

what are the things I should never compromise on.

In my short 30 days here, what has become clearer and clearer to me is that the issues that I should never compromise on go right to the heart of who we are as a people; that is, our Constitution, our democracy, and our rights.

I think there are going to be plenty of areas where I can overlap with Trump policies. The auto industry, agriculture, dealing with China, I think there is going to be overlap. But what has disturbed me the most in my first month here, 30 days on the job, is the willingness of people in the city and in this body to roll over as the Constitution, our most sacred document, is pushed aside.

#### NOMINATION OF RUSSELL VOUGHT

We are here all night because of the nomination of a guy that probably most people in Michigan, I know, have never heard of—Russell Vought. He is to potentially run an Agency that most people have probably never heard of—the Office of Management and Budget. But what they don't know about this wonky side of Washington, they felt last week. They felt it.

For the first time, the Trump administration reversed something that they did in their first 2 weeks. Why did they do that? They reversed themselves on a full Federal freeze of all funding. The Trump administration froze every single dollar that was going out across the country, not for a future budget but money that had already been appropriated by this body, by people who sit in this room, by people who have been here for 30 years.

Again, that might not have really caught much notice in a place like Michigan except for the fact that that money had already been planned for and in use by thousands upon thousands of organizations and people. So we had an unprecedented number of calls in my office. I think we had 5,000 calls come into my office when that funding freeze went into place.

We heard from people in law enforcement. I had deputy sheriffs in my office saying: Hey, we get a chunk of money to pursue sexual assault cases. We hire deputies with that money. Do I need to fire those deputies or let them go?

We heard from cancer researchers and scientists, who said: I am trying to research better treatment for cancer, and it has just been cut off.

One of the most painful calls that I got was from a doctor at the National Institutes of Health, a pediatric oncologist who does critical trials for very sick children, who said: I don't know if I can continue my trial or not.

We heard from Head Start. We heard from our superintendents. We heard from people Democrat and Republican. This was not a partisan thing. These were people who had built a budget and who were serving the people of Michigan and who now couldn't receive their money.

We organized a very quick Zoom. We had a thousand RSVPs.

I think while it created chaos in the system and instability in the system and questions about what these Agencies and organizations could do, it spoke to a bigger issue, and that was the constitutional issue of who gets to decide how to appropriate money and who doesn't.

Luckily, we have a very easy guide for this. You just have to read the Constitution of the United States and the division of powers. It made this body a coequal branch of government and said that money that is appropriated by this body must be spent in that way.

The reason I bring this up, first, the Trump administration reversed themselves in less than 48 hours because they don't like being unpopular. They don't like when people in places like Michigan are unhappy with them—Democrat, Independent, Republican—so they reversed themselves very quickly.

But Mr. Vought, Russell Vought, who is up as the nominee for the Agency that spends the money, that puts it out into the world, has said very clearly that he does not believe that this branch of government is, as the Founders intended, able to appropriate money for a specific reason; that the President of the United States can actually decide how to spend it.

I had the opportunity to personally question Mr. Vought. I am on the Homeland Security Committee. He came in front of our committee. I don't care that he has been in Washington for 25-plus years, that he has been burrowing himself in in think tanks and has very specific kind of Washington, DC, ideas about things. I don't care about that. What I cared about and the one fundamental question is, Will you uphold the Constitution?

You are going to swear an oath. Every single person who gets sworn in swears an oath to the Constitution to protect and defend it. I have taken it many times. Many in this room have taken it. You do not swear an oath to protect and defend any one person, any one President, any one king; you protect the Constitution. And he could not articulate that if he was asked to do something that contravened the Constitution, he would push back.

Again, this is a small soda-straw issue on a much bigger trend that is happening in the first couple of weeks that President Trump has been in office.

I personally do not question that President Trump won the election. I do not question that he and his administration have the right to nominate their own people, and they have the right to create a new budget, forward-looking budget, that they propose here. I don't question that they are going to perform policies and put out policies that I am going to fundamentally disagree with. That is not in question.

To me, the only thing that matters is that any administration uphold the Constitution because if not, what are we? What are we doing here? I cer-

tainly don't know what my colleagues across the aisle are doing in this body if they are not interested in being a coequal branch of government.

I understand you can have those conversations in private. I understand people are concerned about sticking their necks out. We have a culture of fear that is dominating Washington right now. But to me, it is important to stand up for the very core things that make us Americans.

Now, we all know that we are going through something as a country right now. That is not hidden from anyone, no matter what your political affiliation. We are going through turmoil. We are pendulum-swinging between parties. Just look at going from Bush to Obama to Trump to Biden to Trump again.

We make policies every 4 years, and then the next President comes in and undoes them. That is not normally our tradition in this country. Our tradition in this country is that administrations have different policies, but they don't radically swing from one to another.

If you come from a State like Michigan, where my neighbors on both sides are devoted Trump voters, where we are purple, and we have political views that differ even within families—Thanksgiving dinner has become uncomfortable in the State of Michigan—we understand that there is something going on that is just different in the United States of America.

So how do we understand what is going on? For me, I am aware that next year, we will celebrate our 250th anniversary as a country. While that seems like a long time on some scales, in the scale of human history, that is not a long time. We are a pretty young country. I personally believe we are going through our teenage years. We all know what it is like to have a teenager who can't make up their mind, who is angry and then happy and then sad and then excited and who is turning against their own family and their friends but then wants a hug from those same family and friends. We all know what it is like to deal with a teenager.

What do you do with a teenager who is putting themselves at risk, who is putting themselves at risk with their behavior? You just try to get them through alive. You just try to get them through those teenage years out the other side, where they are sort of settled, have a bit more maturity, and can say: I am going to think clearly about what is important in my life.

That is what I see as our job as senior elected leaders in the United States. There are 100 of us. We have the responsibility to see our country that we love through this period in our history, through our teenage years. And how do we come out alive? What does it mean for our country to survive? We have to support the Constitution. We have to invest and believe in our democracy and not wipe it aside because we happen to like one politician over the other.

I understand that President Trump was elected with a mandate to bring in disrupters to the government. That is very clear.

Colleagues on my side of the aisle will say: Well, this is disrupting everything.

I say: That is the point. That is what President Trump ran on.

That, I don't question. But to me, what I can't understand is the willingness to say: I am willing to violate or bend the rules of the Constitution in order for my own party to win.

I would say last week, after we saw the reversal of the funding freeze, it got a lot of people's attention—veterans groups, universities, people of both parties. My mayors and town supervisors were screaming from the rooftops. It woke people up to an issue maybe they don't think about all that often.

Since then, we have heard incredible stories of people and what it would mean to the average person if this funding didn't come through—things like the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative, just caring for our Great Lakes, which is one of the most bipartisan things in the State of Michigan.

We heard about chronic disease prevention, veterans programs, opioid treatment—all kinds of things—rural health programs.

Then we heard about the things that were connected to national security. This is the thing that I think people don't understand. We are having this conversation about Federal funding. It can seem very far away.

But when you yank Federal funding that has already been built into local budgets, that has already been built into National Security Agency budgets, you are literally putting people at greater risk, right? These things have consequences.

I think the other pieces that we are seeing that, to me, are hard to process are things like these sort of across-the-board pushing out of people in the civil service—and I say this as a former civil servant—what is going on at the FBI, what is going on now at the CIA, what is going on at the Director of National Intelligence Office, the NSA.

I am a former intelligence officer, and I understand what people do every single day, in the dead of night, when no one is watching, to protect us. Again, as someone who was in the Federal Government, I will be the first one to say that there is fat on the bone. I will be the first one to say that, when I was a boss in the Federal Government, I couldn't fire people who deserved to be fired as easily as I wanted to. That is, to me, not a question.

And I actually don't have a problem with a group taking a hard look at cutting back Federal Government and the different Departments and Agencies. I think what I take issue is with the complete lack of strategy or even understanding of what those across-the-board slices are going to do to the average security of someone on the ground in Michigan.

When those proposals first came out—the letter saying you can leave the government—first of all, I think those letters have almost no credibility. The letter, which was a carbon copy of what Elon Musk sent to Twitter employees, said: You can go ahead. We will pay you out.

This body appropriates money. So any commitments of money by the executive branch—right there, that is extremely fishy.

No. 2, they said: You can leave. We will pay you for sitting home for 8 months. But you know what? If you want—even better—go and get a job. Go and get a job somewhere else. Like, best of luck to you.

I think they were misunderstanding that there is Federal law that a Federal Government employee, as I was, cannot take a job in the same field. It violates laws on conflict of interest. If you work on the railroads at the Department of Transportation and then you go and work for a private railroad company, that is an inherent conflict of interest. And, by the way, if you are a CIA officer and you go sit at home and then a Chinese company wants to hire you because they know you understand the intelligence community—massive conflict of interest.

So those offers, to me, aren't worth the paper that they are printed on, and I think, again, it speaks to this complete lack of awareness of what this does to real people.

Some of the first people who got those letters in Michigan were FAA flight safety instructors and evaluators. Is there anyone in America who thinks we need fewer flight safety instructors? Is there anyone in America who wants fewer people from the FAA watching and deconflicting what happens above our airports, with everything that has gone on, with all these tragedies that have gone on, including another collision, I understand, just in the past 24 hours out in Seattle?

So, again, trim fat. But are we sure that the American people want fewer people looking at their security, their safety here at home or from threats abroad?

Most Americans don't understand. I was someone who specialized in Middle Eastern terrorist groups and militias, the groups that were shooting at U.S. forces and plotting against the U.S. homeland. Every single day, decisions are made to keep Americans safe, and Americans are sleeping at home in their beds and have no idea. By pushing those people to leave and not being thoughtful about it, you are pushing out some of our best in a generation and then purposely hiring no one behind them.

And to me, again, this isn't about pieces of paper. This is about the safety of American citizens.

The other thing that is just rubbing people the wrong way, that is just fundamentally feeling wrong to citizens of all stripes is the idea that a group of billionaires are coming in and leading

around this administration by the nose—leading them around, right? We are all here talking about the confirmation of officials. What is the point of confirming a Cabinet Secretary at the Treasury if a billionaire can just parachute in with a bunch of 25-year-olds to tell him what to do? I mean, that is humiliating for the Cabinet-level official, not to mention what that does to the President of the United States. Right?

Just look online. American citizens don't want unelected billionaires with their private data, all their tax information, their Medicare healthcare records. Is there anyone who wonders what Elon Musk and anyone else is going to do with that data? What do they want it for?

The goals of a billionaire are not the same as the goals of the average American citizen. He has other conflicting interests. And let me just say, the number of interests he has in China is public record. The closeness of that relationship is well documented—and his relationship, by the way, with his competitors.

I come from Michigan. We are American autos. He has no love for our car companies, and now he has the data of every single competitor, of every single person he has ever negotiated with, of every single person that he doesn't like. Is there anyone who wonders that he is going to put a backdoor on that information and have access to it for the rest of time?

American citizens care about their privacy, especially their tax records, their healthcare records. So I think this idea that this administration is being led around by its nose by billionaires does not pass the sniff test.

And I have had a lot of people call me, write me, text me—who are Trump supporters—who said: Hey, you know, I voted for Trump, and I still think he is the guy, but I don't like them sharing my data with these seeming oligarchs.

So I think, again, I don't dispute that Trump has the ability to do things that I am not going to like. It is the things that violate law. And, make no mistake, a new government employee who hasn't turned in a financial disclosure form, who hasn't gone through the full background check, who has just been stamped an employee, does not have the right to have all that information. And now we have lawsuits that are coming. So this will be meted out in court.

But I think the bigger question is: What does it mean to have a President that is beholden to a bunch of billionaires? What does that change about their calculus when they are sitting in the privacy of the Oval Office making critical decisions?

Why is the President of the United States tweeting about South Africa? Is there anyone—at least in the State of Michigan—who woke up this week and said: South Africa is super important to my personal interests in Michigan? No. He is tweeting about South Africa

because Elon Musk told him to. He is being led around by his nose, and I think people are starting to see that.

And again, if Elon Musk wants to help look at how to reform the government, that is one thing. Access to our data is a whole other ball of wax, and it is not for the interests of the United States.

Now, I think there are a lot of questions about how we get through this period, these teenage years of American history, this pendulum swinging, this anger between people, neighbor arguing with neighbor about politics. I know in Michigan there are a heck of a lot of people, including in my own family, where we just say: We are going to get together. We are going to tailgate. We are going to hang out, but we are just not going to talk about national politics.

It has become something we can't talk about. And, by the way, in Michigan that was never the case. We were always politically diverse. My dad is a lifelong Republican. My mom was a lifelong Democrat. We never used to argue with anger in Michigan. We were more likely to argue about sports than we were about politics when I was growing up: Michigan versus Michigan State, you know. Hands were thrown, but not over politics. That was not our way.

And you would kind of rib someone. If my dad—again, a lifelong Republican—and his friend from childhood came in and he was a liberal or something, he would say: "Here comes the commie." He would make jokes. It was sort of a ribbing kind of thing. It wasn't this anger that we can't stand, right, that has made us uncomfortable with our neighbors.

So how do we get through it? How do we get through this period of our history? Well, the first answer is we can't have our citizens just turn off. I have heard from a lot of people who say: Do you know what? I am just going to, like, stop reading the news, stop looking at the alerts on my phone. I am just going to pretend nothing is happening in Washington and just put my blinders on.

That doesn't work in a democracy. Guess what. This is a team sport. But there are basically four things that we can do to help our country get through this moment in our history. We have to be strict upholders of the Constitution, even when that contradicts people we have supported, and that goes for Democrats and Republicans.

So we have four options. We have legislation and appropriations, the things that this body does. We can make laws that respect our values, that push back. They have to be—based on how the Senate is divided, that has to be bipartisan. Bipartisan answers are durable answers. They last longer. They are not pendulum swinging.

We can appropriate money based on our values. That means making sure we have flight safety instructors and making sure we have the right people

in the Pentagon and in the CIA who are protecting us.

We have litigation. And, unfortunately, that has become an important tool. We have lawsuits going on—I mean, I think it must be dozens at this point—that are just trying to uphold the law, and we want them to move swiftly through the courts. We need people to be invested in those court cases and watch them and start to educate yourselves on those cases.

We have communication. We have the ability, each one of us, in our phones, to communicate with our fellow citizens, to talk about how concerning it is that we have a President that is being led around by their nose by a bunch of billionaires. Talk about that. Your neighbors aren't happy with that.

And then, ultimately, elections, the fourth category. That is how we mete things out in this country. And we will have new Federal elections in 2 years, where people can decide if they are comfortable giving the President of the United States unfettered authority, if they feel like he has been a good shepherd of our Constitution.

Now, I will just say, in closing, that this body has a special responsibility. There are 100 of us. We are some of the most senior elected officials in the country. That means we have the roles here in legislation and appropriations. It also means we have convening power; we have the ability to pull people together and lead. And that is what the country is asking for right now. They are asking for leadership from this body, from Democrats and Republicans, from people who are new and people who have been here 35 years. They are asking for us to stand up for them and to keep this country alive through these volatile years.

History will watch this period. History will watch what we do on both sides of the aisle. And for me, as someone who is new to this body—30 days in this body—I will always seek to work where I can with my colleagues, but not at the expense of the fundamental freedoms and our democracy. That may not be politically palatable back home, but I don't care—because if we can't do it, what is the point? What is the point of being senior elected leaders in this body if you don't stand up for the country that you love?

There is no king in this country. There is an elected President. Please, stand up on behalf of your country.

With that, I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Arizona.

Mr. GALLEGOS. Mr. President, since the beginning of the Trump administration a little over 2 weeks ago, my office has heard directly from Arizonans about how the cronies of this President are impacting their day-to-day lives.

In one his first acts, the President and the Office of Management and Budget moved to freeze the grants and loans to Arizona organizations that

work tirelessly each day to better the lives of Arizona families. These are not people who do the work because they are chasing a high salary. They are not doing it out of a drive to be millionaires or billionaires. They are doing it to help their fellow Arizonans.

The programs impacted by the Federal freeze include Assistance to Firefighters Grants so our firefighters can purchase equipment; Staffing for Adequate Fire Emergency Response—better known as SAFER—Grants, which fund the hiring of firefighters; sexual assault services, which provide rape kits to sexual assault survivors; and Preventing the Trafficking of Girls, which supports the prevention and early intervention services for girls who are at risk of or are victims of sex and/or labor trafficking; the Rural Violent Crime Initiative, which supports the implementation of violent crime reduction strategies, improves investigations, improves services to victims, and enhances collaboration between local stakeholders; Public Safety Officers' Benefits Program, which provides death and education benefits for survivors of fallen officers and firefighters; violence against women formula grants, which improves our capacity to reduce domestic violence; the Byrne Memorial Justice Assistance Grants, which are used to purchase critical technology, infrastructure, et cetera, for police departments and other public safety entities; and the CHIPS Research and Development Programs to grow Arizona's semiconductor industry and the country's.

These lifesaving programs and economic drivers were canceled not because they were ineffective, not because Congress voted to cut them, but because they were in the way of one man's crusade to tear down the Federal Government, and that man is OMB nominee Russell Vought.

Russell Vought is a danger to the United States. He has been a staunch advocate for drastically eliminating or cutting our safety net programs, such as Medicaid, Medicare, and Social Security. He helped design Trump-era budgets that sought to cut trillions from these programs, while simultaneously advocating for tax cuts that would only benefit the wealthiest of Americans.

So let's make sure we understand what is happening here. He wants to cut help for the poorest Americans to make sure that there is enough money left over to give it to the richest Americans. His vision for America is one where billionaires thrive while the families of Arizona and America struggle to get ahead.

Vought has showed complete disregard for our democratic institutions. He was a key architect of efforts to politicize the Federal bureaucracy and push for policies that would replace career civil servants with partisan loyalists.

He played a significant role in enabling the Trump administration's refusal to cooperate with congressional

oversight. His actions set a dangerous precedent, and it is a playbook that the Trump administration is looking to deploy and has deployed in this second term—a playbook of reducing transparency, accountability, and disregarding the power of Congress in favor of an empowered executive branch.

The Office of Management and Budget is one of the most powerful Agencies in the country. It is responsible for crafting the President's budget, overseeing regulatory policies, and ensuring the efficient operation of government programs.

The OMB Director must believe in the fundamental mission of government, which is to serve the people. Vought, by contrast, has spent his career trying to dismantle government institutions and push an extreme agenda that benefits only a select few.

If confirmed to lead OMB, Vought would have the ability to impose cuts on essential programs, further politicize the Federal workforce, and continue his assaults on democratic institutions. His leadership would result in policies that worsen economic inequality, weaken national security by defunding key Agencies, and eroding public confidence in government.

The confirmation of Vought would not only be a step backward, but it would also embolden extremists seeking to undermine the role of government. His approach to governance is not about responsible budgeting or efficiency; it is about dismantling the Federal Government from within. The stakes are too high to allow such a dangerous individual to return to a position of power.

Russell Vought is a major threat to our democratic institutions. His track record makes it abundantly clear that he is unfit for any leadership management role in budget, in government, especially one as powerful as the Office of Management and Budget.

Confirming Vought would allow an individual with a history of extremism, obstructionism, and divisiveness to control the country's budget and regulatory framework. His vision for America is one where government serves only the wealthy and the powerful, while ordinary citizens are left without support and the services they need.

In the face of such a threat, it is crucial that we reject any attempt to put Vought in any position of power. The future of the country depends on leaders who believe in governance, transparency, and fairness, not those who seek to destroy it and the institutions that make this all work.

The Senate and the American people must stand firm against this confirmation, ensuring that those who wield power do so in service of this Nation, understand why they are doing it, understand that it is not just for the sake of ideologic crusades that we should be putting Vought in power but to make sure that we have a government that answers for the people and by the people.

In conclusion, we must remember at the core what is going to happen and what is happening.

Just yesterday, I met with many of my local healthcare centers in Arizona—more than 50 of them—and I asked them: What is going on in your communities? What is happening right now?

Many of them were telling me about the fear that they are hearing in the communities. What many of them also told me—these are very critical community health centers, some of the health centers that are the frontlines of taking care of some of the poorest communities in the country with some of the largest health disparities in the country, people that are chronically ill and going to these places because it is the last place that will see them since they do not have doctors, they don't have access to hospitals, and they don't have access to insurance.

These community health centers were telling me that right now, most of them still cannot access payment. The organizations that are essentially taking care of the poorest of this country cannot get payments for services they are giving to these poor communities, for the contracts that we signed with them as the Federal Government, because people like Vought want to freeze those grants. They want to freeze out those types of groups that are taking care of the poor in order to save as much money so that they can give this money and these tax cuts to the richest of Americans. It is the most cynical thing we could be doing, the most cynical thing this Trump administration could be doing, and certainly it is a very dangerous thing that OMB nominee Vought will be doing.

With that, I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Democratic whip.

Mr. DURBIN. I want to thank my colleague from Arizona, originally from Chicago, for taking time to come this morning to the floor of the Senate.

Let me also thank the Presiding Officer and the staff who have weathered this experience as we consider the nomination of Russell Vought for the Office of Management and Budget. I know it has been a personal and demanding sacrifice on their part, and I thank them for being here.

Why are we doing this? We are hoping to call attention to this nomination. Most people in America, if asked, would not be able to identify the initials of OMB, Office of Management and Budget, and if they could identify it as a Federal Agency, they would be hard-pressed to know what it does.

I have been in politics in the congressional government for a number of years, and I have insight into what the Agency can do. I want to tell you, the head of the OMB, although not a very known figure across America, has more power than almost anyone in the President's Cabinet. This person decides policy and spending supports across the Federal Government and can make a serious, serious difference.

Russell Vought has had a chance to show America what he will do if given another chance to head the OMB. You see, in the final 2 years of the first Trump administration, he had the same job, so we saw him in action, and we saw what his philosophy might be.

I want to read you something which sounds incredible, but I am afraid it is true, from the press release by the Union of Concerned Scientists. Here is what they wrote in their position paper branding Russell Vought as a "dangerous choice to head OMB":

As director of the OMB—

Under President Trump's first term—Vought would occupy a powerful position over federal agencies and the federal civilian workforce. Here's what Vought had to say in 2023 about his intentions for these hard-working civil servants under a second Trump administration:—

I am now quoting Russell Vought—

"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 of the rules against our energy industry because they have no bandwidth financially to do so. We want to put them in trauma."

Russell Vought, what he would do if head of the OMB. Honest to God, is that what we want in America—a person who takes a look at Federal employees that do a myriad of responsible tasks in our Federal Government and treats them as villains, traumatizes them?

For Mr. Vought, this sounds like a political game, but for many of these people, first, it is their lives and their careers that they have dedicated to their country and their government to do the best they can, and some critical jobs, which we may take for granted on a regular basis until that moment when we realize how important they will be.

It was just a few weeks ago when we had a horrible plane crash near Washington National Airport. I followed that closely because I will tell you, literally, I have flown that flight pattern a thousand times—a thousand. I returned home to Illinois every week that I served in the House for 14 years and then in the U.S. Senate now 28 years, so I know that piece of real estate pretty well.

Planes come down the Potomac River to avoid noise in the city of Washington, and some have to make a rather abrupt turn into the runway 33 that is available to them.

The evening of the accident, an American Airlines plane made the turn and came into contact with an Army helicopter. Sixty-seven people died.

We checked to see what was going on with air traffic control, and we realized that the air traffic controller was doing double-duty that night. He had to do not only the civilian side but the military side. It is not beyond a person's capacity, but it is not preferable. There should have been more air traffic controllers on the job.

