

never come back. Once this door is open, it is going to be very difficult to close it again—no matter who the President is. No matter who is in charge.

To my colleagues, are there no redlines? Are there no limits?

Just in the past 10 days, we have seen the literal destruction of a statutorily—I emphasize that word—statutorily established and funded Federal Agency by people ostensibly working for the President under vague authority, no transparency, and, certainly, no guidance from the Congress.

Did they come to the Foreign Relations Committee and say: What do you think about AID? Are there parts of it we should work with? Are there parts that can be reformed? No, there was zero.

This small group—and we don't know who they are. But this small group—apparently, it is reported, is in their twenties—have no experience with government, no experience with foreign aid, no experience with the operation of the U.S. Government, but they are making, basically, policy decisions and constitutional decisions.

The Constitution does not give to the President or his designee the power to extinguish a statutorily established Agency.

I can think of no greater violation of the strictures of the Constitution or the usurpation of the power of this body. None. I can think of none. Shouldn't this be a redline?

And by the way, I find it especially galling to read the sneering comment from the richest man in the world:

We spent the weekend feeding USAID into the chipper.

Describing an action that will literally take food from the mouths of starving children. Forget redlines, do we have no decency? And then there is an Executive order freezing funding, again selectively, for programs the administration doesn't like or understand.

I mentioned I was a former Governor. I would have loved to have had this power, but it is a fundamental violation of the whole idea of the Constitution, the separation of powers. To say to the Executive, you can pick and choose which laws you like, which funding programs you like, the level of funding, you can impound if you don't want to spend it. Richard Nixon tried to do that. He was rebuffed by the Congress, who passed a specific statute: no impoundments.

In addition to the chaos, the uncertainty, and the demonstrable damage which my colleagues have been outlining all day brilliantly, there is nothing theoretical about cutting off funding to a rural health clinic, for example, or support for small farmers, or grants to your fire department.

But getting away from those specifics—and it is easy to get pulled into those, and my office is hearing calls every day; we can hardly handle the volume.

This—again, to underline—is a frontal assault of our power, your power, the power to decide where public funds should be spent.

Isn't this an obvious redline? Isn't this an obvious limit?

Or, finally, and I have just sort of picked a few examples, but my final example is the power seemingly assumed by DOGE to burrow into the Treasury's payment system, the Office of Personnel Management, and now CMS for undefined purposes, zero oversight, and it raises questions up to and including threats to national security.

Do these people have clearance? Are the doors closed? Are they going to leave open doors into these? What are the opportunities for our adversaries to hack into the systems? We are already under unprecedented cyber attacks, and we are opening doors.

Although it is impossible to determine what they are taking—remember, there is no transparency or oversight—access to Social Security numbers seems to be in the mix, all the government's personnel files, personal financial data, potentially everyone's tax returns and medical records. That can't be good. That can't be good. That is data that should be protected with the highest level of security and consideration of Americans' privacy.

And we don't know who these people are. We don't know what they are taking out with them. We don't know whether they are walking out with laptops or thumb drives. We don't know whether they are leaving back doors into the system. There is literally no oversight.

The government of the United States is not a private company. It is fundamentally at odds with how this system is supposed to work.

Shouldn't this be an easy redline?

In short, we are experiencing in realtime exactly what the Framers most feared. When you clear away the smoke, clear away the DOGE, the Executive orders, foreign policy pronouncements, more fundamentally, what is happening is the shredding of the constitutional structure itself. And we have a profound responsibility, and it seems to be based on that pesky oath that we all took, to stop it—to stop it.

If the Republican Members want to appoint Mr. Vought, OK, that is fine—it is not fine. It is terrible, but that is their right. But stop what is going on in terms of altering how our government is supposed to fundamentally function to protect our people.

The power of the majority is with you, my Republican colleagues. Together—together—we have the power to right the balance, to reclaim the authority we thought was inherent in our jobs and, in the process, save our country.

In a prior time of crisis, Abraham Lincoln came here, December 2, 1862, when he defined the stakes for all of us.

Fellow-citizens, we cannot escape history. We of this Congress and this administration—

This could have been written yesterday.

We of this Congress and this administration, will be remembered in spite of ourselves. No personal significance, or insignificance, can spare one or another of us.

We will be written down through history. We will be lit through history “in honor or dishonor to the latest generation.”

And I would suggest that the redline should be the Constitution of the United States.

I yield the floor.

THE PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from North Carolina.

DEPARTMENT OF GOVERNMENT EFFICIENCY

Mr. TILLIS. Mr. President, this week has been interesting, as I have seen from some of my friends on the other side of the aisle, a lot of wailing and gnashing of teeth and all the horrible things that are going to come before us. And it reminded me of a book that I used as a basis for management consulting training back in 1998. It was called “Who Moved My Cheese.” It is a story about two mice and two small people in a maze. The mice are named Sniff and Scurry, and the two little people are Hem and Haw. And it is only about a hundred-page book. But the premise of the book is the cheese was moved in the maze, and the challenge was to figure out where the food source was.

Well, Sniff and Scurry, the mice, actually did a pretty good job, fairly quickly, to kind of move where the cheese was and deal with the status quo. But Hem and Haw really had more challenges.

And I think we have some hemming and hawing going on here in Washington right now because they just don't understand business practices that we are trying to apply to government that have never been applied at scale before.

And I decided that I would give you an idea because a lot of people think that Elon Musk is off the chain and causing all kinds of havoc. I haven't seen that yet. As a matter of fact, if time allows, I am going to talk a little bit about the narrative this week over the payment system and all the detailed payment data that supposedly got out—which is patently untrue, contrary to what press reports have said.

But I thought I would start with the story of SpaceX. When Elon Musk decided to invest in and create SpaceX, he did something that has never been done before in this industry. He decided that instead of doing what the old players do—which is to be perfect, never launch a rocket until you are absolutely certain that that mission can be accomplished—he decided that you can learn from failure.

