circumstances, deep in enemy territory? It was a USAID DART team, a disaster assistance response team, there alongside our military, that helped the President of the United States make decisions in the Situation Room about what to do next, about whether or not we were going to decide to protect these people or not.

And the President, based off of the information provided by USAID, made the decision to conduct humanitarian airdrops and be able to provide over-flight coverage and be able to provide support and security to those people. And we were able to get them off that mountain, and it was one of the finest moments I had ever seen in government. On those days, I saw the best of us, and I saw a government that can inspire.

We see USAID working on disease eradication, on agriculture, global health, humanitarian aid and economic growth, food security, clean water; helping with the eradication of smallpox; saving countless lives through simple oral rehydration therapies—things like that—that have had immeasurable, countless benefits. It was a legacy that excited me when I walked up on my first day at work as a recent college grad.

And then, just this past Monday, I walked through those same doors at the Reagan building yet again, only to find it empty, apart from a security guard who I went up to, and he told me that he had instructions to bar and prevent any USAID employee from entering the building that day, to bar public servants from going to the office to do the work that they are entrusted by the American people to do.

It was just despicable, the demonization of public servants.

Now, let's remember why USAID exists. American global leadership has always been hand in hand with our foreign assistance, from the Marshall Plan forward, under both Democrats and Republicans.

Kennedy, in 1961, said:

The program requires a highly professional skilled service, attracting substantial numbers of high caliber men and women capable of sensitive dealing with other governments, and with a deep understanding of the process of economic development.

He went on to say:

In the face of these weaknesses and inadequacies—

Of the previous system—

it is proper that we draw back and ask with candor a fundamental question: Is a foreign aid program really necessary?

The answer is that there is no escaping our obligations: our moral obligations as a wise leader and good neighbor in the interdependent community of free nations.

And he said:

To fail to meet those obligations now would be disastrous; and in the long run, more expensive. For the widespread poverty and chaos lead to a collapse of existing political and social structures which would inevitably invite the advance of totalitarianism into every weak and unstable area. Thus our own security would be endangered and our own prosperity imperiled.

So Kennedy went on and called for an effort to—he said, “unified administration and operation—a single agency in Washington and the field, equipped with a flexible set of tools.” And this was going to be drawing upon “the most competent and dedicated career servants now in the field, and attracting the highest quality from every part of the nation.”

He went on to say that he wanted to ensure that this was separate from our military assistance, for instance, because, he said, “our program of aid to social and economic development must be seen on its own merits, and judged in the light of its vital and distinctive contribution to our basic security needs.”

He was clear in saying this was a bipartisan legacy, one that had “moved forward under the leadership of two great Presidents—Harry Truman and Dwight Eisenhower—and drawn its support from forward-looking members of both political parties in the Congress and throughout the nation.”

He said:

It's about American global leadership.

Now, there is a reason why the USAID headquarters is at the Reagan Building. Reagan continued that emphasis on development and humanitarian aid.

He said:

The ultimate importance to the United States of our security and development programs cannot be exaggerated.

Here is another quote that is actually quite apt for this moment. He said:

You know the excuses: We can't afford foreign aid anymore, or we're wasting money pouring it into these poor countries, or we can't buy friends—other countries just take the money and dislike us for giving it. Well, all these excuses are just that, excuses.

Reagan said:

[T]hey're dead wrong.

Now we have a Secretary of State, Marco Rubio, saying USAID takes taxpayer funds and “spends it as a global charity irrespective of whether it is in the national interest or not the national interest.”

But do you know who else said that the work of USAID isn't charity, like Kennedy, like Reagan? It was Marco Rubio just a few years ago. “Foreign aid is not charity,” he said. “We must make sure it is well spent but it is less than 1 percent of budget and critical to our national security.”

Rubio went on to say:

We don't have to give foreign aid, we do so because it furthers our national interest. That's why we give foreign aid.

He said:

Anyone who tells you that we can slash foreign aid and that will bring us balance [to our budget] is lying to you. Foreign aid is less than 1 percent of our budget. It's just not true.

Look, there can always be space to review our foreign assistance. I worked in these organizations. I know there are places that we can try to fine-tune, make more efficient, make more effective.

If there are programs that Congress and Members of Congress have questions about, that is ripe for our oversight role. But to undermine USAID as a whole is flat wrong.

We see this with Secretary Rubio's first trip this past weekend. He went to Panama and complained about Panama accepting support from China through the Belt and Road Initiative. Yet he then goes on to help Trump and Musk gut USAID—a critical tool that we have to counter Chinese influence. It very much exposes that this “America First” foreign policy really means “America Only.” If we continue down this path, we will find ourselves alone.

Over the years of our global power, our strategic advantage has always been in building coalitions. In this dangerous global environment, this “America First” approach leaves us distracted from the real threats and challenges. This is about American global leadership.

I think about my own family. My parents were born during the Korean war. They grew up—the very first Americans they ever met were American servicemembers and other Americans that were there to try to help Korea rebuild.

It wasn't just America's resolve in the war; it was about what happened afterwards in terms of helping provide assistance, Americans taking action to feed kids like my parents.

As I said earlier, 50 years ago, my parents decided to come to America. They knew nobody here—not a single person. They didn't know anybody in the entire Western Hemisphere of planet Earth, but my parents moved here to America because America meant something to them. It is because they met the best of us—Americans abroad, willing to work in dangerous places, in tough circumstances, wanting to try to live out the values of our country.

We learn it is not just the GDP of our Nation that makes us a leader; it is the projection of our values, and ultimately it is our people.

Now we are pulling back our foreign assistance. We are closing the door to immigrants like my parents. This is unfortunately a moment of American withdrawal. That is not what the American people want. They wanted a government that was focused on them instead of billionaires and the biggest corporations, but they understand the importance of American leadership.

When I talk to leaders and officials in other countries—I remember there was one situation where I talked to one,

and he said something to me that really just stuck in my mind. He said: I just want you to know, when I talk to other leaders around the world, when we talk about America—this official I was talking to—we ask ourselves a question: Is America a reliable partner?

He asked that question knowing full well what the answer is, and we know what the answer is, which is we are not the reliable partner we should be.

This isn't just about USAID. We know USAID—that these attacks are only just the beginning. It is the canary in the coal mine. Next, it will be the Department of Education or Justice or FBI or elsewhere, schedule F, an effort to kill the civil service, return to the spoils systems of 200 years ago, and it goes back to Russell Vought.

I want to emphasize that quote I said earlier because it is worth emphasizing in this moment. He said:

We want the bureaucrats 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. We want their funding to be shut down so that the EPA can't do all the rules against our energy industry because they have no bandwidth financially to do so. We want to put them in trauma.

When you listen to those words, doesn't that sound like exactly what happened over the last week? I get these phone calls and texts from people at USAID, people that I worked with, texting me and telling me "Things are very grave," talking about how disrespected they feel.

It saddens me greatly to think that Trump and Musk and Mr. Vought and others are relishing in that anxiety, fear, and pain that they are purposefully—purposefully—trying to create.

In an interview with Tucker Carlson, Vought said Trump "has to move executively as fast and as aggressively as possible with a radical constitutional perspective to be able to dismantle that bureaucracy and their power centers."

Now, why do you think they need to move so fast? It is because when you want to grab as much power as you can, you want to do it before the American people understand and see what is happening. They feed off the apathy and the helplessness. They want people to be disengaged. They are intentionally using terms like "shock and awe"—a term of war that we had used, and now they are using that against the American people.

I have been saying this line a lot lately where I say: I believe that the opposite of democracy is apathy.

We have to stay engaged. There is a massive division in our country, no doubt about that. It is not just between Democrats and Republicans; it is between those who are engaged and those who aren't. And these actions are built to paralyze you with anger, fueled by disinformation and distraction to make you disengage, but don't let them.

So what comes next? All we have to do is look at Mr. Vought's past statements to know exactly what is coming.

He said:

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

When he was talking about the Federal Reserve, he went on to say:

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

That quote of his led me to ask him directly in a confirmation hearing if he believed that the President has the right to set interest rates in our country, and Mr. Vought refused to answer. He couldn't answer something as simple as that. The answer should be very easy. It should be, clearly no.

I talked to a number of leaders at the Fed recently, and they really emphasize the longstanding bipartisan agreement that we do not want someone approaching critical decisions about fiscal stability in America based off of what is best for the next election for that leader. We don't want to see that kind of politicization. The goal always needs to be towards the stability of our economy and the responsibility towards growth and prosperity.

Vought—he just believes in power and not just any kind of power. He believes in an all-powerful President—something our Founding Fathers specifically avoided. We don't want a monarch. We have coequal branches of government. But is that what the American people have seen since January 20? No. We have seen blatant power grabs, illegal actions, disregard of laws passed by Congress, chaos.

But, remember, as you see this, chaos is their plan. It is Trump's plan. It is Mr. Vought's plan. It is the reason why they are going after public servants, and it is the same reason that happened 200 years ago, because public service is about serving the people, while corruption, we see, is about serving themselves.

Public service was the answer to countering corruption in the 1800s, and it is my belief that it is the answer to the current threat to our democracy.

When you see these attacks on public servants, when you see what is unfolding before our eyes, that is not the golden age that Trump tried to talk about in his inaugural address. It is not the "Make America Great Again" slogan that he has been using. It goes back to another phrase that he used over the campaign where he talked about "the enemy from within"—those three words, "the enemy from within." That is what this is all about. Painting our public servants who swear an oath to protect our Constitution as the enemy.

Earlier, I talked about my parents coming to the United States 50 years ago. Now my family—we think about the next 50 years. I am now a parent of a 7-year-old and a 9-year-old, two little boys. I will be honest with you, I worry about what kind of America my boys are going to grow up in. What will it look like? What will this country look like when they are my age? So that is why I am here. That is why I stand here on the floor of the Senate. I am

here because I refuse to believe that my kids and their generation are doomed to grow up in a broken America. I still believe in the America that inspired my parents 50 years ago to travel halfway around the world, and I know we are not the only family out there that believes in this.

There is a hunger in this country for reform and change. People don't want to see the status quo, but that doesn't mean they want to hand over our country to corruption, hand it over to patronage, hand it over for another generation of the worst inequality our Nation has ever seen, where every day it gets worse.

As I mentioned before, we just took on and fought against machine politics in New Jersey. I heard it straight from the people; they don't want to see that kind of rise of broken machine politics across our Nation. Corruption is the quickest way to take the strongest, most powerful nation in the world and send it into decline.

In just a little over a year, we will have our 250th anniversary as a nation. And as I close here, I want us to reflect on that—250 years. I hope we can commit, as a nation, to have that more than just about fireworks; that we use that as a moment to try to rededicate ourselves to the mission of this country, to the purpose of this Nation, and why it began.

After the January 6 riots, the way I framed it is I said I was going to dedicate the rest of my life to try to solve one singular question, which is: How do we heal this country? I believe the answer to that question is "service." That we need a new "ask not what your country can do for you" moment, a reminder that we are part of something bigger than all of us. Instead of attacking public servants, we should be promoting and encouraging them.

And I hope on our 250th anniversary, we rededicate ourselves to this project, build a national service program, invest in civics education. We need to reject divisiveness that is infecting our Nation and restore a sense of trust.

We start by rejecting this dangerous nomination to do just that.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Hawaii.

Mr. SCHATZ. Mr. President, I just want to say how much I have come to admire, in a short period of time, the junior Senator from New Jersey. That was a—that was a real speech, you know. We are, obviously, spending 30 hours on the floor to oppose Russ Vought's nomination, and, you know, a lot of people have to come here and speak for 60 minutes or 30 minutes or 90 minutes, and we will take anything, right? Some people just read whatever they have got, and we appreciate all of it because we have to take the floor, and we have to maintain presence on this floor.

But that was a beautiful, well-crafted speech about American democracy,

about his life story, about his dedication to public service. So I am very honored to work alongside him.

Mr. KIM. Thank you.

Mr. SCHATZ. Last week, without any advanced notice, OMB issued a memo freezing all Federal funding in order to end wokeness, "Marxist equity, transgenderism, and green new deal social engineering policies." Like, I just want to—we can pause right here, right?

This is not the kind of thing that the OMB is supposed to say, right? It is the Office of Management and Budget. They are not supposed to have an opinion about wokeness or not wokeness or anything like that. It is just a very odd way to view what is otherwise a kind of technocratic position, and that is what is very important about this particular OMB and this particular OMB Director. He does not view it as merely administering the budgets and the spending bills within the government. He views it as a power center through which all of his ideology and all of Project 2025 is going to be implemented.

Like, to think of the Office of Management and Budget as a place to fight wokeness and Marxist equity—I don't even know what any of that means, but I think a lot of us know the previous OMB Director. She was really well-regarded by both sides of the aisle. I think the Presiding Officer actually knew her from Louisiana. And, you know, like, she was left of center, but she would never say anything other than what is sort of straight down the middle as it relates to the Office of Management and Budget.

And that is—why would we take the floor for the OMB Director? Well, because he is the author of 2025. He is essentially the architect behind the Federal funds freeze. And in Project 2025, among all the things that they talk about, they also, like, devote a huge passage to how important OMB is and how powerful the next OMB Director should be.

Just so happens that the author of that section saying the OMB Director should be, like, pretty close to all-powerful and, essentially, representing the President in all things policy and budget, so happens that the guy that wrote that passage is the guy that is going to be in the job to do that. So, I mean, that seems kind of neat. I think OMB should be all powerful; also, I think I should run OMB. So that is what we are talking about.

But just understand what happened last week was not some attack on wokeness—whatever the hell that actually means. It was an attack on all of us. It really was an attack on all of us. All Federal funding was suspended. Millions of Americans around the country were in the dark, how they would access basic things—healthcare, education, childcare, small business loans, VA loans, disaster relief, opioid treatment. Everything from road repairs to cancer research was shut down across the country.

And you have to ask, aside from the very obvious fact that withholding funding from Congress that has already appropriated funding is plainly illegal, you have to ask: What on earth does so-called wokeness have to do with repairing a road? Or letting people refill their prescriptions at a community center? Or helping survivors of a flood or wildfire to try to rebuild their lives?

Is a child having a healthy meal wokeness? Is that DEI? Is that, I don't know, gender ideology, or is that the Green New Deal? Like, seriously, what the hell are we doing here?

A President is allowed to make policy. A President is expected to make policy. But they can't take a law and repeal it by Executive order, and especially as it relates to a spending law. Those laws are not actually optional, right?

And there is a very simple way for a President to get his way in the spending context. The Republicans control both Chambers of the Congress, the House and the Senate and the Presidency. They had a big victory—I didn't love it, but they had a big victory. So if they want changes in spending policy, they can just do it the American way. And so this is like a combination of laziness, impatience, a not-inconsiderable splash of illegality.

But, I mean, this is amateur hour. You want to change something. You want to fight wokeness—again, whatever the hell that actually means. If we have gotten to the point where shutting down a construction project is, like, attacking wokeness, then the actual word has ceased to mean anything. And DEI is this other, like, epithet they throw at things, but it is—the dragnet has caught all of Indian country, most Native people everywhere. Do you know what they did? They literally "control F" searched for keywords and then pulled those things out. They don't know anything about these programs. They pulled these things out if it said "gender" in it, or if it said "equity," or if it said "inclusive," or if it said "climate," and they just, like, pulled it out and said: We are not funding that.

First of all, what a goofy way to make policy. Seriously, what a goofy, like, childish way to make policy.

Second of all, just to reiterate, you don't get to do that. If you want to make a change in a law, you have to make a change in a law. You can't just write a memo saying: I don't like the law; therefore, it no longer exists because I won.

It is true that the President won a free and fair election, absolutely a free and fair election. I didn't like the result, but I was absolutely prepared to tolerate policy outcomes that I didn't like.

But this is not that. This is them, like, skipping a step. And by skipping a step, I mean literally skipping the legislative branch.

And so there has been a lot of consternation on the Republican side; I

mean, a lot of consternation. Right-wing Republicans, moderate Republicans—all of them are a little, like, I don't know about this.

But you can't stand up for the legislative branch in secret. You can't uphold the Constitution privately. At some point, you have to stand up for your prerogatives. And, listen, there is a lot of very talented people here, actually. I don't agree with them. Some of them I don't even like, but supertalented people, high-achieving human beings who could be doing something else.

And my view is, like, if you are going to forfeit your constitutional prerogatives, like, go be—I don't know, whatever. Do something else. Do something more interesting. Do something more lucrative. Do something more easy. But if you are going to be here and you are going to go through all the pain of running for election, of getting beat up by everybody left, right, and center, of people complaining about you, of putting your family through challenges—I am serious. Why would you do that and then forfeit, like, I would say two-thirds of the power that you are in possession of. You ran, presumably, to achieve some measure of influence so that you could actually change things. And now there is just a collective shrug of the shoulders.

So the problem with Mr. Vought is twofold: One, we have a government with three coequal branches, and Congress is the article I branch that holds the power of the purse, and we decide what to fund and at what levels. And in the face of an illegal action, the courts can step in and strike it down, as several judges did with the original funding freeze memo.

And this is one of the things, to the extent that there are at least 20 or 30 people still watching, Donald Trump and his team are running a huge bluff. It is not that they are not causing damage. I know they are causing damage. But understand that what they want to do is multiple illegal things and then see if they can get a few of these things to stick.

They have articulated that pretty clearly. Mr. Vought has said that. JD VANCE has said a version of that. And just say: We are going to defy the Federal law and see whether we can come up with some judges who will give us a different interpretation.

And so the reason that that is an important thing to say is not just for me to be another Democrat saying: I can't believe he did this—but to understand Donald Trump is not the only person in the world who is not constrained by Federal law.

We saw last week the Federal funding freeze was found to be illegal and it was suspended and there is an injunction against it.

Last week—or maybe it was 2 weeks ago—the birthright citizenship nonsense was rejected by a Federal judge. Even what is happening with the access to the Treasury payments is being constrained in the court system. So I am

not, like, Pollyanna about the status of the court system. I am very frustrated, especially with the Supreme Court, and I do not expect, if it is at all a close call, for it to break our way.

But these are not close calls. These are clear violations of Federal statutory law, and so we don't want to give up in advance. The roots of democracy are still strong. And, like, my old now-friend, one-time adversary, the Former Speaker of the House in the State of Hawaii Calvin Say, he used to say:

Be like the bamboo, bend but don't break.

So we all have to understand that Donald Trump is a disrupter, and it is going to be rocky. But this idea that he is just going to rack up wins and there is nothing anybody can do about it is a dangerous premise because it can become self-fulfilling—people out on the streets, people in the courts, people in the legislature. We are out of power, but we are not powerless.

So everybody needs to understand that Russ Vought represents a very specific view of Presidential power, which is essentially unitarian, executive—whatever you want to call it. But it is a view that once you win, you are basically a monarch and that all those niceties—rules—I mean literally rules, right? You make a law, and usually the Agency has to make rules to kind of explain specifically how to implement any law. They view that as just an impediment to the inherent constitutional power of one man.

This is also consistent with the way that the tech bros view government. They view government as unnecessarily slow, too many checks and balances.

Why doesn't the government run like a business? Let me tell you why. Because if you ran government like a business, you would shut down every rural hospital. If you ran government like a business, you would actually not have a national transportation network; you wouldn't have a library in Kai. If you ran government like a business, by the way, most of the money would be spent in the cities. So we have a system of government that we all have to be committed to defending.

I want to spend a little bit of time with some letters that I received from constituents last week.

I just wasn't expecting it all to go sideways so quickly. After the OMB memo came out that said Federal Agencies must temporarily pause all activities related to the obligation or disbursement of all Federal financial assistance—what a crazy—can you imagine being a person who previously was at OMB—this person is not new to this—issuing a memo saying: Pause all activities related to obligation or disbursement of funds. I knew immediately—I was like, oh, my God.

There are these portals, and they are basically websites. If you are the Department of Hawaiian Home Lands or the Hawaii Department of Transportation, almost daily, you are doing draws. You have your little code words.