Air traffic controllers are Federal employees, Mr. Vought. Want to traumatize our air traffic controllers? I don't. I want to feel safe in an airplane. I want to be able to travel with my family with the comfort of knowing that a professional who works for the Federal Government is doing his or her job well.

Of course, if you are going to traumatize and call them villains and make them the object of your political fantasies, that is what you get with Mr. Vought and the OMB. It is not fair. It is not fair to them, and it is not fair to the American people. These people who work in our Federal Government do responsible, important jobs day in and day out.

My staff advised me yesterday that this is reaching a point where no one seems to be in control.

They have decided to save money by eliminating the publication of public health brochures that are put out regularly on a weekly basis to notify people all around the United States and the world of outbreaks of illnesses and diseases that could be dangerous.

For the first time since 1961, we have stopped publishing those in the last 2 weeks. The Trump administration has decided to "save money" by reducing the information available to medical professionals all over the world.

They used to look to us, count on us every single week to put out this publication. We stopped doing it "to save money." I am afraid the day is going to come when we regret that decision and a lot of things that flow from it. I want to say a word, too, about the Department of Justice. Yesterday, I had an individual come to see me who is seeking to be the Deputy Attorney General—a good fellow. I had never met him before. And he talked about his career in the law and what he had done as a prosecutor and as a defense attorney. His resume is certainly strong.

I asked him a question: When he worked for the U.S. Attorney's Office, was he given assignments, or did he choose his caseload?

Oh, when you are brand new, you take what they send you. They put me to work on files and cases as they wish, and I did them willingly. That was my job as a member of the Department of Justice.

So I said: So you have had no, really, personal decision over these cases? You just did what you were given by your superiors?

And he said: That is exactly right, and that is how it works.

And I said: Would it be fair to say that when it came to the assignment of these cases, some hierarchy made that decision, not yourself.

He said: Of course.

I said: Do you know what is going on in the Department of Justice now? They are asking the employees of the Department of Justice to fill out a questionnaire. The Trump administration wants to know: Did you play any role in the prosecution of those accused

of violence here in the Capitol on January 6, 2021?

And clearly this is being done to separate out those who prosecuted those thugs who came into this building and attacked us. And I don't know where this is going to lead. We are going to have to watch it closely. It has not been done before.

If they are dismissed, terminated, it is fundamentally unfair.

As this individual who wants to be part of the Trump administration told me, he had nothing to say about the assignment. He did what he was told, and he did the best job he could. And now to fire these individuals because of the January 6 rioters is just fundamentally unfair.

Mr. President, you are new to this Chamber, and I have been here a while. And I will tell you that day, January 6, 2021, is one that I will remember for the rest of my life. I was sitting at this seat on the floor of the Senate. Vice President Pence was the Presiding Officer. We were going about our responsibility under the Constitution to count the electoral votes and to announce who won the Presidential election.

It was a rather routine assignment in the past, and people haven't noticed. But it has taken on new importance and attracted more attention now because of disputes over votes in various States. And 2020 was one of the most graphic examples of that, when President Trump announced afterward that he did not lose the election; that it was stolen. And he gathered together his supporters who believed that point of view into a rally on January 6 on the Capital Mall.

Thousands of people showed up at the President's invitation, and he invited them to come to the Capitol and go wild. They sure did. They went wild by beating down the doors, breaking the windows, crashing through the doors, coming into the U.S. Capitol Building while we were meeting here.

Vice President Pence, at about 2:10 p.m.—I saw him turn to one of the Secret Service agents who was protecting him, and the agent grabbed his arm and pulled him out of the chair you are sitting in right now and took him off the floor. And we were sitting here with no one presiding.

CHUCK GRASSLEY, President pro tempore, was going to take the Chair, and a member of the Capitol Hill police, instead, walked up to where you are sitting and announced to all the Senators in the Chamber and the staff people to stay in this room. This was going to be a protected room, a safe room, and that other people were going to join us.

Meanwhile, outside, you could hear the roar of the crowd as they were crashing through the doors and beating up on Capitol Hill policemen. We were here for about 10 minutes when the same Capitol Hill policeman came up and said: Change of plans. We can't keep this room safe. Grab your belongings and leave quickly through that door, which we did.

We went to a building nearby and waited to see what would happen next. I was part of the leadership that was called to a secure location, and I was with MITCH MCCONNELL and CHUCK SCHUMER and NANCY PELOSI.

As we followed the proceedings of what was happening on the floor, it was a horrible scene. We were able to see the Senate Chamber through C-SPAN and realize that the thugs who were taking over the building were sitting in your chair, going through my desk, posing for pictures, jumping off the balconies. It was a scene you couldn't image.

It was sickening to me. This building means something to me. It has been an important part of my life. I went to college here in Washington. I used to come up for my assignments in my part-time job and get a chance to steal away for a few minutes and sit in the Gallery and follow what was going on, on the Senate floor. Just to be in this building, I considered a privilege, and I still do. And here were people doing horrible things in the building and beating up on the Capitol Hill policemen and the DC policemen who were trying to keep us safe.

That was the reality of what happened. These people who work for the Senate and the House are Federal employees. In Russell Vought's view, the villains—the villains—that is what he calls them. Risking their lives to keep us safe and being called villains by Russell Vought, for goodness sake—has he no sense of responsibility for the men and women and their families who risk their lives for this building.

Those who were prosecuted for this ended up being in the hundreds of individuals—some for misdemeanors, for trespass; others for more serious crimes, assaulting police officers.

One of them already has been released by a pardon from President Trump. He went on to defy a policeman in Indiana, and there was a gunfight that followed, and this individual was shot dead on the scene just a few days after he was released by the President's pardon.

The point I am trying to make is that there are important and serious jobs taking place here in Washington and around the Nation. We count on Federal employees, and we count on people to be held accountable if they violate the law. I am sickened by the fact that these men and women in uniform, whom I have come to know over the years, are considered to be disposable, dispensable. In my mind, they are not. Their lives are worth something, and those who attacked them should be held responsible.

So when the wheels of justice turned, and these individuals were held responsible, it was through the Department of Justice. Now, there is a hunt on in the Department to find out each and every one of their names. If they are going on a list to be terminated, I would just say to the Trump administration, you are in for a fight. These men and

women did their jobs. They were responsible for prosecuting the individuals who raided this Capitol, and they did it well, as far as I am concerned.

I am sad to report that Kash Patel, who is President Trump's nominee to head up the Federal Bureau of Investigation, does not agree with me, and I will tell you why.

The Federal Bureau of Investigation has 28,000 Federal agents around the world, 400 different field offices. These individuals are the premiere law enforcement Agency of the United States of America and have an international reputation. Mr. Patel wants to be the person to head that Agency.

And yet what he decided to do—this is Kash Patel—was to make a project out of music from those who were convicted of crimes on January 6, 2021. He gathered together a number of them—he swears he doesn't even know their names—and created a recording, a song that he wrote and proudly played at President Trump's rallies, a song to be sung by the prisoners, and they call them the J6 Choir.

We asked Mr. Patel to tell us more. He said: Well, all the proceeds of the album go to the families of the prisoners.

I said: Did you ever consider the proceeds going to the families of the men and women in uniform who were risking their lives to keep this building safe?

No, he said. He focused on the families of the prisoners. He called them political prisoners.

Of course, they were convicted under the court of law. Many of them pled guilty. They couldn't deny the fact of what the videotape showed of their conduct.

So Mr. Patel was raising money through this recording being played at the Trump rallies of these individuals. He said he just didn't know their names or who they might be. And we are considering this individual to head up the FBI.

What would morale be like at the FBI if a person is put in charge who was entertaining America with the songs by the prisoners in jail who raided this Capitol?

I often think—I wonder what we would have thought if the tables were turned a little bit on January 6, and it didn't happen here in Washington, but happened in London. If we heard that a mob had crashed down the doors of Parliament and taken control of the House of Commons. My reaction would have been: It is impossible. I have been there. I have seen that. It is carefully guarded and watched, and it is a venerable institution when it comes to parliamentary law. I can't imagine that a mob would take over the House of Commons in London.

Well, think about America, and think about the impression of what happened on January 6 to other people around the world, and that this happened in our time, in this building. We have to go back to the War of 1812 to find an invasion of an enemy force.

And now we come to January 6, 2021, so-called political prisoners—some call them tourists—who came in and desecrated this building. That was the reality.

I am only making that point because I think it is a serious, historic event, and one that we will think about many times again.

Individuals who were involved in that were Federal employees, and they were doing their job and risking their lives in the process for doing it.

So what is going on through the Office of Management and Budget? There is a man named Matthew Vaeth, V-A-E-T-H, who issued an order. He called for a freeze on Federal spending not that long ago, 2 weeks or so. I don't know if he thought through what he was doing, but he said he was doing it to make sure that there would be no Federal spending which would support transgenderism—that was one of them—or what he called Marxian—capital M—Marxian equity or some Green New Deal. So he wanted to make sure there was no political investment in those causes across America.

Do you know what he shut down? He shut down a Head Start Program in Chicago, IL. It is called El Valor. It has been in business for many years. Families of moderate income who live in the neighborhood send their kids to the Head Start Program, and they are very proud of the results. These kids are learning how to read. They are learning how to socialize. They are going to be ready for kindergarten and ready for school as a result of it.

Well, Mr. Vaeth at OMB decided to shut it down and cut off their funds. And at least overnight, there was a fear that that was exactly what would happen.

It was only when there was a national response in opposition to that, that they reversed their position and decided to keep some of the things open.

Head Start is open in Chicago, which I just mentioned, but there are others that are questioning whether they are open as well.

I got a phone call, as well, from some doctors in Chicago during this shutdown—this OMB shutdown under President Trump. And I said: What impact has this had on you?

They said: We are researchers for the National Institutes of Health. We work in laboratories looking for cures for diseases—heart disease, cancer, all sorts of different challenges. And we, frankly, were told at 5 p.m. on the day of his order to stop working on what we were doing. Most of the projects that we are involved in are long-term projects involving a lot of work that goes beyond regular work hours. But we were told to stop—stop medical research—because of this order from the Federal Government that came out of the OMB.

So when we consider what happened, just a few days ago—and it is still reverberating around country—and con-

sider the nomination of Russell Vought, you have to ask yourself, honest to goodness, do you consider that to be a villain who is working at that laboratory in Chicago for a National Institutes of Health project?

I consider that person to be a great professional, and I wish them all the success and luck in the world. To characterize them as villains, as Mr. Vought has done, is unfair to them and an indication of his values.

So we are trying to appeal to our colleagues on the other side of the aisle to join us with a few votes to stop Mr. Russell Vought from taking over the Office of Management and Budget.

This is an important responsibility, and it is one that needs to be left in the hands of those who will accept that responsibility personally.

I see that my colleague has joined me from Maryland. I am glad she is here. I am going to wrap up by just saying: We are going to rue the day if we put Russell Vought in this job as to what he is going to do.

When he characterizes our Federal employees as villains and says we will put them in trauma—do you want our air traffic controllers to be in trauma? Do you want the men and women who are responsible at the FBI for keeping our country safe from terrorism to be in trauma?

I want them working for America's future, as they have in the past, and to characterize them as the enemy is unfair.

I will be voting against Russell Vought, and I hope other colleagues will join me.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. SCOTT of Florida). The Senator from Maryland.

Ms. ALSOBROOKS. Mr. President, Democrats have been here all night—and guess what? We are not letting up, because, right now, in Maryland and across this country, the administration is conducting a witch hunt for Federal workers.

See, when the President said “I am your retribution,” he meant that he will scapegoat, bully, and attempt to silence the Federal workforce. It is a retribution that they do not deserve.

I really want to paint a picture of who these Federal workers are and who they are not. They are not partisan hacks, hell-bent on pursuing some kind of political agenda. They are not part of some deep state conspiracy that, apparently, keeps this President awake at night.

In fact, to the contrary, these people are hard-working Americans who believe in this government regardless of who the President is. As a matter of fact, they are my friends; many of them are my neighbors; and they are my constituents. They are Marylanders.

See, I represent over 150,000 Federal workers. In Maryland, we are proud to have the highest number of Federal workers per capita in the country.



They are public servants in the truest sense of the word, who are not guided by party and not moved by vicious news cycles, but they are driven, instead, by mission—a mission to serve this country to the very best of their ability under any President of any party. And in just 17 days, this President has put all of their livelihoods on the line.

How shameless. How reckless. How callous. How depraved.

There have been so many actions that this administration has taken to villainize and hurt our civil servants, and I want to be explicit about exactly what they are up to.

They have fired inspectors general—the people who conduct independent audits and investigations within government Agencies to detect and prevent waste, fraud, and abuse. It is to replace independent watchdogs—this is the plan—with loyalists. Now you want to talk about making government efficient? Might I suggest not firing the very people who are committed to rooting out waste, fraud, and abuse of our taxpayer dollars.

Next, we have the whole Federal buyout scheme—yes, a scheme—and today marks the last day of the so-called “Fork in the Road” buyout, but the administration continues to suggest that should enough people not take the buyout, they will begin mass layoffs. Hard-working Americans who have done their jobs dutifully—some for decades; I have spoken with them—fired for no reason whatsoever.

This week, USAID missions overseas have also been ordered to shut down. I have heard from Marylanders abroad who are doing critical work to prevent wars, who don't know if they will even have a job anymore.

We have learned that FBI agents and employees were asked by Justice Department leadership to fill out a 12-question survey detailing their roles in investigations stemming from the January 6 attack on this Capitol. This led to the FBI turning over details of 5,000 employees who worked on January 6 cases to the Trump Justice Department.

We know the administration has issued a freeze on Federal hiring. Dozens of employees at the Education Department have been put on leave, and more are expected. Rumors continue to circulate that this administration wants to shut down the Department itself. At multiple government Agencies, Agency heads were asked to identify employees on probationary periods or who have served less than 2 years, likely because these employees are easier to fire.

The administration issued a memo pausing, potentially, trillions of dollars in Federal aid, sowing chaos throughout the government. Thankfully, this directive has been partially halted, thanks to legal challenges.

They have issued a stop-work order in the U.S. State Department for all existing foreign aid. And 160 National

Security Council staff members have been sent home while the administration reviews staffing.

They ordered a review of the Federal Emergency Management Agency, or FEMA, as the administration considers whether to close the country's lead disaster response.

How reckless. How callous.

We have gotten reports of more than 40 Head Start providers still unable to draw funds after last week's funding freeze. This is, of course, despite a court order, because this administration not only sows chaos but also has set the example of what lawlessness looks like. These are illegal actions, and these providers who help make sure that our vulnerable kids get what they need to thrive have all been put into a position of being insecure and uncertain. They provide for our children food, education, and so much more, and these are the very people who have been targeted by this administration.

Our veterans haven't been spared either. The administration froze Federal aid for critical programs serving veterans and their families and then fired the VA's top watchdog official in charge of protecting veterans from waste and wrongdoing. They are firing the very people charged with making the Veterans Health Administration more efficient to better serve the great men and women who serve this Nation.

How callous. How reckless.

Each and every one of these moves inflicts pain, and they all have a ripple effect—pain on the civil servants who do the work these programs and Agencies fund and pain on the people who rely on the work of these programs and Agencies. It is a raw deal for Americans, period.

What is clear is this witch hunt has only just begun because, today, this very body is going to be voting on a nominee who wants nothing more than to see the Federal workforce burned at the stake. He said it himself. About civil servants, he said:

We want to put them in trauma.

That is unbelievable. It is absolutely unbelievable.

I will repeat. He said:

We want to put them in trauma.

What man or a person speaks in that way? But those are the words of Russell Vought, the man whom this President has chosen to lead the Office of Management and Budget. So when Russell says he wants to put them in trauma, I am going to take him at his word, because this isn't one of those situations where we need to see what Vought is going to do. History has already shown us.

In the President's first administration, Russell Vought was the lead author of his budget requests for fiscal years 2020 and 2021. Each plan contained a blueprint for robbing the American public of the services that their tax dollars are supposed to fund. He called for \$500 billion to be cut from

Medicare, and I will note, very significantly, that over 1 million Marylanders are enrolled in Medicare. Two of them are my parents—77 years old—who worked their whole lives. These are the kinds of people this President and his administration have determined that they will target.

He called for \$900 billion cut from Medicaid. I will note nearly 2 million Marylanders rely on Medicaid.

He called for up to \$71 billion cut from Social Security. And I will note 1 in 7 Marylanders receives Social Security benefits. By the way, it is so important to note: These benefits are not ones that have been given to these Marylanders; these are benefits they have earned over a lifetime.

He called for \$170 billion in cuts to college affordability initiatives.

This flies in the face of everything that Americans say that they desire. It has never been said that Americans want us to cut benefits to our elders. It has never been said that they want to cut benefits to those who are disabled, who rely on Medicaid and others.

And it sure has not been the case for so many of our young people who came out and voted in this last election cycle, hoping to get a government that would make their lives better, and, instead, they are making it worse. I will note that 25 percent of Maryland's undergraduates receive student loans, and over 100,000 Maryland college students received Federal grants in the fiscal year 2023–2024 academic year.

How shameful it is to target these students who will be the next leaders of our country.

And this isn't just the classic case of the past becoming prologue. In the interim, between administrations, Russell Vought has continued on this anti-worker crusade because, yes, Federal workers are workers, no matter what Russell Vought or anyone in this administration says. They are hard workers, dedicated workers—Maryland-strong workers.

The crusade continued when Russell Vought raised his hand to help write Project 2025. In particular, I want to hone in on the goal to deploy Schedule F.

Here is what the American Postal Workers Union had to say about it:

Project 2025 seeks to undermine this expectation of efficiency and expertise in public services by dismantling the Federal Government and reinstating Trump's 2020 “Schedule F” Executive order. This would allow the ruling administration to reclassify many civil servants as policymaking or policy-evaluating workers, thereby removing their civil service protections and making them at-will employees. President Trump could then install whomever he pleases based on favoritism and loyalty to his administration. Deploying Schedule F to replace dedicated civil servants with inexperienced cronies removes the very people who are experts at their jobs and have the knowledge to help our government serve our communities in the best possible way. Installing employees based on “who you know” favoritism effectively removes the nonpartisan and professional nature of civil service—civil servants

should simply be the most qualified for the job. That's why tests like the ones postal workers must take for employment exist [at all]. An unbiased exam means that workers earn their jobs based on their skills, not who we know or what color our skin is. Furthermore, in the long run, this practice could effectively dismantle public trust and efficiency in government services, letting billionaires like Donald Trump and Elon Musk make the case for a privatized, capitalistic government that profits off of its citizens instead of a government that exists to uplift workers in our communities.

Russell Vought isn't concerned with making the government more efficient. All of us recognize this. No one is confused about this. I highly doubt that he cares anything whatsoever at all about whether government works or not. What he cares about is making sure that every single Federal employee supports President Trump.

This isn't a blue State or a red State issue. This is a United States issue. If this man is allowed to enact the President's revenge, there will be a collective and uniting pain that courses across our country. People, whether they voted for this President or not, will feel the devastating impact of not only a less efficient government, but a government unable to deliver on the services that it promises to provide.

That is what this administration refuses to understand. When you target Federal workers, you are also targeting the people who they serve. Do you know who Federal workers serve? The American people.

When Russell Vought says "We want to put them in trauma," let's talk about who he is talking about.

A woman I spoke with who has worked at the Department of Health and Human Services for over 35 years has been put on leave as a part of this President's Executive orders. What has she done? Nothing to deserve this. Yet her family is a family that has been targeted, a person who has served 35 years.

Another woman I spoke with has worked for 37 years at the Department of Agriculture. Believe it or not, she was placed in her current position under the President's first administration. And guess what. As a result of this crazy and callous and corrupt witch hunt, now she is being let go as well.

Remember, of course, that these two women are women who have worked now for several administrations, both Democratic and Republican Presidents, and they have done so honorably.

There are the Marylanders at the FDA who make sure that the water we drink is safe and that the food we eat is safe.

Let's talk about scientists and doctors who are actively researching cures for cancer at the National Institutes of Health.

They are targeting civil servants at the Pentagon working every day to protect our national security.

When I think about the Pentagon, I can't help but think about my own

grandmother. Her name was Sarah Daisy. Sarah Daisy was a person who was a housekeeper, but it was her greatest dream to work in the Federal Government.

Many will remember that there was a time, however, when you went to work in the government, you would take a civil servant's exam and take a typing test. Well, my grandmother Sarah couldn't afford a typewriter, so she went into the family's kitchen and put a white piece of paper up on the refrigerator, and she drew a keyboard on that white piece of paper.

My father told me that in the one-bedroom apartment that they all shared—my grandmother, her three children, and another family member—she stood in front of her refrigerator every single night and taught herself the keystrokes so that she could take the typing test to get herself a job in the Federal Government.

Well, she went on and took that typing test. She passed it. She got herself a job in the Federal Government, and she was so proud of the work that she did as a civil servant. She showed up every single day, took buses to get to her job at the Pentagon.

She would often tell me she was so proud. She couldn't wait to tell me: I passed General So-and-So. I passed General So-and-So in the hallway.

She was very proud to have served her country.

But Sarah Daisy isn't the only one of her sort—civil servants who show up every day just to serve the American people. Those are the kinds of civil servants who are being targeted by this administration.

We think as well about FBI agents. Look, I am a former prosecutor. I spent 13 years working in courtrooms. I worked alongside many of our best and brightest in the law enforcement community, including the FBI. Never once did I ever wonder if they had voted for me. What mattered is that they were honed in on the same mission that I was: building safer communities for the people we collectively serve and people like my grandma, whom I spoke about.

Again, these are all people who serve every day doing the very best they can.

She never came home and told me whether the people she served at the Pentagon were Republicans or Democrats because, guess what, it didn't matter. It didn't matter. This is who we are talking about here.

There have been so many calls to my office.

You know, the question we should be asking ourselves about people like my grandmother and about the other agents whom I worked with as a prosecutor who have given their whole lives to civil service—what we should be asking is, how can we repay them? Is it by villainizing them, taking away their jobs? It is ludicrous. It is outrageous.

There have been so many calls to my office. Some people have even shown up to my office in person looking for support.

I stepped out the other day, and there were three women who had driven here from their homes. They were exasperated, couldn't even bear the thought of calling or emailing. They needed to come in person to let me know about their displeasure about the actions they are seeing from this government.

We received a call from a Federal employee as well who has worked in an Agency for 17 years and is now furloughed. On the verge of tears, she was afraid not just for her own livelihood but for the fate of those losing their title II food aid. She was thinking of malnourished children who will stop receiving food because of this administration's callous actions.

We received a call from a Federal employee concerned about Elon Musk and his access to confidential information. He said he feels helpless, and after 22 years of service to our Nation, he is afraid that he will lose his job. He said: "It feels like a bad movie."

A former Federal employee of 10 years called my office, scared about how this is impacting her neighbors and her community, how it will hurt all her friends who work in the Federal Government.

There was one call from a woman in her sixties. She was debating whether or not to take this buyout. She is close to retiring. In the end, she told us that she wanted to continue this work.

When I learned of this particular call, I immediately thought of my grandmother yet again and the pride that she had in her work at the Pentagon, the joy that she carried with her, knowing that her job had purpose, that her service was meaningful. The North Star she always looked to was helping her fellow Americans.

It came as no surprise to me that this Marylander wanted to continue her work. I don't think it would come as a surprise to any Marylander who has answered the call to serve their government in this way.

We take great pride in this work. We believe in the power of the Federal Government to do good things for the people of this country.