This is actually a social media post of one of his first launches where the booster failed to come back to Earth. His immediate response—whether it was either his instincts or really good communications people—his immediate response was a social media post

that said: “Great launch, unscheduled RUD”—R-U-D, which is rapid unscheduled disassembly.

So he was telling his shareholders and the people that have invested in SpaceX, that what happened, on its face, looked like a disaster. But, in fact, it was being willing to fail—provided that human life was not at risk—that being willing to fail was how you accelerate and you bypass everybody who has a partnership with the Federal Government. You get through all of that, and now you have the premiere launch platform, while all the other competitors have been working on it for years or decades, because he understands the concept that I understand in business, where I spent most of my life, that you learn from failure, if you know how to measure it and you are responsive and resilient.

Now, when I advised clients on enterprise transformation, we would push the envelope. We would pull back if we thought it was a market reputation risk or a center business risk.

So I believe that we need to do more of that, but we need to have guardrails, clearly.

Now there are just people that they just can't figure out where the cheese is. Now, if I just go back to the one area on payments, I have to admit, when I first heard about the payments information with read-only access being provided to someone who may be technically a government employee, but not a career government employee, it did give me concern.

So I had my staff dig into it. And since then, the administration has put out a fact sheet that anybody who is concerned about what is happening in the payments platform should look at it.

They are not looking at detailed payment data. What they are looking at is the way payments are processed to determine whether or not there is an opportunity to do it more efficiently, more cost effectively, and leave more money in the U.S. Treasury as a result—maybe more money that we can use to retire our debt. That seems like a reasonable thing to do.

People said they are getting top secret information and confidential information they shouldn't have.

I asked the specific question. I have been assured that if there is classified information, that the only ones who are going to see it are people that already have the appropriate clearances. And I have also been assured that there is no confidential information being passed.

So I would defy those in the press or maybe some of my colleagues on the other side of the aisle. I am all about facts here. If I have established no reputation in the U.S. Senate, it is that I am tedious and I complete my due diligence.

I went to the administration. I asked these questions, and I believe we are dealing with a false narrative because people don't want to know where the

cheese has been moved. They have got to get used to change.

I have been in the U.S. Senate for 10 years. I am sick of saying: Medicare has to get better. I am sick of saying: Medicaid has to get better. I am sick of saying: We are not getting people more healthy on Medicaid today. I am sick of hearing people say that on both sides of the aisles, folks.

So if we don't take some calculated risk, then we are going to be talking about the same sort of vexing issues 10 years from now.

And so I want to ask everybody to reject this narrative that we are going too fast, too soon, too many things on the line, and let's get to specific examples.

I have used the example that has dominated the press this week to determine most of what is being said is a red herring to take the President and, in this case, Elon Musk, off of the trail of trying to find efficiencies.

You have facts to dispute that? Come to the Senate floor; I can learn from it. But stop creating a false narrative because you don't want to go through change because you want to continue to establish and follow the status quo, which is failing the American people and failing to fulfill promises that I have heard people make for the last decade.

Mr. President, I come here to say—I also shared a story. I had a friend of Greek ancestry call me this week and say: What is going on with Mr. Musk?

I will say, Mr. Musk has put out some social media posts that are incorrect. He actually is one of the reasons why we are having to complete this due diligence because he was talking about looking at payment data versus having professionals who—some of them are career personnel looking at source code to figure out how to make it better. He probably needs to tighten it up.

But my Greek friend told me—when I thought about all this stuff, I said: I think the President has enabled Mr. Musk and other people a lot like Icarus's father provided him with wings. They were made of wax and feathers. If you know mythology, the idea was for Icarus to fly and never go so low as to drown in the sea but never go so high as to have his wings melted, his feathers float away, and ultimately drown in the sea.

So to those who are looking at all of this in the way that I am, I want that sweet spot. I want those who are looking at government efficiencies to understand the rules. They need to understand confidentiality, national security, and when lives are on the line.

When we are talking about DOD, the intel community, the Foreign Service, you need adult supervision in the room to make absolutely certain we don't compromise or put those men or women in danger. But in the meantime, if we really want to force change, if we really want to fulfill the promises that we made to the American people when we took control of Washington,

we have to get people comfortable with change. We have to start fulfilling promises—some of the big promises that for the 10 years I have been here, I heard it every year, and we haven't made appreciable progress.

Look, the American people are patient. If my colleagues on the other side of the aisle will present facts, not innuendo that could be politically motivated at best or just bad information at worst, then we can get through this, and we can do right by the American people as a result.

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

Ms. DUCKWORTH. Mr. President, after hours and hours of arguments by my Democratic colleagues—not that I woke up this morning with the desire to hear my own voice on the Senate floor—I am here because decades before I ever considered a career in politics, when I was just starting out in the Army, I raised my right hand and took an oath. I swore to support and defend the Constitution of the United States. I vowed to protect our Nation against all enemies, foreign and domestic.

In this moment, at this precipice in our country, I need to make good on that promise, because in the just 18 days since Donald Trump was inaugurated, we have witnessed an all-out assault on the system of checks and balances that our government was founded upon.

We have seen the President both overreach and underdeliver, proving through Executive orders and Twitter marching orders that he cares more about the billionaires who belong to Mar-a-Lago than the middle-class folks he pretended to care about on the campaign trail.

Look, 250 years ago this April, a few brave patriots grabbed their muskets and risked their lives at Lexington and Concord, sacrificing for a country that was still more of an idea, more of an ideal than actual reality. They did so because they could no longer stand living under a tyrannical leader. They did so because they had dreamt up the notion of a government of, by, and for the people. They knew that a system based on checks and balances was the best way to keep this Nation's leaders from turning into the very kind of tyrant they fled England to escape—a system of checks and balances.