You have to send your little invoice, and then there is an electronic transfer of money to a clinic or a construction project or the Veterans' Administration or whatever it is. Those portals were shut down, and everybody was in an actual panic. I am not exaggerating.

People voted for Trump for all sorts of reasons, but one of the reasons that kept coming up over and over: They thought he would bring down the price of eggs, the price of groceries, the price at the pump. What they did not vote for was to lose their ability to get a home loan or healthcare or childcare or a healthy meal or a good education for their children.

I want to read a couple of letters from constituents:

I am reaching out with a heavy heart as a program planner and student adviser who works directly with students across several Maui County schools. I also want to include representation of our sister programs, which collectively provide vital support for low-income, first-generation Native Hawaiian students.

This year has been one of the most difficult in recent memory for our students and their families. The devastating Lahaina wildfires left deep scars in our community, and many of our students are still working to recover from the emotional, physical, and financial toll that disaster caused.

For many of them, this catastrophe was a breaking point where they saw their homes, their schools, and even their sense of safety and stability go up in flames. Despite overwhelming loss, these students are still resilient. They are fighting to stay afloat, to keep their dreams alive, and to continue their education, despite the trauma that they have endured.

These support programs have been there for them every step of the way, offering them emotional support, academic assistance, and a safe space for students to process their grief and focus on the future. Through our programs, they have found a sense of community and hope.

Our academic advisers and mentors have been working tirelessly to ensure, even in the wake of the fire, that these students know that they are not alone, that there is a path forward.

But now we face a crisis that can further jeopardize these opportunities for these young people. OMB has imposed a Federal freeze on funds set to take effect at 5 p.m. eastern time. This freeze will halt the disbursement of federal funds, including those essential for our programs.

Without access to these funds, we will be unable to continue providing services that our students need to heal, thrive, and succeed. The support that they so desperately need—academic tutoring, mentorship, college prep, and a strong network of peer support—will be in jeopardy.

For many of our students, this isn't just a program; it is a lifeline. These students are not just looking for a way to finish high school; they are looking for a chance to rebuild their lives, to break the cycles of poverty and hardship, and to find their footing in a world that has been turned upside down. To take away the programs that have supported them through the wildfires and their ongoing recovery would be devastating.

Is this program woke? Is it DEI? Is it Marxist? What the hell are we doing here? What the hell are we doing here? Why would we cause this amount of pain? Some sense of like fiscal discipline? We are not saving the money.

On top of everything else, thousands and thousands and thousands of employees—not just at USAID but at the Small Business Administration and at the CIA—were sent home. By the way, because of civil service law, we can't lay them off. It is not a private sector situation. You can't lay them off as a matter of law. So we sent them home to not work. We are shutting people out of their emails to not deliver service to the public. Awesome. Let's run the government like the worst business ever where we are just going to pay people not to work.

I am an eighth grade student at Halau Ku Mana in Honolulu, Hawaii. I am writing to ask for your support in protecting federal funding for Native Hawaiian education. The proposed freeze on federal financial assistance under executive memo M-2513 puts programs like ours at risk. Without them, students like me will lose access to the cultural education that connects us to our identity.

At Halau Ku Mana, our learning is different from other schools. We don't just sit in a classroom all day. We malama aina, meaning care for the land. We learn from cultural experts and study through real experiences. Programs funded by federal grants allow us to go on educational journeys, restore fishponds, grow food in kalo taro patches, and learn traditional skills. These experiences teach us about our past and prepare us for the future.

I guess it was too woke.

As your constituent, I am writing to express strong opposition to the White House order to freeze federal funding across all federal agencies. Millions of families will lose access to services provided by SNAP, TANF, and HUD housing assistance. Millions of students in Head Start, grade schools, and colleges will lose access to classroom funding, school resources, federal loans, and Pell grants. Millions of local firefighters and public safety officials will lose federal grants and resources needed to protect communities. Millions of veterans would lose access to VA mortgages and home loans and suicide prevention services.

Is that woke, Marxist ideology?

You see, what is happening is they want to dismantle the public services that we all rely upon. Can you imagine a week ago—I guess it was a little more than a week ago—air traffic controllers were told to quit? And we have—I think it is a 30-percent vacancy rate. We are short of air traffic controllers.

I understand. I have been in politics, I have been an appropriator for a while. Sometimes people cry wolf: If you don't give us this money, it is going to be dire. But the air traffic controller situation is quite dire, and we saw the impact of being understaffed last week.

So the language about woke and Marxism and all that stuff is a smoke screen. What they truly want to do is dismantle whatever the Federal Government does—if it is firefighting, if it is the CIA, if it is the National Weather Service, if it is VA home loans.

Their Project 2025 is to—they call it dismantle the administrative state, but really what they want to do is provide less service to people. The reason they want to do that is they have a yawning \$1 trillion to \$1.5 trillion gap that they have to fill because they want to provide a \$1 trillion to \$2 trillion tax cut

for the wealthiest corporations that have ever existed—literally have ever existed. They have a bunch of hardcore fiscal conservatives on the House side that just won't do it on a deficit finance basis, so they have to find savings, and that is what this is.

They really are cutting the stuff that matters to regular people, and then they are going to book that as savings, and then they are going to shove it in the direction of billionaires and billionaire corporations.

I see my friend Senator MURPHY is here. It is a little bit like old times to see you on the floor at 2 a.m. It used to be easier when I was on Hawaii time, but I have been here for a couple of weeks, so this is actually late for me.

I just want to recognize that we have most Democratic Senators speaking at some point through this 30-hour period, but MURPHY decided to take the 2 a.m. to 5 a.m. shift.

I hope you haven't had too much Mountain Dew at this point.

I would be happy to yield to the Senator from Connecticut.

With the permission of the Chair, I ask unanimous consent to engage in a colloquy without having to go through the Chair every time.

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

Mr. MURPHY. Just for the record, Senator SCHATZ, it is Diet Mountain Dew. Mountain Dew is disgusting. Diet Mountain Dew is acceptable.

Mr. SCHATZ. Can I say one thing about—I did not know that this whole Senate is powered on Celsius. I never had Celsius before. I was walking around offering people coffee, and everyone had a Celsius.

Mr. MURPHY. I think it is two or three times the amount of caffeine that a Red Bull has. There is a reason why the conversion is happening—not that I have an intimate understanding of which beverages have which amounts of caffeine.

But I am motivated to get up at this point because I think you hit on something really, really important. There are a number of different lanes that the policy we are talking about and the agenda of Russ Vought occupy, but I thought you just talked about a really important one, which is the effort to take anything left in the common space and shift it off to the private sector to become a commodity.

Much of what we are discussing today is an effort to raid services that help poor people and kids and middle-class families and just bank that money so that they can afford this giant tax cut that is going to go primarily to the very, very wealthy and the corporations.

Because Mr. Vought and the other folks who wrote Project 2025 and the other people that are populating the administration still believe in this long-discredited theory of trickle-down economics—which is that if you just give a ton of money to the very, very richest, then eventually that money

will trickle its way down to everybody else. That is not how economics work. It was a fraud from the beginning. It is just intellectual window dressing for the rich and the powerful to get more rich and powerful.

But there is this other lane you were talking about, which is finding the last remaining elements of public services that we decide to do together not for profit and turn it into a source of profit. TSA is one of those targets.

So Project 2025, written in part by Russ Vought, says TSA—this is the Transportation Security Administration; this is the Agency responsible for the security at our airports—should just be outsourced to the private sector; that some private equity firm should be running security at our airports.

To a lot of Americans, that idea is frightening—the idea that we would just turn security at the airports over to an entity that is doing it only for profit. It seems like we should have a public mission at the heart of airport protection. But you were reading this letter from, it sounded like, a student who may not see what is coming for our school system. This is—I was going to talk about this later, but I will bring it up now.

This is a pretty long article on a massive play being made by private equity into education and, in particular, into elementary education. It is kind of hard to think about this—but it may be coming—and that is a private equity firm or a hedge fund or an investment firm owning your child's elementary school.

Right now, private equity investors are lining up to put money in funds because they believe they are going to have a chance to bid on your child's elementary school or to bid on your child's middle school. We are literally going to outsource the education of our kids to investment firms.

If you read this article, it is absolutely chilling because the folks who cover the private equity industry are kind of, you know, used to being unapologetic about the fact that the only thing that matters is money, right? So, if you read this article, there is not a single word in here about quality or about making sure that, you know, there aren't 50 kids in a classroom. It is just about the private equity industry realizing that “Oh, my gosh, there is a ton of money that we can pull out of our elementary schools and our middle schools. This is a wonderful source of profit for us.”

They are not mission-oriented; they are profit-oriented.

So in addition to this agenda about stripping bare services in order to create the illusion that you are saving money so that you can pass along a tax cut to the very wealthy, this is also just a simple play to take every element of public services that haven't been commoditized and turn them into a commodity so that somebody can get rich.

I don't know. I just—I get sick at the idea of my kid's middle school becoming a source of profit. I am a capitalist. I believe this country is great because we allow people to get fabulously rich off of entrepreneurship and great ideas—but man, I just think there should be, like, a couple of things that we don't do for profit. I just think there should be a few things that we do because it is just the right thing to do, whether it is police protection or fire protection or building a road or educating our kids or protecting our airports. Like, not everything has to be for profit.

So I just wanted to pick up on this really important element of the 2025 plan and the Trump administration's agenda.

Mr. SCHATZ. I just want to drill down on why the profit motive is so dangerous to public service.

If you are in the business of trying to figure out where to drop a Starbucks or whatever, you have got to figure out where the people are, right? You would not drop a Starbucks in a place where it is, you know, a 300-person town. Fair enough. You don't have to drop a Starbucks there, but you do need a health clinic somewhere around there, and you do need a public library somewhere around there, and you are going to want a fire station somewhere around there. And if everything becomes a question of profitability and arithmetic and ROI, what is going to happen is that rural communities are not going to get what they need because, if you do that arithmetic as if you were a private sector investor, I promise you that the only place anything makes any sense to do it is in the cities, and that is what they are going to do. They are going to eviscerate public service across rural America.

You know, I think the Senator from Connecticut knows this:

I care very much about NOAA, the National Weather Service. Part of Project 2025 is this idea that we should privatize NOAA. Like, these people launch satellites; provide us with data; and then people can make, I mean, basic plans of what they are going to do that day. But aviation depends on it; farming depends on it; shipping depends on it. And the backbone of this is, like, a pretty expensive data collection enterprise and satellite-launching and maintenance enterprise. Then, in the back of that—right?—like, there is AccuWeather and these private sector companies, and they will put a skin on it and give you an app that tells you what the weather is, but they are all using the NOAA data. They are using the National Weather Service data. What they want is to be able to monetize this public service. It is always that—it is socializing the losses and privatizing the gains.

I think that is what these folks want to do, but—they have always kind of wanted to do this. They have always had this point of view, and some of our Republican colleagues, like, have a

point of view where, at the edges, we could have an argument about what ought to be a private sector enterprise or what ought to be a public-private partnership. Like, those are all kind of within the bounds of normal political discussion. But that is not what this is. This is, like, arson.

Mr. MURPHY. Yes.

And, to your point, when profit is the only motive, somebody loses out as in your example about, you know, a health clinic in a rural area. It is true also of education, right? I mean, it is pretty costly. It is not monetizable to have a school in a very rural area where teachers have to drive long distances; where there, you know, isn't a high volume of kids. So, if you live in a world in which the private sector gets to run our schools, then you are just going to have the haves and have-nots. You might have in-person education in the cities or in the suburbs, but those private equity firms will figure out pretty fast that it just doesn't make a lot of sense to run a bricks-and-mortar school in a rural area, and those kids will just be constantly tele-learning. Those kids will just be staring at their screens all day long.

Mr. SCHATZ. If there is any internet.

Mr. MURPHY. If there is any internet.

So there are places, when it comes to government and government services, for which there is a proper role for the private sector. We have long had public-private partnerships. Inside the Department of Defense, I think we have very well married together a fundamental public mission, right? We don't privatize the Army—right?—with the private sector mission. The technology for the Army gets developed a little bit faster if the private sector has a role to play; but what we have realized is that there are limits to the degree to which the private sector wants to own unprofitable services.

One of the grants that got turned off before the court injunction was issued was a grant to community health centers. Community health centers, which are not-for-profit healthcare centers that are primarily funded by the Federal Government, often exist in the places where there is not a profit motivation to run healthcare, either in rural areas or in very low-income areas of cities. They run on very, very thin profit—excuse me—on very thin margins at all. They don't make profit. They are on very thin margins. So when they miss one payment from the Federal Government, they are talking about immediately laying off workers.

Mr. SCHATZ. I used to run a social services agency. We had a couple hundred employees, and we delivered mental health services, and we were a Medicaid provider. It was back in the day when we weren't yet receiving electronic payments, and I would go to—like, I would wait for the mail every Wednesday and Thursday to see if we had to dip into our line of credit to make payroll. We ran a successful

agency, and we were one of the bigger social services agencies on the island of Oahu—the most populous island in Hawaii.

But that is what this is like. Even if you are a pretty solid social services agency or health clinic, it is always hand to mouth. You don't have some, like, cash reserves. So when they turned off that spigot, it was instantaneous, right?

I think part of what is happening with 2025—and excuse me for, you know, maybe diverting our conversation slightly—is that there is just a lot of very ideological people in cubicles who haven't been outside of Washington, DC, and are actually thinking in abstractions, and they truly believe in their heart of hearts—it is the billionaires, first of all, but it is also some other people who wrote the document who believe—I mean, deeply—that no one is going to miss the Federal Government if it doesn't deliver these services.

I think one of the things that has given me some comfort in the last couple of weeks—and, you know, it has been a rough couple of weeks—is that, boy, it was instantaneous, right? People were freaked out across the country—red States, blue States, rural, urban, suburban, exurban. Like, everyone was, like, what the hell, right? Like, I might have voted for Donald Trump or I might not have, but, like, nobody wants this. You are at the helm of the Federal Government, and then you just, like, within the first 2 weeks, go, like: I am going to destroy this place. Isn't that what you wanted?

No. People didn't vote for Donald Trump so he could destroy the Federal Government. They like that he is a disruptor. They like that he, you know, doesn't talk like the rest of us. They were pissed about the cost of eggs and groceries and gasoline and all the rest of it. I understand all of that, but I don't think this is what people signed up for. Like, I would like this guy to shut down the Medicaid portal. I would like for Head Start to have difficulty making payroll. I would like for construction projects to be staged and then send everybody home because there is no money to pay them. Like, this is not the kind of disruption that people thought they were getting.

They thought it was going to be like, I am going to make those Democrats uncomfortable or I need a businessman to, like, not—you know, to “think outside of the box.” But this is not that. This is arson, and people see it for what it is. It wasn't one of those things where we are arguing about the impacts, and then 3 years from now everybody figures out what the impacts were. It was instantaneous, and it was pretty violent, right? I don't mean physically violent, but I do mean, like, Whoa! What are you doing to us across society—right?—and all under this, like, Marxist ideology, woke, DEI? Like, it is just like you put a bunch of—like, “Please say cliché stuff about

Democrats” into ChatGPT and then, like, spit out an Executive order.

Mr. MURPHY. Listen, if not for lawyers who brought lawsuits, if not for judges who issued injunctions, we would be in a different kind of crisis today. So we are talking about public outrage at an executive action—that was midwived, in part, by the nominee—that only existed for about a day before it was enjoined, before it was stayed. But if that Executive order had actually been fully implemented, there literally would be, today, rural health clinics that would be shut down. There would be hundreds of thousands of children who would not be in preschool tomorrow morning. There would be a national catastrophe. Whether or not these billionaires don't need many government services unless their houses catch on fire and even though they don't understand that people actually rely on government-funded services sometimes, this would have been an absolute nightmare and disaster.

(Mr. SHEEHY assumed the Chair.)

So we need to remember that while we feel like we are in a constitutional crisis right now, that crisis would be fundamentally different if not for the court's stepping in at this moment.

Let me just raise another issue because I think you started by talking about the assumption that the young men in these cubicles made when they were writing Project 2025, when they were implementing these orders. I mean, there is this wild assumption about people who do public jobs. The contempt that this administration, these billionaires, and the authors of Project 2025 have for public employees is just extraordinary.

Who are public employees? OK, you can envision somebody sitting in a cubicle at a desk in Washington, DC, pushing papers. That is a public employee. But so are teachers, so are police officers, and so are firefighters.

Here is what Russ Vought said about the Federal workforce, he said:

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. We want to put them in trauma.

He is talking about researchers at NIH who are trying to cure cancer. He is talking about people who are trying to just get special education funds to our schools to make sure that our kids get a fair shot at learning. He is talking about the people at NOAA who are just showing up to work every day, trying to make sure we are prepared for natural disasters.

The contempt they have for people that get up every day and don't go to work for a bank or a hedge fund or private equity company but instead go to work because they just want to make the world better or their community better or their country better is absolutely extraordinary. It is as if these folks have never actually spent any time with a teacher or a firefighter or an NIH researcher.

Mr. SCHATZ. I think about my constituents in the IFPTE who work at

the Pearl Harbor Naval Shipyard. I think about 20 years ago, I guess, the Pearl Harbor Naval Shipyard was low-performing. It was not great. There was the BRAC Commission to determine if we were going to get rid of some of these bases and installations, and quite reasonably, people were looking at Pearl Harbor as one of those to possibly get rid of because it was so low-performing.

They have, in the great tradition, by the way, of—after Pearl Harbor was bombed and they quickly built a fuel storage facility and rebuilt ships in, like, months when it was expected that it would take a couple of years, what they did was literally miraculous and caused us to win the war. Without it, we wouldn't have won the war. Those guys dug in, understood there was a need for improvement, and now it is the best performing naval shipyard.

Are they woke? Are they DEI? What are we doing here?

I want every American to share our sense of outrage on behalf of the nurses and the firefighters and the technical workers and the welders and the boiler-makers and the TSA agents and the Coast Guard men and women. These are patriots. By the way, some are also in a cubicle pushing paper. That paper probably matters. It might be your VA benefits. It might be your Social Security benefits. It might be your ACA subsidy.

Nobody likes a big bureaucracy. I am a Kaiser member. God bless everybody who works there, but I have my frustrations getting through to someone, navigating the system. So it is easy to hate anything that is big, whether it is Verizon or Comcast or Kaiser or the Federal Government. You don't have to love everything that happens in any big organization, and you don't have to think it is perfect. It is not perfect.

The Federal Government needs reform. I actually think there are some really interesting opportunities to provide better service using AI. I am all in if you want to make the government work better. But DOGE is kind of dressing up what they are doing as some sort of effort at efficiency and a better delivery of service. That is actually not what they are doing.

You don't terrorize your employees. Anybody who has run an organization larger than two people knows that if you are going to get stuff out of someone, then you can be tough, but you can't actually terrorize them.

Mr. MURPHY. "We want to put them in trauma." What CEO says that about their workers?

Mr. SCHATZ. They would get—I was about to swear. It is the Senate floor. I will not. But they would get canned. They would get immediately sacked.

Mr. MURPHY. Their board of directors would get rid of them.

Mr. SCHATZ. Like, this guy is nuts. Get rid of him.

Mr. MURPHY. Yes.

Mr. SCHATZ. Even in the private sector, just so we are clear—because

there are also differences between the public and the private sector in terms of civil service protections and unions and all that. I am happy with that because, by the way, the unions are some of the people who are standing up not just for the rights of the workers but the services they provide.

I think this is a little bit of a—look, I know not everybody is paying super close attention to all aspects of this, but I think in the abstract, people might have gone, like, yeah, maybe you should cut the Federal workforce by X, and there is probably a lot waste, fraud, and abuse. Conceptually thinking, yeah, who cares? Then suddenly you realize, oh, no, that is a VA home loan. Oh, I actually don't want a shortage of air traffic controllers. No, I don't want a private company collecting my biometric data as I go through the airport.