If you ask any civil servant "Could the government use improvement?" well, you would hear a resounding "Yes." I think every Democrat and every Republican believes that we can make the government more efficient. But firing a bunch of hard-working Marylanders because you think they may not agree with your policy, gutting Agencies that work on behalf of the American people—well, this isn't going to make the government more efficient. In fact, dismissing experienced workers who care deeply about the mission is only going to weaken government functions. It is going to hinder the government's ability to do its job—everything from Medicare to Medicaid, to veterans' benefits, to law enforcement, to cancer research, to—I mean, the list goes on and on and on.

In this brazen and callous mass firing, President Trump is going to end



up with a government incapable of doing what the people expected of it. It is shameful, and it is un-American.

Let me say this painfully clear to anyone considering supporting this nominee: The trauma that Mr. Vought describes won't just be exacted on the Federal workers that he despises; it will extend to the people in this country who utilize the programs of the Federal Government—the exhausted mother of that child who calls the 9-8-8 lifeline for support on the darkest of days; the single dad who has to call out of work because his daughter's Head Start classroom closed its doors; the family business that didn't get their disaster relief check to rebuild after the floodwaters receded; the grandmother stretching her fixed income to feed a nourishing meal to her grandkids, turned away at the check-out line when her SNAP EBT card was declined; the woman seeking refuge from an abusive partner—the kind of women that I represented for many years as a domestic violence prosecutor—just to be turned away from the local family violence shelter; the first-generation college student who loses their Pell grant and Federal work-study and can't afford to stay in school; the veteran whose appointment at the Veterans' Administration gets canceled, delaying his screening and treatment from his battlefield exposure.

When Russell Vought talks about inflicting trauma, none of us should forget these people.

In these times of chaos, we must remain vigilant. We must not only acknowledge the deep pain being felt by so many American workers now but transform that pain into action. The tools at our disposal may be limited, but our resolve must remain limitless. And my promise to the people of Maryland is that it shall.

I would like to just end my comments because I see my colleague has joined us on the floor and say that there is a Prayer Breakfast happening this morning. It is my understanding that the President is there to attend and many others. It is my greatest desire that their prayers today will be for the American people and for our country.

There is a Scripture that is so clear in the Bible, and it reminds us—and the President professes that he is a person of faith. It reminds us of one fact, irrefutable fact: The Bible tells us that they will know us by our love. In fact, it says, "They will know you are my disciples if you show love," that we should love one another. I believe that ought to be the guiding principle that guides us in all that we do—the only thing that will last is what we have done—and that we will exude the light of God, and in so doing, we will have love one for each other.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from California.

Mr. PADILLA. Mr. President, I rise today in the strongest terms to oppose

the nomination of Russell Vought to serve as Director of the Office of Management and Budget. I do so not just for his poor performance and lack of transparency before the Senate Budget Committee during his confirmation hearing but because of his truly dangerous and damaging vision for the future of our country.

I will be very clear. If Russell Vought is confirmed to lead the Office of Management and Budget, it will be working families in America that pay the price. If he is confirmed, he will work to slash the social safety net, threaten Medicaid and SNAP benefits, and to balance the budget on the backs of our most vulnerable neighbors—all in service of cutting taxes for billionaires and for large corporations.

Let me start this morning by saying that if we were hoping for some sort of clarity or some commitment, some reassurance from Russell Vought during his confirmation process, we certainly weren't given much to work with.

During the confirmation hearing—and, yes, I am a member of the Budget Committee—at best, he was not responsive to our questions and inquiries. In fact, he was actually pretty evasive when asked some of the more pointed questions.

As I reflected on his testimony, I observed that it was what he didn't say that spoke volumes. It told us everything that we needed to know about the dangers of reinstating him to this hugely important and consequential position.

Other Trump nominees at other confirmation hearings in other committees that I have been a part of, at a minimum, they committed—at least they uttered the words—that they would respect the Constitution and abide by the law. That should be the bare minimum for someone seeking Senate confirmation for any position that is to serve the American people. That is the minimum. But Mr. Vought couldn't even do that. He refused to commit to follow the law as it pertains to implementing the spending plan and priorities established by Congress—including us, colleagues. We are the U.S. Senate.

Why would he refuse to commit to that fundamental premise? Because if he were to do that, he would be lying under oath. He made it abundantly clear that, as Director of OMB, he has every intention of ignoring the laws passed by Congress, including the spending plans. He has been very explicit about that.

Now, if this was any other nominee by any other President and he refused to make such a commitment, we might be left wondering about what his true priorities are, what his true agenda is. But, for better and for worse, Russell Vought has already shown us exactly what he intends to do. We don't need to deal in hypothetical scenarios when it comes to him.

For starters, he has served as head of the Office of Management and Budget

before, you will recall, during the first Trump administration. In that time, in that capacity, on multiple occasions, he illegally froze congressionally appropriated funds and withheld taxpayer dollars in order to obey President Trump's political demands.

And, even today, Russell Vought has already restarted this effort, as unlawful as it is—restarted this effort even though he hasn't even yet been confirmed by the Senate. He has already played a central role in OMB's attempt to withhold funding these last couple of weeks—funding for programs including Head Start that so many families across the country rely on, withhold funding for job assistance programs for our veterans—yes, veterans, the very women and men that we honor for their willingness to serve, their willingness to pay the ultimate sacrifice on behalf of our country, who need our assistance. And when they return home from service, that is who he is going after?

He has withheld funds from countless other programs that working families across the country rely on. His actions in these last couple of weeks have plunged not just the Federal Government but, frankly, the country and our financial markets into chaos and confusion. And like I said, he hasn't even been confirmed yet, and this is what is already happening.

But, colleagues, if these early signals weren't enough for you to grasp what he is capable of, what he is hell-bent on doing, if you are wondering what else he may have in mind and in store for the OMB, I guess you are in luck because he literally wrote a playbook for what he intends to do. I invite you all and folks watching at home, if you haven't done so already, to go to [project2025.org](https://project2025.org). And as you call up this playbook, as you call up this agenda, you will see that he is one of the key authors.

And while President Trump claims he hasn't had a chance to review his Budget Director's vision for the administration, and while many Members of this body might have been a little too busy these last several months to read it for themselves, let me try to help by giving you just a very, very brief summary, some of the key points, because when you boil it down, the main goals of Project 2025—as the authors, including Mr. Vought, have expressed—are this: No. 1, give the office of the President of the United States unprecedented power; No. 2: to use that power to slash the rest of government in order to pay for tax cuts for billionaires and large corporations.

It is that simple. That is their goal. That is their objective. That is their agenda. They want an unchecked President to gut investments—investments that Congress directs to help working families—in order to give even bigger tax breaks for big corporations and billionaires—billionaires, by the way, just like the ones he surrounded himself with in his inauguration.

It is not a secret. It is not a veiled attempt. It is blatant. It is out in the open. They are literally working to steal from the poor to give more to the rich. That is the Trump agenda, and that is all that Russell Vought is working toward.

But again, colleagues, don't just take my word for it. Let's look at the record. It is easy to chalk up these first couple of weeks of the second Trump administration just to chaos. That is how they operate. We have known this. We have seen it coming.

Well, it certainly has been chaotic. Some of that chaos may be due to incompetence. I think a lot of it is very, very intentional, and clearly a lot of it is due to an utter lack of empathy. But what is intentional is chaos by design. You have heard these terms. They are proud of it: Flood the zone. Traumatize Federal workers.

Yes, they said it. I will come back to that in a couple of minutes. But they have sought distractions from the scale of what they are trying to do. So, through it all, to my colleagues and to the Nation, I urge us all to keep our eyes on the ball. See the Trump administration exactly for what it is and who they are. To understand this administration, you simply have to understand their single biggest objective: huge handouts to the largest corporations and the wealthiest Americans.

President Trump is trying to one-up his first term. His signature legislative accomplishment wasn't infrastructure improvements, as much as he tried to talk about that. It wasn't increasing access to healthcare or quality of healthcare. In fact, they worked so hard to try to take it away. The single biggest accomplishment of President Trump's first administration was record deficits brought to you by record tax breaks for the wealthy and by cutting the corporate tax rate by 14 percent, from 35 percent down to 21 percent. That is right; he was giving huge tax breaks to corporations to increase their profit margins. And it is not that they weren't making money. They were making plenty of money. Who wasn't making plenty of money were the workers who made those profits possible. The wage growth wasn't what American workers deserved it to be.

Now, that was the first Trump administration. We have just begun the second Trump administration, where you would think that maybe, just maybe, they would work hard on making good on their campaign theme or campaign pledge—whatever you want to call it—of putting “America first.”

I would love to see it. They could put America first if they chose to invest in our education system and to help educate and train our future workforce in ways that would grow our economy in the years and decades ahead. Or they could put America first by tackling the high cost of housing and grocery prices.

But no, that is not what they are doing. They are right back to focusing

on tax breaks for corporations by hundreds of billions of dollars. It is the only thing that President Trump is about, frankly. Look at his record. Look at his life. He wants to make life even easier for himself, for his family, for his wealthy friends, for the top not just 1 percent but the top 0.1 percent of America.

But you can't just give these tax breaks away for free. You have got to pay for them somehow. Somebody has got to fund them. So in order to pay for these tax breaks, the administration is determined to cut as much spending from our communities and our most vulnerable as they can. Like I said, they are not even hiding it anymore.

On the campaign trail, President Trump enjoyed playing dress-up at McDonald's and staging photo ops with garbage trucks, but on day one of his administration, who did he surround himself with? Not a fast-food worker, not a sanitation worker, not an auto-worker, whom he claimed to reach out to in recent years, or a steelworker, as much as he wants to champion blue-collar workers in the Midwest. No, he chose to surround himself with the richest men in the country—some of the richest men in the world.

Remember his inauguration? They were right there in the front row. You recognize the names: Zuckerberg, Bezos, Musk.

To hard-working Americans who may have voted for him in November, I am sorry to tell you, he used you. He used you for your votes. He got what he needed from you, and now he and Russell Vought are about to make you pay.

For an idea of what the next 4 years with Russell Vought and Donald Trump in charge will mean, let's review again these last couple of weeks. It has been decision after decision after decision following Russell Vought and Project 2025's playbook: Empower the President, and then enrich themselves and their wealthy friends.

Now, we have long known that this President could not care less about the guardrails put in place in our Constitution. Since when has he cared about what is constitutional or not?

But after the Supreme Court granted him blanket immunity, he is using his newfound powers to eliminate any opposition or dissent around him.

From day one in the second administration, President Trump has used his powers to seek retribution against anyone he perceives as a political enemy. And he sought to undermine and threaten any potential opposition. On day one, he issued 1,500 pardons for the January 6 rioters, if you want to call them that. Insurrectionists is what I call them. Folks who desecrated this U.S. Capitol, who attacked law enforcement officers in an attempt to overthrow an election.

The last couple of weeks, he has begun to investigate and fire professional career prosecutors at the Department of Justice who did their duty when asked to investigate the crimes

committed on January 6 of 2021, prosecutors who were required—when assigned to—required to investigate insurrection, sedition, violence against law enforcement personnel. Serious crimes, folks, serious crimes.

President Trump's team even sent out a survey to members of the FBI regarding their involvement in January 6 investigations. Now, just this week, CNN reported:

FBI turns over details of 5,000 employees who worked on January 6 cases to Trump Justice Department, as agents sue.

And:

President Trump has illegally fired 18 inspectors general and over a dozen career prosecutors from the special counsel's office who worked under Jack Smith to investigate and prosecute criminal actions from his first term in office.

It is still early in the second administration, but the message is already crystal clear. President Trump will threaten anyone who might show a willingness to hold him accountable for his actions. It is the same reason why he is not just firing folks, but he is installing loyalists at the Department of Justice, especially at the FBI, so that no one will dare tell him no.

Now, how do we know these are loyalists? The newly sworn in Attorney General of the United States has served as President Trump's personal attorney. Well, people say there is a conflict there, just delegate it to the Deputy Attorney General. So who might that be? Oh, surprise, surprise, another former personal attorney. Where will the conflicts end?

But, of course, there is still dedicated public servants out there willing to do what is right, even if that means standing up to Trump. But it is, indeed, getting harder and harder.

Now, earlier this week, the New York Times reported that the head of the FBI's New York office wrote to his colleagues and vowed to dig in—that is what he wrote, “dig in,” in the face of this assault. Not just on law enforcement personnel but Justice.

He wrote:

Today, we find ourselves in the middle of a battle of our own, as good people are being walked out of the FBI, and others are being targeted because they did their jobs in accordance with the law and FBI policy.

That is what is happening, retribution for folks who were doing their job, just because President Trump doesn't like it, fears the consequences and accountability. And even if it was just at the FBI, even if it was just at the Department of Justice, it would be cause for alarm; but a similar trend is happening across Departments and Agencies not involved in our Nation's law enforcement.

When President Nixon fired just a fraction of these numbers, it was called the Saturday Night Massacre, and it led to his resignation. In comparison, I can't help but note that what President Trump is doing is not a Saturday Night Massacre; it was a January massacre.

And as astonished as I am, about what President Trump is trying to do, I am equally astonished at Senate Republicans who are standing by and watching it happen, letting it happen—letting it unfold as if you have no choice, as if you have no power.

They are unlike their Republican predecessors who had the courage and the moral compass to recognize the harm that a President could do to the country and to tell President Nixon that enough was enough.

The Trump administration is hoping to force out thousands of experienced career Federal workers who have served both Democratic and Republican administrations, so that he can replace them with people whose only qualification is blind loyalty.

We have heard about the loyalty tests, right, that he required of folks who wanted to be considered for appointments. President Trump is attempting to twist the U.S. Code to redefine what nonpolitical career workers are, to give him even more power to fire and torment our Federal Government workforce. One of the ways he has initiated this effort is by trying to offer a buyout or a severance to nearly all Federal workers, hoping that non-loyalists would choose to leave rather than stay and be tormented.

He is doing this, by the way, with absolutely no authority to do so. I focus on this point because it truly hits home for us in California. For Federal firefighters who have spent the first month of this year working 24-hour shifts battling life-threatening fires in Los Angeles County, they returned home—not just Federal firefighters from California, but from a number of States. They returned home to find a message from President Trump.

Now, you would think after weeks of 24-hour shifts fighting these life-threatening fires, that they would come home to a thank you message from the President of their country.

That wasn't the case. The message they came home to was a request for their resignation. How outrageous. How insulting. How offensive. So much so that I think it is worth repeating just a couple of the messages that I received from Federal firefighters who reached out after these buyout offers went out.

The first:

It's hard to put into words just how disrespectful this feels to any civil servant, but especially to someone who has given so much. Sacrificing precious time away from family, risking everything for the greater good.

Another reads:

Today I returned home after a two-week fire assignment in California. A slew of executive orders over this past week have put myself and a lot of others on edge. I am worried for my livelihood and my future. A purge of Federal wildlife firefighters will have catastrophic outcomes. Our fire seasons are only getting longer. Neighbors continue to expand well into wild landscapes. We cannot control when a fire will choose to wreak havoc on a community, but we will show up. We want to show up.

Can't help but see it the way they see it. This is a slap in the face to Federal firefighters, and it is a gut punch to the confidence and the pride that so many dedicated Federal workers have in the job that they do.

But I will remind us again that that is exactly what Russell Vought wants. He has said—and I will quote him:

We want the bureaucrats to be traumatically affected. When they wake up in the morning, we want them to not go to work because they are increasingly viewed as the villains.

And:

We want to put them in trauma.

Let me repeat that last sentence.

We want to put them in trauma.

This is Russell Vought, on behalf of President Trump, speaking:

We want to put them in trauma.

Let that sink in. What kind of person says that about the people that they are preparing to work with and about the workers who they will be responsible for?

We want to put them in trauma.

What kind of person wants to inflict trauma on anybody else? Is that really the kind of person you put in charge of the Office of Management and Budget, the nerve center of our Federal Government?

Now, clearly, in Russell Vought and Donald Trump's governments, you are not rewarded for your love of country and service to country or for standing up for the Constitution; in fact, you are punished, and you will be made to suffer. And by purging the Federal Government to make way for loyalists, the Trump administration is trying to further protect a reckless President from any accountability for his actions.

President Trump's goal remains clear. He wants to destroy the founding principles of our country. He wants to eliminate the separation of powers, the checks and balances enshrined in our Constitution, and to strip Congress—yes, one of the three coequal branches of government—of its power. That is not an exaggeration. Congress, particularly those involved with the appropriations process, know and respect the power of the purse. Congress, of course, has the power to create laws. And Congress has an important power to conduct meaningful oversight to serve as a check on a Presidency and an administration, just as the Founding Fathers intended.

After all, the United States was created fleeing a dictatorship. We chose better: a democracy where the power lies in the people and the Congress representatives of the people. And between the legislative, the executive, and the judiciary, checks and balances. Let's not let power become overly concentrated.

Well, despite President Trump's attempts and Russell Vought's enabling of further concentration of power, no matter what President Trump wants to believe, Congress, the President, and

the courts are coequal branches of government.

Yet at the start of the President's second term, once again, we have also received calls from officials in our Nation's health Agencies because they had to abruptly cancel meetings. Now with every new administration, we might expect a temporary pause on some external communication, right? There is often some legitimate transition activity. So if there is a pause or a momentary stop to social media communications—FaceBook and Twitter, maybe—that is one thing. But to deny Congress and the American people important information on public health? That is truly dangerous.

But, sadly, again, it seems that our Republican colleagues are simply unwilling to exercise their constitutional authority.

I am 51. Now that may not be considered old by Senate standards, but I am old enough to remember when Republicans used to be concerned about Presidential overreach. And it wasn't that long ago. Like in 2017, when then-Attorney General Jeff Sessions called former President Obama an emperor for his use of Executive actions—Jeff Sessions, former Member of this body, as attorney general using the word “emperor” in describing President Obama's use of Executive actions. Or when former Speaker Paul Ryan referred to President Obama's Executive orders on gun safety as “a dangerous level of executive overreach.” The Republican leader in the House, Speaker at the time, saying it was Executive overreach.

It wasn't that long ago. And so I can't help but ask: What has changed? What has changed?

Just 8 years later, in 2025, the Republican party is clearly the party of Donald Trump. And with more power in the hands of the President to gut the Federal Government, are Republicans willing to serve as accomplices in selling out hard-working Americans in order to pay for this big tax break for billionaires and large corporations? That is the question.

Now let's take a minute to look at who is running point for Donald Trump these days. Now, before he was sworn in for a second term as President, Trump happily handed over the keys to the government to the richest man in the world. Elon Musk paid nearly \$300 million to help elect Donald Trump, and now that wager is paying off in spades. The richest President in history is now allowing the richest man in the world to find ways to cut funding from the American people. And they will lie to your face when they claim they are returning power to the people. Because if you were to ask “Which people?” they certainly don't mean average, everyday, hard-working Americans. They are putting power and wealth further and further into the billionaire class.

That is right. Trump has now handed shadow President Elon Musk control of

your Social Security payments, your Medicare benefits and Medicaid benefits, the government programs that you paid into to help you in retirement—the retirement that you earned. That is all at risk now.

And now Elon Musk has access to the sensitive data for hundreds of millions of Americans. He has your bank account information. He has your tax data. He has your Social Security number. He has your home address.

To be clear, no law has passed to create this so-called Department of Government Efficiency, DOGE, and no law was passed, certainly, to give it any authority to make spending decisions, to shut down programs, or ignore Federal law. So we should all be concerned as Musk gives recent college graduates who now work for him full rein over Treasury's servers and payment programs.

If Treasury payments were ever intentionally or even unintentionally stopped, it could paralyze our economy, and it would stop people's Social Security benefits. Now, most people that I know truly rely on their Social Security to get by.

So let's be clear. For Donald Trump and Elon Musk, this has never really been about government efficiency. It is about a government takeover to steal from the American people and further enrich themselves and their friends.

It is the very same reason, by the way, that they are attacking USAID, illegally dismantling an Agency that Congress created, working to end humanitarian assistance. Dictators around the world are celebrating. China, opening its arms, as Trump forces our allies to look somewhere else for partnership and support.

Colleagues, USAID was created by Congress, has been annually invested in by Congress—including your votes.

President Trump, Russell Vought's philosophy: Who cares what they did. We are going to do what we want. Keep telling us over and over and over again. They are standing by, letting him do it.

Now we hear that the Department of Education might be in Elon Musk's crosshairs next, with Donald Trump promising to abolish the Department as a whole. Think about that. Threatening support for millions of our students and further holding back a generation of children who have already suffered interruptions through a pandemic and who can't afford more instability?

It all begs the question: Who is really in control here? Who is calling the shots? Is it Donald Trump? Or is it Elon Musk?

Well, today, I say to you that to working families, it doesn't matter. Neither one of them is looking out for them.

And, again, this is exactly what Russell Vought has envisioned: billionaires cutting support for American families to make room for even more benefits for the rich. And his fingerprints are

already all over Donald Trump's earliest steps to cut funding.

Now, as I mentioned, even before he was confirmed—and he is still not confirmed—Vought had a hand in a constitutional crisis just last week when President Trump issued a government-wide funding freeze. He hoped to withhold hundreds of billions of dollars from social safety net programs that Americans have paid into, all to lay the groundwork for his billionaire tax cuts.

These Federal programs might not mean much to the wealthiest people in the country, but they mean a lot—a lot—to hard-working families across the country.

In California alone, State agencies and local governments were blocked from accessing Medicaid and housing assistance grant portals. The director of a grant-funded program, the Los Angeles District Attorney's Office, supporting victims of violent crime—is that who we are trying to look out for? The local prosecutors working to protect victims of violent crime were concerned about the future of their work because Federal funding had been frozen—who knew for how long.

Funding for research on cures for childhood cancer was threatened. Colleagues, childhood cancer. We are trying to find a cure, not freeze them out of hope.

Local commuter rail officials in Sonoma raised concerns about their ability to continue to service the community if outstanding Federal funding was frozen. This is the kind of service that people rely on to get to work, keep our economy going. Funding freezes make it difficult to do that.

The city of Vacaville was worried about potential impacts to their housing authority and vouchers. Head Start grantees were frozen out of their Federal payment management systems. Health centers in San Francisco met to assess their ability to provide services if grant funding and Medicare reimbursements were frozen.

The Oakland Fire Department raised alarm bells about having to cut staff if an outstanding FEMA grant to support pay for 35 firefighters was paused. Northern California, Central California has seen what fires have done to Southern California. They don't want the same. Yet we are going to jeopardize firefighter staffing? Really?

Not to mention President Trump is still holding up hundreds of billions of dollars that were promised for key infrastructure projects in California, and communities are losing confidence that they will ever see that money. And I will cite just two examples: The city of Tracy was awarded \$41 million for a key infrastructure grant that would create good-paying jobs, but now they may never see that money. The LOSSAN rail corridor that connects San Diego to Los Angeles to San Luis Obispo—I know you all love that part of the California coastline. The LOSSAN rail corridor was promised \$27

million to help improve service along that route. Now that is in jeopardy. I know this one well, this corridor. There are great plans in the works, not just for efficiency, improved service, but improved safety. Imagine that—improving the safety of the rail lines in America. But no. You all are OK with stopping that work.

Now, although President Trump has threatened to block hundreds of billions of dollars to support families recovering from catastrophic fires, law enforcement agencies that we rely on to keep us safe, and the children and families who depend on Federal childcare and nutrition programs—that is what they are doing.

I know some of you have said: Well, that order has been frozen, so we shouldn't worry.