Well, 2 weeks ago into Trump's America, the only checks I see are the ones going into the pockets of Trump's rich friends. The only balance I see is Trump's balancing act between ripping off the middle class and endangering our national security. Our system of government is being eroded before our eyes. It is being perverted to work for the few—the billionaires—rather than the many—the people.

It is sickening to see so many of my colleagues on the other side of the aisle put their hands over their eyes and pretend they don't see what is happening. They are refusing to speak up as our President turns into more of a despot

every day as his power grabs get more extreme, more insidious, more cruel.

Even if we took the full 30 hours of debate on this nomination, I don't think we could get through all the ways that Trump's absolute disregard for the rule of law over the past 2 weeks has already harmed America and Americans, but let me use my time to try.

Last week, news broke that Trump had declared a blanket freeze on all Federal grants, ignoring the fact that Congress had already appropriated those funds, ignoring that he point-blank did not have the authority to do so, ignoring that his action would and already has hurt countless folks who rely on these grants for their most basic needs.

President Trump may think that he owned the libs by causing havoc in our Federal Government, but what he has really done is create a reality where his own voters who depend on groups like Meals on Wheels are not sure how they are going to put food on the table next week. He may think he destroyed woke culture with this freeze, but no—he didn't. Instead, he manufactured a crisis that has left that single mom working a double shift in a South Side nursing home unsure whether her Medicaid will be stripped away in the dark of night. He has created a crisis that has left veterans wondering if they will be able to access the benefits they earned with the blood they were brave enough to shed for our country. He has fabricated a nightmarish reality where homeless shelters might have to close their doors and turn back onto the streets the very at-risk teenagers who rely on their care.

Listen, when I was in high school, my family struggled. My dad lost his job and was unemployed for 4 to 5 years. We eventually ran through all of our savings, and we ended up with no money, and some days, we had no food.

I still remember going to the grocery store and counting out our last five one-dollar food stamps to buy as much bread and baloney as possible and then praying we would have enough to last the week.

I still remember fainting from hunger in my high school English class and waking up on the floor disoriented, not knowing what had happened.

I still remember the hours my dad spent walking from pay phone to pay phone, hoping to find 10 cents at a time so that he could find enough so that my brother and I could each get 50 cents to buy lunch and breakfast at school that next afternoon. A lot of times, that 25-cent hot lunch at school was the only meal I could count on for that entire day.

So as a former hungry kid and now as a mom of two little girls, I cannot imagine the pain of parents who rely on school meals to feed their own kids and who are now terrified that Trump's vanity project of a Federal freeze will force their 5-year-old to go hungry as their grants to fund cafeteria meal programs may now get gutted.

Shame on Donald Trump, and shame on Republicans who can't see to find the ounce of courage necessary to stand up and say what all of us in this Chamber so obviously know: that this is wrong, that this is outrageous, and that this is a wild, unlawful abuse of power.

But Trump didn't stop with the grant freeze. Last weekend, he gave Elon Musk, the world's richest person—someone not elected by the people of the United States of America—the power to cut off aid from the world's most vulnerable people. He gave him authority to dismantle an entire Agency in one illegal fell swoop.

Together, they are now actively gutting USAID, completely undermining the United States' national security and global standing; knowingly, intentionally jeopardizing the safety of countless innocent people worldwide who rely on the organization for humanitarian assistance.

Now bad actors in the communist People's Republic of China and Russia will be able to step in to fill the leadership vacuum that Trump created, forcing folks in need across the world to turn to our adversaries and not us for help.

Let me be clear. USAID is an organization dedicated to doing good around the globe, but the good that it does also has a direct, tangible impact on the safety and economic security of families right here at home in the United States.

It is an organization that helps allies detect fentanyl, in part so we can stop it before that fentanyl comes across our own borders.

It is an organization that helps feed starving families worldwide, but it does so using \$2 billion of food purchased from American farmers, with the paychecks going into their red, white, and blue pockets so they can keep their family farms for yet another generation.

It is an organization that helps stop global pandemics.

It is an organization that works to make sure that the poorest children in the poorest countries don't die from drinking dirty water—a mission that also happens to be critical to our national strength, as when countries experience water insecurity, they are more likely to undergo political instability as well. That increases the odds that their governments fail and power falls into the wrong hands, leading to a sequence of events that often ends up with the kind of immigration crisis we are already facing at our border.

I know there is waste, fraud, and abuse in our government and I am all for rooting that out. In fact, I have written and passed legislation that has successfully done just that. But eliminating an entire Agency with such vital missions is not the way to go about this.

USAID makes up just 1 percent of our Federal budget, and these shortsighted cuts will end up costing the

American taxpayer even more in the long term, as there will be more global instability, more migration crises, more pandemics to contend with as a result of this frankly idiotic decision.

It is ironic that the guy in charge of making our government more efficient is making it more costly and more chaotic. Case in point: He has threatened to use American troops to bring home USAID workers if they don't leave their overseas post in the next 30 days—a move that in itself would cost Americans an estimated \$100 million. That is Elon Musk spending 100 million more dollars, not saving it.

Elon Musk is unelected, unvetted, and unqualified. He does not have the legal authority to dismantle entire Agencies. Yet, in Trump's America, he is almost a coequal President, and the size of his bank account and how far he is willing to bend the knee is enough for our President to bestow on him unchecked power.

Musk is willing to bow down to Trump's throne made of fool's gold and false promises, so in return, Elon gets to run wild, run rampant. He gets to have access to Americans' Social Security numbers and veterans' personal information. For what reason no one knows and all of us should fear. He gets to hijack our systems to enrich himself rather than the middle class. He gets to stomp on those in need and fire anyone who dares to stand up for what is right or what is legal.

Trump and Musk are not bringing back the good old days of Ronald Reagan. Reagan believed in international aid. Reagan is the one whose name is on the front of USAID's building. They aren't making America great; they are making it authoritarian.