So there is kind of a broad recognition, there is a waking up to the idea that destroying the Federal Government is doing damage to the United States of America. It is not doing damage to woke something. It is not doing damage to the left. It is just that the Federal Government has an important role in society whether you like it or not.

We can argue about the size and the scope of that Federal Government, but that is not what we are arguing about anymore. They are out to destroy it. They don't want to make it 4 percent smaller over a period of time or 20 percent smaller; they want to commit arson.

I want to talk about USAID. I understand USAID is not an animating issue for, like, most voters. Fair enough. You have got your own problems, and imagining money going elsewhere is sometimes hard to swallow. But I want to set that aside, whatever your view is of foreign aid, which you and I both strongly support because instability elsewhere is dangerous to the United States of America.

But setting all of that aside, they literally just shut everybody out of their email and told them all to go home. We were standing there trying to enter USAID to just conduct some oversight and ask what is happening, and we were told by the security guard that no one was there. No one was there. So this isn't, like, some efficiency effort; they are sacking everyone.

Now I think it is 1,400—it might be more—Foreign Service officers across the planet who got an email. They are everywhere. They are at the Embassies in Europe, in Asia, in Africa, in Central America—everywhere—and they just got an email saying: Come home. You have 30 days. If you want an exception for any health reason or any specific circumstances, you can submit it to us, but otherwise, you are out.

These people have their kids in school. These people are there to respond to disasters. These people are there to build relationships on behalf of the United States of America.

Imagine the kind of person who takes the Foreign Service exam and then says "I want to work in Ghana" or "I want to work in Ecuador on behalf of this country." Those are legit patriots, and they get deployed wherever they get deployed or sent—I shouldn't say "deployed"—they get sent wherever they get sent, and they try to dig in. Their kids are going to the American school in whatever city it is. It is challenging, but it is exciting, and it is important. Then they just get an email saying: We are recalling you, and there is no choice.

That is not an efficient way to do anything; that is just arson.

Mr. MURPHY. And they dressed that up for, like, 2 days, suggesting that they were reviewing USAID for efficiencies. For 1 day, they said they were folding it into the State Department because it would be more efficiently run inside the State Department. That was never the plan.

I mean, I would just sort of have to call out the fabrication. The plan clearly from the start was to eliminate USAID, and they willfully pretended for a handful of days that the agenda was efficiency when the agenda was, in fact, the wholesale elimination of the Agency. The stated on-the-record reason for the elimination of the Agency is bananas—bananas. They are calling USAID a "criminal organization." I mean, it is extraordinary.

I was on a radio program the other day, and the interviewer wanted to talk to me about the constitutional crisis and whether legally the President can dismantle USAID. The answer is no, he cannot. But the interviewer was like: You know, they say it is a criminal organization, and let's just set that aside for a minute.

I was like: No, no, wait a second. Don't let them get away with the idea that USAID has to be shuttered because it is a criminal organization.

Apparently, the conclusion that they have come to—the allegation that they are making is that because many of the USAID employees in their free time may support Democratic candidates for office, that it is a criminal enterprise, because you are apparently not allowed to have any political views.

There are certainly many other Agencies and Departments and public functions in which the majority of employees support Republicans. Public services are staffed by people who have a variety of views.

But the rationale on its face for getting rid of the Agency is just absolutely—

Mr. SCHATZ. Is that it has too many Democrats.

Mr. MURPHY.—is absolutely absurd, that there are too many Democrats.

So I guess we are going to shut down any Agencies that have 50 percent plus 1 Democratic affiliation, and we are going to hold on to Agencies in which the employees are 50 percent plus 1 Republican.

It shouldn't matter. I don't care whether a Republican or a Democrat is

teaching my kid. I don't care whether a Republican or Democrat is staffing the domestic violence shelter or putting out the fire at my neighbor's home. And most Americans don't care.

But this war that has been waged—I mean, that is what “woke” means, right? “Woke” really just means that a service is being provided by somebody who has views or a lifestyle that I don't agree with.

We have never approached public service like that. We have decided as a country that we are going to have these people called civil servants who get up every day to serve the country no matter what their background is, their ethnicity, their race, or their political views, or their religion; that their reason for getting up in the morning and going to work is to just serve everybody—to serve everybody.

We are now retreating to this world in which, no, the only legitimate people to work for the Federal Government are people who share the political views of the President.

The purge is happening in so many different ways.

Mr. SCHATZ. Well, I want to just sort of pause on that because, CHRIS, you are right. This is a purge.

I was sort of yelling in the Press Gallery—maybe not the best idea, but it was at a press conference—and I just basically pointed at all these people whom I have a lot of respect for in the media, but I am getting quite frustrated because this is actually not that hard to see if this were happening somewhere else.

We are both on the Foreign Relations Committee. We do a lot of travel. A lot of times, you sit down with some foreign leader—a Minister or a Prime Minister or another legislator from another country—and if you can see autocratic behavior like that, then it is literally on your talking points to encourage them to not engage in purges, to maintain a free media, the importance of an independent judiciary, blah, blah, blah. But when it happens to our own country, we just can't see it. If this were happening in Belarus, we would be like, ah, creeping autocracy. If this were happening in a Middle Eastern country, we would know what this was.

So I think you are really, you know, hitting the right point as it relates to public service.

I think about the U.S. military, which has been always, always a bastion for integration.

Mr. MURPHY. All sorts of integration.

Mr. SCHATZ. All sorts of integration. And now we are deciding that some people are not eligible to serve, not because they can't meet the requirements but because somebody finds it weird.

We are going back not 5 years but 20 or 30 in terms of—by the way, this anti-DEI and anti-woke thing, I just want to drill down on it just for a moment.

If what you don't like about DEI is the whole consultancy where someone

comes into your workplace with a PowerPoint or whatever and makes you feel guilty for your personal ethnic background, I have been in some of those meetings, and there is a lot of eye-rolling in there, and they are very ineffective, and they do not increase diversity, equity, or inclusion. I am sure there is good versions of it.

But there is a lot of people who got frustrated with DEI because when they think of DEI, they think of a kind of goofy consultant guy telling everybody how to divide everybody in the workplace and how to be sensitive in the workplace, and a lot of people are thinking, I am fine, I am nice to people, I don't harass anyone, I don't discriminate, why are you hectoring me about this issue?

But what DEI has become is anything that is related to civil rights, right? And so as these people, mostly kids, are getting access to the Federal payment system, they are clearly just looking for words like “gender,” right?

So I think in the NSF, National Science Foundation, or CDC, I forgot, research, they are no longer allowed to say gender and—

Mr. MURPHY. The kids say they can't use the word “female.”

Mr. SCHATZ. Yeah. So the problem is though, you have to do research on females in order to understand what is happening with females.

Mr. MURPHY. No, no, no. That is DEI.

Mr. SCHATZ. Yeah, yeah. This is the crazy thing.

By the way, different, I am an Ashkenazi Jew, right, I do actually have—there is a thing called—I think it is called Tay-Sachs or something that I have a proclivity to having it, so we have to have a special check. And the reason we know that is we actually do the kind of medical research to know how people of different ethnic extractions and different sexes will respond to medicine and what they may need.

African Americans need certain things that Jewish Americans don't need. And this isn't some woke DEI thing; it is like a biological fact. But now because these guys are, I mean, childish, right? They are not just saying: Hey, we should have a colorblind workplace; they are saying: You can't say sex—the word “sex”—in medical research.

Mr. MURPHY. You can't say female; you can't say gender.

I have the list here. It is absolutely patently absurd, right? Do you remember, OK, so that is an element of DEI, but there is another element of DEI.

So when that tragic plane crash happened, within hours, Donald Trump was hustling to organize a press conference for one purpose and one purpose only, to blame the crash on DEI.

Now, what did he mean in that context? It is crystal clear what he meant. He meant that if you employ women or Black people or Latinos or Asian Americans, the country is maybe in jeopardy, maybe, maybe the country is not safe if White men aren't in charge.

And so sometimes, DEI means the consultancy that legitimately some people think has gone a little bit overblown. And sometimes, it means we just can't discuss the differences that we actually have with each other, but sometimes, it just means real old-fashioned misogyny and discrimination and prejudice, right? It stands for a lot of things, most of which are pretty sick and creepy and outdated.

Mr. SCHATZ. And we have the Fair Housing Law, we have equal employment law, like you are not allowed to discriminate in housing. And so just to understand, they are not trying to just like cancel these programs related to DEI; they are trying to cancel the civil rights movement, like in statutory law, and defund anything that mentions a woman or mentions gender or mentions civil rights, right? And these are like long-settled questions.

And so everybody needs—we don't need to spend all night talking about this, but we do need to—like to me, when I saw that thing where it was maybe DEI was the cause of a plane crash, I thought, this is when the DEI thing jumped the shark. And as I see these pages, you can Google “jumping the shark” later on.

Mr. MURPHY. I don't think they know jumping the shark.

Mr. SCHATZ. Don't Google it. Google doesn't work anymore.

But anyway, this is the end of this as a useful way to understand something. It is now just an epithet that you hurl when you are not sure what else to say, right?

And so, look, back to Russell Vought for a moment, he is part of a crew, right? And it is Homan, it is Brendan Carr of the FCC, who is now trying to intimidate the media.

The Project 2025 crew is—I mean, they are really rolling. They are populating the Cabinet of the President. And the President was clever enough during the campaign to disassociate himself with Project 2025, but that did not last long because about two-thirds of his senior staffers are closely affiliated with 2025. This isn't some like ancillary thing; they are like in it.

Let me read to you something from my local FOX affiliate:

Hawaii's rural healthcare at stake as federal funding freezes

The freezing of federal funds has thrown many nonprofit organizations in Hawaii, especially those providing healthcare services, into a state of uncertainty. Amongst these organizations is the Maui AIDS Foundation, which serves some of the most vulnerable populations on Maui. Linda Puppolo, executive director of the [Maui AIDS Foundation], is deeply concerned about the potential consequences of this freeze.

Many clients fear being exposed in other healthcare settings due to stigma, which makes [Maui AIDS Foundation's] discreet, nonjudgmental environment crucial.

“We have quite a lot of clients who are terrified right now because they feel like they will be exposed somewhere else.”

The foundation's operating budget is about \$2 million, but a significant portion of that

[comes from federal funding]. Some grants are directly administered, while others flow through state agencies.

One of the most at-risk programs is the housing subsidy for people living with HIV. And Puppulo fears the worst.

Without the housing grant, "That's over \$1 million of our housing subsidies right there."

People are going to be homeless.

In addition to the financial strain, Puppulo expressed frustration with the lack of transparency . . .

"There's a gag order on federal employees, and we can't get any straight answers."

And by the way, this has been the case, I am sure, CHRIS, you have seen this in Connecticut, Russell Vought has already done it; he is not even confirmed. He is not even a government employee, but he is clearly already at the helm, and he has clearly already achieved his objective, which is to terrify and terrorize public employees.

And so one of the things I have been saying—and it is easy for me to say, I understand that, but I will tell you that the Federal employees I have talked to who got that e-mail saying, "fork in the road," were like, now I am not going anywhere, right?

And I know 20,000 people say they signed up for it, but I was thinking about this, 20,000 people out of 2 million—first of all, I don't know if that is true. And certainly, it is unclear to me whether that would be honored, but that is actually 1 percent of the workforce.

Mr. MURPHY. It is pretty normal attrition.

Mr. SCHATZ. That seems like normal attrition in a 9-month period, so I think what we just did, is of the people who were planning on retiring anyway, we just gave them like a 6-month payout. So we get nothing because they get paid through September—if this thing sticks, very unclear. But if this thing sticks, they get paid through September but just retire early, and we don't achieve any sort of turnover savings. So I just think these people are trying to terrorize the workforce.

Mr. MURPHY. And all the Federal employees who have been furloughed from the USAID employees to all the folks who are doing DEI to the FBI agents, they are still getting paid right now, right?

So for the last week, all those USAID employees were sent home, they were doing nothing to protect America, and they were still getting paychecks.

Mr. SCHATZ. Well, and just to be clear, they don't even have their e-mail accounts working, so think about that.

First of all, it is a little weird to send people home and say, We are still operational, and then they can't even get their dot-aid, dot-gov e-mail to work, and they are not permitted to use their private e-mail to conduct public business.

And so I know someone who said: I am reading spy novels, like, I am just killing time. And we are paying them.

Mr. MURPHY. It is almost like the agenda isn't efficiency.

Mr. SCHATZ. Right.

Mr. MURPHY. It is like if you read about all the people who were going to quit anyway, but quit and got a payout and the people who are at home locked out of their e-mail but still getting paid, it is almost like there is a different agenda.

And listen, you are right that the agenda is to terrorize public employees, they have made it absolutely clear, to try to keep them silenced and to try to make everybody decide that there is a different line of work that would be better for them.

But you know what, I know the folks that work at Prudence Crandall domestic violence shelter, and they didn't go into that line of work because it is lucrative, right? They didn't go into that line of work because it is an easy job. And when they get home every night at 5, it is just really easy to unplug. That is like the hardest work in the world to show up every day and work in a domestic violence shelter, dealing with women, mostly, at the worst moment in their entire life, having just fled a home in which they were regularly abused, often to the brink of death, by their spouse or their boyfriend.

And so, yes, they are scared today because they got told a week ago that their funds were being cut off. And that domestic violence shelter in New Britain, CT, it can't run for more than a week or so without Federal dollars.

Guess what? Our domestic violence shelters in America do not make any profits. They do not make a profit.

News flash: Your taxpayer dollars actually do pay for domestic violence shelters. We need to actually fund that publicly because that is not something that you can make a big profit on.

The women who are fleeing violence don't show up at the door with a check to pay for the shelter that they need for a couple days. Those people are scared. They are feeling harassed. They don't know whether the doors will remain open, but they are not going home. They are not going home because they have decided to live their life in a way devoted to a mission—to a mission.

And so this is a moment to just say thank you, frankly, to all of the folks who work, either for not-for-profits that rely on government funding, who are public employees doing the good work, who are staying on the job.

I don't begrudge anybody who decides that, listen, I am better off if I just go do something else amidst this harassment campaign, but I am thankful, on behalf of abused women in Connecticut, that there are people who are deciding to stay on the job, despite the fact that they are getting threatened and harassed by the Trump administration and, in particular, the nominee that we are discussing today.

Mr. SCHATZ. Well, I think I have been, on one level, trying not to overreact, but I also think there is a little danger of underreacting. And I have been talking about this a little bit with

my brother, who is a professor with an expertise in former Soviet Union countries, Kazakhstan in particular. And so in this town—and you know this, CHRIS—in this town, the worst thing is to be overreacting, like that is just very not cool for the cocktail party and pundit circuit.

Everything is always going to be fine, and if you are alarmed, you are shrill; that means you are not savvy. And the savvy thing is always that this will land fine. And I feel like we are sleepwalking into a very dangerous place.

And so as I think of my theory of change, just mine, I don't presume to know exactly what we should do, all of us, I know in the legislative context, we have got to do a couple of things: We have got to find opportunities—we only have 47 of us, so we have to find opportunities to find three or four Republicans.

And I have had some very constructive conversations with Republican appropriators who are super uncomfortable with what is going on. Now, they might not be quite ready to go public, but they are certainly trying to figure out how they are going to exert their authorities and reestablish that it is coequal branches here.

So part of our strategy has to include: Find Republican support where we can. I think part of our strategy has to be, where we can't, to not make it easy for our Republican colleagues as they try to march to the beat of Donald Trump's drum.

I think we also have an obligation to just speak out and explain to the public, especially when we are powerless to stop things, what exactly is happening and why it is bad. But the rest of society has a role here too. I think the media has an obligation to stop underreacting, to stop treating super unconstitutional, illegal, "thuggy" acts as if it is just, like, the President proposed there be an AI commission or something. The way these things are talked about, it is like: President attempts to reform USAID.

It is, like, no, that is not what happened. They stormed in, and they took over the servers. They stand over people and tell them what to do. And if those people don't do exactly what the DOGE folks say—or, yeah, say—they are relieved of their duty on the spot.

And then they sent everybody home, and then they got into the secure conference facility, the SCIF. Like, this is not to be characterized as something kind of mundane and, oh, this week there is a markup on the social media bill. Like, this is different, and we have got to treat it differently.

And there also is a role for the Federal employee—and, to your point, where they can, because I don't presume to know anybody's personal situation, and a lot of people have other personal stuff going on, and I can't ask for them to be brave on my behalf.

But there are some people who are deeply committed and deeply patriotic

and care about the mission and care about public service, and all I would ask you is: Stay if you can. Stay if you can. And if someone tries to shove you around and if someone tries to tell you to do something that feels like it might not be permissible, don't do it. Talk to your union. Ask them whether this is authorized by law. Stick, because they are counting on you, sort of, vanishing from the scene.

And then the other thing—and, CHRIS, you and I have talked about this. You are the one that pointed it out to me. The difference between this week and last week is that individual citizens are physically showing up to protest what is happening all across the country.

I mean, we have been here in Washington, DC, and we have seen it at the Treasury building and at the Senate—they call it the Senate swamp—and elsewhere. It has been a minute since people have shown up in person this organically, and I think that is a really important aspect of any mass movement to preserve democracy.

It can't just be your legislators fighting in the legislative context. We only get credibility if there are people behind us.

And now I think—look, I think we were in a bit of a slumber, frankly, and I think the American public was in a bit of a slumber. There was this sense that some people were excited about the election; some people were sad about the election. But everybody was kind of not animated in the same way that they were prior to the first Trump term.

And over the last week, people said: Oh, my goodness, this is real. And by the way, even Republicans who were sort of imaging that this was all going to be manageable and that you are just going to get your conservative outcomes with some mean tweets. That is what people thought they were going to get. I really believe that. Good people that I know thought: This guy is going to be good for the economy. He is going to be provocative on line, and that will be that.

Mr. MURPHY. And, listen, you had Trump's first term as evidence, right? Obviously, President Trump says a lot of things that he has no intent of doing. News flash: We aren't going to invade and occupy Gaza. But he says a lot of things.

Mr. SCHATZ. I am a no on that one.

Mr. MURPHY. I would say 98, 99 percent of Americans are a no on that.

In his first term, he said a lot of things that he never even tried to do. He said a lot of reckless things that he never actually followed up on.

And during the campaign, he said many things that sounded a little crazy to folks. He said: I am going to be a dictator on day one. He said the No. 1 enemy of the people are Democrats, and I am going to use the military to take care of the enemy within, which he referenced as his political opposition.

And I think many Americans said: Do you know what? I heard him say a lot of stuff like that in his first term. He is not going to really do it.

So you are right. After the election—we had an election; he won. And people assumed that things were going to be different. There was going to be a little bit more topsy-turvy. Maybe this country needed to be shaken up a little bit. But they actually didn't believe he was going to act like a dictator. They actually didn't believe he was going to violate the Constitution so brazenly in the first month. They didn't believe he was going to shut down funding for preschools and for medical research.

Mr. SCHATZ. Or pardon everyone in the January 6 event. You know this, and you have talked about this on the floor.

Mr. MURPHY. Right.

Mr. SCHATZ. They recommend that he pardon, essentially, the people who improperly entered the building.

Now, I would have opposed that.

But then he just said: You know what? Pardon them all.

Mr. MURPHY. Because it was too hard, as he explained, to try to pick out the really violent ones from the nonviolent ones.

Later tonight, I am going to read through some of the very easily accessible stories of the really violent protestors. It wasn't that hard to just pick out a handful of people who literally beat police officers over the head with poles, that stuck Tasers into the necks of police officers until they had a heart attack. Like, it wasn't hard to identify those people and say: You know what? Those people should stay in jail. Those people should complete their term.

The American public didn't think that he was really going to absolve everyone who invaded the Capitol and beat the hell out of police officers that day.

And so the reason that it has taken a minute for the people to rise up—and, by the way, we have seen big crowds in DC, but, you know, that doesn't really mean much if there is nobody out there in the American public. Today, there were pretty big rallies in all 50 States. This weekend, there are going to be many more.