Technically, the OMB funding freeze order has been halted by the courts—not by choice, by the courts—for now. We know that the fight is far from over. This is just their first attempt in this administration, not their final attempt. And we know because this is exactly what President Trump and Russell Vought want—a constitutional crisis to give the President more power and to make way for those billionaire tax breaks that you guys are so hell-bent on. That is their plan for our families, for our Constitution, for our country.

Here is another tool they have. They will use immigration and other culture wars to divide us because if we are fighting amongst ourselves, Trump and his ultrawealthy friends will just be helping themselves to tax breaks. They will try to overwhelm the system to enrich themselves, whether it is legal or not, because they are banking on us being distracted by culture wars.

In fact, look at just how much has been struck down by Federal judges appointed by both Democrats and Republicans. This isn't a partisan deal. How much has been struck down already just weeks into this administration? One judge has already enjoined President Trump's blatantly unconstitutional Executive order on birthright citizenship. Not one but two judges have enjoined the OMB spending freeze. Two Federal judges also enjoined his Executive order on transgender prison inmates. And that is just in the last week. Multiple suits have also been brought challenging his illegal purge of the Federal workforce and his attempts to interfere with USAID.

So we know that President Trump and his billionaire friends are only in it for themselves. That has been well established. They have shown us exactly who they are for years now.

But colleagues, I have to admit that what surprises me most—what surprises me most—is that what I hear from my Republican colleagues one on one is: Well, we agree on more than you think. Let's just keep talking. Let's work to try to find this common ground. Let's do what is right for our country.

Call me an optimist, but I believe my Republican colleagues when they say they came to Washington to help their constituents.

Now, while I disagree with it, I understand that some of our colleagues are choosing to make political decisions with some of President Trump's nominees. You may be thinking about a potential reelection in 2026. Maybe you think it is just easier to stand up to Trump on an issue somewhere further down the road than right now.

But here is what surprises me: What is different with Russell Vought is that this is a nominee who embodies a larger vision about the Presidency and about the country that would fundamentally hurt your constituents too—not just our constituents, not just my constituents, all of our constituents. And it already has. This short-lived OMB funding freeze alone gave us a look at just some of the backlash from cutting a wildly popular social safety net.

So to my Republican colleagues, respectfully, I know you are getting the same calls as I am. I know you are hearing about the constituents whose lives have been made harder because of this. I know you are not blind to the real-world effects of Donald Trump and Russell Vought.

This week, I have had Californians come out in droves to my office encouraging me to oppose this nomination. They are demanding that the services they rely on be protected, and they are refusing to let Russell Vought pillage programs like Head Start, like Meals on Wheels, like so many others just so that the wealthiest Americans can get a bigger tax break.

So today, I will end with this: a question to my colleagues across the aisle. Who are you more loyal to—your own constituents or a reckless President? What are we doing in Washington if we are afraid to stand up for our States and for our constituents? Did any of you run for Senate to cut veterans' housing assistance? Did any of you run for Senate to slash school lunch programs and force kids to go hungry? Did any of you run for Senate to make it harder for communities to get support after a natural disaster and rebuild their home, to rebuild communities?

I may sound crazy when I suggest this, but I don't believe it is any political risk at all to stand up for your constituents. Even if you hesitate to speak out publicly against Trump's unprecedented power grab, at least join me in voting against Russell Vought and his dangerous world view. Don't let Trump's allegiance to billionaires crush your hard-working constituents because I won't stand for it as he attempts to crush mine.

I invite you, I encourage you, I implore you to do the right thing.

I yield the floor.

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

**Mr. WYDEN.** Before he leaves the floor, let me thank my colleague from

California, my southern neighbor, for his excellent comments that so eloquently put in perspective what the choices are all about.

You and I want everybody in America to have a chance to get ahead—everybody. That has not been the case with what we have seen with Mr. Vought and the Trump administration. The breaks are going to go to the people at the top, and we are going to offer a very different approach.

I am going to spend a few minutes following up your good remarks and then yield to my colleague, who has been a wonderful addition to the Senate Finance Committee, Senator SMITH.

**Mr. President,** Russell Vought is the lead architect of the Trump economic bait-and-switch. It is a pretty clear approach to follow. Donald Trump spent months and months on the campaign trail promising that workers and working families were going to be his focus. You might recall that he promised he was going to lower grocery prices. He went into grocery stores and he said: Prices are going to go down under my Presidency.

It took just a few weeks before that one was dropped. Anybody who wonders about grocery prices today, just go to the market and try to figure out how to get through buying some eggs because it is the same kind of problem.

All these kinds of efforts to tell working-class people that they would come first have really given way to something that I call the bait-and-switch. Instead of the relief being targeted to workers, people for whom the big issues have the second word as "bill"—it might be medical bill, it might be rent bill, it might be gas bill, but that is what is going on in their lives—they are hurting.

The reality is, Trump doesn't care about that, so he is going to cut programs that they depend on, like housing and healthcare and affordable energy, in order to take that money and move it over to supercharge the 2017 tax cuts and give even more benefits to the people at the top.

We are going to, on the Finance Committee—and I have my colleague here, Senator SMITH, who I know shares this view—we are going to push back against that kind of economic bait-and-switch because we know how unfair it is. Right now in America, if you are a firefighter or a nurse, you pay taxes with every single paycheck, no question about it. It is a responsibility of citizenship. You pay taxes with every paycheck.

If you are one of the high-fliers though, Mr. President, it doesn't work that way. You can, to a great extent, pay what you want, when you want to, and sometimes go for years on end paying virtually nothing. In fact, on the front pages of the Wall Street Journal, it was described some time ago as "Buy, Borrow, and Die." Buy lots of assets, maybe houses you don't use at all; borrow against them for your very opu-

lent lifestyle; and then you pass. Buy, borrow, and die—the glidepath that ensures that if you are at the very top, you will pay little or nothing for years on end while working people get clobbered.

You can be sure this is going to be something that Mr. Vought and President Trump are going to pursue very vigorously because this is what they had in mind when they were making plans to do the bait-and-switch and take from people of the working class and transfer those benefits to the people at the top.

Mr. Vought was a coauthor of the infamous Project 2025. This has been particularly curious because when Donald Trump heard about this, he acted like he had nothing to do with it: Project 2025? What is that? Who knows anything about that?

Well, it is pretty clear that he knew everything about it, that he was working with Mr. Vought, and what started off as a rightwing wish list quickly became the guiding policy agenda for Donald Trump and his administration. It is the blueprint for Republicans to unravel the Federal Government as we know it.

There are some highlights of Project 2025 that certainly deserve some discussion here this morning.

A nationwide abortion ban is on the agenda; slashing food assistance programs; eliminating Head Start early education; yet more goodies for Big Pharma; a green light for various types of discrimination; and then, to top it all off—the real essence of the agenda—take a sledgehammer to checks and balances and give the President the power to throw the Constitution in the trash can and defy congressional authority—a pretty graphic parade of horrors.

Over the last few days, the American people have witnessed the reality of one of the mainstays of Project 2025 play out right before their eyes.

Last Friday, just 6 days ago, whistleblowers told me about something that has turned out to be more alarming than I thought. We were told that the Treasury Secretary was going to give the keys to the Treasury payments program to Mr. Musk, and that has played out now before our eyes.

I say to my colleague from the Finance Committee, we got this letter a day or so ago saying: What is everybody worried about? Nothing to see here. No big deal.

And you slap your forehead or something and you say: Are you kidding me? Look at what Musk is announcing every single day that he is doing.

I have said it before, and I say it again: Elon Musk, take your hands off the people's money. You are seizing control of the Treasury Department's highly sensitive payment system containing home addresses, bank account numbers, private Social Security and tax information of hundreds of millions of Americans.

My colleague from Minnesota and I spent a lot of time advocating for privacy rights. When Musk is done with

that agenda that I just described—looking at people's home addresses, bank accounts, Social Security numbers—there are going to be very little elements of real privacy left.

Even more concerning, Musk has shown that he is willing to use control of these payment systems to target nonprofits that he disagrees with. He starts with religious nonprofits, providing crucial community services.

So the whole point of this, as Senator SMITH and I have watched this, was supposed to be going after fraud and abuse. What did he do? He went after religious nonprofits, providing crucial community services.

This DOGE takeover is the type of thing Mr. Vought and his far-right buddies were dreaming about. It probably goes all the way back to their dorm rooms.

Just last week, the Office of Management and Budget—the office Mr. Vought would be tasked with overseeing—put in place a funding freeze that would cut off Federal funding for any organization or group across the country that relies on it.

Law enforcement, schools, small businesses, and firefighters—these are services that are lifelines to small communities. All of them—all of them—are being punished.

Within hours of that freeze going into effect, our staff received word that the Medicaid payment system had gone completely dark in all 50 States.

I remember what this was all about from my days as director of the Gray Panthers. This kind of program was a lifeline in terms of giving people information about their medicine, and nursing home benefits, and the services of Medicaid. So when I heard about this, I put something up online: All 50 States—all of them—had Medicaid portals that were backed up, maybe not working at all.

For several hours, States were locked out, leaving the fate of Medicaid and healthcare coverage for tens and millions of vulnerable Americans unknown and leaving patients, States, and providers scrambling.

Because of the tremendous outcry from senior citizens advocates, disability rights folks, community leaders of all political philosophies, that portal got up and running. But it is a sobering reminder that Republicans have their sights set—particularly Mr. Vought—on doing everything they can to unravel Medicaid and rip away health coverage for millions of Americans in the process.

While OMB seemingly tried to walk back parts of the funding freeze just a day later, confusion and chaos has had lasting impacts and likely will for weeks and months to come.

To continue in that vein, my office is still hearing from Head Start providers back in Oregon that are locked out of their payment systems. Unless those funds are turned back on soon, these schools that serve the rural parts of Oregon will have to start closing their

doors because they can't afford to keep operating.

All of this makes sense if you understand that one of the main goals of Project 2025 and its key author, Mr. Vought, is taking away Congress's power of the purse and giving it directly to the President. That means giving the President the authority to redirect or cut off Federal funds to programs they don't like or that didn't align with their personal agenda, because the painful truth is Donald Trump doesn't care if the economy crashes and these communities I am talking about suffer.

He and Mr. Vought want hungry kids and seniors to just try to get by on their own. They want domestic violence survivors to have nowhere to turn for shelter. They want to deny law enforcement the resources they need to keep our communities safe.

I just had groups of law enforcement people come to see me pleading for help with resources. They didn't come as Democrats and Republicans. They came as folks from Oregon and the Pacific North West to say: We want to make sure that our communities have that added measure of safety.

Unfortunately, the Trump people want to end lifesaving research that is going to be so important to dealing with cancer and other diseases. They don't seem to be at all concerned about patients being turned away from basic healthcare.

It is clear to me that with this array of challenges that I have described, the Trump people—particularly the President—have walked back the pledge that was made in the campaign to put working families first, and to give everybody a chance to get ahead. Those campaign promises from the vault have vanished. Poof, they are gone.

What is taking place now is a very different agenda, the bait-and-switch agenda, where instead of following through on those promises to working families, they are going to make sure that the people who get the fruits of the economic reforms that are coming are going to be the people at the top.

America can do better. We always do better when we give everybody in our country a chance to get ahead, and we come together to pursue that in a united way.

I am voting no against Russell Vought because that kind of economics is not on his agenda.

I yield to my colleague from Minnesota.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Minnesota.

Ms. SMITH. Mr. President, I would like to thank my colleague from Oregon for his remarks. As he serves as ranking member of the Finance Committee, I know that he is always thinking about how our tax system is working for regular people in this country and how we make sure that it is fair, that it is funding the critical services that we have, and that we are not putting the burden on regular people and

letting billionaires and big corporations off the hook.

So I just want to thank you for your words. I was listening closely to what you were saying, and I think it is very important in this moment that we hear this.

Colleagues, we have been up all night long. It is a quarter to 9, I think, in Washington, DC. It is 7:30 or a quarter to 8 in Minnesota, where my family is. My grandchildren are just about getting up and getting ready for school. I think we are going to get some snow in Minnesota this morning. And in New Mexico, where my 95-year-old father lives, it is only about 6:45 in the morning, and he is probably thinking about getting up.

Senator WYDEN, in your home State of Oregon, it is only about a quarter to 6.

Every place around this country, people are getting up, and they may be noticing that we have kept the Senate in session all night long. They may be wondering what this is all about and why we are doing this and what impact this has on their lives.

Because, after all, we are talking about the nomination of a man—Russell Vought—to lead something called the OMB. I would guess that a lot of people in this country don't even really know what the OMB is.

The Office of Management and Budget oversees Federal Agencies' performance and administers the Federal budget. It sounds pretty innocuous, right? It is not anything that you should be too worried about. It seems like the role of this Agency would be to make sure that the laws that are passed by Congress are implemented; that the Federal budget, which is the purview of Congress, is implemented in a way that reflects what the representatives of the people of this country asked and expected.

So, colleagues and those who are listening, we are here today because what is happening with this nomination of Russell Vought, this confirmation that we are going to be taking up at some point, later today, kind of masked in this innocuous OMB, is actually one of the biggest power grabs that I think we have ever seen in the history of our country—a massive power grab by the executive to seize power that rightly, as described in the Constitution, belongs to Congress, because what Mr. Vought and Donald Trump and Elon Musk have proposed is that, with Russell Vought leading the Office of Management and Budget, they can just pretty much ignore what Congress has said we should do with the Federal budget.

So I want to just spend a little bit of time talking about what that means and talking about what it means for you if you are here on the east coast or if you are in the Midwest, where my family is, or in the Southwest, where my father is, or any place in this country. What does that mean to you as you are getting up this morning? Because



we have seen—we don't have to hypothesize what this means with Russell Vought leading the OMB, with Elon Musk running rampant throughout the Federal Government, what this nomination means and why we need to oppose it. Because we can see it—it is right there in front of our eyes because they have already started to implement their plans, the plans that are laid out in Project 2025.

I say this to my colleague from Oregon, I was just looking at the latest news just to give us an idea of what this really means. Here is a quote from a lawyer in the Washington Post. This is part of a Washington Post story that posted this morning. This is not some radical, progressive lawyer who said this. This is Ty Cobb, who served in the first Trump administration. He says what is going on here today with this vote nomination, especially with Elon Musk, he says:

It's a naked power grab consistent with what Trump's advisers have persuaded him to do, which is to flood the zone with as much unconstitutional activity as possible, with the hope that they get away with some or all of it.

Now, this is Ty Cobb, who has served as White House lawyer during Trump's first term.

I offer that up as sort of a preamble to my remarks because I think it shows that even Republican lawyers can identify that what is happening here with the Trump administration and with this nomination of Russell Vought is a naked power grab, to seize power from the representatives elected by the people of this country and Congress and to concentrate it in the White House in the hands of Elon Musk and Russell Vought in order for them just to run rampant over our constitutional system.

As I said, you don't have to just believe me when you hear what I am telling you because we can see them already start this process.

Last week, in the Trump administration, we could see that they hurt real people in my State, in the State of Oregon, in the State of Florida, by creating this unprecedented chaos in Federal Agencies and programs, all based on the blueprint of Project 2025. And Russell Vought, whose nomination the Senate is considering today, is the architect of that blueprint.

I think you could see that his ideas are dangerous; they are unconstitutional; and they are already causing real harm to people.

In just the 2 weeks since President Trump has been in office—I guess it is 2½ weeks at this point—what he has done is he has attempted to freeze Federal funding that was authorized and appropriated by Congress. That is our job.

Whether this freeze right now—whether it is still frozen, whether it has been enjoined or temporarily blocked by the courts, whether the administration has turned on the funding spigots in some places and not in oth-

ers, as my colleague from Oregon has said, it has created massive confusion.

I know in Minnesota, some people say the money is coming again, as it should be, constitutionally. Others are saying it isn't. None of that really matters in this moment, as we consider this nomination, because I do believe, as Ty Cobb said, that the chaos is the point—creating the chaos is the point. Hurting people right now, that is the impact of that.

So what we are doing is we are seeing what Russell Vought's extreme and dangerous ideas mean and how far they are willing to take this.

Think about this for a minute. In Minnesota, my home State, where a Federal funding freeze is truly life or death, the administration's list of programs that they have frozen or want to freeze covers most basic needs for a lot of people: food, shelter, medicine, and safe drinking water.

I have heard from thousands of Minnesotans who are terrified about what this means. The Senate phone lines, the phone lines into my office, over this last week—and I suspect that this has been the case for many of my colleagues on both sides of the aisle—have been overwhelmed by people calling in and basically saying: What is happening here? How could this be happening? I am worried that I am not going to get my Social Security check. I am worried that the organization that I run to provide domestic shelter for women who are the victims of domestic violence is going to have to shut down. I am worried that the services that we provide to people who are resettling in Minnesota—often, this is done by faith organizations in my home State—I am worried that we are not going to be able to do those things.

Our phone lines have been overwhelmed with stories like that.

I would have to say, colleagues, there is just a level of outrage and just furiousness that I haven't seen for a long time because people can see that this is having an impact.

People call my office who voted for Vice President Harris. People call my office who voted for Donald Trump. But I am not seeing here a distinction. What I am seeing is even people who voted for President Trump are saying: This is not what I voted for. This is not the vision that I had for my country. This is not the campaign that I voted for to lower the cost of groceries—or, you know, even many of the things that I completely disagree with with the President.

This is actually having an impact on real families and people and hurting them. And where is this going to lead from here?

I think the scope of the Trump and Vought Project 2025 and the funding freeze that it has inspired is so broad that I don't think there is a single person in this country who wouldn't be impacted in some way, either directly or indirectly, and I don't think it will be good for anyone.

I also just detect, colleagues—from the calls that I am getting in, it is easy to see—easy to see from all the calls coming into my office that Americans are feeling a lot less safe and a lot less secure than they did last Monday before this all unfolded, before this funding freeze that was described and is now being implemented—was described by Project 2025 and Russell Vought and now is being implemented, is happening. People do not feel as safe today. And they know the reason why is that this freeze has put our most fundamental and essential services in limbo.

In Minnesota, cities have been notified that their Federal funds to help pay law enforcement salaries are subject to the freeze. To give you an idea of what impact this has, counterterrorism coordination programs, programs to combat human and sex and drug trafficking, and programs to fight child sex trafficking have all been covered by this—it is really a funding cut, to be honest. It is like suddenly you had the money, and now you don't have the money anymore to do these things. That feels like a cut if you are looking at your organization and what you are trying to accomplish.

So what does that mean if you are the victim of a violent crime? The Federal program that helps you to recover from that, to get restitution—those services have been frozen. If you are the survivor of sexual violence or domestic violence, you don't have the same access to a safe place to be. You are less safe because of Russell Vought and Donald Trump and Elon Musk. This should be worrying to every single one of us Americans, whether or not you are in that specific situation or whether you just have some compassion and care for folks that are in that terrible situation.

Vought and Trump's funding freeze has also endangered, as I said, the survivors of domestic and sexual violence. Without these services, which are supported by Federal tax dollars, survivors will have no place to go. Domestic violence shelters truly save lives, and any delay or freeze in Federal grant funding means that those services—provided, for example, by Alexandra House or the Southern Valley Alliance in Minnesota—will have huge impacts. The survivors who count on those places to go—sometimes with their children—to be safe will be much, much less safe.

Colleagues, I have heard from one domestic violence organization in Minnesota which gets 70 percent of their funding from Federal grants. Think about that organization. Even a short delay in reimbursements will mean that they have to lay off their counselors and other folks that work there and stop services. These are not organizations that have millions of dollars in their bank account; they live hand to mouth. They are providing services as they are able to get the funds to do it.

If we allow Russell Vought and Donald Trump and Elon Musk to continue

this, it is not just these organizations that suffer; it is the individuals that count on them. I think—I know that many folks would find themselves in life-threatening situations as a result.

I can see from what is happening in Minnesota that the freeze is also creating serious strain on our healthcare system. Even if you don't use a community health center yourself, the freeze of their funding could make it harder for you to get access to timely care.

Throughout the country, there is an incredible network of community health centers that provide primary care to moms and children. Many of these facilities are providing not only physical healthcare but mental health care, which I think we all know is lifesaving.

People count on this network of community health centers to get their basic care. That might be you or it might be somebody who lives in your community or it might be—you never may know somebody who goes there. But here is why this affects you if you are waking up in Minneapolis or New Mexico, where my dad is, or Oregon, where Senator WYDEN is from, or New Jersey, where Senator BOOKER is from. If folks don't have those community health centers to go to, where are they going to go when they get sick? The funding freeze is not going to freeze sickness. A funding freeze is not going to freeze injury. It only freezes the places where people who are experiencing those things can go to get help. So what are they going to do instead? They are going to go to emergency rooms. Right now in Minnesota, emergency rooms are packed full of people who have the flu, who have RSV, who have norovirus.

Community health centers are a source of huge relief to emergency rooms because it creates a place for people to go who need urgent care. If they are not there, what is going to happen is that those individuals are going to do the only thing they can do, which is to flood emergency rooms.

So if you get your primary health insurance through Medicaid, for example—just remember, colleagues, that is about 45 percent of all moms who are delivering babies; it is maybe roughly 40 percent of all children in this country who get their health insurance through Medicaid. If you can't go to one of those community health centers, then you are going to end up in the ER.

In Minnesota, there are 170,000 people who could lose, with these funding freezes, their access to healthcare. That means 170,000 people who are going to end up in emergency rooms, and that is going to affect all of us. That is going to affect the health and safety of all of us. It is going to put huge stress on hospitals and be, again, another example of how Russell Vought and Donald Trump and Elon Musk are actually, in their actions, right now, today, making all of us less safe, less secure.

Last Tuesday, I heard from community health centers that were preparing to furlough workers by the end of the day as these funding freezes were sifting through the news and getting to them directly.

I think it is important to understand that, yes, the courts did issue sort of a short-term reprieve or rescission to stop that, but those organizations are still trying to decide in real time what they can do and how they can move forward.

This morning, I was listening on the radio to organizations that said they had to furlough people when those freezes came into place and even when they were temporarily lifted. Now they are in the process of trying to figure out how to bring those people back, and every minute that goes by, that is wasted energy and effort and time.

I think about my Republican colleagues who say that they want to see efficiency, that they want to see government run like a business. Yet these kinds of just outrageous, unpredictable, chaotic funding freezes and then unfrozen and back and forth are the epitome of inefficiency. And who bears the price of that? Who bears the price of this Russell Vought strategy to try to do this big power grab away from Congress and not following the laws that Congress passed? The organizations that are serving Minnesotans and Americans are paying the price, and ultimately Americans are paying the price for that every single day. Every minute that goes by in which the threat of rescinded or withheld funding is still out there, there are real consequences for people.

Across the country, we are facing a very real health threat, public health threat, when it comes to avian flu. This is another example of how Russell Vought and Donald Trump and Elon Musk are, in real time, hurting the health and safety of Minnesotans and Americans.

In Minnesota, farmers and producers understand the impacts of avian flu better than anyone else. Minnesota is the largest Turkey producer in the State. We also have large dairy herds, big food processing facilities. It is very important to our economy, important to tens and tens of thousands of jobs and billions of dollars of economic activity in Minnesota.

Right now, Minnesota farmers and producers are grappling with the avian influenza. Last year, the bird flu jumped from poultry to livestock, and then it jumped from livestock to humans. So this is something we have to pay a lot of attention to. It is something that could be extremely concerning. This is something that the Federal Government has to take seriously to prevent a real crisis—an economic crisis and a public health crisis.