We should all be asking ourselves, if we let them gut USAID, then what is next? The answer is, the Department of Education and then your Social Security and your Medicaid. The things you and your families need to get by are right behind on their list to take out.

Look, Trump ran his campaign on the idea of lowering costs for the middle class. I support lowering costs for the middle class. He said he would reverse inflation on day one. I would love to see him reverse inflation on day one or whatever day we are on now—well, day one has come and gone. So have day two, day three, and day four. Here we are weeks in, and all he has done is break his campaign promises and then take actions that have hurt everyday Americans to help his rich buddies afford yet another private jet.

Under his wide stewardship, egg prices have actually skyrocketed, inflation remains sky high, a needless trade war seems to be getting closer every day, which could raise the price of gas and groceries even further, and all of us are in greater danger from bad actors the world over.

Enough is enough. Enough was enough a long time ago. Donald Trump is unchecked. The scales of our government have become unbalanced. Every

day, those scales tip more and more away from serving the needs of the working class and toward feeding the greed of the billionaires who pal around with the President on his golf course.

It was Ronald Reagan who once said:

The genius of a constitutional system is its recognition that no one branch of government alone could be relied on to preserve our freedoms. The great safeguard of our liberty is the totality of the constitutional system, with no one part getting the upper hand.

Reagan also described the Constitution as a “covenant”—a “covenant” that, he said, “we have made not only with ourselves but with all of mankind.”

So, today, I am asking my Republican colleagues to honor the covenant so cherished by their own conservative hero, Ronald Reagan. I am asking them to heed his words, to heed his warning, to heed his plea to us all.

Under Donald Trump, our government is not of, by, or for the people. It is of, by, and for the people with the deepest pockets. *E pluribus unum*—“out of many, one”—is supposed to signify the strength of foundation and the solidarity of our Nation. Do not let Donald Trump pervert it to mean that, out of the many people, he and his buddies are the only ones who matter.

To my colleagues on the other side of the aisle, all I am asking you to do today are the jobs you were elected to do. All I am begging for is that you make good on the oaths you took when you were first sworn into this Chamber—to support and defend our Constitution from all enemies, foreign and domestic.

Trump is acting as if he believes that the Constitution is just an old, yellowing piece of paper that he can crumble up at his will.

My colleagues, you know better, and you know your constituents deserve better. Please find the courage to stand up and say so. It is the least each of us can do for the country that we are lucky enough to have been elected to protect. You can do that today by voting no on Trump's latest unqualified, unfit Cabinet nominee, Russell Vought—a man who doesn't even care to hide that he will happily rubberstamp Trump's worst instincts.

Now, I would like to take some time to illustrate the very real impact that Trump's illegal actions have already had on the middle-class Americans, and I want to begin by reading some of the many, many letters I have received over the past few weeks from my constituents in Illinois.

First, let's start with Trump's Federal funding freeze. Here is a message we received from Metro Chicago's YWCA, an organization that supports the delivery of over \$10 million worth in Head Start funding to childcare providers. Taking funding away from our childcare providers and families is both cruel and counterproductive. It hurts our families, our businesses, and our economy.

This is what the YWCA said:

YWCA Metropolitan Chicago partners with 19 childcare center providers to enroll 621 children in the Head Start and Early Head Start program. Many of these centers are “mom-and-pop” small businesses.

Due to the callous and irresponsible federal funding freeze yesterday, the YWCA was unable to access the payment portal for these critical programs for several hours. They heard childcare centers across their service population were frozen out from receiving direct payments as well, payments these centers depend on to make payroll, feed children, and provide other resources to children and parents.

Childcare centers in Illinois are scared. Childcare centers across the country are scared.

The childcare businesses YWCA serves typically survive on profit margins of less than 1 percent. Wages are astonishingly low, with childcare workers making less than 98 percent of the nation's other workers. They don't have the funds to float their employees while the President attempts to threaten our national security and deny resources for states, localities, and American families and businesses.

The harm has [already] been done [even with that temporary funding freeze], and it cannot be undone.

The at-risk children the YWCA serves with Head Start and Early Head Start funds include those living in poverty, children in foster care, children experiencing homelessness, people of color, and children with disabilities.

Their parents and caregivers are hard-working, tax-paying Americans. When they don't have access to quality childcare, the Federal Reserve tells us that childcare problems are the main barrier to job-seeking, the main reason for missed work, and the main reason for part-time work.

Next, I received several messages from my constituents after they were locked out of their Medicaid accounts in the aftermath of Trump's illegal Federal freeze. Here is what Medicaid means for them:

[I am a single mom in central Illinois. Medicaid] provides a quality of life for my disabled son, including many services and supports that I as a single parent for over 25 years would not be able to provide for him otherwise.

[I am a parent in southern Illinois.] Alex's genetic disability requires many doctors' visits and tests and medication. She also requires physical therapy and occupational therapy. She will always require a caregiver. Medicaid provides caregivers. In the future, Medicaid will provide day programs when I am not physically able to care for her and her brother becomes her guardian. Medicaid provides for her needs now so she can have a good life and will provide for her needs in the future. As a parent of a child with a disability, this relieves our stress. As a parent, we won't live forever, and it gives us peace of mind to know she has these services to live a fulfilling life!

From a parent in Newton, IL:

Medicaid has been a lifeline for our family for the past 2 years. My daughter has a rare condition called Aicardi syndrome. She suffers from a whole slew of medical issues. Medicaid pays for nursing that our primary insurance does not cover. The state allows me to be paid as her nurse, so we are able to financially pay for our daily needs, home, and wheelchair van to transport our daughter. Without Medicaid, we would not have access to medications, equipment, supplies,

and nursing. These are the things that keep my daughter alive.