It is because people, even many who voted for him—but many who didn't and just wanted to sort of respect the choice of the electorate—are now realizing that this is so much more dystopian than the first term was and a crisis that is going to immediately impact them in a real way. It is not somebody else's problem. It now seems to be my problem when a billionaire has access to my Social Security, Medicare, and tax refund data. That sounds like something that actually potentially hurts me.

Mr. SCHATZ. Yes, I think you are exactly right that we are—look, every day I try to sort out, of the 20 outrages, how many can I even focus on? And to your point, the Gaza thing was deeply

offensive, right? Deeply offensive. But also probably not worth devoting a ton of bandwidth to because, by some accounts from people I think who do know, it is pretty clear to me he does not have a plan. He was just literally talking.

And so sometimes we are going to have to not quite pull a punch, but not "hair on fire" freak out because that is not—to your point, that is not happening, right? That is not happening.

They would need an appropriation. They would probably need a war authorization. And, by the way, occupying a country in the Middle East, it doesn't usually work.

Mr. MURPHY. It often doesn't go well.

But here is the difference, though, getting back to the nominee, right? Russ Vought is a serious person with the ability to execute on plans.

Mr. SCHATZ. Yes.

Mr. MURPHY. And so his plan, which is to destroy elements of the Federal Government and State governments and the nonprofit sector that help regular people; his plan to try to intimidate and harass Federal workers; his plan to try to make folks who work in government pass a loyalty test to the administration; his plan to destroy access to reproductive healthcare—I mean, all of that is being put into place as we speak.

So, you know, what makes this moment so dangerous is that they kind of learned their lessons. They wanted to do a lot of these things in the first term, but it all kind of snuck up on them really fast. They had 4 years to put into place a plan called Project 2025 so that they could, starting on day one, destroy services for the middle class and poor people, root out of government anybody that doesn't swear a loyalty test, and endorse violence in a way that hopefully suppresses political dissent.

That is not working right now, and I don't think it will work. But Russ Vought is dangerous because he has got radical ideas, and he actually has the means to implement them.

Mr. SCHATZ. He is a smart dude. He is a smart dude, and he is a serious guy and actually knows the government. I mean part of the problem with the DOGE folks is they don't really know what they are even looking for. So they literally just, like, "Control F." Oh, does it say "gender"? Maybe this is bad; maybe this is woke. That is terrible and irresponsible, but it is also incompetent.

But Russ Vought is not incompetent. He has an actual project, not just Project 2025. But he has been like this for a while. He has a view of the government, which is that the bigger the government is, the less freedom you have.

And Ben Sasse, our old friend and colleague who is now retired from the Senate, he had that sincere view, right? And it was a kind of radical view. But it was sincerely held that—I

mean, I would go to him and go: What about rural health clinics? And, like, he was consistent—nope—right?

What about Federal firefighters?

Counties can take care of that, right?

I don't want to characterize all of Ben's views, but—what about the Federal Emergency Management Agency?

Nope, we have got to get rid of that.

And FEMA is a really good example of—there are just some things that, if you are going to have a country, that your Federal Government has to do, because I think of two examples: When the town of Lahaina burned down, the County of Maui is kind of small. It is a couple hundred thousand people. It is not a poor county. It has some tax base and all the rest of it, but it is not capable to respond to a disaster where a whole town burned down, was incinerated to the ground in like 3 hours—2,200 structures. So 2,200 structures, basically, between 6 and midnight, all of them gone—110, 109 lives lost.

And so the Federal Government comes in when—you know, this is how a disaster declaration works. The county or the State submits something to the President of the United States and basically says: We can't handle this. This disaster is bigger than our ability to handle it, right?

And then the President signs the disaster declaration, and then that releases FEMA to go and be on the scene.

And if there is no FEMA, there is no recovery. FEMA prevented—I got into some fights with FEMA about the way they were doing it, but they are good humans. They are trying their very best to alleviate suffering.

And in the immediate wake of those wildfires, nobody went hungry, nobody lacked a place to live. And it is going to be a long recovery, but people's most basic needs were met.

And when I think about Western North Carolina, in particular, on some level it is worse. It was bigger. It was more structures. It was actually more property damage, and it was so vast. I mean, just the portion that got flooded is like the size of small States. And these little towns are not even as big as Maui County, right? These are 500 people, 700 people, 2,000 people, 75 people.

If the Federal Government doesn't come in and help folks like that through FEMA, then you are just leaving people, I mean, really to fend for themselves.

And over the last year, these disasters keep getting worse and worse. I suppose we can pretend it is not climate change. Even if you want to pretend it is not climate change, you have to concede that something is out there that is causing us to have more frequent and more severe disasters.

So let's set aside the question of climate and what we ought to do about it. Everybody knows my view about it, and everybody knows yours. But the fact is we had about \$150 billion worth of damage last year.

And so I am not prepared to tell small States, small counties, little

towns that they are on their own. But that is what Project 2025 wants to do.

Mr. MURPHY. So one of the things that is confusing for everybody, including us, about this moment is that it is not clear whether there is consistency or inconsistency.

So you may be right that they are going to try to just destroy FEMA writ large and erase from existence the ability for our country to come together in a patriotic way to try to help out our neighbors when a natural disaster hits.

But it can't be coincidental that they launched the idea to destroy FEMA in California, when a very blue State was responding to a terrible disaster, right? That doesn't seem coincidental.

It doesn't, also, seem coincidental that the first big infrastructure project that the President came out and said that he would be defunding was also in California, while an equally big city-to-city, high-speed infrastructure project in Florida is on no one's radar screen. And so this may be a consistent nationwide assault on public services, but it also may be—or in addition may be—simply a grift in order to provide services and grants in States that are loyal to the President—meaning they voted for him—and to deny services to States that are not loyal.

We have not, historically, cared at all whether a natural disaster hit a State that sends Democrats or Republicans to the U.S. Senate. We have sometimes had fights over how much money and when we are going to authorize disaster assistance, but we have never fought over whether a blue State or a red State should get it if the other party is in charge of the U.S. Senate. All of a sudden, that seems very relevant. That seems very relevant.

And part of the reason why the Constitution does not allow the President to have power over spending decisions is because that leads to a fundamental potential for corruption.

Mr. SCHATZ. Before you came on, Senator KIM talked about taking on the New Jersey political machine. Political machines everywhere work pretty much the same. If you behave well, you get your stuff. And pork is distributed based on political alliances. I think you are right to notice that the President of the United States wants to sort of create a Tammany Hall vibe nationwide.

I will say, just to take your own advice, that on, say, withholding disaster aid from California, that feels like just—like he is just ranting, and he is not actually in a position to do that because the Stafford Act provides that this is a disaster and that once we fund it, they have to help, and they will help. They are not permitted not to help. Now, he may stretch the boundaries of the law, but I do not think he is in a position to withhold aid.

Now, do I think MIKE JOHNSON is going to initiate a disaster supplemental for California? No. But the terrible fact of the matter is, there will be disasters going forward, and they hit

blue States and red States equally. You just never know.

Mr. MURPHY. But what Trump says, whether or not he ends up implementing it, sets the agenda for his party. So what is the Speaker talking about and what are many of our colleagues talking about with respect to aid to California? Yes, they are very worried about setting a precedent in which a State doesn't get aid if they are of the opposite party of the party in charge, but they know that they have to be loyal to the basic premise of the President. And so they are talking about conditions; that California is going to have to change its laws to, I would assume, more align itself with Republican priorities in order for it to get money, which would be a perversion of Federal law and precedent and very dangerous.

Mr. SCHATZ. It is not changing laws regarding disaster preparedness or infrastructure; it is changing laws on voter ID.

Mr. MURPHY. Right.

Mr. SCHATZ. That is one of the things I have noticed about this President is just the unapologetic “I have leverage, and I am going to use it” aspect of it and nobody bats an eyelash. If you behaved like that, you would get lit on fire, appropriately.

So I think one of the things that I have noticed over the last couple of weeks is there's—look, Democrats need to understand, this guy is unusually talented. And we used to say “what a buffoon,” whatever—maybe—but he is a very talented politician in a very unconventional way. But he is also not infallible. He is capable of making incompetent decisions. He is capable of being beaten legislatively and in the court of public opinion. Right now, he is in the saddle because he has all these EOs, all these Executive orders. But, eventually, events overtake. And a President, usually, is responding to events rather than creating conditions on the ground.

So part of the thing that I want everybody to kind of understand as they feel their frustration, as they kind of process and try to metabolize the flurry of nonsense coming at the American people, is just to understand it is not always going to be like this.

They don't have 1,200 days' worth of Executive orders ready to go. And as these things are—some of them are like wishes and could have been a tweet. Many of them are illegal and, in some cases, the President does have pretty raw authority. Tariffs, he can do; and there is not much the legislature can do about it.

My favorite EO was—I think it was a Presidential memo, not an EO. But after the plane crash last week, they did a memo that this was Joe Biden's fault.

Mr. MURPHY. That is right.

Mr. SCHATZ. I was like, now we are cooking. He was like, I want another EO to just say it was Biden's fault. That is like when they admitted that

what they are doing is when all you have is a hammer, everything looks like a nail. They understand that their agenda is so unpopular—their agenda is so unpopular—that they can't even get it through the Congress of their own party.

Mr. MURPHY. As happened in 2017.

Mr. SCHATZ. As happened in 2017. They couldn't even do the things that they promised they were going to do, except for the tax cuts.

So I think they understand the fundamental weakness of their position, which is we have a President who is likely to do very unpopular things. And although he is not unpopular at the moment, he is, relatively speaking, very unpopular for a newly inaugurated President, historically unpopular for a newly inaugurated President. And it is going to get worse because everybody knows the way he conducts himself does not age well. So they are in a hurry.

But it is not always going to feel like this; it is not always going to be like this. They will lose in court. They will lose in the court of public opinion. I am not suggesting we are not about to experience some bad public policy outcomes and that people will not suffer. A lot of bad stuff is about to happen. But the roots of democracy are deep; and like my friend Calvin Say says: "Bend but don't break." I want everybody to understand, "bend but don't break."

I am so proud of CHRIS for coming here and staying from 2 to 5. I may go get a little more coffee and come and join you, or I may take a nap.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Connecticut.

Mr. MURPHY. Brian, thank you very much for your work in organizing this effort and always great to be with you on the floor today. I will not hold it against you if you go take an actual nap and get some rest. You exerted a lot of effort to make sure we were all here united—Democrats on the floor, raising the alarm.

I am going to try to go through the case as to why I do think this is a red-alert moment; the reason I was so glad to jump in and join you this evening and why I volunteered for the 2 to 5 shift tonight. I am very grateful for Senator WELCH. We had a gap from 5 to 6, and I hear I may not have to go the full 4 hours.

But I certainly have 2 hours of material here because I think something really, really dangerous is happening to this country right now; something that is worthy of an overnight session on the floor of the U.S. Senate; something that every American needs to be talking about.

I first want to just go through all of the events and developments of the last 2 weeks that matter because Senator SCHATZ was referring to a phenomena that I think is important. Donald Trump and Stephen Miller and Steve Bannon and other people who advise

him are pretty unapologetic about this strategy. They call it "flooding the zone." The idea is they are going to make so much news, they are going to make so many outrageous statements every day, that it becomes really hard for Americans to understand what is real and what is not real, what is important and what is not important.

I am not saying that the President's comments last night on Gaza won't have deep impacts; they will. I can guarantee you that Hamas and Hezbollah and other terrorist groups in the Middle East, right now, are using the President's comments to recruit. The idea that the United States is coming to Gaza to invade, occupy, cleanse, and level Gaza—that is bulletin-board recruiting material for terrorist groups.

Our country is less safe today than it was yesterday because that is easy recruitment material for the groups that we are fighting. It keeps them alive at a moment when they were on the run. It separates us from our allies, because despite what President Trump said last night that everybody agrees with the plan, that was not true. Not true. Nobody agrees with that plan.

Benjamin Netanyahu doesn't want America coming in invading and occupying Gaza. No Middle Eastern leader wants that. The President said it; it is not true. He says many things that are not true. It makes Americans look like a laughingstock around the world because everybody knows we are not invading Gaza. So when the President announces that he has come up with a brilliant plan that everybody supports and every world leader knows he is not telling the truth and he is never going to do it, it undermines American credibility and reputation around the world.

I am not suggesting that the President's absurd statements last night about Gaza don't hurt America; they do. But he is not going to do it. He won't get support from Congress to do it, and nobody in the American public wants him to do it.

I can't get into the President's brain, but I suspect it was part of this strategy, this articulated purposeful strategy to try to confuse people about what is real and what is not real. I don't think it was coincidental that the President was making this outrageous, outlandish statement about Gaza last night on the first day that you really felt like the American people had figured out the game. The people turning out to protest were bigger than they had been since the election. All of a sudden the President comes up with a new plan to invade and occupy Gaza.

I think one of the exercises that I want to go through in my time today is just to tell you the pieces of the agenda—an agenda set by Russ Vought—that matter; that are the most dangerous; that are the ones that you should pay attention to.

I wouldn't spend a lot of time worrying about the drama over the Pan-

ama Canal or Greenland, just like I wouldn't worry too much about the President's statements on Gaza.

But here is what I would worry about. I am clearly going to cover ground that has been covered here today. But I just want to lay it out because I have more time to do it than anybody else, so I will be a little more thoughtful and comprehensive about it.

At the top of my list is the President's decision to seize control of Federal spending. So this was his Executive order from a few days ago that suspended all Federal spending. For that day, everything seemed to be turned off. Even the Medicaid program was not open for reimbursement. Head Start programs were not getting money. No State in the country could access dollars for different projects that they run. Not-for-profits weren't receiving funding.

Now, the order was for 90 days, but if you believe that, I have some bridges to sell you. Even if it was for 90 days, that is patently illegal. That is patently illegal. The Founding Fathers spent a lot of time wrestling with a foundational question: How to preserve democracy in America and prevent what, up until that point, had been an inexorable retreat to despotism in countries that had tried to engage in some kind of self-determination. The Founding Fathers thought relentlessly about the kind of tools that would be available to a President that could allow him to take control and rule as a king or as a monarch.

Now, some of the things they spent a lot of time thinking about feel, today, a little anachronistic. The Founding Fathers, for instance, were really focused on not giving the President a standing army. Now, we have moved beyond that belief that a standing army is a threat to our liberty, but that was one of the things the Founding Fathers worried greatly about. They didn't necessarily write that protection into the Constitution, but they thought a lot about it.

The protection they did write into the Constitution was the protection to reserve spending power for the branch of government most directly connected to the people. That is Congress—the branch that gets elected every 2 years, the branch that has different factions, different geographies represented. They wanted the spending power to be invested in the most democratic body so as to make sure that the compromise on spending ended up benefiting the whole country—every geography but also every political affiliation. So they said: Congress has the power to spend. Congress has the power to decide how money is spent.

So, for 240 years, courts and the Supreme Court have broadly recognized that a President cannot decide by himself what money to spend and what money not to spend. A President also cannot decide for himself to apply new conditions to spending beyond what the democratically elected Congress selected.

The reason for that—the reason why that power is vested in Congress—is primarily a check on despotism because if a President has the ability to unilaterally decide how to spend money, then, of course, the natural temptation will be to only spend money in a way that benefits and preserves and advances your political power. Spend money on people who support you, and deny money to people who don't support you in order to pressure more people to support you.

I wasn't here for Senator KIM's speech, but it sounded like he laid out the corollary that still exists, unfortunately, in some closed political systems in this country wherein you have party machines that give out favors and money and privilege based upon loyalty. OK. We decided, in this country, the President is not going to get to do that because it is inherently subject to fraud and abuse and corruption.

As we have talked about—as Senator SCHATZ and I talked about—this President has been pretty unapologetic and Russ Vought has been pretty unapologetic in their insistence that, yes, in fact, people who are loyal to the President should be treated differently.

It isn't as if we don't understand what the President is trying to do by capturing Federal spending power. He is criticizing projects in Democratic States. He is saying: We may not fund disasters in Democratic States. They are targeting Agencies that they believe are populated by people with different political affiliations than the President's. They are firing FBI agents who engaged in any kind of law enforcement action against Republicans.

Maybe this conversation would be a little bit less frantic—the moment would feel a little bit less urgent—if you thought the President was seizing control of Federal spending for some halfway legitimate reason, but, in fact, it looks as if President Trump is trying to seize control of Federal spending for the exact reason that worried the Founding Fathers so much that they were explicit in the Constitution: No, the President cannot seize control of Federal spending. It will lead to fraud, corruption, and ultimately the erosion and perhaps destruction of our democracy.

The Founding Fathers worried every single day about writing a document that prevented a slide to despotism. You can laugh that off as hyperbole. You can say: Democrats are crying wolf. Of course, America is always going to be a democracy.

Every democracy dies. It does. Every democracy has an expiration date just like every civilization has an expiration date. There is an end, and there is a series of events that leads to that end. Maybe this isn't it, but, boy, when you package the list that I will give you together, it looks suspiciously like the roadmaps that caused other democracies to fall, and it looks suspiciously like the set of things that our Founding Fathers were clear about protecting against.

The second thing that matters is the President's decision to shutter certain Departments. It has started with USAID, and we spent some time talking tonight about what has happened at USAID. It is absolutely extraordinary. This is the nonpartisan Agency that fights for the United States abroad.

Our military leaders—I suspect most of whom are Republicans; I don't really care—are fond of saying: If you get rid of USAID, if you were ever to stop paying for foreign aid, you would have to double the number of bullets you buy us.

Our military leaders consistently, consistently make the case for USAID because USAID is a partner with our military in preventing chaos and instability that ultimately lead to war and threats to U.S. troops.

The Army and the Navy and the Air Force—they chase Chinese influence. They try to protect us from Russia. But so does USAID. China's power in the world is not just military power. Every nation's power is multifaceted. China, frankly, gets more influence in the world through its nonmilitary tools than it gets through its military tools. China doesn't have the number of military partnerships that the United States does. In fact, it has very few. Its partnerships are information partnerships, technology partnerships, economic development partnerships. Those are the kinds of tools that USAID has. So when USAID just vanishes from the playing field, China wins; Russia wins; nonstate terrorist groups win.

One of the things USAID was doing in Lebanon was running a bunch of programming, trying to depress Hezbollah's influence and trying to help stand up a government that was independent and free of terrorist influence.

What was USAID doing in Mexico? It was trying to build up the capability of law enforcement so the drug gangs that send fentanyl to the United States didn't control areas of Mexico which allow them, without interruption or harassment, to be able to send fatal drugs like fentanyl to the United States.

So there are things our military can do to advance U.S. power, but they can't do everything, so USAID was doing those other things. Now that they are off the playing field, America is fundamentally weaker. That is the merit-based case for why it is a disaster for the United States and a gift to China and Russia and terrorist groups that USAID has disappeared.

But there is a clear legal and constitutional case. USAID is an Agency established by statute. We passed a law establishing USAID. We pass a budget every year funding not just USAID but specific accounts in USAID. A President of the United States cannot by fiat eliminate a statutorily authorized Agency. That is what a monarch does. And you are already hearing that the

Elon Musk crowd that so happily got rid of USAID is now talking about "USAID" as a verb. They are going to "USAID" the Department of Labor. They are going to "USAID" the Department of Education. They can't eliminate those Departments from the statutes, but they could just send everybody home. That would be illegal, but they could just send everybody home.

What a disaster it would be if the people who make sure that our factories are safe and that workers aren't abused by greedy corporations all of a sudden don't show up to work. That is great for the companies and the corporations, but that is terrible for workers.

Pay attention to this effort to shut down Agencies because these Agencies, while certainly you can have a conversation about making them more efficient, provide essential services.

The Department of Education provides essential services. Two-thirds of our schools run on funds from the Department of Education. Disabled kids are protected because of laws administered by the Department of Education. The Department of Labor protects workers to make sure they don't get run over and abused by companies. USAID protects America all over the world. There is a cost to Americans' pocketbooks, to the quality of life, to the defense of America when these Agencies get shuttered, so you should pay attention to that.