By the way, colleagues, if you are wondering why the price of eggs has gone up so much in the last month or so, several months or so, this is why. It is because over 100 million birds have

been culled from flocks all across the country because of avian influenza. Yet what has Russell Vought done? What would Russell Vought do? What has Donald Trump done? What is Elon Musk doing to address this problem? Well, the programs that support my State's and your States' public health infrastructure, those programs were included in this freeze.

On top of that, the communications blackout that also happened in the very early days of the Trump administration as part of this Russell Vought-Project 2025 agenda—there was a communications blackout from all Federal health Agencies, which also applies, by the way, to their communications with Congress. All of the work that was happening—nonpartisan work, nonpolitical work, all of that work that was happening—communications about this really concerning public health threat of avian influenza, that was all stopped.

Now what I am hearing reports of from my friends and colleagues back home in Minnesota is that they are seeing this public health data, which is very important to fighting the avian flu—some of that data has been removed from government websites. It is like they are trying to erase it. Who knows why this is. Maybe there was some mention of the word "inclusion" in what was in those public health reports, and so they got scrubbed. Who knows. Who knows why that is. But that is another example, colleagues, of how this sort of strategy of Russell Vought and Project 2025 and Donald Trump is hurting our health, because, I can tell you, we would all be better off if we had access to that public health data so that we could understand what was going on and what is happening.

We are supposed to be doing surveillance on the avian flu so that we know where it is going, what other flocks it might be infecting, whether we are seeing additional jumps to humans, what humans are infected. Yet Russell Vought's plans are putting all of us at risk. He is making all of us less safe in this circumstance.

I know my colleague from New Jersey is going to be ready to speak in just a few minutes, and so I will just touch on maybe one or two other examples of what is happening in Minnesota as a result of the Project 2025 plan, Donald Trump's plans, and why opposing Russell Vought's nomination is so important.

Minnesota is in the far north part of this country, as many of you know. It can get cold in Minnesota, and yesterday it got down to minus 12 degrees in International Falls. We are in the dead of winter in Minnesota.

There is a great effort that we have long had—often has had bipartisan support—which helps keep the heat on for low-income families when it gets really cold outside. The idea, which is so obvious to me, is that if it is in the winter-time and you are having trouble paying your heating bill, you ought to be able

to get a bridge, working with your utility, so that the heat doesn't get turned off, so that your kids aren't cold in the dead of winter, so that you can stay in your home rather than moving to a shelter, so that you are able to have a safe place to call home.

This program is called LIHEAP. I won't tell you what the acronyms are because I never remember the acronyms myself. But it is a very important way to make sure that people can stay in their homes and can stay warm when it gets really cold outside in places like International Falls in Minnesota. Yet this program, LIHEAP, was subject to the funding freeze that was put into place a couple of weeks ago by Donald Trump, part of Russell Vought's Project 2025 plan.

I will close with this. This funding freeze also has put Minnesotans at risk of going hungry. Food is already expensive. I was talking about the price of eggs and the avian flu and the dangers to our public safety with the funding freeze getting at putting out public health information. But what about bringing down the price of groceries, which, I think, if you voted for Donald Trump, that might have been what was in your mind as you decided you were going to vote for him.

Well, in this country today, more than 47 million people experience hunger. They don't always know where their next meal is going to come from. They are not sure how they are going to be able to feed their children dinner as well as breakfast. One in five children live in families where that is their circumstance.

And some of the most, you know—the people that we care about the most, seniors, children, folks that are working hard and working in low-income—have low-wage jobs, so they depend on Federal nutrition assistance to meet their basic needs. And, of course, these programs don't just provide food, they are a real lifeline for families as they are working to get ahead, to work their way up, to get to where they want to be.

A great example of this is Meals on Wheels, which is about making sure that seniors have a warm meal, but it also is about more than that. It is about social connection and dealing with issues of loneliness and isolation, which so sadly afflicts so many of our elders in our country.

And this is something that works really well; it has been in place for a long time. It is not a red issue or a blue issue; it is not a rural issue or an urban issue. It is something that makes a huge, huge difference.

And so what is happening, Colleagues, is that every community in this country has members who need help, have people who need help feeding their families, and Russell Vought is working to take that help away.

So I started out by talking about how people in this country are waking up in the morning and wondering why they should care about who runs the Office

of Management and Budget, the somewhat innocuous-sounding Agency which oversees Federal Agency performance and administers the Federal budget.

And I hope that in these comments, I have laid out just a few of the ways that this nomination of Russell Vought could have a clear impact on your life, on your safety, on your security, because his extreme agenda is anathema to how we should be running this country, and it is anathema to the basic belief that this country is founded on, the basic structure that we have, which is that Congress, the elected representatives of the people of this country, make decisions about how we are going to spend your precious tax dollars. And then it is the job of the office of OMB to make sure that those intentions are followed through in the Federal Government.

And what Russell Vought wants to do is to turn that on its head. He says: I don't care what Congress said. I don't care what your representatives voted for in Congress. I am going to do it my way.

And that is the most blatant power grab counter to your interests that I have ever seen.

And this is why, Colleagues, it is so important that we oppose the nomination of Russell Vought.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from New Jersey.

Mr. BOOKER. I am grateful not only that you recognized me, but with the respect which you said the State of New Jersey. I know that you love my State. Many of my State residents are moving to Florida, so you are a very Jerseyfied State yourself, so thank you very much for recognizing me.

I want to say to my incredible colleague TINA SMITH, the incredible stance that you just made, the facts you laid plain, the reality she has exposed, it is so important.

The exercise going on this floor for the last 24 hours has been extraordinary and unusual. And one of the reasons why leader after leader came to the Senate floor was to show that this is not usual times. These are not usual times.

It is extraordinary to me that all through the night at the 2:00 hour, the 3 a.m. hour, the 4 a.m. hour, the 5 a.m. hour, Senator after Senator came down here to speak up, to talk about the unusual things that are going on in America and, in truth, the things that we believe unequivocally are violative of not just our democratic norms, but violative of the separation of powers.

Now, much of this is taken up in the courts already. You have State attorneys general suing right now because powers that were given to Congress are being taken by the Executive.

We know in the United States of America that we do not have a king. We are not an authoritarian government. And the debates of our Founding Fathers were central to this point that

we should have three branches of government, coequal branches, with clearly laid out—in article I, article II, article III, clearly laid out rules and responsibilities, obligations under the Constitution.

Now, this whole process, one could say, we are doing one of our article I obligations to advise and consent on the President over his nominations to key positions like OMB. But this is so much more than that.

This is not just us advising and giving consent; it is standing up for what was the bipartisan norms of our Nation. In fact, it was the democratic norms of our Nation from the very beginning that Congress has certain roles. And I often say, we are the article I branch of government. The article II branch of government has their roles.

But our role, perhaps very importantly, is the power of the purse. Spending decisions, spending priorities, spending allocations are made in this body. And the people have a say in that through our elections.

Every 2 years, a third of this body is up. Every 2 years, all of the House of Representatives are up, and the people elect people to carry out the Constitution. We swear an oath—I have done it a number of times now—to protect and defend the Constitution.

And so why are we doing this unusual thing of talking all through the night about a nominee for something that many Americans don't know much about—the Office of Management and Budget?

That is because what has been going on in the first three weeks of the Trump administration is a reckless violation of our separation of powers.

This body has differences, but there is one thing I know my colleagues and I agree on is that the powers assigned to Congress by the Constitution are sacrosanct, and we cannot allow a President to step over their powers and begin to do things that are more akin to dictatorships or authoritarian governments.

We have seen that erosion of democracy from Europe to Africa, where executives elected begin to try to take powers away from the other branches of government.

Let me give you a specific example. Agencies within the Federal Government are set up by Congress, funded by Congress, given directives and a mission by Congress, and then Congress provides oversight for those Agencies and how the Executive is conducting those congressional mandates.

What we saw over the last week or so was a direct assault on a bipartisan congressional intent: USAID, the United States Agency for International Development.

The President of the United States decided that he didn't want that Agency to exist. Without any thought, without any strategy, without any understanding of the Agency's vital functions, the President of the United

States took an Agency funded in a bipartisan manner where colleagues of mine—I serve on the Foreign Relations Committee—know so much of the work done on both sides of the aisle to support the critical mission of USAID. They attacked it and tried to dismantle and stop it.

Suddenly, the workers we have around the globe—so everything freezes. They were told to stop what they were doing. They were denied access to their e-mails, to critical files. Many of them were put into volatile situations because a lot of our great USAID government officials work in unstable environments; and, suddenly, their cell phones are not working, and they can't access their e-mail.

Resources that we allocated in a bipartisan way that were being spent for critical missions of the United States were so abruptly frozen that food aid, perishables, were left sitting on docks, medicines were stopped in their tracks—many of them that are perishable as well.

You want to talk about government waste? Food that could keep people alive, medicines that can keep people alive were left, basically, to spoil.

And this all ripples. Most people don't know this. There are 50,000 private sector jobs here in the United States, people who contract with the government, that are connected to this Agency USAID, created by Congress in a bipartisan fashion, year after year funded in a bipartisan agreement, bicameral. The President of the United States—by fiat, the President of the United States decides we are going to kill this Agency, stop it in its tracks. That is a violation of the separation of powers. Plain and simple.

Congress created the Agency. If the President wants to get rid of it, he should come to Congress. This Presidential action didn't show Donald Trump's strength; it showed his weakness, because a strong President makes his case to the American people, makes his case to Congress, lays out a vision, lays out a strategy, comes before Congress and proposes the legislation to do what they are saying. But, no, not this President.

Instead of following our constitutional dictates, instead of doing what a strong leader would have done, instead of doing what FDR did when he did sweeping things in the government, he came to Congress to fight to pass the laws to support his agenda.

LBJ, Ronald Reagan, strong Presidents who have a vision for this country that might be a little revolutionary, that might create great changes—they respect our Constitution. And they come to Congress with their vision to pass the laws necessary to support that vision.

I have watched it over my lifetime. I haven't always agreed with what the Presidents did, from Bush to Reagan, didn't agree with all their decisions, but they showed strength. They came to Congress and got Congress to pass laws to execute their bold vision.

I think a lot of bad decisions were made that way, but it went through Congress. Congress had a vote on the Iraq War. Congress had a vote on the authorization to use military force. Congress had a vote on welfare reform. Congress voted on Bill Clinton's vision for public safety to put 100,000 police officers on the street. Congress voted for the war on drugs. These are things I might not have always agreed with, but strong Presidents come before Congress, in alignment with the Constitution, with a respect for the separation of powers, abiding by the law, strong Presidents stand in the well of the House of Representatives and give a vision for this country.

As it says in my faith: Without vision, the people will perish. God bless the visionary Presidents we have had. John F. Kennedy pointing to the skies and saying, "We will go to the moon."

And then what did he do? He came to Congress with a vision to increase funding for science, math, for STEM education. What did he do? He came to Congress with a vision for making NASA something that would be the envy of the world. What did he do? He inspired a nation with a vision that was so compelling Democrats and Republicans joined together and followed him. What does this President do? What does Donald Trump—who is no Reagan, who is no JFK—what does he do? In the dark of night, he sends in unelected individuals to access computer systems in a way that is so violative of the privacy of Americans and without congressional approval, without a legal basis. They go in and upend Agency after Agency after Agency. And for USAID, they shut it down.

That is not a visionary Presidency. That is reckless, undercover vandalism, illegal action, and the hurting of Americans.

And so why—why—has Senator after Senator come down here to speak up? Why? Because to treat this as normal would be to normalize these constitutional violations. And to allow someone like Vought, who has been saying over and over again: I don't respect the Constitution. I don't respect the courts. I don't respect the rule of law. We are going to take over.

If you don't believe me, listen to what Vought says in his own words. He believes that Congress should do what it wants to do. We knew that Vought published this memo and basically said: I have no regard for the Federal law or for Congress's power of the purse.

In 2018, Vought was instrumental in the Trump administration's attempt—they weren't successful; attempt—to use the Impoundment Control Act to withhold appropriated funds beyond their period of availability. This was a backdoor way to try to go around the law. This idea of impoundment is a theory that a President—despite Congress in a bipartisan, bicameral way passing a funding bill—this is the idea that the President of the United States, despite

all of that, can just say: Nah, forget Congress. Forget the will of the people. Forget the people's representatives. Forget the U.S. Senate. I decide what we spend as a country.

And so he tried this attempt, but the attempt was determined by our processes to be illegal.

The GAO, the Government Accountability Office, said: You can't do that.

But Vought kept pushing to employ the same strategy the following year, to try to freeze foreign aid—this is 2018; the past is prologue, folks—and in doing so, he wanted to do it again, ignoring the 2018 GAO legal decision.

And in response to a 2020 prehearing question—this is how flagrantly defiant Vought is—in a response to a 2020 prehearing question, Vought wrote this: I will not abide by the 2018 decision, claiming it was wrongly decided.

Think about this. He is in the administrative branch and deciding that a legal decision was wrongly decided. So perhaps Vought not only wants to do the job of Congress, but now he wants to do the job of the article III branch of government and the courts as well.

What does that sound like? Does that sound like a patriot to our democratic traditions? No.

Does that sound like somebody who is willing to follow the rule of law? No.

Does that sound like somebody who is in the spirit of 1776—the spirit of compromise, the spirit of patriotism, the spirit of adherence to the democratic ideals of the United States of America? No.

It sounds like someone that believes that they have the power to act in an authoritarian manner and declare themselves the executive, the legislature, and the courts.

It is a deliberate misreading. And the GAO, in its earlier decision, previously signaled that the consequence of an unenacted rescission proposal should be the full prudent obligation of budget authority. In other words, I am king.

In his response following his nomination hearing, on GAO's legal decision, writing in a response to our Homeland Security Committee, he said: I do not agree with the GAO's report. OMB did not violate the IPA, as I set forth in my January 19, 2020, letter to John Yarmuth, chairman of the House Committee on the Budget. In other words, he is still standing strong during his confirmation hearing that he is doing the right thing. He stands by his defiance. He stands by this violation of the separation of powers.

And here is what a former employee who worked at USDA wrote about how dangerous this position is: For 30 years, across both Republican and Democratic administrations—decades of constitutional norms, decades of bipartisan commitment. This is what this employee said: I argue Russ Vought is the most dangerous person in the Trump administration, even over Trump, given his ideological bent and belief. He believes that the President does not spend congressional appropriations.

This, this USDA official said, defines a dictator.

We can't normalize this. And this is what I know, being here for over a decade now. If this was being done by the Barack Obama administration, there would be hair on fire on the other side of the aisle. Every Member, every Republican, would look like me as a bald man; they would have no more hair.

If Barack Obama decided to ignore the dictates of Congress, to say: Your funding decisions have no hold on my actions. I am going to ignore congressional mandate. I am going to ignore congressional rules—my Republican colleagues would be apoplectic.

If he decided with foreign policy that, hey, there is this thing called the Hyde amendment; I am going to ignore it—if Barack Obama did that, not one of them would normalize it or excuse it or look the other way.

It is that complicity that bothers me. We are at a constitutional crossroads here. We do have someone in power now who is showing weakness.

It is a weakness that other authoritarians in democratic nations have tried to do: I am not going to work through the system as designed by that nation's founders. I am not going to work in adherence to the spirit of the Constitution. I am going to do as much as I possibly can to take power for myself, to violate norms, to violate the Constitution, to indeed violate the law, and then challenge you to stop me.

And the question is: Who will speak up? Silence is complicity.

And there might be some people who are just sitting and saying: Oh, this is politics as usual. Oh, this is right-left fighting. Oh, this is not really that important. What does this have to do with me? Well, let me lay it plain, giving you one example of what has happened.

Stopping USAID's work without any plan or strategy has now endangered every American because there are things we get to go to bed at night and not have to think about because we have a government full of officials, scientists, hard-working people who, every day, make it their life mission to focus on things so that we, the people, do not have to think about them.

Think about that for a second. We know it in our own towns and communities. We have firefighters. We have police officers that stand on the front-line. They stand in the breach to protect us, to get dangerous things and conditions and people off the streets so that we are safe and we don't have to think about it every night.

(Mr. MARSHALL assumed the Chair.)

Well, that goes for USAID too. They are a national security organization. How do I know that? I am a spiritualist. I really am. I believe there are universal spiritual principles. One of them was spoken by this great American, one of the few people who is not a President of the United States whose statue sits under the dome. He was a spiritualist. He was, in fact, a person of

faith. He was a minister. And he spoke to us about a scientific truth using spiritual language.

It was in this great body of work called "Letters from a Birmingham Jail." And if he only knew that his words would resound in history, these spiritual words would speak to a scientific truth.

He said this: "We are all caught in an inescapable network of mutuality"—that we are tied in a common garment of destiny, that "injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere."

Powerful words, right? But what do they have to do with science, Cory? What do they have to do with our present political crisis, our present constitutional crisis? What do they have to do with that?

Well, here is what they have to do with that. You see, in the wisdom of this body, as I have worked in a bipartisan way on the Foreign Relations Committee, we fund the USAID to do things to protect us. But we are not doing them at home. USAID officials are around the globe.

And one of the reasons why we, in the wisdom of Congress that this President is trying to violate—one of the things that we know, because we have got engineers in this place, we have got doctors in this place, we have got dedicated public servants in this place, we have got a few big, bald nerds like me in this place—what we know is that the USAID does work that is vital to keep Americans who are sleeping at night safe.

Let me be specific. Right now in Uganda, there is an Ebola outbreak in the capital. Ebola is a vicious disease that is highly infectious. I remember this because back under the Presidency of Barack Obama, it was dominating the headlines. I saw one of the most courageous things done, that Chris Coons here flew to Africa to support the efforts that the United States of America through USAID was doing to stop Ebola in its tracks in Africa so it didn't visit us here.

But because of the global interconnected transportation systems, it was getting closer and closer to threatening American lives.

This was a crisis that dominated the headlines during the Obama administration. And who was then there to fight the spread of Ebola, to arrest it in that African nation? Who was it? USAID, American people. Who was in Uganda right now up until the Trump administration stopped their work? Who was there? Americans working for USAID. In the midst of a nasty, horrific infection, they were like our first responders, they were like our soldiers because they understand that spiritual truth that King spoke: "Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere." An infectious disease anywhere is a threat to public health everywhere.

What was the administration's plans to deal with global infectious outbreaks? Did they come to Congress and

put forth a vision? No. What was the administration's strategy to stop the growing threat of global pandemics and global threats? Did they share that plan with Congress? No. What was this administration going to do? Well, they didn't seem to care. There wasn't one hearing about this. There wasn't one conversation. There wasn't a consultation with Congress where leaders from the HELP Committee or leaders from the Foreign Relations Committee were invited to the White House to discuss their strategy in making sure that the vital functions of this Agency are preserved.

They were pursuing a radical, ideological agenda, ignoring the truth of science and the power of the spiritual truth that America's interests and national security demand Americans—be they soldiers or scientists—sometimes standing away from our country in Africa, in Asia, in Europe, protecting us from infectious diseases that are so nightmarish that—most Americans would be happy to continue to send taxpayer dollars to stop Ebola in Africa so that someone doesn't get on a plane not knowing they are infected and come to visit our country and begin an outbreak of disastrous proportions.

But here is something that USAID has been working on that is terrifying to me—truly is, and I have been talking about it for a long time in Congress—we are beginning to see bugs around this planet that are resistant to antibiotics. I talked about this in my work because I think we are these overusers of antibiotics.

Almost 50 percent of our antibiotics will be used prophylactically—not because we are treating diseases but because of the way we raise animals in America. We have to inject them over and over again to try to stop them from getting sick and end up with these horrible things where farmers have to cull their whole herd of pigs or chickens because of some kind of outbreak.

This threat of antibiotic-resistant diseases—well, thousands of American die of them all the time.

So here is a particularly infectious, nasty disease. It is called tuberculosis. Right now—I shouldn't say that because Trump has stopped it, but there were some of the best scientists in the world that happened to be ours, Americans, working for USAID on the frontlines of treatment-resistant tuberculosis, not just Ebola, in Uganda. USAID workers were trying to figure out what kind of treatments and regimens could be put into place to stop the spread of resistant tuberculosis because of the virulently viral nature of that awful disease.

How irresponsible for a President whose No. 1 responsibility is to protect Americans to tear down the Agency, stop the Agency workers—cut off their cell phones, cut off their emails, cut off their access to files, leave them not even knowing how they would get

home—on the frontlines of an infectious disease that they are trying to stop so it does not show up in America.

This is not just a violation of our Constitution. This is not just a violation of separation of powers. This is not just a violation of the law. This is a violation of common sense. This is a violation of pragmatism. This is a violation of a sacred oath to protect the American people.

I heard, folks—you did as well—the promises that were being made to America in the campaign of this President: I will keep you safe. I will drive down your costs.

Well, in 3 weeks in office, we are less safe to infectious diseases than we were under the past two Presidents. Biden and Trump 1 didn't tear down USAID infectious disease work. Obama, Republicans and Democrats—I have worked with many of my colleagues across the aisle on making sure that we are funding the important global work to fight infectious diseases. Heck, I passed bipartisan legislation to stop wet markets, which is one of the places that these zoonotic diseases can lead to human beings.

I saw momentum after COVID that we should be working together to stop infectious diseases that might start in China, in Africa, in Europe from coming to America. There seemed to be a bipartisan commitment to that idea in Congress, and it is one of the reasons why, with past Presidents, we have funded USAID to do this vital work with some of the best scientists on the globe who are willing to put their lives at risk, to step into an Ebola outbreak, a tuberculosis outbreak, an avian flu outbreak, and say “I will do what I can to protect my country,” like firefighters do and soldiers do and police officers do.

They are great Americans, but what happened to them? What happened to these great Americans risking their lives to stop infectious diseases? The President of the United States, in an act of cowardice, did not come to Congress to give a vision for how we would protect our Nation from infectious diseases, how we would do the vital work of USAID—no. In the cover of night, countermanding our laws, violating the Constitution, and an affront to the wisdom on both sides of the aisle, he just went ahead and did it. He just went ahead and did it.

The world is a complex and dangerous place. As much as government workers are being maligned and attacked and vilified and beat upon, most Americans take for granted what these patriotic Americans do every day. You shop in your supermarket and don't think about “Does this food have some disease or worm in it?” because these government workers at USAID are inspecting that food and are making it safe.

A lot of government workers got flashed on the TV with our first major aviation accident in 16 years. Well, I get on planes a lot, and I have gone and

talked to air traffic controllers. I fought for them and their contracts because I know that during those 16 years, no accident happened. You had incredible government workers working very hard, pouring their hearts out in one of the most stressful jobs, to keep us safe. So when I jump on a plane, I don't think about the air traffic around me. I know that I am on an aviation system that is safer than me getting in my car because of government workers.

We, in a bipartisan way—and this is what I am saying—there is so much goodness on both sides of the aisle. We have government workers that are doing suicide prevention work for our veterans, when we were seeing veteran after veteran die day after day after day. There are government workers, some of them I met, that make it their mission to be there for veterans that come home with invisible wounds.

I am going to make a statement that may sound braggadocios or hyperbolic, but it is actually true. In this body, there are former Governors, there are former county executives, and there are former mayors. None of them, when they were an executive, cut government more than I did.

I cut the size of Newark, New Jersey's government by 25 percent. Think about that—cutting a governmental body by a quarter. I did it. It was painful, it was hard, and it was difficult. It was during the great recession, and I had no choice.

But I had a city council. There were rules in the way I did it. There were civil service protections which I abided by.

Oh, but not this President.