From a parent in Chicago:

My child has a rare genetic disorder. She is medically fragile and technologically dependent. She requires 24-hour care and is unable to do anything for herself. Medicaid allows my family to survive financially by covering all of the health-related cost. Without Medicaid, we would drown in debt, and my daughter would have to live in a hospital—[costing the taxpayers even more money].

From a parent in Elburn, IL:

Medicaid helps me to care for my daughter at home, where she belongs. It provides the critical support Ava needs—ventilator care, nursing, and medical supplies—so she can grow, learn, and thrive with her family. Without Medicaid and the MFTD waiver, keeping Ava home wouldn't be possible. It allows us to give her every opportunity to reach her full potential while keeping our family together. Medicaid isn't just a program—it's a lifeline for families like ours.

Now, I would like to read some messages from some of the healthcare providers, researchers, and patients in my State who are worried about how the Trump freeze will impact their lives.

One constituent said:

I am a cancer survivor, thanks to research into the early detection of and into the treatment of cancer. Currently, I have a friend who is at Vanderbilt Medical Center for the treatment of his leukemia. I have another friend who is undergoing chemo for blood cancer and will go to Vanderbilt for a monthslong treatment in May.

Reports say that all communications and grant reviews, as well as all cancer research and/or trials have been stopped [by the Trump administration]. I ask you to do everything in your power to restart the cancer research and trials so that lives are not lost.

Thank you for your help.

Another email to me:

My uncle has a genetic disorder. My cousins have [a] 50–50 chance of having [the] same issue. My uncle has been in several studies at WashU in St. Louis, Missouri. They are working to identify what causes this gene and then, consequently, how to treat it.

The new administration has halted all meetings and grant reviews by the NIH. This funding is VITAL to researching what causes and how to treat so many diseases, including the one my uncle is suffering [from].

PLEASE push [to] fully fund the NIH so that we can continue to research and treat terrible diseases that could impact all of us and our families.

Next, here is a message I received about how the Trump freeze could hurt staff, researchers, and students at Southern Illinois University:

Southern Illinois University estimate[s] that they have approximately 550 employees who are paid fully or partially through federal dollars. A pause in funding the programs they lead and research they perform in important areas, like treating and preventing Alzheimer's disease or ensuring that the food we eat is safe to consume, would keep them from earning a salary to support their families.

The TRIO Upward Bound program in East St. Louis currently serves 225 participants between both programs, the majority of whom come from low-income, first-generation, college-bound families. These students already face significant challenges, including academic barriers, limited access to resources, and a lack of college preparation

support. Any freeze in [the Federal] funding will stop the university's ability to effectively assist them in overcoming these obstacles.

The Upward Bound program plays a crucial role in preparing students for college, providing tutoring, college admissions guidance, and mentorship, which were at risk due to the funding freeze. Additionally, our dedicated staff, who work tirelessly to support these students, faced uncertainty regarding their employment. This disruption also affects our broader community as our program serves as a vital resource for encouraging educational advancement and economic mobility.

Next, here is an excerpt from an email I got from Ignite Promise, a Chicago nonprofit serving homeless youth in the immediate aftermath of the Trump freeze. The nonprofit had to reach into their own wallet to keep up their work. They said that the freeze turned their sector "upside down."

This is their message to me:

Thankfully, we were able to carry out our commitments to youth over the last 24 hours because we have a small funding reserve. However, if this is not resolved, these are the direct services Ignite offers to youth that are at risk:

Essential mental health services and housing for over 500 young people throughout our programs;

Youth, ages 14 to 17, who are victims of trafficking will lose access to our 24/7 shelter;

Young people at the greatest risk of harm will lose access to a 24/7 crisis hotline.

This freeze turned our sector upside down and shifted over 100 providers in our CoC to rush into emergency mode.

And the most devastating effect was the fear youth experienced, assuming their safe and stable supports were going away, and insecurity our hardworking staff felt for their employment.

Now, I would like to share a message we received from Beyond Legal Aid Chicago after they learned Trump's freeze would impact their work as a nonprofit that provides legal services to underserved communities and veterans throughout the city of Chicago.

Their message reads:

First, when the freeze went into place, the Notice of Funding Opportunity for Homeless Veterans Legal Services was put on hold. Without that funding, we will be unable to serve Veterans in getting access to the benefits like the ones featured in this story:

Our client was a 57-year-old Veteran suffering from service-connected disabilities [and] faced challenges navigating the VA system. His efforts for a disability upgrade have been denied, preventing him and his family from accessing critically needed support. He met our staff at one of our Veterans' legal clinics. With our legal advocacy, he was [actually] successfully upgraded to 100% permanent & total disability status. He is now protected from a rating reduction by the VA. We raised his monthly benefits. . . . He is also now entitled to additional benefits: DEA; CHAMPVA for spouse and children; no cost for VA healthcare; VA dental care; and a DoD ID card for him and [his] family and access to bases. His children are now eligible for education assistance up to \$107,136 [for their college education]. This family's financial situation was stabilized, solidly keeping them in the middle class by recognizing what this Veteran's service cost him.

In 2024, using federal funding, we were able to work in partnership with a homeowner-

ship preservation organization in the South Suburbs to save 64 homes from foreclosure. That's 64 families who now have \$19 million-plus in preserved home value and can pass along the homes to the next generation. Our legal work saved 64 families from homelessness. Without federal funding that supported that work, those homes would likely have been lost, and those families would have faced housing instability.

Over the course of our 3-year OVW Legal Assistance for Victims (which we receive through the Department of Justice) was the principal funding source for our work serving 286 survivors of sexual assault.

They say further:

All of that work, and more, is funded directly by non-LSC federal grants, all of which was subject to [Donald Trump's] freeze.

Trump's freeze even impacted members of law enforcement in Illinois. Trump loves to say that he backs the blue and that Democrats want to defund the police, but in reality, it is his actions that are taking money away from our law enforcement officers and public safety, not to mention his pardoning the people from January 6, who actually assaulted the blue—our Capitol Police officers.