The third thing that you should pay attention to is the corruption that is happening inside the Department of the Treasury as we speak.

The Department of the Treasury pays the bills of this country, and those bills range from contracts we have with companies and not-for-profits to, you know, your tax refund or your Social Security check or your Medicare benefit. That is really sensitive stuff, so we historically have had totally nonpolitical people running that payment system.

Congress decides how that money is spent and what the level of your benefit is, but a bunch of civil servants—people who are not loyal to Democrats or Republicans, who just want to make the payments—run that system.

What really caused this public tempest in the last few days was the disclosure that Elon Musk—a billionaire with all sorts of interests when it comes to the Federal Government; he became a billionaire based off of Federal policy and Federal contracts—has been given access to the Treasury's payment system, not just him but a bunch of kids who work for him. So a bunch of twenty-somethings fresh out of college, with absolutely no expertise in payment systems, have gotten access to these payment systems. They are apparently inside these payment systems right now, fiddling around with them. They broke one payment system as soon as they got access to it in the Medicaid system.

Now, I will be honest with you, we don't know why they want access to the payment systems. We don't know what they are doing inside the payment systems. But there aren't a lot of benign possibilities. Are they getting ready to turn off payments to individuals and entities that they don't like? Are they just sort of looking under the hood so that they can get your tax information or get the tax information about Elon Musk's competitors? I mean, this is unheard of. This is a private sector individual—an individual who actually cannot get a security clearance because he is deemed to be a security risk—who is inside the most sensitive part of the Department of the Treasury, with access to every single American's personal data. That is a corruption. That is a perversion of norms and rules, and it matters. That matters. You should pay attention to it.

The fourth thing that matters is the darkness that is descending over the Federal Government. A few hours—maybe it was a day, 2 days—after President Trump was inaugurated, he fired I believe every single inspector general.

What is an inspector general? An inspector general, again, is an independent, nonpartisan individual who has got an office and staff that work for them that sit inside each of our Agencies. Our Federal Agencies are big. They are. They spend billions of dollars. They do really good work, but there is always the chance for fraud and abuse. So we historically—Congress historically has authorized a little bit of money inside of every Department to have a watchdog. We call them inspectors general because they are inspecting how taxpayer dollars are being spent and make sure that the dollars are being spent in accordance with the law.

The inspectors general normally have the power to intervene when something has gone wrong, at the very least, the power to issue a report to tell the public and Congress: Hey, guys, you know, the money was supposed to be spent on trying to fight wildfires, and instead, it is being spent on something else. Those inspectors general are gone.

Donald Trump didn't get rid of them because he thought they were doing a bad job and he wanted to replace them with somebody else; he just got rid of them illegally. You can't do that. You have to, at the very least, give notice to Congress.

At the same time, they have begun issuing what we call gag orders to Federal employees. The most notorious one happened at USAID. As the purge started beginning at USAID when they started to, first, just sending all the supervisors home, when they suspended all USAID programming all around the world, a corresponding order went out to employees saying: Do not talk to anybody about what is happening.

Now, I can understand being sensitive about rank-and-file employees

talking to the press. But they didn't just say the press. They said don't talk to Members of Congress. Don't talk to elected Members of Congress who are in charge of spending the taxpayers' money. Don't even talk to them about the purge that is happening.

That all sounds a little suspicious, right? That is a little worrying when, with intention, all the watchdogs are fired; with intention, an order goes out to employees: Shut your mouth. Don't say anything.

That probably doesn't mean that good legal stuff is happening inside these Departments. That probably doesn't mean that this administration is really focused on rooting out fraud and corruption and tackling inefficiency. When you get rid of the watchdogs, that normally means that you are preparing to engage in some pretty bad stuff. Pay attention to the fact that the watchdogs are no longer there.

The fifth thing that matters—and I wrote it on my list here as the fifth thing, but it probably matters the most, and I will spend some time later talking more about this—is the legitimization of political violence in this country.

There is something special about force. The thing that matters most to us in life is the physical safety of ourselves and our kids and our family. I talk about this a lot because I do a lot of work on gun violence. And I try to explain to people that this is the issue that matters the most to people, the physical safety of their family.

I mean, you would give up anything in life to defend your family from physical harm. You would give up your house. You would give up your savings. You might even give up your life to protect the life of somebody that you love.

Physical harm is really, really scary. And because physical harm is so traumatic, the threat of physical harm is impactful. It makes people do things and change behaviors if they think there is a chance that they are going to be hurt. Every single person knows this because, at some point in your life, you were threatened with physical harm.

And, yes, maybe once or twice, or maybe for some people more often than once or twice, you stood up to that bully or you fought back. But for most people, there are plenty of other times in which you just changed your behavior. If the bully was on this street, you went the other block. I stood up to bullies a handful of times in my life, but I also changed my route home a bunch of times as well.

There can be no place for physical violence in politics, there just can't, because it does change behavior. When somebody is subject to the threat of physical violence, you are no longer making a decision based on what is best for the country or for your constituents. You are instead making a decision based on what keeps you physically safe and what keeps your family physically safe.

Democracies do not exist when the party in power, when the individual in power, gets to use the threat of physical violence as a tool to try to influence behavior. That is, by definition, not a democracy.

I am pretty confident none of my colleagues really thought that Donald Trump was going to pardon every single January 6 protester, but he did. But he did.

I will just tell you, subsequent to that decision, the threats of violence to my office—and I suspect the same is true for Democrats—have risen. Republicans have been subject to threats of violence before. They will continue to be. But this is different because Donald Trump has not immunized violence writ large, neither has he immunized political violence writ large. What Donald Trump did by pardoning all the January 6 protesters is say: If you commit violence in my name against people who are trying to stop me from advancing my power, it is cool. It is cool.

What were the police officers doing? They were defending the Capitol from an attack that was designed to keep Donald Trump in power. Those people were storming the Capitol because they believed that the election had been stolen from Donald Trump. They were coming here to install him in power permanently.

The police officers who were defending the Capitol, they weren't political. They weren't Democrats. They were engaged in an effort to try to stop the seizure of power by Donald Trump's supporters. And when every single one of those rioters got pardoned, the message was clear: If you commit violence against people who are trying to stop Donald Trump's political agenda, it is cool. Do it. There will be no consequence.

So it is not shocking that threats of violence have increased to me and my Democratic colleagues because, right now, we are trying to frustrate or stymie President Trump's political agenda. And Donald Trump has said: If you beat the hell out of people who are trying to stop my political agenda, I will let you off the hook. The legitimization of political violence, the endorsement of political violence, that matters.

The final thing that has happened over the course of the last 2 weeks—really, it has been happening since the election—that matters is the effort by Donald Trump to try to co-opt and control the media.

Obviously, the Founding Fathers thought a lot about the independence of the free press. They knew that one of the bulwarks against despotism was a free and independent press. So even though they didn't get around to it until a little bit later, in the Bill of Rights, they guaranteed the freedom of the press.

As we have watched other democracies fall in the last 240 years all around the world, as we have watched countries like Hungary slide away from

democracy, a key facet of that slide, that purposeful slide, engineered by a would-be autocrat, is the seizure and control of information.

It is obvious why you would want to do that because, if you can control information, then you can make sure that the dominant narrative is your spin and you can suppress any criticism.

Already, one of the Nation's biggest information platforms, Twitter, is effectively an organ of the White House. Donald Trump announced that he wanted to take a 50-percent ownership stake—using taxpayer dollars—in TikTok, maybe the most influential of platforms today.

He has apparently cut deals with the owners of other platforms. Most notably, the CEO of Facebook, right after the election, came down to Mar-a-Lago, and Trump openly bragged that Facebook had decided to do what he wanted, which was to stop fact-checking all of the lies that get put online by Trump's supporters.

Trump said: Yeah, he probably did that because I threatened him. He was probably worried that I was going to do something to hurt him.

Maybe not coincidental is the fact that there is an FTC lawsuit pending against Facebook. We will see what happens with that lawsuit. But would it be surprising that that lawsuit disappears after the owner of Facebook said: Yeah, Mr. President, I will do what you want. I will take down my fact-checking to make sure that your misinformation—and all misinformation, frankly, because the misinformation doesn't only come from the right—misinformation gets to exist freely on-line platform.

So pay attention to the hard work that Donald Trump is engaged in to try to control, to the best he can, the information infrastructure in this country.

I mean, it wasn't a coincidence that not every billionaire was sitting up there on the dais with Trump during the inauguration. It was primarily the billionaires who control information companies. Facebook is an information company. Apple is an information company. Amazon is an information company. They have other business lines as well, but they are controlling huge amounts of information in this country. It is not a coincidence that those are the companies that Donald Trump is trying to gain the most influence over.

Those are the five things that I have identified as the things that should matter: the seizing of control of Federal spending; the illegal shutdowns of Departments—and, by the way, I mentioned USAID. But, as I said, Labor and Education seems next on the chopping block—the infiltration of Treasury's payment system by Elon Musk, a private sector individual who can't get a security clearance; the firing of the IGs and the gag orders, shedding darkness on our Agencies; the legitimization of

political violence, the endorsement of political violence; and the attempts to put the President in a position to control the flow of information in this country.

Why this matters tonight is that Russ Vought is going to occupy a space at the nerve center of all of those policies.

That is what OMB is. The Office of Management and Budget is essentially the government's nerve center. It is the place where all the Departments of the Federal Government and all the accounts and all the policies, they all connect.

In many ways, the Director of OMB is the most powerful person in government, often one of the least well-known. The job tends to exist behind the scenes. But OMB is the place where all the pipes connect, where all the regulations and policies and Executive orders have to be vetted, the place where all the Department heads have to get a sign-off before moving forward with policies.

So none of this can happen or will happen—the seizure of Federal spending, the shuttering of the Departments, the infiltration of the Treasury payment system, the firing of the IGs, the legitimization of political violence, or the influence of information platforms—without the Director of OMB being in charge.

By the way, it isn't coincidence that that comprehensive document that Trump swore he had nothing to do with—Project 2025—was authored in part by Russ Vought. Russ Vought was one of the primary authors, one of the primary organizers, of Project 2025, which was this document that explained exactly how you would do many of these things to push American democracy toward autocracy. It isn't a coincidence that one of the authors—one of the primary authors of the Project 2025 document is now the nominee to run the Agency that perhaps has more influence than any other Agency in the Federal Government: the Office of Management and Budget.

OK. So having talked about the things that matter versus the things that don't matter, I want to talk about the why and I want to talk about how all of the six developments that matter fit together because this isn't a random set of priorities, events, or developments. All those things that I mentioned serve two major purposes, and this is what I want to spend the remaining time that I have on.

The first goal is to enact a massive, massive transfer of both money and power from poor people and the middle class to the corporations and the billionaires and the millionaires.

Senator SCHATZ and I talked about this long-discredited economic theory called trickle-down economics in which, if you just cut taxes for the very, very wealthy, the economic elites, the masters of the economic universe, eventually all that money will spill down to everybody else. That

was a fraud as a theory. It was a fraud. It was essentially made up in order for rich people to just pretend like there was some intellectual underpinning to their greed.

When people get really, really wealthy, they tend to just want to get more and more wealthy. For many people, being a billionaire is not good enough; you have to have \$2 billion and \$3 billion. So they came up with this idea that "If you just continue to give us money, it will eventually find its way down to everybody else."

But everybody knows that that is not how it has worked because people in this country in the middle of the economy are miserable—they are miserable—because they are working harder and harder, and they are not getting anything back in return.

Wages have gone up a little bit, especially over the last 4 years, but they are not keeping pace with prices; they have not for decades. Even though this country is becoming much more productive—every worker is way more productive than they were 10, 20, 30 years ago, in part because of technology—the gains from that productivity are not accruing to workers; they are accruing to the owner class, to the capital class.

So there is this separation happening in this country whereby everybody in the middle is just kind of like treading water, and then you have this set of superelites—people like Elon Musk and Jeff Bezos and Mark Zuckerberg, the people who were on that inauguration platform—that have more money than they know what to do with, and very little of it is actually ending up trickling down. They are hoarding much of the money that they are collecting.

So this theory has never ever worked, but greed is powerful. It is powerful. So that crowd, that economic elite crowd—there aren't any poor people walking around Mar-a-Lago. Everybody that Trump hangs out with at Mar-a-Lago—those are really, really rich people—really, really rich people. Trump is not playing golf with, you know, his cleaner. The people that Trump is talking to are people who are immensely wealthy, and they see a real opportunity. It is not just good enough to have low taxes; they want them lower. They also want the ability to squeeze as much as they can out of the Federal Treasury for themselves.

So what Project 2025 is all about and what the Trump agenda is all about is, first and foremost, about a massive transfer of wealth and power from the middle of America to a very handful of elites. I want to try to walk you through that for a second.

The first thing they are doing is trying to set up another round of massive tax cuts for the billionaires and for the corporations. They are going to try to get money other ways, but the most important thing to them is for their taxes to be much lower; for the corporate taxes to be low or nonexistent; for them to be able to pass along all

their wealth, without any taxation, to their kids so that you have these permanent billionaire families where nobody ever has to work, and the money just gets handed down from generation to generation; for regulations to be gutted so that they can abuse the environment or workers in a way to pile up more money. They are going to do that in this bill that will be considered later in the year through a process called reconciliation.

Now, when Republicans did this bill in 2017, they made no attempt to try to pay for it. It was almost all borrowed money, and it was one of the reasons the piece of legislation was really unpopular. People hated that tax cut because, fully enacted, that tax cut would have sent about 80 percent of the benefit to the very, very wealthy, but it also was just all put on the American credit card.

There was again this argument that, A, if we cut taxes for the wealthy, it will trickle down to everybody else and it will result in a magical increase in tax revenue because of all the economic activity caused by the tax cut, and that magical economic activity and the tax revenue from it will pay for the fact that we are now collecting less in taxes from the very, very wealthy.

That didn't happen. It just didn't happen. We lost a ton of revenue because the rich and the corporations were paying much less. The economic activity that they predicted did not happen, and the deficit grew. The deficit grew. It was a massive explosion in our deficit. No President up until Donald Trump had added more to our deficit than he did during those 4 years.

So this time, knowing that that tax cut was really unpopular—for a lot of reasons but not the least of which the fact that it wasn't paid for; it was all borrowed—Republicans are trying to create the illusion that they are serious about savings. So part of what is happening with the cuts at USAID—the evisceration, the elimination of USAID—and the next round of cuts at the Department of Education or the Department of Labor is about gutting a series of programs or at least creating the illusion of cuts that then create a pretext that “Hey, we have saved a lot of money. We have cut a lot of government services. We can afford that massive tax cut for the rich and for the corporations.”

Now, as I talked about with Senator SCHATZ, a lot of those cuts are illusory. All those USAID employees that have been sent home, they are still getting paid. I mean, it is insane. We have thousands of Federal employees right now who are home or are about to be recalled, many of whom have lost access to their email, so they can't even work from home, that are getting paid to do nothing. So some of these cuts are illusory. They don't exist. It looks like you are saving money, but you are not really saving money.

But eventually, if you do shutter the Department of Education and you do

shutter the Department of Labor and you keep USAID illegally closed, then, yeah, some savings will appear. But where do they come from? They come from a retreat of American power. They come from our decision to stop contesting the rise of China. They come because we have decided to hand Ukraine to the Russians. They come from our decision to stop fighting terrorists.

If you close the Department of Education, you will get some savings, but it will only be because we have abandoned children with disabilities, we have stopped trying to fight bias and discrimination in our schools, and we are no longer helping kids afford college.

If you destroy the Department of Labor, yeah, you will get some savings that you can apply to the billionaire tax cut, but it is because you have shut down OSHA, which makes sure that our factories and our workplaces are safe; it is because you are no longer helping workers collectively bargain so that they can get better wages and better benefits.

USAID protects this country. The Department of Education and the Department of Labor help regular people. It is easy for the billionaire class to say: Let's shut down the Department of Education. All their kids go to private schools. They don't need the Department of Education. And even if their kids are discriminated against, they can hire fancy teams of lawyers.

So some of the savings are illusory, some of them are fake, but many of the savings, if you shut down USAID and the Department of Labor and the Department of Education, they are real, but those savings are gleaned by hurting real people.

Shutting down schools or withdrawing from a fight for civil rights and protections for kids with disabilities or stopping trying to protect workers from harm done to them by corporations or a retreat from the world, a decision to just pack up and let China own the world—there is a cost to all of that, and the cost is borne not by the wealthy and the billionaires but by regular people.

(Mrs. MOODY assumed the Chair.)

Military leaders say routinely—I will say this again; I mentioned it earlier—that if you eliminate USAID, if you stop soft power, right, you have to buy us twice as many bullets, because they know that USAID helps keep really dangerous places—places that matter to the United States, like the Middle East—stable. And if you stop focusing on stability in parts of the world that matter to the United States, conflict breaks out, and the United States often gets dragged into that conflict. When the United States gets dragged into that conflict, it is not the billionaires' kids that are fighting. By and large—we all know this—the people that sign up for our military are middle-class families, are often poor families.

So the billionaires and the corporations won't have much to lose if the

evisceration of USAID leads to American troops being sent into conflict around the world. It will be regular folks—the nonbillionaire class—that will get impacted by that when their kids are sent overseas, when their kids don't come home.

So this attack on Agencies, this illegal shuttering of Departments, it is all in service of trying to make it seem as if there are savings happening so that we can afford that tax cut for the very, very wealthy.

But then there is this other thing that is happening. Again, we don't know what it is yet, but, man, it looks really worried.

So why is Elon Musk inside the Department of the Treasury? Why has Donald Trump given him access to this incredibly sensitive payment system?

I am going to admit to you: We don't know yet. It just is unprecedented. And you saw the long-time Treasury employee. I mean, this is a nonpolitical guy. This is just a guy who shows up to work every day trying to make sure that you get your Medicare benefits and you get your refund check. He left. He left because he had never seen anything like this. He had never seen a billionaire with a political agenda come in and take control of this payment system.

And so what is the agenda there? I don't know. But could it be in the same service as the elimination of USAID and the potential elimination of other Departments? Could it be that they want to take control of the payment system so that they can strip benefits—admittedly expensive benefits—for the middle class so they can afford their tax cut? If you have control of the payment system and you don't care about the law and you don't care about the Constitution, you can decide to reduce payments or shut down payments.

For a day, they stopped paying Medicaid claims. So it is not like this is beyond them. For a day, they shut down the Medicaid system.

If Elon Musk has control of the Treasury payment system and there is a need to save some big money so that you can claim that you passed along the big tax cuts to the billionaires and the corporations and you didn't increase the deficit, then maybe those Social Security benefits get turned off for a day. Maybe those Medicare benefits get turned off for a day.

I don't know what the hell he is doing inside that payment system. And you can say: Well, you shouldn't believe the worst, or you shouldn't hypothesize. You shouldn't guess. But we haven't been given a good explanation for something that looks like a fundamental perversion of precedent and the law.

Remember, Elon Musk can't get a security clearance. He can't. But apparently, he can have access to all of our most sensitive information and data. And maybe it is in service of trying to rearrange payments to save money for that tax cut.

I mean, it is stunning the number of programs that he has access to: Social Security and Medicare benefits, salaries for all Federal personnel, payments to government contractors and grant recipients, tax refunds. The system holds a lot of sensitive information, including Social Security numbers—all of our Social Security numbers, all of our names, all of our addresses, much of our private banking information, much of our private tax information.

News broke today that Musk now has access to even more. He didn't just get access to the Treasury payment system, but now, he has access to CMS's payment system. CMS runs Medicare and Medicaid. So now, Elon Musk has access to all of the payment and contracting systems that run Medicare and Medicaid—literally has control of hundreds of billions of dollars in payments to healthcare providers. They got access to that payment system.

Today, they also showed up at the Atlanta headquarters of the CDC. They met with Labor Department leaders to begin the process of getting access to those payment systems as well. Why is this happening? Why is this happening?