We actually used what people called buyouts. We offered packages to people. But all of this we did in accordance to the laws of our State and my city in conjunction with our legislative body. We presented a vision for Newark, put a plan forward that, hey, these departments may be losing personnel, but we are going to make them more efficient.

To this day, I remember some of the data. We had like half the inspectors but did almost twice as many inspections because we had a thoughtful plan that we executed in consultation and coordination with our legislative branch.

I am the first person to tell you, as the No. 1 government-cutter in this place, that there are a lot of ways to cut waste. Just the procurement process alone in the Department of Defense is still being done in ways that are antiquated, that are being corrupted by people that leave the Pentagon and go work for the big contracting agents—a circle that is corrupting. There are ways to create more transparency on that. There are ways to bring new technology on that. There are so many ways to improve that system.

How do I know this? Because the first person to tell me this out at his ranch in Arizona was the former Secretary of the Navy, in a late-night conversation

where I just sat there and learned at the foot of some wise men, was John McCain. He went on and on and on about the corruption in our U.S. military that is undermining our fighting forces. He said we could be spending less and have higher capabilities if we only started to root out the wasteful spending and the corruption in that institution.

We should be doing this in a bipartisan way. There are so many things that many of us see that don't make sense. And there is a process we could follow to do it.

A President that is a strong President would come to Washington, would come to Congress, would give a bold address like Kennedy did when he said we were going to go to the Moon; like LBJ did when he said we are going to be a great society; like Ronald Reagan did when he said it was going to be morning in America again. This is my vision. This is my plan. I am bringing it to Congress, and we are going to get it done.

But, no, this President didn't come here to push our government to a higher level, to inspire and engage, to be thoughtful about how we were going to be safer, stronger, and more prosperous—no. He brought in an unelected billionaire that everybody in this body knows is so conflicted, a guy who has so many government contracts, a guy whose net worth has been deeply affected by this government. He brought him in, and he and his agents have gone into systems that, to me, violate privacy.

They have no transparency of what they are doing until we wake up in the middle of the night or wake up the next day and find out that the people on the frontlines fighting against infectious diseases that threaten the United States—they are gone, cut off.

We just saw this last week when Donald Trump froze funding to everything—from veterans to first responders. He froze funding for daycare that had everybody in the station—I had calls from mayors who were Republicans, Democrats, Independents who couldn't access certain key portals; that had acted in contracting, relying upon a government stream of money; that had made plans and hiring decisions that suddenly were cut off in a lurch.

The powerful thing about that is the outrage across America took this President, who was violating the law, violating bipartisan spending decisions, violating the separation of powers—the fact that Americans from all over this country spoke up and spoke out stopped him in his tracks because that is how you deal with injustice. You don't normalize it. You call it out. And God bless America. This man who thought he was going to bully and steamroll and cut critical streams of funding all across this country was stopped in his tracks.

Now, he said: Oh, I am just pulling back temporarily because I am going to come back at this.



But the sigh of relief.

I have met with prosecutors this week. I have met with police officers this week. I have met with people who voted for him, voted against him, and didn't vote in my State, and all of them said that that was an outrageous move. Thank God we stopped him. Well, how did we stop him? By speaking up, by not normalizing this, by not thinking this is just politics as usual.

So that is what this all-night speak-out has been about. It is about raising voices. It is about not being silent. It is about the gifts of this democracy: the right to protest, the right to petition your government, the freedom of speech. You see, we believe in this democracy—that the power of the people is greater than the people in power. We believe in this democracy in that every voice matters.

Donald Trump is creating chaos, confusion. People like Vought have said on the record they don't care about constitutional norms, that they don't care about legal proceedings and the outcomes because that is wrongly decided. "I have decided that that is not binding on me." Vought doesn't believe that we make spending decisions, that it is the President of the United States—despite the budget that was negotiated and passed by two Chambers in a bipartisan way—that the President can then decide "I don't like this. Congress decided a spending priority. I don't care. I am not spending that money." That is Vought.

So some people say: Well, they have the votes. CORY, can't you count?

Well, I know I am here because I stand on the shoulders of my ancestors, like all of us do. We are all the beneficiaries of the struggles and the sacrifices that came before us. We are all the beneficiaries of moments in American history where democracy was in the balance, and the majority of our people chose the right way.

We are all here because in the Depression, when a general of the United States was calling for a military takeover, people stood up and spoke out.

We are all here because, during World War II but before America joined and there was a Nazi rally at Madison Square Garden full to the rafters, more Americans here said that we were going to resist fascist impulses.

We are all here because, on the left, there was a Senator named Huey Long, who said: Oh, the people should take over the Capitol. They are going to storm the Capitol, and I am going to be with the people.

Well, the people weren't listening to that extremist at the time.

We are all here because, moment after moment in American history, when democracy was at a crossroads, when our Constitution was at a crossroads, people of good faith stood up.

I remember one of the earliest women Senators that stood up against McCarthyism right here on the floor, criticizing someone of her own party—a profile in courage. I was taught a lot

about that courage. In a chapter many people may not remember, there is a little panel to it right there. If you are in the Galleries and walk out, there is a panel to this wonderful moment in American history when we were at a crossroads.

It was the election of 1876 between Rutherford B. Hayes and Samuel Tilden. It was hotly contested. You see, in that, one person—Tilden—won the popular vote, but Hayes seemed to have won the electoral college. Now, the Democrat, Tilden—there was a lot of controversy because this was post-Reconstruction—excuse me—post-Civil War, and the South had lots of African Americans participating, and this left a bit of a constitutional crisis and what became the Compromise of 1877. Hayes was declared the winner, but the compromise that was made was that the Republican, Hayes, would win and be the President as he was in exchange for what the Democrats wanted, which was to pull Federal troops out of the South who were protecting African Americans. An outcome of an election not just upended Reconstruction and upended the progress that was being made, but it upended something that was incredible, which was, I am the fourth Black person ever elected to the U.S. Senate, but during the Reconstruction era, the first one appointed—there were two.

Black folks, from the end of the Civil War until about 1901, when the last African American, Congressman White, left this place because of the fall of Reconstruction—because as soon as Federal troops were pulled out, reigns of terror began in the South. All kinds of laws were being passed to stop Blacks from voting because, in America, voting is power. Black elected officials were being beaten. Black judges were being pulled out in the streets—whipped. The Klan rose. Lynching in America—hundreds and hundreds of African Americans were being lynched with regularity who were standing up for their power. There were massacres going on to cut down Black political power.

Here we had had an election, and the results in terms of our constitutional norms—the power to vote, the idea that we secure the rule of law and protect citizens—all of that was being upended in flames and terror and violence and lynching in the South that took an early wave of Black participation in Congress. And the last one, Congressman White, in 1901, gave a phoenix speech. He knew it would be the last time. He predicted that Blacks would disappear from Congress but that, one day, they would rise like a phoenix.

Now, interestingly, in his State, a Black person didn't come from North Carolina's congressional delegation. That was 1901. Not until 1992 was another African American elected from North Carolina.

His prediction was right: Blacks would disappear because of the terror in the South, but because of the power

of the civil rights movement, Blacks and Whites and Asians and Latinos—it was a rainbow coalition of people—would not be silent amongst tyranny and amongst violence and oppression. American citizens from all backgrounds, all religions, all races, bound together and were not silent. They spoke up.

One of my great heroes in this time—I have seen her spirit today. I had seen her spirit yesterday at a rally. I had seen her spirit across this country of people who know they can't necessarily stop, right now, what is going on but are saying: I am going to speak up anyway. This person was named Ida B. Wells.

Now, Ida B. Wells was a journalist in the South, and she was documenting the lynching of African Americans, documenting the injustices being done, documenting how the abuses of political power and electoral power were being used in a fascist way to stop the people from being heard. And the lynchings—the gruesome lynchings, which she was documenting and putting out there as her pamphlets were becoming nationally known, so upset people that her offices were attacked and ransacked. She had to flee for her life because Ida B. Wells was not being silent. She was telling the truth. She was letting folks know what was happening.

I think about her courage, to know that what you are doing and what you are saying against an authoritarian-style leadership can endanger your life, and yet you still tell the truth; how you are getting threats that you, too, will be lynched if you don't stop, but you keep telling the truth—the ugly truth. You put the stories out there again and again and again. Ida B. Wells could not be stopped.

There were all of these common lies that were being said about the lynchings: Oh, these were African Americans who did horrible things. These were African Americans who were guilty of crimes. These were African Americans who raped. They should have been lynched. They should have been killed.

Ida B. Wells would write detailed stories about the injustices that were even being upheld in courts of law, but she told the truth that so shocked the consciousness of our country that she, in many ways—may have been a journalist, but she was a farmer—every day relentlessly sowing seeds of truth that would one day reap a harvest of consciousness in our country, where good folks—Black folks and White folks and people of all backgrounds—would finally say: Enough is enough.

Congress here tried to pass antilynching bills way back around the time that Ida B. Wells was trying to show this horrific crime, and this body failed over 100 times over the course of a century—failed to make lynching a violation of Federal law. I am really proud that I got to lead the legislation in a bipartisan manner to finally correct this injustice; to finally bring full

circle some of the work that Ida B. Wells—this truth-teller—was doing.

I bring up Ida B. Wells today because it is my concluding message—this defiant refusal in the face of injustice, this strength of character in the face of powerful people—Governors of States, a President of the United States, and others—making decisions on the Federal level that wreaked utter havoc for millions of Americans when you didn't have the numbers, when you didn't have the votes, but what you had was the truth: to not let things happen, not just to be a bystander but to be an upsetter. This was what Ida B. Wells did.

We study American history with an obligation to let it be not just our past, but we study American history to let it be our calling in the present so that we can try, as humble as we are, to live up to those who came before us; that but for them, our entire way of being would have collapsed.

Ida B. Wells said this:

The way to right wrongs is to turn the light of truth upon them.

Let me repeat. Ida B. Wells—this documenter of savage injustices, this truth-teller about lynchings in America, this sower of seeds of truth that, generations later, even in this body, we honor her by passing anti-lynching legislation after a century of trying—Ida B. Wells said the first thing we must do “to right wrongs is to turn the light of truth upon them.”

For all those people in America right now, whether you are a worker in Uganda who can't even access your emails or you are an American who wants to stop Ebola; whether you are a worker here in the United States who has spent your entire professional life working to protect Americans from threats to our food or our air quality; whether you are someone who is just seeing what is going on in America right now, and you are afraid; whether you are someone who is worried that Vought will come in and upend educational funding that your disabled child relies upon every day; whether you are an American who is struggling right now and had hoped for promises that your cost of living would get better but are now seeing that, indeed, whether it is a tax on streams of revenue for middle-class families or the police in my community; or whether it is threats of tariffs with our neighbors that directly affected your small business that is barely staying afloat—whatever the challenge is, whatever the fear is, what I want to tell you right now is don't normalize a President who is violating the separation of powers. Don't normalize a President who is violating civil service laws. Don't normalize a President who is ignoring the dictates of Congress in establishing Agencies.

This is the time to summon the spirit of Ida B. Wells and “to turn the light of truth upon what is going on” because you may be witnessing defeats, but the democracy is not defeated. You may

say what is going on is wrong, but that does not stop the power of right.

As the great poet said:

You may write me down in history with your bitter, twisted lies. You may trod me in the very dirt, but still like dust I'll rise.

This mighty Nation stands on the shoulders of truth-tellers, of defiant, dedicated patriots of grit and gumption. It is we the people. No matter if you are a billionaire or a President, if you are a teacher, if you are a cop, if you are a plumber, this Nation says that our voices matter.

In the words of that Negro spiritual, as we have tried to do here all through the night, I hope everyone in America understands that this is the time for us to “lift every voice.”

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. MULLIN). The Senator from Colorado.

Mr. HICKENLOOPER. Mr. President, I would like, first, to recognize the great Senator from New Jersey, Senator CORY BOOKER. It is never easy or fair to speak after him.

But I take the floor today to urge my colleagues to vote no on President Trump's nominee for the Office of Management and Budget, Russell Vought.

Some remember Mr. Vought from when he served as the head of the same Agency during President Trump's first term. He is one of the very few repeat appointments—clearly, a reflection of his loyalty.

You may also know him for his leadership, his authoring of Project 2025—that far-right agenda that the President, during the campaign, swore up and down he had no idea about.

I would leave it at that, although, I think he understood many discussions, perhaps, outlined in the framework.

Project 2025 would gut our long-standing and globally admired framework of checks and balances. It would gut them. It would ensure civil servants will be hired and fired on the basis of political loyalty—something that this country has struggled for many decades to get rid of.

It would truly weaponize our system of justice—again, something that almost everyone works toward keeping nonpartisan.

It lays out in detail the plan to dramatically change our American system of government, perhaps for a very long time. It is truly not a question of if anymore. The plan and the people putting it in place are disregarding laws and norms dating back to the Constitution.

They are throwing everything at the wall to see what sticks. This means firing or pushing out vast swaths of the Federal workforce of civil servants. These are career civil servants, many of whom have devoted their lives to keeping our government running—from processing Social Security checks; keeping our weather systems afloat; or helping to stop waste, fraud, and abuse.

Some would say our Federal workers don't do anything. But they are honest, hard-working Americans.

Project 2025 is just getting started. If confirmed, Mr. Vought and Project 2025 could have devastating consequences for Colorado.

Deep in Project 2025 are plans to heavily restrict access to contraceptives and abortion medication, denying women and families the freedom to make their own reproductive decisions; plans to make healthcare more expensive by repealing policies that empower Medicare to negotiate prescription drug prices and drive down the cost for healthcare seniors; plans to make Colorado less resilient to these increasing frequent disasters caused by extreme weather.

They are already reinstating cruel immigration policies and threatening to come after the LGBTQ community.

At a time when grocery prices are rising on everything from eggs to meat, Project 2025 is going to make life harder for Colorado farmers and ranchers and more risky.

Project 2025 would cut safety nets for our ag producers when they have a bad season. It includes plans to gut essential crop insurance. Project 2025 even wants government to get involved in the specific techniques our ranchers use to farm.

Our Colorado farmers know their land better than anyone else. Hanging small farmers out to dry does nothing to lower grocery prices for Americans.

We have been hearing in our offices from producers across the State who are very concerned about what this Project 2025 means to them. We have over 38,000 farm operations in Colorado. Some harvest wheat. Some raise meat or poultry. Some specialize in dairy. All of them support our rural communities and play an essential role in feeding families really all across the country.

We don't have to speculate about what Mr. Vought would do to the Office of Management and Budget. He has really laid it all out in Project 2025. He wrote Project 2025, to a large extent, himself.

One of his finest contributions is a section championing the executive branch's ability to overreach and “impound funds.”

Let's not mince words. This is, by all historic measures, blatantly unconstitutional. Congress alone has the authority to decide how government spends its money.

This isn't an opinion. It says explicitly in article I, section 9, clause 7:

No Money shall be drawn from the Treasury, but in Consequence of Appropriations made by Law.

“Made by Law,” designated by Congress.

Again, in article I, section 8, clause 1: The Congress shall have the Power To lay and collect Taxes, Duties, Imposts and Excises, to pay the Debts and provide for the common Defense of general Welfare of the United States.

We got a taste of how Mr. Vought would attempt to execute something like this last week. In a truly chaotic,

late-night, 2-page memo, the Trump administration halted all Federal grants and loans. We are talking about hundreds of millions of dollars—Federal spending for a staggering number of programs, programs that provide America's healthcare, food, nutrition, housing, childcare, and so much else.

The memo stemmed from an Executive order calling on Federal Agencies to review and eliminate spending on “woke” ideologies or the “Green New Deal”—both things that aren't clearly defined and don't, in any specific way, exist.

In this rush to create chaos and a jumbled policy, the implementers didn't bother to specify which programs would continue and which programs would end.

Our office and our staff were immediately flooded with calls—hundreds and thousands of calls. We heard from folks in every corner of Colorado—big cities, small towns—asking: What does this mean for them and their families? There was real fear, real worry, and for good reason.

The Trump administration tried to walk back the original memo to clarify that the freeze wouldn't affect individual payments like Social Security or food stamp benefits, but that didn't clear up too much. It certainly didn't help that the White House Press Secretary couldn't answer specific questions, like pertaining to critical government programs like Medicaid, whether they were going to be affected.

Frustrating as it is—and I get how frustrating it is—there are reasons why the government moves slowly.

All of this, if implemented as requested, would have had a devastating impact on Colorado, a devastating impact.

The Federal programs and funds make up roughly 25 percent of our State's effort to build transportation and infrastructure and provide needed services for the most needy in our State.

Head Start, a truly vital service for over 9,000 low-income kids in Colorado, would be forced to shutter its operations that provide these low-income kids of all communities with the early childhood education, health, and nutrition that they need. Even as we speak, there are reports that Head Start providers around the Nation are not able to access funds.

If implemented, it would cut off 83,000 low-income Colorado families from the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program, which helps heat their homes in a cold winter. These are folks, in many cases, who are unable to pay their heating bill or wouldn't be able to heat their homes without this assistance.

Our public safety and law enforcement would be weakened. The pause would strip funding that helps our local agencies prevent terrorism, helps them crack down on drug trafficking and prevent crimes and provide services for those who have been victimized by crime.

Colorado has one of the largest veteran populations in the country—something we are very proud of—but this funding would cut resources for those vets. It would cut resources for community-based suicide prevention efforts, organizations that provide care for veterans experiencing homelessness, and services for veterans living with disabilities, many of them taken in the defense of our Nation. It is hard to be cruel to those who have given their country so much.

Before entering public service, I was in the restaurant business. At our brewpub in downtown Denver, we would cook, pack, and donate meals every year to Meals on Wheels to feed seniors throughout the Metro Denver area. I have seen firsthand the difference this makes, the relief it provides to seniors who need it. Many of them don't leave the house and are so grateful to have someone come that they can talk to as they get their meal.

But the Federal funding freeze left Meals on Wheels in Colorado and all across the country unsure of how and whether they would be able to continue serving meals. Over 25,000 Coloradoan seniors every day rely on Meals on Wheels to access food. Why would we leave our seniors hungry and unsure when their next hot lunch is going to come?

Our office also heard directly from a Colorado rural health organization about how this Federal funding freeze would have life-or-death effects on Coloradoans in 47 rural counties. When we are in towns like Cortez or Hugo or Julesburg, we hear all the time about how our rural hospitals, clinics, and community health centers are already strained by workforce shortages and by rising costs. These medical providers are on the frontlines in dealing with our Nation's mental health and opioid crisis, and we are cutting their ability to provide these services?

These folks in rural Colorado and in suburbs around every city in Colorado are watching their friends, family, and neighbors struggle with mental health issues that rose up after the pandemic. This funding freeze wouldn't just strip funding from these programs; it would force our critical rural hospitals to lay off staff or turn away patients at a time when they need it most. We should be fighting to increase access to quality, affordable healthcare no matter where people live, not take it away.

The Federal funding freeze has already been blocked by the courts several times because it is blatantly illegal. It makes no sense. But make no mistake, Mr. Vought and the Trump administration will keep poking and prodding our courts and our Constitution until they get their way.

All of these actions serve a sinister purpose: to completely transform our government into one that gives enormous—enormous—tax cuts, largely directed at those who don't need them and—in many cases in Colorado—don't want them and puts working-class Americans out to pasture.

The Federal funding freeze is just one of many chaotic actions Mr. Vought and the administration are pushing. We see Project 2025 come into clarity in this administration's illegal attempts to dismantle Agencies without congressional approval or their attempts to access Americans' sensitive data.

Look, I am all for cutting government waste. If you want to seriously look at how we spend money and where we can cut actual fraud, waste, and abuse, I am game. A more efficient government will help us all. But that is not what is happening.

I have worked as hard as I could to find ways to work across the aisle. That is not going to change. When I was mayor of Denver, when I was Governor of Colorado, we balanced the budget every year, and we worked hard to try to streamline government processes, just like every mayor and every Governor in this country. You can't just shove working families under the bus or violate the law to do it.

We will fight these attempts in the courts, on the floor of the Senate—like now—and everywhere else we can to defend Colorado and the Constitution. It is time to use every tool at our disposal to disrupt what Mr. Vought and his Project 2025 are trying to do.

We have supported these lawsuits, we have opposed Executive actions, and we have voted against nominees. But if we need to hold the Senate floor, like we are doing now, vote all night, disrupt business as usual, we will do that too.

I will oppose every nominee that poses a genuine threat to Coloradoans. It is why I am here on the floor and will vote no on Mr. Vought today. Coloradoans sent us to Washington to solve problems, not to create more.

Project 2025 is a brutal plan to wreak havoc on our Nation and really change the way our government operates, the way our democracy functions.

I hope people all over the State emulate that old movie “Net Worth” and they can shout out on every corner “I am mad as hell, and I am not going to stand for it.” Let's hope they get so loud that they can't be drowned out.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Nevada.

Ms. ROSEN. Mr. President, Nevadans sent me to the Senate to stand up and fight for hard-working families throughout our State, and that is exactly why I am here today: to sound the alarm about Russell Vought's nomination to lead the Trump administration's Office of Management and Budget. They oversee virtually every Agency and the entire Federal budget.

Mr. Vought would be a disaster if he is put in this role again. Russell Vought is an extremist, will betray working families—betray your family—and there is simply no other way to put it. After all, he was the main architect behind the Project 2025 agenda. You might have heard of it, but for those who don't know, Project 2025 is Russell Vought's far-right playbook for

seizing full control of the Federal Government. I want to repeat that. He wrote the playbook to seize full control over the Federal Government—our government, your government.

It is filled with extreme ideas that would hurt families like yours, ideas like putting essential government programs like Medicare, Medicaid, and Social Security on the chopping block. And he is going to give handouts to billionaires and big corporations on the backs of America's middle class—on your backs.

Seeing how much power this administration has already given to unelected—unelected—billionaire CEOs, it is not hard to imagine what is coming next. Don't just look at Mr. Vought's ideas; take a moment to look at his actions.

When he oversaw Trump's budgets during the first administration, Russell Vought spearheaded efforts to—well, he wanted to try to do this: cut Medicare by more than \$500 billion, cut Medicaid by just over \$750 billion, and cut Social Security by close to \$80 billion. That is your Medicare, your Medicaid, your Social Security on the chopping block. Think about that.

These programs are a lifeline to so many Americans, and they can mean the difference between a person's financial well-being or their financial ruin. And these aren't abstract numbers. These folks are our neighbors; they are our family; they are our friends. That is who we are talking about here. These are not some numbers in a budget; they are people—people we love.

So you have to ask yourself this: How is this helping you? How is this helping the ones you love? How is this helping any of us? It is not. It is not. Instead of reforming and bolstering these programs to help real people—to help you—Mr. Vought wants to give more tax breaks to billionaires, the ultrawealthy, while telling working families, hard-working families, to figure things out for themselves. Families who get up every day and work hard, good community members, they want you to figure it out for yourself.

Under his plans, the richest people in this country would get hundreds of thousands of dollars a year in tax breaks, while regular working Americans would get next to nothing by comparison—next to nothing. And that is who Russell Vought is, and that is what he stands for.

Disturbingly, Mr. Vought has made it abundantly clear he does not care about violating our Federal law or the Constitution to see his terrible mission through. Russell Vought does not care about our Constitution or the law. Just look at the wave of threats to illegally fire career civil servants, many of whom are veterans, by the way—people who just want to make a difference in other people's lives.

It is all outlined in Mr. Vought's Project 2025, which aims to put as much power as possible in the hands of President Trump and his unelected bil-

lionaire buddies. Russell Vought—well, he thinks the rules don't apply to him. In fact, he seems eager to abuse whatever power he gets. It is dangerous. It is undemocratic. It is un-American. It is not how we govern.