In the aftermath of Trump's freeze, police departments reached out, saying that their High Intensity Drug Trafficking Areas—the HIDTA—offices were notified that they may lose funding. The High Intensity Drug Trafficking Areas program provides support for law enforcement agencies operating in areas determined to be critical drug trafficking regions across the United States.

Illinois is part of two of these regions. They provide crucial assistance, especially to rural agencies, to combat gangs, cartels, and the proliferation of fentanyl in our communities, as well as those that surround us in places like Indiana, Missouri, Kentucky, and Iowa.

Remember that the next time Republicans claim they say they back the blue, they are actually not backing the blue.

Now, I would like to read a list of Federal programs that could be at risk if Donald Trump proceeds with his freeze and make clear how it would affect the lives of the tens of millions of Americans who depend on them.

Let's begin with Head Start. Donald Trump's illegal freeze jeopardizes Federal funding for Head Start Programs that provide comprehensive early childhood education for more than 800,000 kids and their families. Teachers and staff may not get paid, and programs may not be able to stay open.

Donald Trump's illegal freeze jeopardizes Federal funding for our K-12 schools because school districts may not be able to access key formula grant funding, including title I, IDEA, impact aid, and career and technical education, which would pose tremendous financial burdens on schools in the middle of the school year.

Food assistance programs. Donald Trump's illegal freeze jeopardizes funding for millions of American citizens who rely on nutrition assistance programs like SNAP, WIC, and school lunch. These Americans would be left

hungry as funding is cut off, and nonprofits that provide additional assistance would lose Federal funding. Some of that funding, especially for SNAP and WIC and school lunches, actually is spent purchasing from our American farmers, who also would be negatively affected.

Disaster relief. Donald Trump's illegal freeze jeopardizes funding for public assistance and hazard mitigation grants from the Disaster Relief Fund to State, Tribal, territorial, and local governments and nonprofits that help communities quickly respond to, recover from, and prepare for major disasters, right as so many communities are struggling after severe natural disasters—most recently in California, Florida, Georgia, and North Carolina.

Public safety. Donald Trump's illegal freeze jeopardizes Federal grants for law enforcement and homeland security activities, undermining public safety in every State and territory.

Health services. Donald Trump's illegal freeze jeopardizes Federal funding for community health centers that provide healthcare for over 30 million Americans, creating chaos for patients trying to get their prescriptions, regular checkups, and more.

Veterans' care. Donald Trump's illegal freeze jeopardizes Federal grants to help veterans in rural areas access healthcare and grants that help veterans get other critical services, including suicide prevention resources, transition assistance, and housing for homeless veterans.

Support for our servicemembers. Donald Trump's illegal freeze jeopardizes support for a host of DOD financial assistance and grant programs supporting servicemembers and their families, including the Fisher House, impact aid, community noise mitigation, ROTC language training, STEM programs, and the USO.

Preventing domestic violence. Donald Trump's illegal freeze jeopardizes all Violence Against Women Act grants as well as funding for victims' assistance and State and local police.

Suicide and crisis lifeline. Donald Trump's illegal freeze jeopardizes funding for the 9-8-8 suicide and crisis lifeline as well as grants for mental health services.

Life-changing medical research. Donald Trump's illegal freeze jeopardizes all funding for critical health research, including research on cancer, Alzheimer's disease, and diabetes, as well as clinical trials at the NIH Clinical Center and all across the country, disrupting lifesaving and often time-sensitive research.

Support for small businesses. Donald Trump's illegal freeze would mean that the Small Business Administration would have to halt loans to small businesses, including those in disaster-ravaged communities in North Carolina, Texas, and Florida.

Emergency preparedness. Donald Trump's illegal freeze jeopardizes critical preparedness and response capability funding used to prepare for disasters; public health emergencies; and chemical, biological, radiological, and nuclear events.

Support for firefighters. Donald Trump's illegal freeze jeopardizes grants to support firefighters across the country. This includes grants that help States and localities purchase essential firefighting equipment.

Good-paying jobs in the energy infrastructure. Donald Trump's illegal freeze jeopardizes grants for critical energy projects nationwide, halting billions of dollars in investments nationwide and jeopardizing good-paying American jobs. The Department of Energy's Loan Program Office would halt loans in 28 States, impacting hundreds of thousands of construction and operations jobs.

Infrastructure projects. Donald Trump's illegal freeze jeopardizes all federally funded transportation projects across the country—roads, bridges, public transit, and more—including projects already under construction.

Combating the fentanyl crisis. Donald Trump's illegal freeze jeopardizes funding for communities to address the substance use disorder crisis and combat the fentanyl crisis.

Programs for American innovation and competitiveness. Donald Trump's illegal freeze jeopardizes existing grants to support research for AI and quantum computing and any new grant funding, undermining U.S. innovation and competitiveness with the PRC and putting American jobs at risk.

Programs to strengthen our military readiness. Donald Trump's illegal freeze jeopardizes grants and other assistance appropriated to strengthen military effectiveness and defense capacity, including the Defense Production Act support for the defense industrial base, basic research grants necessary to advance key technologies, and small business support to strengthen our supply chains.

Programs to protect Americans overseas. Donald Trump's illegal freeze jeopardizes programs that track and combat the spread of infectious diseases, create business opportunities for American companies in emerging markets, combat terrorism, and counter the influence of the PRC, Russia, and Iran. Efforts to ensure the safety and security of Americans implementing these programs are all suspended and could be terminated.

Food inspections. Donald Trump's illegal freeze jeopardizes whether some States will have to take on the full financial burden of ensuring the Nation's meat supply is safe if Federal cooperative agreements for meat inspections are halted.

Support for Tribes. Donald Trump's illegal freeze jeopardizes funding to Tribes for basic governmental services like healthcare, public safety net pro-

grams, Tribal schools, and food assistance.