Well, it could be that they are trying to save money so that they can afford the billionaires' tax cut, but it also may be so that they can direct payments to the companies and the individuals that have pledged support to Donald Trump and they can deny payment to people who have not pledged loyalty.

And, again, I understand that that sounds a little fanciful, but just look at what is happening right now at the White House. The President is saying he is going to shut down a high-speed rail system in California, while saying nothing about a high-speed rail system in Florida. He is proposing eliminating FEMA because there was a series of devastating, deadly wildfires in California, but he wasn't—and Republicans weren't talking about eliminating FEMA when there were disasters in Republican States. It seems as if there is a pretty unapologetic preference for political friends.

And if Elon Musk has control over the payment system, then why should we assume that he wouldn't use that control to turn on money to people he likes or maybe even entities that he is affiliated with and turn off money to entities that he is not affiliated with or to his competitors. That is why you don't allow a billionaire, that is why you don't allow somebody with massive financial interests, to be in charge of the Treasury's payment system. That is bananas. We don't do that because it opens up the opportunity for fundamental corruption.

But if you understand one of the key reasons for all of these early actions to be a transfer of power and wealth away from regular people to the billionaire class, then it makes sense, because you can either use your control of that payment system to bank money that you

can use to cut your own taxes or you can just use control of that payment system to pay people that are affiliated with you or help your business and deny money to your competitors.

This is where the firing of the IGs matters because, if we had inspectors general in these Departments, then we would actually be able to have a view as to whether the access to these information systems are being used for corrupt purposes.

Here is the list of the inspectors general: the inspector general at the State Department, the inspector general at the Department of Energy, the inspector general at the Interior Department, the inspector general at the Defense Department, the inspector general at the Department of Veterans Affairs, the inspector general at the Department of Transportation, the inspector general at the Environmental Protection Agency, the inspector general at the Small Business Administration, the inspector general over Social Security, the inspector general at the Department of Labor, the inspector general at the Department of Health and Human Services, the inspector general of the Department of Agriculture, and the inspector general at the Department of Housing and Urban and Development.

All of those watchdogs are gone, and they are being replaced with no one—because the complaint wasn't that these inspectors general weren't good enough watchdogs of the Federal taxpayer dollars. The complaint was that they were watchdogs. The complaint was that somebody was looking and watching. All of these inspectors general were fired and replaced with no one for the purpose of darkness descending.

Elon Musk got access today to the entire Medicare and Medicaid payment system. Why? We do not know, but it is certainly plausible to believe that there are nefarious purposes afoot, that his access to that system is part of a design to harm our democracy or enhance his economic interests, but we will have a really hard time figuring it out because the inspector general at the Department of Health and Human Services, coincidentally, was fired days before Elon Musk was given unprecedented access.

An unaccountable, unelected billionaire with tons of business interests inside this government was given access to the most sensitive payment systems in our government. It is not a coincidence. I was being facetious. It was not a coincidence that all the inspectors general were fired right before Elon Musk got access to these payment systems.

The intent is darkness. And if your intent is to steal from the American people, if your intent is to use that access to be able to divert money from legal purposes to illegal purposes, if your intent is to transfer resources that are supposed to be due to the taxpayer instead to the millionaire, bil-

lionaire, and corporate class, then you can't have sunlight. You can't have pesky inspectors general because the public would hate that if they knew it was happening.

There are thousands of people showing up to riots, but there would be hundreds of thousands showing up to protests. But there would be hundreds of thousands of people showing to protests if they knew, through the reports of these inspectors general, that there was thievery happening. We don't know what is happening because darkness has descended upon these Agencies.

The other part of this plan related to the shutdown of these Departments and the infiltration of these Departments by people like Elon Musk is that another way for the billionaires to get richer, beyond cutting services, influencing the economy by giving themselves payments and denying payments to their competitors, is to just privatize more and more of the Federal Government so that they get to take it—to privatize more and more State and local services, so they get to take it.

Project 2025, written by Russ Vought, amongst others, is very clear about that intention. They sort of look at the remaining parts of the Federal Government—in our government writ large, that are still done just for the common good, not done for profit. And they say: To hell with that. We want every public service to be a source of profit.

Now, I think that is a disaster. I think there is an important public-private sector partnership in a lot of parts of our government. I think it actually does work pretty well, for instance, the Department of Defense, to have the Army, the Navy, the Air Force, to have our military servicemembers be a public service, right? We don't have a mercenary army, right? Our Army is run by the government, by generals, by officers who work for the government.

But they are supplied with equipment that comes out of the private sector because, in the private sector, you are maybe going to get some more innovation than you would in the public sector. I think that is a very legitimate public-private partnership.

Same with healthcare, I don't like how much of our healthcare system has gone to the for-profit sector, but I understand that it is important to have a profit motive, for instance, in drug discovery, that private companies probably push a little bit harder to commercialize a breakthrough therapy than might a government laboratory.

So I think there are plenty of places in government where public-private partnerships work. There are plenty of places in government where maybe it should all be in the private sector, and we just flow money from the public sector to the private sector.

But I don't think that works for law enforcement. I don't think that works for protection services. I don't think that works for our public schools. I do not want a private equity

firm to own my kids' public school. I don't want the motivation of the administrators of my kids' elementary school to be sucking as much profit out of the school as possible. I want my kids' school to be a place where they only care about quality and performance.

And does that mean that there might be a little redundancy built in? Does that mean there might be a little inefficiency built in? Yeah, but I just want the mission to be doing good for my kids.

But that is not how Russ Vought sees it. That is not how the Trump administration sees it. They see every existing remaining public service, from the security at our airports to the administration of our schools, as a lost opportunity for the rich to get even richer.

I referenced this article earlier, but I will do it again. This is from the publication called "Buyout Insider." It is a pretty long article entitled "Back to school"—cute little heading—"Back to School: Investors are bullish again on education."

"Private equity's appetite for the sector is strong" is the subheadline. While a lot of this article is, admittedly, about private equity's interest in ed tech, the technology that surrounds schools and is used by teachers, it also talks about private equity's interest in just buying schools—buying and running schools.

It talks about some of the schools that are already being bought and run by private equity. Remember Betsy DeVos, the first Secretary of Education during Trump's first term? She ran for-profit schools, schools where the goal every day was not to educate kids but to make money for Betsy DeVos and her family.

So part of the agenda here is not just to pass along a tax cut to the billionaires and the millionaires and the corporations, but also to ship big parts of our public service infrastructure into the private sector.

I am a capitalist. We are all capitalists here. I believe in the genius of the private sector. I just do think there are some things that we should just do for the common good. There are some things that shouldn't be about how much money can I make. Billionaires and the corporations, the private equity firms, they are doing fine. They don't need our schools. They don't need our schools.

Frankly, there is plenty of evidence to show that when they get their hands on fundamental public services, they do it worse. For instance, if you look at nursing homes that are owned by private equity firms versus nursing homes that are not-for-profit, the not-for-profit homes are better quality homes—are better quality homes. Less people die in nursing homes owned by not-for-profit organizations than die in nursing homes that are owned by private equity. Why? Because private equity exists not to keep patients alive—I am not saying the owners of these

companies aren't moral human beings. I am not saying they are indifferent to life. But their bottom line is: How much money do we make? How much money do we make?

There are certain sectors of public life—like the end of life, like my kids' education, like whether I am safe at the airport—that I just don't want profit to be the motivating factor. So it is important to understand the why. The effort to shutter these Agencies is, in part, an effort to send their services into the private sector.

The agenda at the Department of Education is not just to destroy the bureaucracy at the Department, it is also to outsource the education of our kids to the private sector. They want to destroy these Agencies so, in part, they can move the services into the for-profit realm so that the billionaires and the millionaires and the corporations can get even richer. I think it is important to understand that element.

There is another piece of this story, specifically, the story about USAID that is relevant to this effort to transfer power into the hands of the elites. You have to ask: Why was USAID first? Why was there such a fervor to shut down USAID?

I don't know the answer. But what I know is we traditionally don't allow people like Elon Musk to be this involved in foreign policy because they are conflicted. I understand that is probably the reason why Elon Musk can't get a security clearance because he has these massive business interests outside the United States—in particular, in China.

So you have to ask yourself: Why is USAID being shuttered? Why does Elon Musk care so much about USAID? And I hate that we are searching for explanations, but the explanation that we have been given on the record is a lie. It is not true.

What Elon Musk and others have said is that they had to shut down USAID because it is a criminal organization. I mean, there is not a single U.S. Senator—even the U.S. Senators who don't like the fact that we spend money addressing famine overseas—who thinks USAID is a criminal organization. That is ridiculous. It is not true. Nobody who has spent a day looking at USAID thinks it is a criminal organization.

This is just normal public service, committed people who show up to work every day trying to solve problems for America abroad. We just have to accept that their on-the-record explanation that they are shutting down USAID because it is a criminal organization is not true. It is not true.

So we have to search for what the answer is. Who benefits most by USAID shutting down? I would argue it is China. China's influence in the world is primarily nonmilitary. China has a big growing military. We have to worry about that.

But China doesn't have military partnerships with countries like the United States does. China has eco-

nomics development partnerships, technology partnerships, mineral resource extraction partnerships, pork ownership, and administration partnerships. China's influence in the world right now is primarily nonmilitary. They don't do as much relief aid as we do, but they do a lot of it as well. They do help countries invest in public health infrastructure. They do show up and help with disasters. That is how they get influence.

The defining contest in the world right now is between the United States and China for who is going to control the piping of the international economy. When I say "piping," I mean the navigation of the seas, the information infrastructure, the AI data sets, the flow of critical minerals that are so key to making all the technologies, the chips, et cetera, for the future.

China is trying to buy up that piping. And they do that by creating relationships with governments overseas based upon their nonmilitary relationship, the economic development partnerships, the investments that they make. USAID competes with China when it comes to those nonmilitary investments so that China won't command that competition over who controls the economic piping of the world. So when USAID disappears, China cheers.

They are cheering because now they have the run of the place. They are able to gain more influence when the United States is withdrawn. I say that because Elon Musk has a lot on the line with China.

Here is a recent article describing the extent of Elon Musk's business relationships in China:

Mr. Musk has a lot on the line [in China]. His best-known company, the electric vehicle maker Tesla, makes half its cars in China. Tesla sells more cars in China than anywhere except the United States, and his local competition is getting stronger. Chinese regulators have not yet allowed Tesla to offer its latest assisted-driving and self-driving car technology, while allowing Chinese automakers to race ahead with similar systems.

Many of Mr. Musk's other companies, including his ventures in solar energy and large batteries, face formidable competition from Chinese businesses. Some of his businesses might benefit from a decoupling of Chinese and American economies.

It goes on to explain all the different ways in which Elon Musk has real interests in China and real reason to curry favor with the Chinese Government. We can't know for certain whether there is a connection between Elon Musk's ferocity in eliminating USAID, a daily thorn in the side of China, and his business interests, but we certainly haven't seen any more credible explanation.

And we got more evidence today of how Elon Musk's business interests seem to be dictating American foreign policy. One of the places that decisions get made about the rules of the world—rules that matter to the United States and U.S. companies—is the G20, the 20 biggest economies. We are there every

year because we want a seat at the table when the rules of the global economy are set because, if we are not there, the rules are going to disadvantage America, disadvantage our interests, and disadvantage our companies.

Well, the Secretary of State today announced that we would be boycotting the G20 this year. Why? Because we just don't like the place that it is being held. Guess where that place is? South Africa. And guess what Elon Musk has been doing over the course of the last several months and years—running a PR campaign against the government of South Africa for a host of reasons, but one of them is that the South African Government refused to sign a contract with Starlink. He is very mad that the South African Government refuses to sign a contract with him on Starlink because, whether he likes it or not, the South African Government has certain rules about diversity and inclusion and equality that he can't meet.

And so what did Secretary Rubio announce today? We will not be attending the G20 in South Africa because we don't like their rules on diversity, equity, and inclusion. The very rules that are preventing Elon Musk from getting a contract in South Africa are now the reasons why the United States is not showing up at the G20.

I am not a conspiracy theorist, but, man, this seems a little weird that our foreign policy seems to be impacted by the billionaire's interests, the billionaire that has such close connection to the policy of this administration.

One of the other ways that American policy and American law can be perverted to serve the billionaires and the corporations is if there is an integration between the interests of the billionaires and American foreign policy. It is just something we have to have our eyes wide open to.

And the last thing I want to talk about is just what is coming with this reconciliation bill because it could be that what is happening inside Treasury or what is happening in USAID is largely an effort to create savings—or the illusion of savings—to be able to afford this big tax cut for billionaires and millionaires.

But there is also a plan that is put down on paper by a Congressman in the House who is very influential in budget circles that lists out a series of cuts that they intend to carry out or want to have on the table in order to afford that big tax cut for billionaires and millionaires.

On that list is \$479 billion of cuts to Medicare, \$2.3 trillion worth of cuts for Medicaid. Medicare insures all seniors in this country. Medicaid insures seniors and pays for many senior services, but also pays for many services for the poorest families and kids in this country. And 40 percent of births in this country are paid for in part by Medicaid—\$2.3 trillion. I understand nobody understands how much money that is. But that is a lot of freaking

money. That is a lot of really hurt people if you cut \$2.3 trillion out of the Medicaid system. And \$151 billion in cuts to the Affordable Care Act—that means kicking people off of their insurance; \$347 billion of cuts to things like TANF, which is assistance for the very, very poor kids in this country, food programs that keep kids and families alive who can't afford food.

I mean, this is a draconian list of cuts—Medicare, Medicaid, Affordable Care Act, food programs, emergency assistance programs.

None of these programs that are laid out in the Arrington memo—this is Representative ARRINGTON. None of the programs laid out in Representative ARRINGTON's memo impact billionaires in a meaningful way or millionaires in a meaningful way. There is not a cut here that impacts a corporation in a meaningful way. Every single cut listed in his memo—Medicare, Medicaid, food programs, TANF, the Affordable Care Act—impacts middle-class people, poor people, regular people. It is just like USAID benefits regular people, making sure that their sons and daughters don't have to go off and fight a war. It is just like the Department of Labor and the Department of Education protect regular people.

Are you seeing the story here?

This agenda is about stealing money from the middle class and poor people and rerouting it to the billionaires, the millionaires, and corporations.

Every part of this story—the shuttering of these Agencies, the removal of the IGs, the infiltration of the payment system, the requisition of American foreign policy by the billionaires, the reconciliation bill—is all in service of the same thing: taking power and money from people in the middle and delivering it to the very, very wealthy.

For what? What else does Elon Musk need? What more does somebody who makes \$500 million need? Why do they need another giant tax cut? Why do they need to run our schools or the TSA—just to be able to pad their pockets?

I mean, I don't begrudge anybody for making money in this country. That is the genius of America, that you get to get rich if you have a good idea and you work hard. But I don't support the wholesale, rapid transfer of money and resources from folks in need in the middle class to folks who are already rich and don't need any more help.

All we are talking about here is just a realtime shift—cutting Medicare, Medicaid, Social Security, shutting down Agencies that help normal people, corrupting our foreign policy—in order to deliver more money to people who are already billionaires? Nobody wants that.

So let me talk about the second goal here that I think is actually, in some ways, much more urgent.

The second goal is to try to either suppress or shutter public dissent because they know what they are doing is really unpopular—cutting Medicare,

Medicaid, and the Affordable Care Act in order to finance tax cuts for the wealthy. That is not popular. That is very, very unpopular. Repealing the Affordable Care Act was and still is really unpopular.

So how do you get away with that? How do you stay in power and win elections if you do things that are really unpopular?

Well, you rig the rules. You rig the rules. The before and after moment is January 6, 2021. I am still flabbergasted by the fact that the majority of Republicans between the House and the Senate endorsed the idea that Donald Trump should still be President of the United States after he lost the election. That was the majority's position for Republicans in Congress—that Donald Trump had lost the election. No. They said he really won the election. They claimed there was fraud. Obviously, there was not fraud. Obviously, there is no evidence that he won the election. He lost it by a landslide. He lost it by a landslide. It wasn't like a million votes—it wasn't like 1,000 votes. He lost the election by a landslide.

But the Republicans said: No, I don't care that he lost the election. I want President Trump to stay in power.

In many ways, it is the most dangerous day in American politics since the end of the Civil War because it was an admission by one major political party that they care more about power and keeping power permanently than they care about observing the will of the people. The people elected Joe Biden. The majority of Republicans here said: I don't care. I want Donald Trump to stay in power, and I am willing to do whatever it takes, including endorsing and condoning violence, in order to keep Donald Trump in power.

That effort to try to destroy public dissent—to try to eradicate democracy as we know it so as to keep Republicans and the Trump family in power permanently—has not disappeared, and I think it is important to talk about that.

So, as I mentioned before, the most significant thing that has happened in many ways in the last 2 weeks—something that was supported by this incoming Director of OMB—is the endorsement of political violence in the pardoning of the January 6 protesters. It is unforgivable what happened. It is unforgivable because the people who assaulted the Capitol that day engaged in unspeakable violence.

You know these stories: the rioters who came here with metal poles and beat police officers over the head; the rioter who dragged a Capitol Police officer by the neck into the crowd and held him down while his fellow rioters stomped on the Capitol Police officer's body; the rioter who posted the night before, "The revolution is coming. There will be blood"; the scaffolding that was erected outside the Capitol in the chance of hanging Mike Pence; the rioter who went to the scaffolding after

beating up police officers—after beating up police officers—and posted on social media, “Too bad there are no Democrats here”; the police officers who died afterward; the police officer who had a heart attack after being tased repeatedly by one protester; the rioter who walked around the Capitol with zip ties, apparently looking for any Democrat to be able to seize, to kidnap, to torture.

I was here inside this Chamber. For my Republican colleagues who remember that day as a day of wayward tourists, none of my Republican colleagues stayed here to welcome the tourists when they were beating down those doors. The Republicans ran just like the Democrats ran.

I covered this before; so I won't belabor it. But Russ Vought is really dangerous, in part because he has been part of this effort to endorse political violence. And I don't know that we ever repair our Nation from that transition away from a universal belief that only peaceful protest is acceptable in this country to the world today in which, as long as you are engaged in political violence on behalf of the President, you can get away with it.

I mentioned this before, as well, but the other component of this attempt to seize power and hold power permanently for Republicans and the Trump family is this attempt to try to control information.

It is wild to me that this major information platform Twitter is now essentially being run out of the White House. It is amazing to me that President Trump is proposing to spend taxpayer dollars to take a 50-percent ownership stake in TikTok. It is amazing to me that people like Mark Zuckerberg are making deals with the President in which apparently the company will get some favorable treatment from the administration in exchange for Facebook's stopping patrolling false content being posted by everybody but including supporters of the President's.

The bullying of the media, the deals that seem to be being cut, you know, are not unfamiliar to those of us who study the ways that democracies die, and democracies vanish often because the information systems get co-opted or controlled by the regime.

We are not all the way there yet today.

I admit, even though Twitter is run by an ally of the President's, I still post on Twitter, and there are still people who see my criticisms of the President and Elon Musk. But all it takes is one tweak of those algorithms, and, all of a sudden, content that opposes the President is depressed, and content that spreads his narrative is accelerated. And it just isn't a coincidence that all the CEOs who were on stage at the inauguration—or the majority of the CEOs who were on stage at the inauguration—run information companies.

Again, I have covered this before, but another way in which they oppress dis-

sent is just by stopping information from ever getting out to the public. So the effort to fire the inspectors general, the effort to place gag orders on people who work at these Agencies—that is just an effort to try to hide the bad behavior, to hide the potential fraud so that folks who are organizing out there to oppose the President's agenda never get access to the information.

Second to the endorsement of political violence in, I think, the order of urgency for us to talk about is the seizure of government funding.

I talked about the seizure of government funding in the context of how it allows for corruption and how it allows for somebody like Elon Musk to send money to people he likes and to deny money to people he doesn't like; how it allows them to unilaterally violate the laws that we have passed to hold back funding so that they can bank dollars to afford a tax cut or a tax cut for a set of individuals or a corporation.