This isn't a plan for responsible leadership, Mr. President; it is a recipe for disaster, one that we are seeing play out in real time. Just look at the recent Federal funding freeze that Trump's administration put in place. It has caused chaos. It has caused confusion all across the country. It is reckless. It is cruel. It is illegal. These actions virtually froze all Federal grants and loans and have jeopardized key programs that many Nevadans depend on every single day—key programs for our families, our children, our seniors, our first responders, our veterans. The list goes on and on. All of them have been impacted by Donald Trump's Federal funding freeze, and hundreds of Nevadans have called my office to share how it could negatively impact their lives and the lives of those they care about most.

The decisions that OMB makes can determine whether a child in Las Vegas can get a hot breakfast at school or if a senior citizen in Reno will get meals delivered to their home because they are homebound. This Agency can decide on whether our first responders—those who run in when tragedy is happening, when we are running out, to protect us—our heroic firefighters and police, can get the equipment they need to save lives and keep themselves safe while doing that. OMB can decide whether our communities have access to clean, safe water.

Now we are being asked to vote on handing over the keys to our Nation's budget to Russell Vought, the driving force behind the freeze, a man who has focused almost his entire career on slashing programs that real people—real people, you and everyone that you know—rely on—you and everyone you know and love rely on every single day.

I urge my colleagues who are considering a vote for this nomination to think about what working people in this country are going through at this moment.

I urge my colleagues to think about the moms and the dads who come home from a hard day at work. They have dinner with their family. They put their kids to bed, and then instead of relaxing in front of the TV, they sit at the kitchen table and they worry. And they are worried sick about how they are going to pay the bills, how they are going to keep a roof over their head, how they are going to keep putting food on the table.

They are going back and forth trying to figure out what essentials they can live without just to make ends meet. At the same time, the billionaires that Russell Vought is looking out for, they don't understand the struggle, I can bet you that.

I am going to say here, let's ask those billionaires last time they went

grocery shopping and worried about the price of eggs or milk. I bet they don't have an answer for that. That is who Mr. Vought fights for. And these struggles that real families are going through, they are tough choices that far, far too many working families face every single day.

And these are the people who will be hurt most by Russell Vought's extreme—extreme—agenda. And we know that right now, these same families are feeling the squeeze of rising costs. It is everywhere—the grocery store to the gas pump. And with the added price spikes from President Trump's reckless tariff threats, it is going to get even harder to afford food, pay off an energy bill, or make rent. Let alone—let alone—buy a home.

And so it is no wonder people are so frustrated with the way things are; it shouldn't have to be this way.

We should be looking for opportunities to help make their lives better, to make things, well, a little easier. At a time when Americans are already paying an arm and a leg for essentials, when they desperately need the support of critical government programs that make such a meaningful difference, why on earth would we confirm someone who will just make their lives harder? Why on earth would we do this?

So make no mistake, if Russell Vought is allowed to head up the OMB, Vought will work to make sure the ultrawealthy get more, while struggling families get even less than they have now. This is who Russell Vought is, and this is what he will do—what he will do to you.

Nevadans are hurting, and they are looking to Congress for help. If Vought is given the power to shape our Federal budget, we risk seeing critical programs slashed, leaving our seniors, working people, families facing higher costs, fewer services, and with less financial security.

And this isn't just an ideological difference, it is a real threat to millions of people's well-being, to the very core of what is most important to them: their families. And the stakes couldn't be higher. And so I urge my colleagues in the Senate to reject this reckless nomination for the sake of all of our families.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from New Hampshire.

Ms. HASSAN. Mr. President, I rise today to join my colleagues in expressing my opposition to the President's nominee for the Director of the Office of Management and Budget, Mr. Russell Vought, and to join the millions of Americans who have been gravely alarmed by the President's order to cut off already appropriated Federal funds for communities all across the country, a move which has been a longstanding priority for Mr. Vought.

I can think of few people more dangerous and deeply unsuited for the role of director of the Office of Management

and Budget, or OMB, than Mr. Vought. It is not simply that Mr. Vought's proposals will devastate communities across our country—though, if enacted, they certainly will. It is not simply that Mr. Vought's values are deeply out of step with the majority of Americans—though, they are.

And it is not simply that Mr. Vought has demonstrated a complete lack of regard for the notion of government by consent of the governed—though, time and again, he has done just that. It is because in the President's order to cut all funding for all Federal grants, a passion project straight from the pages of Mr. Vought, the President's reckless and illegal actions have already thrown communities into chaos, and they have hurt the American people.

Any nomination for a senior post in an administration is, to a degree, an act of faith. We never fully know the manner in which someone will perform their duties until they are in the post. But with Mr. Vought, the situation is different. Not only do we have a clearer picture of how Mr. Vought would approach the job from his last time that he held this post, not only do we have a blueprint from the proposed budget developed by Mr. Vought at his think tank, we need only to look at the events of the last week to see how Mr. Vought would handle his office.

Mr. Vought was the architect of President Trump's order to cut all Federal grants to communities in every corner of the country, including in New Hampshire. This order rightly and deeply alarmed constituents across our land, who have appropriately inundated their Senators' and Governors' offices with calls expressing their opposition to the President's reckless, thoughtless, and uninformed action.

The President, through his order, interrupted cash flow to critical services and left police departments unsure if they were being defunded. He left fire departments wondering if they would get the grants that they depend on to modernize their equipment and hire more firefighters.

He left rural hospitals in turmoil as they tried to plan for the months ahead. He left the staffs of homeless shelters who provide care for veterans uncertain that they would have the resources that they need to be a port in the storm for America's heroes.

And he left addiction treatment centers without any indication of when the next grant might come, grants that are used to keep our kids and communities safe from the deadly dangers of fentanyl. It was chaos.

And it remains chaos. While court orders have brought a temporary pause to the President's funding cutoff, there is no certainty about what will happen next. And in some cases, cash flow is still irregular, leaving everyone from daycare providers to landlords wondering whether or not they will be able to continue to operate.

And so the American people wait in the dark, prisoners to the President

and Mr. Vought's political gains. Mr. Vought has had experience managing the Office of Management and Budget. One would think that he would appreciate that any organization with a budget—a police department, a small business, a hospital—needs to have a reliable idea of what funds are going to be available if they are going to make any plans for the future.

They cannot depend on the whims of a President's tweet or on the last-minute salvation of a court order. If a small business is going to add a second location or hire more staff, it can't do it if it has to worry about critical grant money being impounded.

If a fire department wants to modernize its operation, it needs to know if the grant that it is planning to apply for and is supposed to be available in a few months, a grant that has already been approved and signed into law, will exist. If it doesn't, the department's new engine is no longer a reality.

But perhaps Mr. Vought does not understand how to maintain a budget because, of course, during his time as director of the OMB, he helped blow up the budget deficit and never turned in a surplus—an extravagance that most Americans cannot afford.

And make no mistake, this is not an academic discussion; behind every one of these budget lines are people, people who will be hurt if the President and Mr. Vought get their way and cut all Federal grants—grants that are indispensable to Americans for a wide range of critical activities and indispensable to our way of life.

They are critical to the firefighter who relies on these grants to have the best equipment while keeping our homes safe from smoke and flame; to the police officer walking the beat who deserves to be supported and not defunded; to the teenager struggling with addiction who is finally on the road to recovery but may fall back into despair if the addiction treatment center closes because the President and Mr. Vought decided that political games are more important than serving the people and saving lives.

In short, this chaos, this flurry of orders and memos and counterorders and Washington doublespeak, this playing with the lives of the American people, this is not leadership, and it is no way to govern a country, much less the greatest country on earth.

We have seen Mr. Vought in action. It has already been a chaotic two weeks since the President ordered this self-inflicted catastrophe.

We cannot afford our police departments, our fire departments, our veterans, our children—we can't afford a chaotic and lawless 4 years under Mr. Vought.

Now, what is particularly astonishing about the President and Mr. Vought's reckless order to cut off Federal funding is that it portrays how deeply out of touch they are with the American people, how woefully they have misread our country in this mo-

ment. Our country, of course, has partisan divisions, but I have found that often on a more fundamental level, the majority of Americans—not the loud, but the many—want most of the same things. They want costs to come down. They want their rent and groceries to be more affordable. They want to get the care that they need from their doctors without worrying about going into debt.

If they have children, they want what all parents want for their kids: They want their kids to be given the chance to follow their dreams. They want to know that they will get to and from school safely each and every day. They want their streets free from the dangers of fentanyl and other drugs.

And from their leaders, the American people want leadership and results. And they know a good idea can be red or blue. Lower costs, safer streets, and a more hopeful future—that is what most people want.

If the President and Mr. Vought thought it was worthwhile to listen to the American people, then they would know this, because in our great country, there is no great clamor from people asking for a President to seize authority—authority that belongs to Congress—to cut off funds to fire departments, police departments, hospitals, and addiction centers.

The American people want more money in their pockets. They aren't asking the President to seize power to choke off funds to their communities. The American people didn't ask for this. The American people don't want this. The American people do not deserve this.

The President's reckless and extreme order makes one wonder who the President and Mr. Vought believe they are working for. Perhaps, Mr. Vought can show me, tell us all, where this great majority of Americans who want a President to have unilateral power to take away fire department grants, defund police departments, or end special education programs, where that majority is.

How is America better off with a fire department unable to buy a new engine? How are we better off with more Americans struggling with addiction, unable to get on the road to recovery? Who does it serve when a veteran is forced to sleep on a snowy street because the shelter he used to stay in closed after a funding freeze? And why should the architect of such a plan ever be in a position of authority?

But let's say for a moment that the President and Mr. Vought don't get their way and this funding cutoff is permanently blocked, the fact that one of the administration's first acts was to draft this order shows just how deeply out of step they are with most Americans.

This order should never have been given and tells us everything about the President and Mr. Vought's priorities. How does the President's order do anything to actually lower prices, to make

rent cheaper? What family is better off because of the President's attempted power grab? Who has been made more prosperous, more safe, or more healthy by this action? The President and Mr. Vought's order serves no cause but the advance of the President's personal political power.

Now, I continue to stand ready to get to work with anyone, including the President, to work on a bipartisan basis to deliver on the priorities of the American people and bring down costs. But the President and Mr. Vought's actions—to put aside efforts to bring relief to American families and instead seize power, to cut off funds to every community in the country—demonstrate that they are, at the present time, unconcerned with what the American people actually want.

Mr. Vought's lack of regard or respect for what the American people want is, unfortunately, not a surprise. Throughout his time in public service, and even in these confirmation proceedings, Mr. Vought has demonstrated a thinly veiled disdain for the principles of self-government—principles which have served America well since we declared our independence.

To my Republican colleagues who are hopeful that the President will restore some or all of the funds that were cut off by this order, I would remind you that the grant money was never the President's to cut, freeze, or restore. It doesn't belong to him or to Mr. Vought. It belongs to the American people.

Congress makes laws and appropriates funds, not the President. At stake is not a legal technicality. At stake is our very notion of self-government, a notion that Mr. Vought appears to disdain.

The right of Congress, the first of the three branches of government provided for in the Constitution, to make laws and appropriate funds was made clear first in our Constitution and then in the Impoundment Control Act of 1974. Administrations from both parties understood and respected this law.

But Mr. Vought does not. Mr. Vought has said that he disagrees with this law. In his hearings, he refused to commit to follow the law, and has since become the architect of a brazen attack on this very law, the attack launched by the President's order to cut off all Federal grants.

The laws of the United States are not meant to be enjoyed *à la carte*. It is not Mr. Vought or the President's prerogative to choose which laws to follow, any more than it is their prerogative to choose which Federal grants to cut off after the grants have already been appropriated by law.

But this is simply who Mr. Vought is—not a trusted guardian of taxpayers' funds but a man who believes that both he and the President do not answer to the people.

In the past, Mr. Vought has refused to allow for proper oversight. He has refused to cooperate with inspectors

general, the people's watchdogs against corruption. He repeated the lie that the 2020 Presidential election was rigged and supported the President's attempt to overturn the will of the people, a will that was reflected in our free and fair elections.

At the start of the confirmation process, Mr. Vought suggested that the President does not even need the advice and consent of this body, and instead he could just abuse of the power of recess appointments to fill out his Cabinet.

So Mr. Vought has placed us in a remarkable position. He is asking us to vote for him in a confirmation process that he does not even believe needs to exist. He is asking for the support of the people's representatives, while maintaining that he shouldn't even have to answer to the people in the first place.

It is also ironic that we are considering Mr. Vought's nomination because it was 5 years ago this week that this body debated President Trump's attempt to illegally impound funds that were intended for Ukraine, an impoundment attempt that was supported and directed by Mr. Vought. Five years ago, Mr. Vought helped the President cut off legally appropriated funds to America's allies. And 5 years later—5 years later—Mr. Vought has helped the President cut off legally appropriated funds to the American people.

Five years later, it is clear the failure to hold the President and Mr. Vought to account didn't mark the last time that some people in this body surrendered their principles to appease Donald Trump. It was not the end of the indignities that this body would be asked to tolerate; it was barely the beginning. It only encouraged more.

That is, of course, the danger of lawlessness. That is the danger of the winding road toward authoritarianism. Once one act of lawlessness is tolerated, it becomes easier to tolerate another, until we arrive to where we are today, where pointing out illegality from our public officials sometimes seems like little more than an afterthought.

It should not be too much to ask, it should not be too much to expect, that those who have the privilege to help lead the world's greatest democracy follow the laws of our land and respect the consent of the governed.

We know what Mr. Vought has done during the President's term. We know that he was the architect of the President's order to seize the power to cut off Federal funds. And we know that, if given the chance, the budget that he would help author would be the most extreme put forward by any administration in our lifetimes and would be devastating for our country.

Through his think tank, Mr. Vought laid out his priorities in what was a proposed budget in 2023 for a potential Trump administration. And now, the President has nominated him to manage the Office of Management and Budget.

In his budget, Mr. Vought would gut Medicaid by over \$2 trillion. He would undo much of the progress States like New Hampshire have made since we expanded Medicaid. He would kick families off of Medicaid, families who are already feeling the pain of high costs and struggling to make ends meet. More people would become sick because they couldn't afford preventive care and be forced to make impossible choices once they fall ill.

These cuts would be especially devastating for families who have children with disabilities, families who rely on Medicaid dollars to get the best support for their children so that the children can thrive and have all the opportunities that any parent wants for their kids, and so the parents can go to work and build a family and a future.

It is not clear precisely when, for Mr. Vought, a child with a disability getting the support that they need became less important than paying for a tax break for a billionaire. But it is not just Medicaid. Mr. Vought's budget would end tax credits through the Affordable Care Act that have helped millions of Americans afford lifesaving care.

His budget would cut back Pell grants and make it harder for families to afford higher education.

His budget would defund much of the FBI, including ending many of the FBI's invaluable counterterrorism efforts.

Mr. Vought's budget would also eviscerate the Department of Homeland Security's cyber security defenses. He is perhaps one of the first people from either party who in today's age thinks we should be spending less on cyber security and not more.

Make no mistake, American families would be hurt by Mr. Vought's budget. America would be less safe with Mr. Vought's budget.

But few provisions in his budget—his proposed budget—are as outrageous as his cuts to veterans' benefits. Mr. Vought has proposed slashing benefits for veterans by tens of billions of dollars. He has proposed narrowing the number of veterans who are even eligible for certain health benefits.

He even proposed banning funding for women's reproductive care for women veterans. These heroes have defended our freedoms abroad, but Mr. Vought would endeavor to deny their freedoms here at home.

We will never fully repay the debt that we owe to those who have served. Indeed, we cannot. But we need to try each and every day. We should be working day in and day out to do more for those who serve, but, instead, Mr. Vought is looking for ways to slash care and benefits for veterans and their families.

It is not clear to me what more veterans would need to do, what further sacrifices they would need to make, for Mr. Vought to agree to not take away the benefits and care that they have earned through their courage and valor.



Let me be clear. There are few things in my mind more deeply un-American than to try to fund the extreme political agenda of a budget by taking money out of the pockets of America's best and bravest.

There has been a quality of make-believe surrounding the debate over Mr. Vought's confirmation. Some of Mr. Vought's defenders have dismissed concerns regarding his proposed budget as alarmist. They assure us that this budget will never be passed. They dismiss our concerns regarding his past statements supporting an expansion of authoritarian power as hyperbolic. They insist that his words do not indicate how he will actually act in his role. They dismiss our arguments regarding his record while at the helm of OMB as rehashing ancient history, and some of my colleagues even dismiss our concerns about the President and Mr. Vought's order to cut off Federal funds as sensationalist and dramatic. They assure us that the court stopped the order and that the President will hopefully restore these funds soon enough.

And maybe, on that last point, they are right. Maybe the courts will fully stop the President's order to cut off these funds. Maybe the President and Mr. Vought will be thwarted by the laws that they seek to circumvent.

But I submit that the President and his nominees should be judged by what they want to do, not simply by what they are able to get away with.

So what kind of America does Mr. Vought want? What would he do if everything that he has proposed in his first term, in his writings, in his hearings, in his budget, and in the President's order to cut off all funds were able to come to pass?

Russell Vought's America is an America where Medicaid has ended as we know it, where more people get sick and fewer people get care, where police departments and fire departments are defunded in the service of political games, where our efforts to fight addiction and get fentanyl off our streets are gutted, and where more people slip from the road of recovery into spirals of despair.

(Mr. SHEEHY assumed the Chair.)

It is an America where the FBI's counterterrorism program is scrapped, and our country is less safe, where cyber criminals from China and Russia are given free rein to gain a leg up. It is an America where families with children with autism are left to fend for themselves, where we even break faith with veterans and take away care that they earned through unimaginable sacrifice. It is an America where even our heroes become dispensable.

It is an America where Presidents decide which laws to obey and disobey, which funds appropriated by Congress to permit and which to take away, where the people's watchdogs can be fired, and the people's representatives ignored.

We would be an America governed not of, by, and for the people, but of, by, and for a President.

I don't know with certainty what the future holds, what the courts will permit and what they will block. But I know that, in this moment, the question before us is whether or not we should confirm to high office a man who has clear disdain for self-government.

Self-government—government of, by, and for the people—it is not simply a patriotic turn of phrase. It is what makes America different. Being a part of this self-government experiment is why all of us are even here serving in this body in the first place.

My dad, a World War II veteran, would always remind me that freedom and democracy are history's exception; they are not the rule. In Iran or in Putin's Russia, there is no debate over impoundment. In autocracies, what the autocrat decrees is law, but in America, we set out to do something different. We created a system of checks and balances. We declared that power was derived from consent of the government. Unlike virtually every nation before us, we did not put our trust in kings or oligarchs. No. Instead, in the words of Lincoln, we dared to ask:

Why should there not be a patient confidence in the ultimate justice of the people? Is there any better or equal hope in the world?

We believed these words once, and most Americans believe these words still. And we believe that even our greatest leaders need to be checked by the people and their elected representatives.

To my Republican colleagues who support the President and who are considering supporting Mr. Vought and who dismiss his words and actions about the need to seize greater Executive power, I remind you that history has shown us that when a leader gains a power, they are inclined to use it, and they certainly are not inclined to give it back. The power of the purse is a power that belongs to Congress and the people. My colleagues need to decide if they are willing to surrender that power on their watch.

To my colleagues on the other side of the aisle, even if you imagine that you may agree with the ways in which the President would use his power to ignore Congress and impound Federal funds today, you certainly may disagree with the ways this illegal power is abused tomorrow. You may open the door for further abuses down the road. You may find that a future President of a different party or persuasion is inclined to use this power in ways that leave you deeply alarmed but unable to stop.

That is the danger of surrendering the rule of law to expand Executive power. History has shown that the end result is never more freedom because, to borrow a phrase, those who would seek power by riding the back of the tiger surely end up consumed by it.

I suspect that my Republican colleagues will vote to confirm Mr. Vought, although they shouldn't. I

voted for many of the President's nominees, and I believe that the President and our country would be better served by people who encourage his better impulses rather than enable his worse ones, who understand that no leader is above the law, and who respect our system of government of, by, and for the people.

In the end, to confirm Mr. Vought is to confirm him in spite of his record, his words, and his promises.

So, no, I am not alarmed by Mr. Vought because he is not a member of my party. I am alarmed by Mr. Vought because, unlike some of my Republican colleagues, I respect Mr. Vought's intelligence enough to take his words seriously. So when Mr. Vought shows his disdain for self-government, I will take him at his word, and so should this body.

In the end, Mr. Vought, while seeking office in our government, is wrong about a fairly fundamental thing. He is wrong about democracy in America. The people's representatives are not a nuisance to be circumvented. The people's laws are not an obstacle to be surmounted. The people's funds are not a political weapon to be seized. Nor are the people's wills, wants, and, yes, votes idle noise to be discarded or ignored. No. In this country, in this great democracy of ours, the will of the people represents nothing less than a hope without better or equal in this world.

Mr. President, I can keep speaking about the damage that Russell Vought would do as leader of the Office of Management and Budget. I will also appeal to my colleagues here to let me know if any more of them intend to speak.

Mr. Vought's nomination to lead the Office of Management and Budget is one we should all reject, not because we disagree with his policies but because he fundamentally disagrees with our form of government. He fundamentally disrespects this body—the body created along with the House of Representatives by article I of the U.S. Constitution. He fundamentally believes that his judgment is better than the people's.

I would also add that Mr. Vought's beliefs are some of the most extreme that I have heard expressed or watched implemented in my lifetime.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The assistant bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

Mr. COONS. Mr. President, I rise today to join my colleagues in speaking against Russell Vought, who has been nominated to run the most powerful and important Federal organization you never heard of, the Office of Management and Budget, or OMB.

Russell Vought has as much business running OMB as I do being a hair

model for Pantene. Russell Vought has as much business being near the Federal Government again and running the central plays that make the Federal Government work as I have standing behind center for the Eagles this Sunday running plays in the Super Bowl.

Vought had this position before, and it was a disaster. President Trump is supposed to be hiring on merit, have the very best people, the world's best people working for him. Why is he bringing back this complete failure for such a critical position?

Last time he was OMB Director, he rolled back critical regulations that keep Americans safe. He illegally withheld funds already appropriated by Congress. Sound familiar?

As bad as he was in the first term, he is already off to a much worse start in the second term as the shadow Director before he is even confirmed. His fingerprints have been all over the last 2 weeks of chaos and dysfunction.

He was the principal architect of Project 2025—a deep, thorough, detailed proposal for what it was that the Heritage Foundation and Heritage Action wanted to do if Trump were reelected; a policy blueprint so extreme that on the campaign trail, President Trump pretended he had never heard of it: Who is that? Who is this? No idea what Project 2025 is, who wrote it, or what it would do.

Russell Vought has demonized the folks who help run our Federal Government—the people who keep the VA running; the folks who deliver Social Security checks; the men and women, many of whom live in Delaware, who help keep us safe through air traffic control systems; who predict our weather through NOAA; who help Federal funds flow to school districts and daycares and senior centers.

I know the average American thinks of the Federal workforce as Federal bureaucrats who don't do much for them, but if you get into the details of their actual public service, the reach and scope and impact of what they do is remarkable—as we learned in Delaware just last week when they tried to shut it all down; but more on that in a moment.