Pell grants and Direct PLUS loans for parents. Donald Trump's illegal freeze puts Pell grants and Parent PLUS Loan Programs at risk. These grants and programs make college more affordable for millions of Americans, giving them the opportunity to access higher education and a ticket to the middle class. His reckless actions create another barrier to opportunity for Americans.

I would like to switch gears a little bit, and let's talk a little bit about more campaign promises broken by Donald Trump.

During his campaign, Trump constantly attacked people he called "unelected bureaucrats" for having too much control over the Federal Government, but now Donald Trump has made Elon Musk, the world's richest man, the most powerful unelected bureaucrat of all, giving him the keys to our government and empowering him to illegally dismantle core Agencies without consulting Congress, not to mention giving him access to all of our Social Security numbers, tax information, and other personal data.

As my colleague Senator SANDERS pointed out on Wednesday, Elon Musk spent \$277 million to elect Donald Trump President. Since election day, he has become \$154 billion richer. Elon Musk's net worth is estimated at \$426 billion. Yes, that is "billion" with a "b." Meanwhile, the average American salary is only \$63,795. The average cost of childcare for just one child per year in the United States is \$9,994. The average price of a gallon of milk in our country is \$4.47. The average price of eggs in America currently is \$5.29 for a dozen, although it is actually increasing as we speak. The average price of gas in the United States is \$3.12 a gallon.

In Illinois, the average person's salary is \$67,192. The average cost of childcare per year for just one child in Illinois is \$11,605. The average price of a gallon of milk in Illinois is \$5.52. The average price for a dozen eggs in Illinois is \$4.15, which is over a dollar more than the national average. The average price for a gallon of gas in Illinois is \$3.26.

So you can see the disparity between the middle class and the billionaires that cozy up to Donald Trump.

And it is not just Musk. Wealthy elites that have more money than most Americans could ever dream of are doing anything to get into Trump's favor because they know he plans on giving them massive tax cuts to line their pockets even further.

Jeff Bezos is just one example. He is from New Mexico, and his net worth is estimated at \$250 billion. Meanwhile, in New Mexico, the average person's salary is \$57,512. The average cost of childcare for just one child is \$8,766. The average price of a gallon of milk is \$3.63. A dozen eggs would set you back \$5.46. The average price of gas is \$2.98.

Next up, Meta CEO Mark Zuckerberg. He is from New York. His net worth is estimated at \$240 billion. Meanwhile, in New York, the average person's salary is \$78,624. The average cost of childcare for just one child is \$12,844. The average price of a gallon of milk is \$5.05. The average price of eggs is \$5.46. The average price of gas is \$3.18.

These guys don't represent America. They have no clue what the middle class experience is. They don't care about making the government work for everyday Americans; they only care about making it work for themselves and their buddies.

Donald Trump ran for President on the promise that he would lower the price of eggs. However, since being in office, he seems to have conveniently forgotten that vow. He has also done nothing to stop the bird flu, which has caused the price of eggs to skyrocket even further. In fact, his freeze would stop the research into and the tracking of the bird flu virus that is causing eggs to skyrocket.

The cost of eggs appears to have accelerated since November—the month that Donald Trump was elected President, according to data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics. In the week ending January 18, a dozen eggs cost \$5.29—a steep climb from February of 2024, when the price was a little over \$3.50 a dozen. In November, the price of a dozen eggs edged up to \$3.65, and in December, it rose to \$4.15.

Since the moment Trump returned to the Oval Office, he has abused his power, both overreaching and underdelivering, signing Executive orders and issuing commands that are blatantly illegal. Hypocrisy must be dead because Donald Trump used to claim to care a lot about executive overreach back when there was a Democratic President in office.

Here are just a few examples of when, ironically, Donald Trump was complaining about President Obama's Executive actions:

In 2016, this is what Donald Trump said:

We don't want to continue to watch people signing executive orders because that was not what the Constitution and the brilliant designers of this incredible document had in mind. We need people that can make deals and can work, because right now in Washington, there's total, absolutely gridlock.

In another instance, Trump declared:

He doesn't want to get people together the old-fashioned way, where you get Congress. You get the Congress, you get the Senate, you get together, you do legislation. He just writes out an executive order. Not supposed to happen that way. . . . You get the Congress.

I am sorry that I am butchering the English language, but I am quoting Donald Trump directly.

You get the Congress, you get the Senate, you get together, you do legislation. He just writes out an executive order. Not supposed to happen that way.

Another time, Donald Trump lied and said:

I would build consensus with Congress, and Congress would agree with me. I'll give you

an example, because I don't like the idea of using executive orders like our president [does].

He was referring, of course, to President Obama at the time.

It is a disaster what he's doing. I would build consensus, but consensus means you have to work hard. You have to cajole. You have to get them into the Oval Office and get them all together, and you have to make deals.

There are also countless examples of other Republicans' hypocrisy when it comes to executive overreach. I just want to name one.

In 2014, then-House majority leader STEVE SCALISE had this to say of President Obama:

President Obama has this fantasy that he can just use his pen to write laws. We don't have a monarchy in this country—there's an executive branch and the legislative branch, and the president has to work with Congress to get things done.

Now, on to the topic of USAID and the Trump-Musk decision to gut the Agency—a decision as dangerous as it is heartless, as it is careless.

First, I just want to correct. STEVE SCALISE was not the majority leader when he said this; he was a Member of Congress at the time.

First, I would like to read several excerpts of speeches given by Secretary Rubio in which he expressed clear support for international aid before he was confirmed.

There is no denying that a globally engaged America comes at a steep price. But the history of our still young nation is full of warnings that a lack of American engagement comes with an even higher price of its own.

Many of our nation's adversaries and rivals have been emboldened by our uncertain foreign policy. So as instability spreads and tyrants flourish, our allies want to know whether America can still be counted on to confront these common challenges. Whether we will continue to be a beacon to the rest of the world.