It also suppresses political dissent and speech, and we saw this happen in realtime. When those grants were all shut down, we had a hard time during that day to get information from grant recipients because they were afraid that, if they went public, the grant would never be turned back on, and that fear has not completely dissipated. It is very hard to get information from grant recipients even when their money has been turned back on because, again, they fear, if they collaborate with Democrats, they will be a target to have their dollars turned back off.

Again, this is exactly why the Founding Fathers said a unitary executive—a single executive—cannot and should not be in charge of who gets money and who doesn't because they can use that money to reward friends and to punish enemies.

So we are still trying to understand the full scope of the President's compliance or violation with the court orders, but it seems clear to us that there is an agenda here to protest money when it goes to places that don't align with the President's political priorities and let money go through when it goes to places that are lined up with the President's political priorities. I mentioned the most obvious example of that being the President's threat to shut down a high-speed rail grant to California but his disinterest in that grant when it is going to another State that supports him, like Florida.

The last very, very worrying development is what is happening inside our Justice Department right now. There is a rolling purge that is happening right now. You are watching the FBI squeeze out anyone who was affiliated with the prosecution of the January 6 rioters. You are watching the firing of anybody who was associated with law enforcement actions against the President.

So the message is clear: If you are in law enforcement and you go after Republicans or you go after Donald

Trump's political interests, you are not going to have a job. That would be worrying in and of itself.

But there is something else that is happening, and that is early threats of law enforcement against opponents of the President. The new acting U.S. attorney in Washington, DC, sent a really interesting letter directly to Elon Musk. Again, Elon Musk is a private citizen. He can't pass a security clearance. But Ed Martin, the acting U.S. attorney for Washington, DC, sent a letter saying: It was good to work with the DOGE team this weekend. We must keep all our American Government employees safe. We must protect the American people's property. I recognize that some of the staff at DOGE have been targeted publicly.

That is true. DOGE is apparently a public Agency. If you are working for DOGE, you have accountability to the American public. It is true that we are having a public conversation about DOGE, about Elon Musk, and about the people who work for him.

He said: At this time, I ask that you utilize me and my staff to assist in protecting the DOGE's work and the DOGE's workers. Let me assure you of this: We will pursue any legal action against anyone who impedes your work and threatens your people.

Let me read that again. Let me assure you of this: We will pursue any and all legal action against anyone who impedes your work and threatens your people.

That is extraordinary. The political opposition in this country is allowed to try to impede the work of the majority party. We are allowed to publicly criticize the work of the majority ruling party. We are allowed to protest outside of buildings. We are allowed to name individual government officials and criticize them for the actions that they have taken. But this letter from the U.S. attorney says: Be assured, we will pursue legal action against anyone who impedes your work or threatens your people.

Online, there are many critics of Elon Musk. The other night, one of these MAGA trolls targeted a critic of Elon Musk, and he tagged Ed Martin, the U.S. attorney, in his tweet.

He said: I found one right here, EagleEdMartin. Lots of stuff in his Bluesky account as well. I would look into him if I were you. He was threatening to hurt Elon Musk. Very unstable figure.

This is a pretty mainstream critic of Donald Trump and Elon Musk. He is not threatening to hurt anybody, but he is a pretty regular critic of Elon Musk.

That critic responds to this troll, and then guess who comes up posting. The U.S. attorney for Washington, DC.

He responds to this MAGA troll: Thank you for the information. Noted.

That is extraordinary. That is law enforcement, with the power of arrest and imprisonment, posting on a thread that includes a very loud, visible critic

of the President and Elon Musk, that he is watching him—he is watching him—coming on the heels of a letter that says: Let me assure you, we will pursue any and all legal action against anyone who impedes your work or threatens your people.

Even if this critic doesn't end up getting arrested, because there is no claim that there is anything he has done, as far as I have seen, that would ever rise to the level of an arrestable offense—he is just a critic of Elon Musk and Donald Trump—even if he never gets arrested, the chilling effect of a U.S. attorney telling critics online that “I am watching you” is authoritarian stuff, and it has impact because this particular individual is not going to stop criticizing.

But plenty of other people, faced with a vague threat of Federal investigation for their criticism of DOGE, will stop doing it, and I wouldn't blame them for it. If I get threatened with imprisonment because I criticize the President, I won't stop. This particular activist will not stop. But it would be reasonable for many Americans, if they were trolled by a U.S. attorney on their Twitter feed, being told “I am watching you”—it would be as logical for them to just stop criticizing as it would be for the recipient of Federal grants to stop criticizing the President because they worry that if they do, their funding will be shut off, as it might be for any ordinary American, knowing now that Elon Musk has the ability to control whether they get a tax refund or not.

Democracies don't die in an instance. There isn't this minute when dissent has been crushed so badly that we don't have fair contests in this country. It is a slow-rolling death.

Why Russ Vought, to me, is so dangerous is that he helped write the document that is the foundation of all of this attack on democracy that is happening. Put it all together: information platforms; agreeing to the terms laid down by the President because they fear retribution by the President; political violence being endorsed and mainstreamed; people being told that if you engage in violence to support the President's power, you won't be held accountable; the message being sent inside law enforcement that you will lose your job if you pursue any law enforcement action against allies of the President; and the message being sent to critics that you will be subject potentially to arrest, at the very least to harassment, if you impede the work of the administration.

Some people will not stand out. Faced with potential political violence, faced with the cutoff of funds to their State or their agency or their organization, faced with the potential action from an unhinged prosecutor, some people will not be silent.

In Hungary today, there are still people who show up for protests but never enough to topple the regime because lots of other people just stay home be-

cause they don't want to get on the wrong side of the government because the government decides where the money goes and where it doesn't go and because they don't want to be subject to an arrest warrant.

We are not there yet. We aren't. We aren't. But we have never had a series of developments like we have had over the last 2 weeks that pose such a significant threat to our democracy and to democratic norms.

The reason we are on the floor tonight, the reason you feel this urgency from our side of the aisle and from the American public, is that we used to think we were in this together, Republicans and Democrats. Yes, we have always had a difference on this philosophy of where wealth and power should accumulate. I think Republicans broadly have believed in this idea of trickle-down. They have not believed as much as we have in supporting the middle class with programs like Medicare and Medicaid and the Affordable Care Act.

That is a legitimate political disagreement. If that is what is going on, then the country will survive, but if there is a seizure of spending power by the President, if the President gets to decide by himself which Agencies exist and which don't, well, our democracy doesn't recover from that because what goes around comes around. Today, it is a Republican President seizing spending power. A Democratic President will do it as well. And then all of a sudden, the people aren't in charge; one person is in charge.

I thought we all were in that exercise together—the defense of the Constitution, the defense of Congress's rightful prerogative to decide how money is spent on behalf of our constituents. What Donald Trump is doing is putting Congress out of business.

I think I heard Senator SCHATZ saying something like this as I walked in: I don't know why you work so hard to get a job like this if you are just going to outsource all of your power to one man.

It is not easy to become a U.S. Senator. Most people spend their entire career fighting to get this job. You have to do kind of ugly, distasteful things, like sitting in a room raising money for hours on end, in order to become a U.S. Senator. You have to give up all your weekends. You spend less time with your family. Why go through all of that if you are comfortable with not being in charge of spending, with endorsing the violation of the Constitution and the enshrinement of spending power in the hands of one person? There is really nothing left to do here. There is a lot less to do here if we don't decide how the taxpayer dollars are spent.

But even more worrying to me is that it seems like we are getting out of the bipartisan business of caring about democratic norms.

I am heartbroken—heartbroken—that a lot of people I like and respect on the Republican side didn't stand up

to the President when he pardoned the guys who entered this building and beat police officers over the head with poles. I am even more heartbroken that many of my Republican colleagues endorsed it.

I don't understand why my Republican colleagues don't see the ways in which this seizure of power could be used for corruption, could be used so that the executive branch gets to show favor on individuals and entities that are loyal to the administration while punishing individuals and entities that are not loyal to the administration.

I am heartbroken that my Republican colleagues don't have a problem with what is happening at the DOJ and the FBI. If you are an FBI agent and you investigated the people who attacked the Capitol, you shouldn't lose your job. We should all be outraged over that, not just because they were doing their job but also because they were investigating a legitimately illegal action. Come on. We can't agree that the storming of the Capitol and the destruction of the Capitol and the attacks on police officers are out of bounds?

Political violence is a real thing. We have had colleagues on both sides of the aisle who have been irreparably injured by would-be assassins, from STEVE SCALISE to Gabby Giffords. I am just telling you, the temperature rose in this country when all of those rioters were let off the hook.

So this is really important, that we raise the alarm as to what is happening in this country. You need to pay attention to the things that matter. You need to understand the story. That story is about the wholesale transfer of power and wealth from average people to the billionaires and the millionaires. That story is about the destruction of democratic norms in a way that may be irreversible if not abated in the next few weeks or months.

Russ Vought is the architect of those plans to erode our democracy and to transfer wealth to the very powerful. He does not deserve to be the Director of the Office of Management and Budget, and I am very glad and proud of my colleagues for being on the floor all night to raise these concerns.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. BARASSO). The Senator from Vermont.

Mr. WELCH. Mr. President, I thank the Presiding Officer. I want to thank all the folks on the floor from the Parliamentarian's office, the floor clerks for spending the night on this important effort. I want to thank the Presiding Officer and your colleagues for occupying the Chair, something I had the privilege of doing for the last 2 years. I want to thank my colleagues, particularly Senator MURPHY, who is working the night shift along with Senator SCHATZ.

And I share the concerns that I have heard Senator MURPHY express about the peril of our democracy and the

peril of the people that all of us represent. My view here is that January 6 is not over. I was here that day, as I know the Presiding Officer was and Senator MURPHY was. And I remember taking a walk in the morning from the Capitol, right here, down past the Ellipse where the President later that day spoke, to the Washington Monument, and then down to the Lincoln Memorial.

And I didn't have a sense of dread or anticipation of what ultimately happened that day. There were lots of people here who were supporters of President Trump. I was looking at them as just American citizens. I was nervous a little bit about the signs that were so aggressive—"Hang Mike Pence"—seeing a gallows that was put up outside the Capitol, seeing the signs about killing NANCY PELOSI.

But I had an assumption that I think all of us had that it would be peaceful and orderly, and I never ever anticipated that there would be a direct attack by a mob on the Capitol. And I don't think any of us did.

On the other hand, my walk had ended before then-President Trump, in his last days of office—he had 14 more days—had his rally at the Ellipse and encouraged people, invited them to come here and go wild. He said that he won the election, feverish activity in a number of States to try to assert that it was false electors. He filed—I don't know—60 or 70 lawsuits, and they were all set aside, I think, except one on a minor technicality. The courts defended the outcome of the election. There was never any evidence that there was significant fraud that in any way affected the outcome of the election. And that is not me saying it. That was then-Attorney General Barr coming to the conclusion that there was no evidence whatsoever that there was widespread fraud or any kind of fraud that was substantial enough to affect the outcome of the election.

So you had 67, maybe 70, courts that rejected all the arguments that the Trump team made. You had his own Attorney General reject it. But despite that, you had intense efforts on the part of President Trump to convince people that he won when he lost. And it got so extreme that he got on the phone with the secretary of state of Georgia and asked him to find him 11,000-plus votes to reverse the outcome of the election. He actually asked a secretary of state to completely violate his oath of office and "find me the votes." You just don't do that when your job, more than anything else, as the President of the United States is to respect the process of the citizens voting for who the next President will be.

And that didn't stop after January 6. When he got feverish calls from highly respected leaders here in the Capitol—"Mr. President, you have got to do something"—that was after the invasion of the Senate when Vice President Pence was actually in quite a bit of danger. And the stories are told that

when the President was told that at the White House, he said, basically, "Why do I care?"

And that attitude persisted. It just went on and on and on. And while the President was in the White House watching TV, watching things unfold—and there was incredible violence here. Many of us were in the building—and I was. I can tell the story. I was in the House, and I was in the Gallery. And the reason I was in the Gallery as opposed to on the floor is, of course, that was COVID, so there was social distancing, so we were doing our business both on the floor and in the Gallery. The Gallery was probably the worst place to be in some ways because you couldn't get in and out with any kind of ease.

And what I so vividly remember was a couple of things. One, we had the Speaker in the Chair, and we had no idea what was going on outside. It was on TV, apparently, but we didn't have—we weren't watching it. We were watching the floor activities.

And, suddenly, the Speaker was interrupted when a Capitol Police officer came out on the floor and interrupted and shouted that the Capitol was under siege and we were to stay in place and that we were to take out the gas masks, breathing apparatus, that were under the chairs and get ready to put those on.

Now, one of the things we still have in the Senate and we had in the House was a sense of decorum. And there might be, in a fierce debate, some talking over one another on occasion, but the Chair was always the person who was in charge. And suddenly we had a police officer literally interrupting the proceedings of the House of Representatives. And I just thought to myself: How is this happening? And, of course, he told us that we were under attack. We didn't know what that meant.

I had taken that walk, a couple-of-hour walk, earlier in the morning, and I saw a lot of very aggressive activity, but I thought it was peaceful. By the way, the one thing I did see that didn't mean all that much to me in the moment but meant a lot to me after all the events unfolded was there were about three groups of people that were marching in military formation, and they were singing anthems, which were pretty vulgar, about what to do to NANCY PELOSI. But they were in a military lockstep. It was all civilians, or so I thought. But it was a formation that I later, in the videos, saw was used to overwhelm the Capitol Police who were at the gates, the racks that were surrounding the Capitol—all very, very premeditated and practiced. It was a military kind of formation.

So going back to the Gallery, we were all mystified what to do. We were apprehensive, obviously. And right after that officer spoke, I saw a couple of other Capitol Police come to the leaders. Speaker PELOSI, Majority Leader Hoyer—I was watching that side of the room—and I think Leader

McCarthy as well were just whisked out. They were just taken out.

And then it was just silence because the mob that ultimately attacked the House side had to get from this side of the Capitol, the Senate side, over there. And we watched and waited.

And one of the things—and then we tried to go back in session, and Congressman MCGOVERN took the Chair and tried to proceed. And I think part of it was that, even though the police officer had told us that the Capitol was under attack, we wanted to get our job done. It was January 6. We had to certify the election. It is a pretty easy job because our job is not to have a debate about who won the election; it is just to validate the vote of the citizens of the State we represent so that their will will be officially recorded and the person that the people of this country, in all our 50 States, elected will be certified. Very, very simple.

And as Mr. MCGOVERN was attempting to proceed, there was more and more alarm, and I watched as our security staff began taking heavy furniture and putting it up as a barricade against the doors. And the doors I am talking about were the ones that—the iconic doors where, when the President of the United States is escorted to the well of the House to give an address to a Joint Session of Congress, with the great ceremony and tradition that we have, is escorted over by the Sergeant at Arms, who announces with great fanfare: Ladies and gentlemen, the President of the United States.

Well, those doors were barricaded. And at this point we all began to hear battering at the doors, those very doors—banging and banging and battering. And then I saw something else I had never seen. I saw our security staff with guns out. I had never seen that. And the banging on the door and then, eventually, the shattering of glass on these doors on the House side that are right over there, the comparable ones. And I saw this pole coming through the door itself, where the person with the pole had managed to shatter that glass.

And there were a number of us up there in the House. And all of us had different levels of fear, and one of the fears that I think a lot of us had is that this is possibly a mass shooting event. All of us know that the tragedy of modern life in this country is that mass shooting events are all too common.

But this is one of the most vivid memories I have. I was standing there and having no idea what was going to happen, but seeing that the police had their firearms out and hearing the glass shatter.

And as I was looking at this, and I was feeling actually personally fearful, as we all were, I had another feeling. It was even more dominant than my apprehension about our safety. It was disbelief.

Even as I was watching, even as I was experiencing this attack—the breaking

of glass, the banging on the doors, the security folks putting up barricades, having guns out—I didn't believe that it was happening. I didn't believe it.

And the reason I didn't believe it is that this is the United States of America. We have been able to enjoy something, that apparently we took for granted, for nearly 250 years, and that is the peaceful transfer of power. That is the renunciation of violence as a means of affecting the outcome of an election. That was shattered that day on January 6.

So, of course, later we found out that there was a huge mob outside, and they did an immense amount of damage. I know they came over here and ransacked the Senate and some of the offices, including the Parliamentarian's.

We had police officers who died. We had many of our Capitol Police injured, and I want to just talk about one police officer who was in the Capitol with me. It was a young man. He was probably about 35. I had been talking to him a little bit. He had two kids. He commuted into work. As many of the folks who work here, they can't live close by. It is too expensive. And they work hard, but it is a tough grind. You have got to commute maybe an hour in heavy traffic to come in and out, especially folks with a young family.

And he was literally standing over me when I was on the floor, with his gun out. And as you know, in the Gallery, it is like in the Senate Chambers. There are all these doors around the Gallery, and they were not all secure, although we did have some Capitol Police up there. And the apprehension all of us had at that point was there was going to be a mob coming through those doors and attacking us directly.

And this officer, a young man, had his weapon out, and he was intently surveilling. And I could just see—or maybe I am imagining what was going through his mind—the last thing in the world he wanted to do, the last thing, was to have to use that weapon on a fellow citizen who was in the Capitol, and, I am sure, for all kinds of reasons.

I mean, just think of the responsibility one has if their job is to protect Members of Congress and the staff, and in the doing of that job, you actually have to make a decision to use your sidearm; and how traumatic that would be for the officer if he, in fact, had to do it—this person who has a family, who is working hard, whose partner is expecting him home in a matter of hours. Maybe he is going to pick up the milk or pick up his kid at school on the way home. All the activities of everyday life—that is what is important to all of us.

But what I could see is that, as horrible as it would be for him to have to take that action, if that was what was required—and, in my case, I was the one he was really protecting—he did not want to do it, but I could just see he was determined to do whatever was required to protect us.

You know, that is the point where I really got disgusted with the people

who were attacking, because I was wondering how is it? You know, I get it. You think your guy won, and you are over the top here. You have actually shown up at the Capitol. And, you know, some were violent. A lot were really violent. Others were less so, but they obviously were part of the mob scene here.

But what disturbed me was the lack of capacity on the part of the folks attacking the Capitol to experience or empathize or see the impact that their actions were having on everyday Americans. Not us in Congress. They don't like us. They don't think we represent them. I get that.

But what I don't understand is how a grievance you may have against Members of Congress on that day or the Vice President or on the actors who were going to actually do the certification—how you would allow yourself to be part of a group that did such harm, in this case, to that officer who was standing over me—to put him in such jeopardy, to cause him such anguish and trauma. You know, there is just no justification.

We have an obligation to one another. As passionate as we may be about the political concerns that we have, it doesn't justify just treating with enormous disrespect, with physical violence, people who just aren't involved in it? They are just collateral damage.

And then to think that while this was going on, President Trump was watching TV, and he was getting frantic calls from people like Kevin McCarthy, the leader, and others: Stop this. It is out of hand. You have got to call them off.

He wouldn't do it. He wouldn't do it.

So that was a dark day, and it is not over. January 6 was the first time in our history where there was a mob attack like that on the Capitol by a group inspired by the President of the United States, where the purpose was to stop the really clerical administrative process of certifying—not electing, but certifying—the victor of the election for President of the United States.

And what the President's team had done is cooked up a bunch of theories, all of which were dismissed by the courts, to make a case that the electors should be rejected and substitute electors provided to get an outcome that the person who lost the election wanted in order to claim that he won the election.

But there is the fact that the President of the United States, who is the custodian, really, and the one most representative of the whole people of the United States—and the need and importance of us having additional commitment to the peaceful transfer of power—was rejecting that and encouraging people to act against that tradition.

And he did an effective job in persuading a lot of people who supported him. And, in fact, many of the folks who came on January 6 later testified

that they thought the President wanted them here and that they believed the President when he said the election was stolen. There is an immense amount of power in that office and in the person of Donald Trump. So a lot of people who came here thought they were doing patriotic work.