Russell Vought has demonized these civil servants—he has called them villains who need to be in trauma—and he wants to radically augment Presidential authority. We are in the middle of a huge power grab by President Trump and his administration. He doesn't know or care whether or not the constitutional appropriations powers of Congress ought to be upheld. Not to get all "Schoolhouse Rock!" on you for a moment, but the core power of this body of Congress is the power of the purse—to decide how to spend the money that we collect from the American people to invest in your safety and security.

If you vote for Russell Vought to run OMB and you happen to be an appropriator, as I am, or one of the Members of this body who votes for appropriations

every year, you are consigning yourself to irrelevance. You are voting to no longer be relevant to the future of our country, to our place in the world, and how the money we sign off on gets spent.

He has got a lot of bad ideas. I could spend a lot of time on the bad ideas of Russell Vought. Russell Vought has been nominated to run OMB, but I wouldn't trust him to run a Wawa.

His ideas include redirecting all disaster assistance to the States. Well, the point of having FEMA, which is the Federal Emergency Management Agency, is when a State gets overwhelmed by a hurricane, a wildfire, a tornado, when a natural disaster is so massive that it overcomes a State's ability to manage the disaster response, we elevate it to a Federal disaster response. That is the point. But he thinks we ought to pull all that back down to the States. Guess what States aren't going to get taken care of.

One of his core ideas in Project 2025 is to take a chain saw to the deep state—by freezing Federal assistance, by impounding Federal spending, and destroying Congress's power of the purse. He is the architect of the Executive orders issued by President Trump on his frenetic first days that produced a Federal spending freeze.

And the results, folks, have been catastrophic: widespread chaos, uncertainty for the nonprofits that provide so much support, whether it is counteracting fentanyl misuse, supporting Head Start, daycares, childcare, monitoring the weather to make sure that folks know when a tornado is coming or when there is a wildfire or a hurricane, supporting State and local law enforcement and our volunteer fire companies. These are all grantees.

To be clear, when President Trump signed an Executive order freezing all Federal grants for the domestic United States, these are all examples of the dozens and dozens of organizations that called me, called my office, called my Governor, and said: What does this mean for us?

Organizations were locked out of the Federal funding portals where they go to get their Federal funding. The Medicaid system went down. A fifth of all people in my State are on Medicaid, and it provides critical public health support for the opioid pandemic.

If President Trump's promise was to bring prices down and keep Americans safe, he has failed on both counts, and what he did with this nationwide Federal freezing ban—dreamed up by Russell Vought—failed to keep us safe.

When FEMA grants went down, when they froze the grants to State and local law enforcement, Russell Vought and President Trump were literally defunding the police.

Let's take a second and look at that again. Lots of my colleagues—I was here on the floor. Lots of my colleagues on the other side of the aisle gave speech after speech about how terrible it would be to ever put at risk law

enforcement—Federal, State, local—by defunding the police.

President Trump did two things in his first week that made clear they don't mean this at all. One was pardoning hundreds of individuals who stormed into this Chamber and assaulted Capitol Police officers, pardoning people who assaulted police officers.

The second was freezing all domestic Federal grants with no exception for State and local law enforcement. I am the cochair of the Law Enforcement Caucus. I was responsible for the second largest police department in Delaware. I know what it means to have Federal grants come through what is called the Byrne-JAG grant program. I know what it means to have Federal grants for bulletproof vests. I know what it means to have Federal grants come through the COPS Hiring Program. For State and local law enforcement, this was a moment of "Hang on a minute. What?" when those grants were frozen.

There are other ways that Federal grants help our country be safe. It promotes research that keeps us healthier. We just survived a pandemic, made worse by President Trump's mishandling of it, but let's not relitigate that now.

Research hospitals in my State got notification from the NIH and the CDC that their research projects were frozen and were now under review. The National Institutes of Health and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention distribute billions of dollars in grants. There are teams of folks doing research on the ground, in hospitals, in academia, in medical practices. All of them got notices that these were being frozen.

Domestic violence shelters. Part of my role in my decade in county government was helping advocate for law enforcement and our paramedics and community-based nonprofits that respond to incidents of domestic violence. It was to be as supportive as possible to make sure the victims were not retraumatized by a second, third, and fourth interview; to protect the security and sanctity of the shelters they went to; and to protect, in particular, children who had been abused.

The idea that in order to slash government spending by wasteful Federal bureaucrats, notice would go out to all of the nonprofit shelters and organizations in my State and around the country that keep people safe from domestic violence—how was this a good idea? This was Russell Vought's idea. I wouldn't trust Russell Vought to run a 5K, let alone to run the Federal Government, let alone to run the process by which we distribute funds to the things that keep us safe and healthy and prosperous. Whether it is hospitals, domestic violence shelters, daycares, senior centers, the things that were impacted by the abrupt taking of a chain saw to our Federal system defies description.

But Russell Vought didn't stop with freezing Federal funds. Bluntly, the disorder, the chaos, the alarm is part of the goal. Empowering DOGE—the Department of Government Efficiency, which is neither a Department nor is advancing government efficiency that is affiliated with Elon Musk—has been advanced aggressively in these first 2 weeks by giving them access to reams of data at the center for Medicare and Medicaid at USAID—the foreign aid Agency at the National Institutes of Health at the Department of Education.

Bluntly, the most alarming thing that has happened is access to the entire Treasury payment system. This is part of Russell Vought's Project 2025—to make sure that this unelected, unauthorized DOGE team got into the most important, critical repository of people's personal information—their tax records—and to be able to control which disbursements of Federal funds will happen and which will not.

Before he has even been voted on in this Chamber, Russell Vought as OMB Director, as shadow director, and as author of Project 2025 has been to facilitate some of the most alarming violations of Americans' privacy in our lifetimes, and this must be stopped.

For all of my colleagues on the right who screamed bloody murder about censorship in recent years but are silent when unelected DOGE bureaucrats can turn off your Social Security and Medicare payments if they think you are not supportive enough, who can peer into and malignly share details about payments you received or didn't receive, they now have the access and control to go back and change the master record of your tax filings.

This should be alarming to anyone who cares about privacy, security, individual liberties. They are now threatening to destroy the U.S. Department of Education and the Department of Labor—disfavored Federal service Agencies—after taking a sledgehammer to our foreign aid system by shutting down USAID. The stuff they are doing before Russell Vought is even confirmed is breathtaking, and the consequences are real—yes—to the government workforce but to people in my home State.

So let me take a moment and just share a few examples from Delaware of how this chaos—how this tearing through our system with a chain saw—has impacted the people I represent.

One Delawarean, alarmed, called in to my office and said:

I am a Department of Defense employee that received the Office of Personnel Management notice that "resign" is an option I should take as part of the ongoing purge of career civil servants by President Trump. We are left—

He said—

with the worst possible decision to make with emotion as the only driver since the list of exempt positions—

Those who are exempt from this drive to force folks out of service—

isn't being shared. So I have to come to work to the U.S. Department of Defense every day, wondering if it's my last day, if I'll be asked to resign and be later told we can't—or to resign proactively and find out later whether the position is actually cut, and I won't receive my severance benefits. As a retired veteran—someone who served our Nation for 21 years in the military and now 5 years in the civil service—I can honestly say, I am ashamed of my government.

This mistreatment of a veteran, of a civilian employee of the Department of Defense and trying to force them out with a scare tactic identical to what was done at Twitter is beneath us.

I have been on this floor, in my 14 years as a Senator, where I have heard passionate statements about the urgency of supporting our veterans and those who support our veterans—the Department of Defense and the VA. Yet I hear nothing from my colleagues on the other side—no alarm or concern. From my constituents, yes. From my colleagues, no.

Here is another message I got this week from a Delawarean in my office:

I am a Federal employee, and I am very disturbed by the continuous string of emails we are receiving about this cryptic deferred resignation program. I feel the information we are receiving is a flat-out lie, and I don't understand how the government can pay employees for 9 months and receive the full pay and benefits if they agree to resign. I feel this email is a lie, and I don't understand how Congress is continuing to allow these emails—pushing us out—to be sent to us.

These are just two of hundreds of examples. The phones in my office—in Wilmington, in Dover, and here in Washington—have been ringing off the hook. The number of calls to my colleagues have nearly broken the voice mail system here in Congress. Folks are alarmed and upset either because they have gotten these emails that they have to choose today—literally, this is the day—whether or not to resign. They are unclear whether it is actually funded. It is not. They are unclear whether this was approved by Congress. It wasn't. They are unclear as to whether, if they fail to accept this "resign now" offer, they will instead be fired and lose some part of their pensions.

These are folks who have served us—as has the individual whose story I just read—for decades. Yet where is the concern from my colleagues for our veterans and those who maintain our Department of Defense, our Veterans Health Administration, our intelligence Agencies, and the rest of the important Federal services that are provided to our constituents and our States?

Let me talk for a few minutes about the brutal impact on our global foreign aid system of Mr. Russell Vought's Project 2025.

I am here on the floor as part of an effort by my colleagues to stand up and speak out against what his plan is doing at home and abroad, and I want to take a moment and talk about USAID, which is an Agency founded by President Kennedy that does good

work around the world on our behalf—work that keeps us safe, keeps us strong, and protects the American people.

The cuts to AID by Russell Vought and President Trump are just the very first step in a playbook that will next move on to other Agencies—Agencies like the Department of Education, NOAA that predicts the weather, the Food and Drug Administration, the Department of Agriculture, the Veterans' Administration, and the Foreign Aid Administration. USAID is just the rehearsal. The main act is coming very soon—in fact, likely this week or next.

President Trump promised to keep America safe, and foreign aid is a key part of keeping us safe. It is less than 1 percent of the total Federal budget.

In my role on the Foreign Relations Committee, I have traveled with Members of both parties to places around the world where I have seen how our trusted nonprofit partners—partners like Catholic Relief Services, partners like Save the Children, partners like World Vision—implement programs that fight disease, that counter human trafficking, that push back on extremism, and that stabilize countries devastated by war. All build relationships with other countries and communities to, frankly, push back on Chinese and Russian influence, to push back on extremism and jihadism, and to make the world safer for America and Americans. This is not just soft power; it is smart power. And for years, it has enjoyed bipartisan support.

USAID programs authored by Republican Presidents, like PEPFAR and the President's Malaria Initiative, which I visited with my colleagues on both sides of the aisle, show real results for the American people. Right now, there is an outbreak of Ebola in Uganda. Right now, there is an outbreak of Marburg in Tanzania. These are horrific diseases—diseases that shred your internal systems and cause you to bleed out of every orifice. Marburg, in recent cases, has a 90-percent fatality rate, and there is no approved vaccine.

It is so much smarter for us to invest in local staff in these countries in East Africa, tracking, tracing, and preventing the spread of these diseases than shutting it all down and waiting and hoping that it doesn't spread.

When the Ebola pandemic occurred in West Africa in 2017, 2016, I traveled there and saw what USAID partners—partners like Samaritan's Purse, partners like Catholic Relief Services, partners like Doctors Without Borders—what they were doing on the ground, bravely, to push back on this incredible, horrible pandemic.

When we cut foreign aid, we cut off our nose to spite our face. We impose costs and loss with the suddenness, the sharpness of these freezes, and we will not have anything left.

Some of my Republican colleagues have said: We are just trying to trim out the woke programs. We are just trying to shrink it a little bit, reform

it a little bit, and most of it will survive.

That, I expected. That, I could work with. But here is how this is supposed to work, folks: Next budget year, which is beginning now, we have hearings. We do oversight. We look at these programs, and we figure out how to trim them and make them more efficient and shape them so that they match the policy objectives of the current majority and the current President. That, I expect, but that is not what is happening.

What is happening is that Russell Vought, the nominee to be OMB Director, in carrying out Project 2025, which Trump claimed he knew nothing about on the campaign trail, shut it down cold, issued an Executive order completely shutting off funding.

Now, there have been some attempts at humanitarian waivers. Secretary Rubio had promised his colleagues there will be waivers for things like PEPFAR, but they are not yet working.

So when hundreds of programs around the world get what are called stop-work orders, which means put the tools down; abandon the food supplies on the dock; walk away from the hospital; stop pulling up mines out of the ground in Angola—a place riven by conflict, where we fund, through The HALO Trust, demining—stop training children how to avoid the predation of gangs and human traffickers in Mexico; stop trying to reduce civil conflict in the Philippines by engaging with civil society groups; just walk away from all of this—a stop-work order has caused our USAID workforce and their non-profit partners around the world to put the tools down.

Just yesterday, an order went out to bring back to the United States the entire workforce around the world of USAID. Don't they have homes? Don't they have families? Don't they have spouses? They do. So what this will effectively mean is, it will force some of the most capable and skilled people, who understand how to deliver humanitarian relief at scale, to choose to resign, to give up a career and a life that they have enjoyed, making a real difference for the American people, or to comply and abruptly sell their home, pull their kids out of school, get their spouse to quit their job, and move back to the United States. Guess what that is. Chaos. That is taking a chain saw to Federal aid, not a scalpel.

That is not reforming. That is not getting rid of the woke. That is not aligning with American values and priorities. That is harming one of the most effective, valued, long-bipartisan Agencies we have. The damage is being done today. While we talk and debate and deliberate, thousands of people's lives are being changed, and millions are being cut off from lifesaving assistance, from critical development support, and from interventions that help make us safe. Who wins? Who is cheering?

I am here on the floor today joining my colleagues in speaking out against the nomination of Russell Vought to run the OMB because his Project 2025 and his plans for what to do with the Federal Government have one clear winner: our adversaries and our opponents.

The complete shutdown of U.S. foreign aid has China and Russia cheering. Russian state media is already celebrating that we are ceding the field, that we are putting down our tools, that we are abandoning our partners.

China has already come to Nepal—a country in the Himalayas, where the United States has long been working with communities to stabilize them after their civil war. China is saying: Oh, the Americans abandoned you. How sad. We will come in and help you.

China has invested massively in expanding their diplomacy and their development, their soft power, and they have won friends and influence around the world. They are getting access to ports and airports, to critical minerals, and to resources that we need, at our expense.

Secretary Rubio, who served as a Senator here with me for 15 years—no one has been more fierce, more persistent, more focused on standing up to the threat of the People's Republic of China than Senator Marco Rubio. I don't comprehend how he can look at what is happening around the world and say this isn't creating a huge opening for China.

So when my friends across the aisle say that this is all about efficiency, about trimming, about reorganization, don't be fooled. Don't believe them. Don't think that this is about a nip here and a tuck there. This is a chain saw. They are starting with foreign aid, and they are advancing to the Department of Education, and then they are moving to the Veterans' Administration, and then they are taking on programs that millions and millions of Americans rely on day in and day out.

Last week was a rehearsal. The Executive order that froze all domestic grants caused a huge pushback in the United States and brought a Federal court action, an injunction. That is the reason, folks, if you are watching, that you haven't seen daycares shut down, that you haven't seen police and fire departments complaining, that you haven't seen veterans' homes shuttered, that you haven't seen an immediate impact here in the United States. It is only because a Federal court in Rhode Island, at the insistence of my attorney general Kathy Jennings and the attorneys general from New York and two dozen other States filed in a Federal court and said this is illegal. Judge McConnell looked at it and said "You are right" and issued an injunction. That is the only reason this hasn't moved forward. But it has moved forward overseas. Our foreign aid has been slashed to the bone, shut down cold. People were called, folks shut out, and security systems infiltrated.

What they have done to USAID is a rehearsal for what they are doing next, and it was all designed by Russell Vought, the nominee to run OMB.

OMB is the most powerful and important Federal Agency you have never heard of, and Russell Vought—seemingly a pleasant man, Christian nationalist, someone who seems to be more interested in academia than in fundamentally reshaping this government and this country—made clear in Project 2025 that that was his goal, has made clear with his actions last week and this week, through President Trump and his Executive orders, what he intends to do.

It is nothing short of a stunning restructuring of the United States, of the role of the Federal Government in the lives of Americans. And when folks wake up—when folks wake up—to the scope and the reach of it, they will be enraged.

The number of calls I got in my offices in Dover and in Wilmington, DE, and here in Washington from people alarmed to hear that DOGE—the Department of Government Efficiency—and Elon Musk and his band of merry men had gotten into the data files that control every Federal disbursement—the amount of alarm about that was appropriate. Wait until they start using it to cut those payments off.

When Elon Musk said he intends to cut \$2 trillion out of Federal spending, he wasn't kidding. But, folks, there is no way to do that without impacting veterans' benefits, Medicare and Medicaid, Social Security, education, environmental work, and healthcare.

The Federal Government only has \$1.7 trillion a year in discretionary spending. So you can't cut \$2 trillion without cutting deep into our Department of Defense, cutting deep into our treasured and valued programs like Medicare, Medicaid, and Social Security.

You should be asking: What are they coming after, and why are they doing it in such a forceful, determined rush?

There are rules here. There are processes here. There are ways we are supposed to do things. This is not following those rules or those procedures. That is why a Federal court stepped in and offered an injunction to try to slow some of this headlong rush toward restructuring the entire Federal Government.

But, folks, the hour is late, and the moment is pressing. We Democrats have held this floor all night to speak out about why this is important, to help engage, educate, and inform the American public, those who are not yet alarmed about what has been happening and what is going to happen.

One of my colleagues said: Wow, it is almost like they had a plan. They did. Project 2025—massive, clear—was developed and written over several years as President Trump planned his return, and its goals are remarkable, transformational, aggressive, frankly, shocking—not to reasonably reform

things in the Federal Government that are misspent, not to look under the hood and tinker in a few ways with the engine of the Federal Government and say “That is a little off. This needs a little tuning,” but to rip out whole systems, whole sections that had been designed over years by bipartisan majorities to keep us safe, to keep us strong, and to keep us healthy. This isn’t a scalpel approach to Federal Government; this is a chain saw approach.

One of the heroes of the new Trump administration is the President of Argentina. I bet if you are watching, you have never heard of the President of Argentina, but take a moment and look him up, President Milei—his wild hair. He has an interesting approach to government. His symbol is a chain saw. He campaigned across Argentina saying: If you elect me President, I will take this chain saw to the Argentine Federal Government. And he has. He was here in the Rotunda, cheering on President Trump during his inauguration.

Why did this foreign head of state from South America come here, and why was he welcomed and celebrated? Because his approach to not trimming, not reforming, not improving but slashing the Government of Argentina is exactly the approach that Russell Vought, if confirmed in this body to lead OMB, will take.

You are going to wake up and discover that, by handing the keys to DOGE of the system that controls all of our personally identifying information and all of our Federal payments, we have handed the keys to the architect of a program to take a chain saw to organizations, institutions, to a workforce, and to programs that the American people need, that keep us safe, that keep us healthy, and that keep us strong.

And folks, putting Russell Vought in charge of OMB is like giving a toddler a crayon and a white wall and saying: Let’s see what you make of it.

You know what is going to happen. It is going to be a crazy mess. And he has already started before this place has even confirmed him.

Russell Vought running OMB is a terrible idea, and he will run this country into the ground. We should vote to oppose Russell Vought, to oppose Project 2025, to push back on this chaotic and crazy attempt to take a chain saw to the American people and our American government.

USAID

Mr. President, I have just been updated on the latest plans for the future of USAID, and I have to say I am heartbroken.

Founded by President Kennedy decades ago, this dedicated cadre of U.S. citizens live and serve around the world. Thousands and thousands of them have spent their lives working with American nonprofits and with local partners combating disease, pushing back on jihadism and extremism, protecting creation and vulnerable

spaces around the world, combating human trafficking, removing mines from fields where they were placed in wars decades before, making us safe.

Next week, there will be no more than 600 staff left of a once proud and strong global Agency that employed more than 10,000 and that partnered with household-name, American-led nonprofits that have done amazing work.

I have seen that work around the world. I have visited places where American volunteers, where nonprofits, where career staff design and implement incredible programs in partnership with local communities. I will mention just a few.

Kibera, in Nairobi, is an incredible place, an informal settlement of slum, of thousands and thousands of people living in shacks in a valley.

The phrase “godforsaken” is one I have never liked because there is no place that is godforsaken. In fact, in Kibera, at St. Mary’s Medical Clinic, on my first visit as a Senator to Kibera—I had been there before—I got to see the care, the support, the nurturing for sick children, for those with no access to healthcare, the delivery of vaccines and medicines, of safe water, of a response to urgent need, done in a clinic motivated by faith, informed by our concern for others, and that makes us and our Nation more safe.

I will never forget being in Kampala, the capital of Uganda, and visiting a refugee welcoming center run by American Evangelicals who had moved there and devoted their lives to providing skills training, counseling.

Thousands and thousands of refugees were pouring into Uganda from the civil war in South Sudan, just to the north. And on an Easter weekend trip with my friend and former Republican colleague Bob Corker, we got to see firsthand the services that were being delivered in the very north of Uganda to recent refugees, profoundly traumatized, most of whom had had family members murdered in front of them and who had walked hundreds or even thousands of miles.

A quarter million people had flowed over the northern border of Uganda and were resettling the Bidibidi refugee camp. Chaos, disease, suffering—to see the work of American hands, volunteers, whether in the capital of Kampala or up in Bidibidi, was to be touched by the remarkable humanitarian work of America and our partners: Ugandans, Kenyans, Tanzanians.

I mentioned earlier that right now, today, there is an outbreak of Ebola in the very capital of Uganda, Kampala, a place I have been to a number of times. And in Tanzania there is an outbreak of Marburg virus. These are hemorrhagic diseases, horrific virus infections that can tear through a village or a community. But the danger of having an outbreak in a capital city of millions of people—to the entire world—cannot be overstated.

In this moment that we have had our Nation put down the tools and say, “Go

home; give up your work; stop protecting our public health; stop protecting refugees; stop pushing back on human trafficking; stop pushing back on gender-based violence,” is shameful, is immoral, is embarrassing, is unsafe.

Our Nation is safe today from so many threats overseas, yes, because of our Department of Defense; yes, because of our intelligence professionals; yes, because of our diplomats. But to take away completely, to shut down cold our global network of development professionals, to abandon the field to China, to Russia, to the extremists and the human traffickers who are delighted that we have receded, that we have walked away from this vital work—it hurts my heart.

It is hard to believe that here in this Senate there are so few voices raised in opposition to this sudden, cataclysmic, chain-saw approach to slashing the investments we have made together over decades.

President Bush came up with the idea for PEPFAR. You may not know what PEPFAR is. It is a program that the United States initiated to fight the dread pandemic of HIV/AIDS which, across the continent of Africa, would have killed more than 20 million people since it was launched under President Bush’s administration. But medical clinics, treatment for nurses, outreach to communities, antiretroviral drugs, pharmaceuticals delivered by the American people in partnership with a dozen other countries and in partnership with the public health services of the countries that PEPFAR works in—all of this in combination has saved more lives than any intervention by any country in human history.

It is a proud part of President Bush’s legacy. It is a proud part of the legacy of Republican and Democratic Senators. It is a proud part of what I would have hoped the Trump administration would continue—fighting malaria, fighting polio. We eradicated smallpox from the planet through the great work of USAID.

I still remember visiting a place in an island off of Tanzania called Zanzibar where we had eradicated malaria, which kills children by the hundreds of thousands every year. We have done great work.

And one of our Nation’s most successful businesspeople and one of the world’s leading philanthropists, Bill Gates, who is spending billions of his own dollars in these same pursuits—in fighting neglected tropical diseases, in pushing back on polio and malaria, HIV/AIDS, and tuberculosis—he has said this week that the work of USAID is critical, is valuable; that the things he has invested in he knew were good and well-performed and appropriate for him to invest in because he consulted so closely with the experts at USAID.

I have known each of the last four AID Administrators—Republican and Democrat—good people who work across the aisle to support and sustain global work by the American people.