Our legacy is that of a nation that for two centuries has planted its feet and pushed out against the walls of tyranny, oppression, and injustice that constantly threaten to close in on the world, and has sought to replace these forces of liberty, free enterprise, and respect for human rights.

These principles are also advanced by other elements of American influence—those that don't require any military might. For example, consider the countless lives we've saved from the scourge of AIDS in Africa through the PEPFAR program. Or consider the economic mobility created by American trade and investment. These accomplishments prove that while military might may be our most eye-catching method of involvement abroad, it is far from being our most often utilized. In most cases, the decisive use of diplomacy, foreign assistance, and economic power are the most effective ways to achieve our interests and stop problems before they spiral into crises.

Marco Rubio said that.

Marco Rubio, where have you gone?

I would like to also share a news article about Secretary Rubio's prior comments in support of USAID—from CNN—and the title is "Rubio's years of strong support for USAID stands in contrast to his sudden criticism of the

aid agency." And I am going to read from the article:

Secretary of State Marco Rubio, newly in charge of the besieged US Agency for International Development, was for years a staunch supporter of its mission while in the US Senate, reversing his views only recently as President Donald Trump and his allies have moved to dismantle the agency.

But a CNN KFile review of Rubio's past comments shows he has been for more than a decade a major supporter of foreign aid and USAID, which in fiscal year 2023 distributed more than \$40 billion in foreign aid to more than 160 different countries.

Rubio's most recent comments directly contradict years of support and praise he has directed toward USAID, including a tweet he posted in February 2017 that said, "Foreign Aid is not charity. We must make sure it is well spent, but it is less than 1% of budget & critical to our national security."

During his Fox News interview Monday, Rubio also dismissed concerns that scaling back USAID's presence could allow China to expand its influence in developing nations.

But just three years ago, Rubio argued the exact opposite, urging the Biden administration in a 2022 letter to prioritize USAID's funding as a key tool to "counter the Chinese Communist Party's expanding global influence."

"We don't have to give foreign aid. We do so because it furthers our national interest. That's why we give foreign aid. Now obviously there's a component to foreign aid that's humanitarian in scope, and that's important too," he said in February 2013.

"Foreign aid as a part of our overall budget is less than 1% of the total amount the US Government spends," Rubio said in one 2017 speech on the Senate floor. "I promise you it is going to be a lot harder to recruit someone to anti-Americanism and anti-American terrorism if the United States of America is the reason one is even alive today."

"Anybody who tells you that we can slash foreign aid and that will bring us to balance is lying to you. Foreign aid is less than one percent of our budget. It's just not true," he added in August 2019, while speaking to the Forum Club of the Palm Beaches.

"Foreign aid is a very cost-effective way, not only to export our values and our example, but to advance our security and our economic interests," he said in April 2012 to the Brookings Institute.

As a senator, Rubio also introduced legislation in 2013 and 2015 to make foreign assistance programs more transparent. A version of the bill was later passed in 2016.

"A lot of times people say, 'Well, cut foreign aid.' Foreign aid is less than 1% of our budget. But foreign aid can make a difference when properly used. And if you ever have a chance, travel to the African continent and you will meet people who are alive today because the American taxpayer funded antiviral HIV medications that kept them alive. It will not be easy to radicalize people who are alive because the American taxpayer saved their lives and the lives of their children," Rubio said while on the presidential campaign trail in late 2015.

Where is Secretary Rubio's enthusiasm for USAID now? Time and time again, we see Republicans reversing their stance. Even members of the Trump administration, just a week or so ago, said that they supported programs like USAID, like Marco Rubio, who now have reversed their position.

Mr. President, at this time I will end my remarks.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Nebraska.

PFML TAX CREDIT EXTENSION AND ENHANCEMENT ACT

Mrs. FISCHER. Mr. President, in America, our news cycle is often fraught with controversy and dispute. From watching the news or scrolling through social media, it might seem like there are very, very few issues that Americans can agree on. It may be true that we disagree on some big issues—important issues—but behind the headlines and the social media posts, there are many things that Americans agree on, and one of those is paid family and medical leave.

The Pew Research Center found that the vast majority of Americans support paid parental leave—up to 82 percent. That is really a broad consensus. And 85 percent of Americans say people should receive paid leave to deal with their own serious health conditions, and 67 percent say they should receive leave to care for a family member with a serious health condition.

We rarely see Americans nowadays so united on other issues, but it is for good reason that Republicans and Democrats come together on paid family leave. The reality is that Americans shouldn't have to choose between their paychecks and caring for their families. That is why I spearheaded our Nation's first-ever Federal family leave policy in 2017 with Senator ANGUS KING.

As part of the 2017 Tax Cuts and Jobs Act, we passed a paid family and medical leave tax credit that encourages businesses to offer leave to their employees. Employers are able to receive the tax credit if they voluntarily offer up to 12 weeks of paid leave. Our credit increases access to paid leave without penalizing small businesses with limited resources, like a government entitlement program or a mandate from the government would.

Almost 8 years later, this tax credit is about to expire, and Congress is set to work on another tax package. So now is the perfect time to pass my bill with Senator KING to make our tax credit permanent and also to improve it.

Yesterday, we introduced the PFML Tax Credit Extension and Enhancement Act. Representative FEENSTRA is leading the introduction of companion legislation in the House. Our bipartisan, bicameral bill supports additional options for financing paid leave, such as paid family leave insurance. It also allows employers to begin offering paid leave to workers sooner after being hired.

The legislation includes a strategy for educating employers and employees about the option to receive this credit, and it requires the Small Business Administration and the IRS to provide targeted outreach and assistance to those who need it. That will raise awareness of the credit, and it will expand the number of Americans who have paid leave.

Passing this bill in our upcoming tax package will deliver on the promises