And then, of course, the Senate and the House reconvened, and we did certify the election. But the dispute continued, and many in the House and many in the Senate voted against certification, in my view, without any justification whatsoever. But there was enormous turmoil among people of our country because a lot of folks did believe—inspired by President Trump's assertions—that the election was “rigged.”

And then, of course, after the certification and even the swearing in of President Biden, the continuing assertion by President Trump was that the election was stolen. He never stopped that narrative.

And I am not enough of a historian to know if what happened on January 20 with respect to the inauguration was unique, but President Trump did not show up. He did not sit on the dais. And the tradition that we have had, of course, in this country as part of the peaceful transfer of power is that the outgoing President does sit on the dais and acknowledges the arrival of the new President elected by the people.

And it is a wonderful ceremony because it reminds us that the power that a President has is derived from the will of the people, and it is temporary. It is while that person is in office that they hold the power of that office until they don't.

So I have been to a few inaugurations, and the only one I have been to where the outgoing President wasn't there was that one. You know, another thing so incredible, the first inauguration I went to was in 2008, and it was George Bush, a transfer of power to Barack Obama. And the ceremony that I remember most vividly was not what happened on the dais in the taking of the oath by President Obama. It was after.

You know, the President takes his oath. Following that, he comes into the building, the Capitol, and there is a dinner with legislative leaders and others, the guests of the President. And there is a lot of fanfare, a lot of people around. But after all that happens, on the East steps, the President and First Lady and the Vice President and the Second Lady, at that time, walked down the steps just themselves. And on each step is a uniformed military person from each one of the service branches.

And there are not people out there. There is some press far away so they can record this. But my wife Margaret and I were out there watching, and I got a pretty good view because I was a Member of Congress then. And they have a ceremony where the branches of the military, each of them, wears a

uniform that goes back to when that branch of the service was originated. And they have a solemn parade past the President—the newly elected President, who has been President for an hour or for 2 hours—and it is a beautiful thing to see a military march when they do it in formation.

And each branch comes by, and as they get right across from the President, who may be 100 feet away, they all turn and salute.

And I just thought: This is a miracle that we have a country where at 11:59 a.m., all of those people who just marched by, their allegiance was to the then President, President Bush. And at 12:01, their allegiance is to the newly elected President, at that time President Obama.

And what is so moving to me is the power of this democracy that we have, where these magnificent, wonderful people, who serve in the military and make this choice to serve, respect the constitutional order that ultimately the power belongs to the people. The person they elected is the Commander in Chief, and their allegiance is not just to that person, that newly elected President. It is to the constitutional right that the people are in charge, not the military. You know, we take it for granted here because it has been there since George Washington.

That is not the way it works in so many parts of the world. If there is turmoil that is political in many parts of the world, the military steps in, and they take over. But this incredibly durable strength of our democracy where it is civilian control in the military is a testament.

And I witnessed that then, and I witnessed it again in the inauguration of President Trump, although that parade because of the weather had to be downstairs in the Capitol Visitors Center.

But what made that happen? What made that happen is not just that the military has that respect for the Constitution that they certainly do, but because all of our leaders—all of our elected Presidents—understood that there was a tradition we had here that was absolutely vital to maintain and preserve, and that is the peaceful transfer of power, and that is to accept the outcome of an election.

And we have had close elections. That one wasn't a particularly close election. Just think of Bush v. Gore. It all came down to a few votes, hanging chads in Florida, and ultimately, a Supreme Court decision. A lot of us disagree with that decision, but Vice President Gore then accepted the outcome of the election, including the role that the Court played in that.

And there is enormous heartache for the losing side. But what all of us have experienced is the pain of defeat—maybe not all of us, but most of us. And if you haven't experienced it yet, it is waiting for you. Sometimes, it can be an ambition that is thwarted. Sometimes, it can be your health that is compromised. But if we are fortunate,

then we understand if you get set back, you lose, you pick yourself up, dust yourself off, and you get back in, and you fight again.

In my political life, I lost two elections. It is a big deal when you put yourself out there—whether it is running for office or trying to get a job—and you get set back. But it is universal. It is always there. But in politics, it is not so much about you losing an election. What is really critical is that we don't lose our democracy.

Each of us has an obligation when we win or when we lose to move on. And if we lost, we get a chance to fight another day. That is what we all knew. You lose an election—the Democrats lose, Republicans lose—you come back, run again. Your party runs again, and you have a shot to get the support of the American people.

January 6 shattered that, and the lingering effects of January 6 are still here. As we know, President Trump never acknowledged that he lost that election and Joe Biden won. And a big part of his comeback was a continuation of the "Big Steal." And it is really a danger to our democracy that now, emboldened by his win—and he won, OK—he won the popular vote this time; he won the electoral vote.

His boast that it was a landslide is totally false. It is about a point and a half margin of victory. We are a divided country. A Lincolnesque kind of President, but acknowledged the obvious, that it was a close call for the American people, but he won. But his job is to represent everybody, whether they voted for him or not.

I think all of us in the Senate, we won, we are here, we are really happy we got the approval of the people we represent. But I think all of us know, whether people voted for us or not—I have an obligation to everybody in Vermont, as you do to everybody in Wyoming, they have a right to be heard.

What we are getting, I think, is a version of leadership at this point that rejects that. Where we are now, and it is very regrettable, we have an administration that is talking about going after people that they perceive as political adversaries, and that will have real effects.

We had hearings about it in the Judiciary and in the Finance Committee. In the Judiciary Committee, we heard from Pam Bondi, the nominee, now Attorney General, and Kash Patel, whom we have not voted on yet, for FBI Director.

In the case of Pam Bondi, I was very impressed with her. She is quite an accomplished person—attorney general in the county that she grew up in Florida, then she had the gumption to run a statewide race in the third biggest State of our country, and she won that to be attorney general. By all accounts, she did a really good job.

But one of the questions that she was asked, Mr. Patel was asked, and others have been asked is the simple question:

Who won the election in 2020? President Trump cannot tolerate anyone acknowledging that Biden won. So the standard answer now that they go through in their preparation for the hearings is that President Biden was the President or he was certified. But they can't say—because it would infuriate President Trump—that he lost or the other guy won.

Now, why is that so worrisome to me? Because it is a continuation of the denial of the decision the American people made. And it is an indication of a demand of fealty that the President is imposing on people who are going to be in very important positions.

Law enforcement, where an Attorney General and FBI Director have enormous power to prosecute and where aggression is a good quality, you want to be ambitious and work hard for the American people, bring law breakers to justice.

But restraint is also extraordinarily important in those positions because the power you have by bringing in prosecution is the power to ruin the life of a person. So there has to be great caution and reservation and restraint in folks who have that awesome power.

And my take on the insistence by the President that an individual is going to serve him, not acknowledge who won the 2020 election, is an indication that first and foremost, the President is demanding fealty to him, as opposed to fealty to the Constitution.

We are in the first whirlwind weeks of a new Presidency, and I am alarmed. I am alarmed at what appears to be a disregard for the law on the part of President Trump.

No. 1, the order the President sent out impounding money that was appropriated by Congress is a direct challenge to the institutional responsibility authority of the U.S. Senate and the U.S. Congress. Under our Constitution, article I, the Congress has the power of the purse, the Congress decides how to raise money, the Congress decides how to spend money.

We have a President in the past who tried to end run that and take away the power that the Congress has. And that, of course, is President Nixon. And the Court found what he did illegal, and Congress passed the Impoundment Act to prohibit the President from doing that, although allowing a President to come before Congress to seek a revision in the appropriations we made. That is the way to do it. This Impoundment Act cut across all levels of government and completely rejected the authority of Congress.

Now, some people may not care about that; let the President decide. So why is it really important? Just as the peaceful transfer of power has been the hallmark of our democracy and served us well, the system of checks and balances of three branches of government—coequal—where ambition is challenged by ambition, in the words of one of our great legal philosophers—

and what that meant is you have an ambitious executive, that is fine; but you have an ambitious Congress where it knows its role is to protect the interests of the people that we represent and assert our authority and stand up for the rights of the people we represent if there is an overreach of executive authority.

So we have the three branches. And there is a tug of war oftentimes. But the last thing in the world any of us can do, in my view, as U.S. Senators, is to abdicate our responsibility under the Constitution to be a separate branch of government. For me, that would be a violation of my oath.

And where you have a direct challenge by the executive, as you do with the Impoundment Act—the memo the President sent out basically picking and choosing which appropriations he is OK with and which he isn't, that is a direct challenge to the authority of the Congress.

As I say, this is not about us individually needing authority. It is about good governance. It is about the constitutional principles of how, as a large and diverse country, we navigate the political questions that have to be addressed in every generation—questions about war and peace, that we do everything that is within our power to protect that separation of powers and stand up for the institutional responsibilities of the U.S. Senate.

The other aspect of this that is very disturbing to me is reminiscent of my experience when I was in the Gallery with a police officer, the young man who wanted to go home to his family and who is now in enormous jeopardy, if not physically, the trauma of what he had to experience and what may have been required of him to do.

There is a kind of callousness to that on the part of the attackers where he is just erased. His feelings don't matter. Whether he gets home with the milk he promised to bring, whether he gets there to pick up his child at soccer doesn't matter to them.

What reminds me of that is the impact of this impoundment and what it did to everyday people. Of course, I am talking the impoundment, but also, I am talking about the letter that went out telling people who are working in countries like Malawi. They are working with us with USAID. They are working in Rwanda. They are working in Ethiopia. They are providing food to people who are starving, providing vaccines to people who may be sick. They are teaching young girls.

I was in Malawi with Senator MURRAY and this beautiful young girl—really, she is probably 12 years old—went to school at USAID. She came up to Senator MURRAY and just threw her arms around her and thanked her that there was this school. She could go to school. But this letter went out in an email. You wake up and open up your inbox, and it says: You no longer work. You are done.

How cruel is that? It is cruel to this person, a USAID worker, whose life is

to serve. That is why they are in USAID. They get gratification from serving, and you take that away from them.

But then think about that young girl who threw her arms around Senator MURRAY and is thrilled. Here she is in Malawi. It is one of the poorest countries in the world, and she is thrilled that she is reading. She is thinking: Maybe I could be a doctor. She is thinking that she could have a big life and be independent, and the teacher who has been showing up for the past several months doesn't appear, and there is no explanation to her.

That has happened in country after country after country and AID project after AID project after AID project. There is a cruelty here that is just bad for us. I mean, that is not how we treat one another no matter how much we disagree on politics. So that actually makes me sad about what is happening.

You know, there are really large issues here that affect us. I was listening to Senator MURPHY, and I thought he made some really terrific points, you know, about our democracy, about what dynamic is happening here with this new administration, about the wealth transfer that is happening.

You know, I will give President Trump this: He did tap into a lot of heartache and a lot of anxiety and a lot of concern that people around the country had. They didn't like the way things were going, and they felt, I think, economically, that they weren't getting ahead despite working really hard. I think that is something that he tapped into, and I think, to some extent, we Democrats did not do the job on the securing of the southern border inasmuch as we did with many of the initiatives, economic initiatives, of the last administration.

There is a reality that confronts all of us, Republicans and Democrats, that if you are a young family and you are trying to buy a house, that is out of reach. Healthcare that we used to be able to count on is getting incredibly expensive. The cost of childcare for young families is like going to college. I mean, these things are really tough on people, and we have got to address them, but those challenges that I just mentioned are in all of America. It is not like that is just red America or blue America. You could talk to a family in Vermont. You could talk to a family, probably, in Wyoming or in Idaho or in Ohio. The challenges they face are very similar.

What that suggests to me is that the problems that we face and that the people we represent face are real. In a campaign, we can argue about who has the better prescription to address them. You won that campaign the last time. You did. By the way, I can say, "Donald Trump won the election." I don't like to say it, but I can say it, and I should say it because he did. But now is the time where the focus we have together should be to try to solve those problems and make life better for

everyday people in the Presiding Officer's State and in mine.

But do you know? If you listen to the inaugural speech of President Trump, I didn't hear any words about housing. I didn't hear any words about childcare. I didn't hear any words about clean air. I didn't hear any words about strengthening rural hospitals. All of those things that we share in common and that are real challenges weren't talked about. The big emphasis was on these tax cuts. You know, those tax cuts will help some everyday people—some of them—but an immense amount of the allocation of those tax cuts is going to go to folks who are doing really well and to our corporations that are doing really well. Those tax cuts are going to come and be paid for by cutting into some of the services the government provides through the private sector, oftentimes to the citizens in every one of our States, and Senator MURPHY went through a lot of those.

The House has now taken the lead on his tax bill. They are trying to come up with ways to cut the spending in order to pay for the tax cuts. Medicare is in jeopardy. Medicaid is in jeopardy. Childcare, to the extent we help, is in jeopardy. So there is a real wealth transfer that has been built into this major agenda item.

The other aspect of this that is disturbing to me is just the impact it has on people in Vermont. There is a lot of turmoil for our businesses and for our service providers. Let me just talk about some of the effects of these across-the-board cuts that the President is talking about and how it would affect Vermont.

It would freeze funding for Head Start. As the Presiding Officer knows, that affects, like, 1,200 kids in Vermont. It really makes a difference to their getting off to a decent start. It is the poor kids who oftentimes don't get the nutrition that they need, and a lot of these kids with the benefit of Head Start go on to become very successful people.

A freeze in funding for community health centers: You know, when the administration sent out that directive just, really, freezing funding—one of the community health centers that we have is the Wells River health center, a community health center. I was talking to the director. They provide healthcare for people in what we call the Northeast Kingdom—it is a very low-income part of our State with very, very hard-working and proud people—and they have an operating cash margin of, like, 0 to 5 days.

So, when the funding was cut off and, of course, the website too—where you can get payments and find out what is going on—it was closed down just unilaterally, which is something Mr. Vought thinks is a good idea. When that happened, the director was in an incredible bind. He had workers who were showing up. He had moms who were bringing their kids in for a dental appointment they had been trying to

get for 7 months. He had support staff who had been working there for years. But with this directive, they couldn't pay the bills. OK? I am not even quite sure what their status is right now, but with that directive imposed on the director of the program—this horrible decision—they were in no capacity to have any confidence whatsoever that he could meet payroll.

Why would you do that? You know, if you have a plan where you are saying, "Hey, we are spending too much money. We have got to figure out how to tighten our belts," then you take some time to have a plan, and there is some consultation with the Agency and the people who are affected. That is a responsible way to proceed but not to have just a bolt out of the blue, when you open up your inbox and you are told you are shutting down. There are the ripple effects that that has on a community. Then, of course, people who work there have to make their plans because they can't wait indefinitely to get the decision as to whether they will or won't have a job, whether it be a community health center will stay open or it will close. There is a lot of destruction that goes into an action that the administration took with that.

You know, we had a couple of roundtables because people were really, really stressed and calling all of our offices. We are a small State like the Presiding Officer is, and, you know, one of the privileges that I think he and I both have is that of being a Senator in a small State, we really get to know an awful lot of the people we represent. I know I have talked to the Presiding Officer about this: The great joy we get is in that interaction with the folks we represent, and that is whether we agree with them or not, whether they voted for us or not. It also makes it a little more painful because it is very real; it is not abstract.

So I will just tell a few stories about some of the Vermonters who got affected.

Sarah Robinson is with the Vermont Network Against Sexual and Domestic Violence. She said:

Federal funding in Vermont supports emergency shelter and hotline services for victims of domestic and sexual violence.

If they get a call in the middle of the night that a woman is getting battered, they respond. They have a network of volunteers who goes out. They will bring that woman to safety, and they will have a safe house for her. That is a pretty amazing service—and, suddenly, that is cut off.

Andy Barter is from the Little Rivers Health Care Center. That is the one I was talking about earlier up in Wells River.

He said:

This has been a week like none other that threatened the continuation of our health center in operations and has dearly affected the feeling of safety for our staff and patients.

You know, you get these local institutions, and they are so important to

everyday people. You count on being able to bring your daughter or your son to the doctor, and it is somebody you know.

I mean, again, I have such respect for the Presiding Officer and admiration in his career as a physician and in the healing he does. I know, you know, the joy he gets in that service; but, suddenly, we have got doctors who end up having that same ethic that you have in Vermont, and, suddenly, the people who depended on them can't go there.

Vermont State Representative Kate Logan, who works at Elevate, said, "Our agencies are currently serving 78 [young people]—youth," and if they don't get the resources, they are not going to be able to continue their services. This is about housing and homelessness. Of course, that problem in Vermont, like in all of our States, has increased very, very significantly.

Sonali Samarasinghe, U.S. Committee for Refugees and Immigrants, said:

We have 79 families in temporary housing. This is very challenging for us. We don't have the funds, and it's a public safety issue because there's homelessness, and we don't have the funds to go on paying their rents.

So this is not new funds they are seeking. These are the funds that have been authorized and have been committed and—boom—out of nowhere, they are told they are out of business.

Karen Price, the Vermont Family Network. She said:

The Executive order and the memo have thrown all of our funding that we have relied on into disarray . . . We suspended all of our planned activities. We talked about furloughing our employees . . . Cashflow for a nonprofit like the [Family Network] is tight. We cannot sustain a prolonged nonreceipt of funding. Every day since Tuesday has been filled with anxiety and uncertainty.

Steve Schmida from Resonance: They do a lot of work with USAID.

He told me: "Seventy percent of our work is with the [USAID] and the State Department. Before the Secretary of State's and Secretary Marco Rubio's foreign assistance stop work order . . . 62 of those have now been laid off.

This is in the inbox: You are not working anymore.

It is no different than if we went home tonight—each one of us—had a nice meal with our families, went to bed, looking forward to resting and getting up and facing today, getting up and—boom—in the inbox, we are told: Don't show up for work.

The two features that I have seen so far in this administration, it really is a continuation of the January 6 ethic, is a willingness to disregard the law—the shattering of norms—and a casual infliction of cruelty for no reason on everyday Americans who just want to keep doing the job that they have and do the work that needs to be done.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. McCORMICK). The Senator from Michigan.

MAIDEN SPEECH

Ms. SLOTKIN. Mr. President, thank you for being here.

Thank you to the floor staff, to the clerk, the entire Capitol team here who has been here overnight.

This is actually the first time that I have ever spoken on the floor. I am a freshman Senator, newly elected from the State of Michigan. I did not anticipate doing my maiden speech so quickly and in reaction to what is going on right now in the country. They tell us that the maiden speech is supposed to be something you think about and you build up to it. In the first 3 or 4 months, you give your first speech. And I find myself here early in the morning, participating in an attempt to stand up on behalf of something very, very simple, which is the U.S. Constitution.

Before I was a Senator, I was a dedicated career public servant. I was a CIA officer. I am what is called a 9/11 baby. I happened to be in New York City on my second day of graduate school when 9/11 happened. It completely changed my life.

I got recruited by the CIA right out of grad school, and within a year, I was on my first of three tours in Iraq alongside the military.

I worked at the CIA, I worked at the Pentagon, and I worked very proudly for both Democratic and Republican administrations.

I was detailed to the Bush White House, the George W. Bush White House. I was there the Friday that he left office and the Monday that Barack Obama walked in. I did the same job proudly for two very different Presidents from two very different parties. In those two administrations, I briefed the President and other senior officials on the most serious national security issues.

I eventually went on to be nominated to be an Assistant Secretary of Defense. I was at the Pentagon for 7 years, and that is where I was until 2017.

In 2018, I decided to run for Congress. This was never a body I was looking to be a part of. When you grow up in the national security world, briefing Congress, doing hearings, you are not often looking to be a part of this body, but to me, it was important to get in the fight for the country that I love.

In 2018, I won my first race for Congress and then just most recently won my first race for the Senate.

I am very keenly aware that I won as a Democrat on the same ballot as Donald Trump. So that means the very independently minded voters of Michigan voted for Donald Trump and ELISSA SLOTKIN on the same ballot. That gives me a very specific mandate. That means wherever I can, I am going to be looking for places that I can work together on things like veterans issues or broadband internet or agriculture, but I think every day, my challenge is going to be to figure out what are the things I have to compromise on and