

Look, the good news is that I think at least three lawsuits have already been filed to try to enjoin this illegal action. But it should tell us a lot that the person who has been nominated to head OMB, the person who said that he refused to commit to complying with the law during his Budget Committee hearing, would be advancing schedule F.

Why do that? Because it is all part of the plan to put in place lackeys who will do your bidding no matter what, who won't put the interests of the country first but who will answer to the political call—exactly what Senators back in the late 1800s warned against.

But that is what they want to do. They want to take us back to the late 1800s spoils system. As I said, they not only want to bring in 50,000 to 60,000 political cronies for these positions, one of the first acts President Trump took was to get rid of the inspectors general. So you bring in your lackeys, you get rid of the independent inspectors general, and that just gives Elon Musk carte blanche to do what he is currently doing right now.

This has nothing to do with more government efficiency and everything to do with setting up the executive branch of the Federal Government to respond to the desires of the folks who were sitting right behind President Trump right down the hall at his inauguration—Elon Musk and the billionaire tech titans and others like them.

One of the things that the billionaires want are even more tax cuts. They don't like the fact that, as very wealthy people, they have to make a contribution to the public good or they want to reduce the contribution they have to make. We know that Republicans over in the House of Representatives have been down in Miami with President Trump planning exactly what form all these tax cuts will take.

Well, I don't think we really have to guess at it because we have seen this movie before in the first Trump administration. They enacted their trickle-down tax policy—big tax cuts for the wealthiest in America, tax cuts for big, very profitable corporations.

They made a lot of promises back then as to what the result would be. For example, they promised that giving tax cuts to very rich people and these corporations would end up generating so much additional economic activity that we would have recovered the cost of the revenues lost by giving those very wealthy people a tax cut. Not even close. Not even close. Deficits went way up.

As I said, I serve on the Senate Budget Committee. I asked experts from both parties who come testify on different issues about whether or not that tax cut “paid for itself,” and the answer is always no, because it didn't.

They also promised that these tax cuts to very wealthy people would end up generating additional activity at the corporate level. So the idea was

that you give a corporation a big tax cut, and that corporation will invest more of its savings that it has into plant and equipment and grow the economy.

Well, that didn't happen either. What happened was those companies engaged in huge stock buybacks, which disproportionately benefited these huge stockholders.

Do you know what else they promised? They promised that if you gave those corporations big tax cuts, they would use some of the savings to increase the wages for their employees. After all, profits at corporations are generated by the hard work of their employees. So the idea was, OK, you have more money, you got this big tax cut.

At that time, President Trump and his administration promised that workers would see an average of a \$4,000-a-year pay increase. It did not happen as promised.

So here we are again, and the Musk folks are going through Federal Agencies. Russ Vought is working to install himself again at OMB. And all of this is a prelude to another round of big tax cuts. Again, these are going to come at the expense of everybody else in America because even as we gather here, we have been seeing various plans come out of the House of Representatives Republican caucus. They are talking about dramatic cuts to Medicaid, which is a program that serves tens and tens of millions of people, including our seniors and people with disabilities. They are talking about dramatic cuts to food nutrition programs and many, many other cuts to important investments for working Americans across the country—all to help pay for or offset the costs of those tax cuts for the wealthy.

I think we also heard President Trump talk about all the money he is going to collect in tariffs. I want to say something about tariffs here because I support strategically targeted tariffs to protect critical American industries. But an across-the-board tariff on every single product being imported into the United States is nothing more than an increase in sales tax on every American. Americans pay that at the end of the day.

I can tell you that Elon Musk is not going to feel the impact of an increase in sales tax—the tariff increase on his bottom line, but working Americans will feel it around their kitchen tables. We will see grocery prices go up. We will see other prices go up.

In fact, if you think that this is somehow a freebie that is only paid by other countries, let's remember that last time, after China retaliated with their own tariffs, we the Congress passed a bill that provided \$28 billion of taxpayer money to farmers who were no longer able to sell as much product into China because of the retaliatory tariffs in China. We all end up paying. The American people ended up paying \$28 billion.

So don't tell us there is not a cost to consumers and American taxpayers for all of this. There is.

We will have a lot more to say in the coming days about some of the accounting tricks we are already hearing are going to be played through this tax cut process that will hide at least on paper the impact on the deficits. But right now, we are hearing about directing the Congressional Budget Office, which is our independent referee on budget issues, to assume that big tax cuts on top of the current law won't generate increased deficits. Of course they will. So more on that later.

Mr. President, I want to end just by talking a little bit about why this is such an important moment. I started by talking about the first 17 days. In that first 17 days, we have seen President Trump hand over to Elon Musk huge powers, and he is using that entree given by the President to conduct illegal operations across the Federal Government.

Courts are very busy today. It is like Whac-A-Mole—hearing cases, putting TROs, temporary restraining orders, on cases. But, as I said, they shouldn't have to do that. The courts shouldn't have to do that. You would think that Members of the Senate would stand up and respect the Constitution of the United States and article I.

What are my Republican colleagues going to do when we have a Democratic President that says: I get to cherry-pick the laws of the United States. I will just implement what I like and ignore what you passed into law.

That is what is at stake here. That is the danger when Russ Vought, who is going to be in the cockpit of OMB—the command and control center for the budget of the U.S. Government—refuses at a Budget Committee hearing to say he will comply with the law. It is no wonder that the Republicans did not want to hold a vote on Russ Vought in committee in public. They wanted to have it behind closed doors here in the Capitol. That is why Democrats on that committee didn't show up—because we think the public has a right to know what is at stake here, and that is what we are debating now here on the floor.

I urge my colleagues to recognize that the person that Donald Trump has nominated for this position is somebody who said he wanted to visit hardships on Federal employees throughout the Federal Government and a person who refused to say that he would follow the law.

Colleagues, I urge a “no” vote on Russ Vought to be the Director of the Office of Management and Budget.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The majority leader.

PRIME MINISTER NETANYAHU AND THE INTERNATIONAL CRIMINAL COURT

Mr. THUNE. Mr. President, earlier this morning, I met with Prime Minister Netanyahu here in the Capitol.

We had a good discussion about Israel's security and about the imperative of the return of the hostages, who have been held in Hamas captivity for well over a year. I enjoyed a candid, personal discussion with the Prime Minister and was pleased that both Republican and Democrat colleagues were later able to join for a bipartisan conversation.

After a number of my Democrat colleagues boycotted Prime Minister Netanyahu's address to Congress last year, it is good that Democrat leaders chose to attend this meeting. It would have been even better if Democrats had chosen to support the Illegitimate Court Counteraction Act, and we had been able to tell Prime Minister Netanyahu that the Senate had passed this legislation in response to the International Criminal Court's illegitimate targeting of Israeli leaders.

But, unfortunately, 2 weeks ago now, all of my Democrat colleagues—all of them save one—voted to block this legislation. The Democrat leader actually celebrated the fact that Democrats had blocked this legislation, even though allowing the ICC's rogue action to go unchecked could put not only Israelis but Americans in the ICC's crosshairs. That is right. Responding to the ICC's illegitimate targeting of Israeli leaders is not just about protecting our ally Israel; it is also about protecting our own citizens, our own servicemembers in particular.

Just a few years ago, the ICC opened an investigation into American servicemembers, despite the fact that, like Israel, the United States is not a party to the ICC and, thus, is not under its jurisdiction. It was good to hear this morning that President Trump will impose sanctions in response to the ICC's targeting of Israeli leaders and to protect American servicemembers.

I am grateful that we have a President who will stand up for our citizens and for our ally Israel, as he has made clear already, including with his decision to prohibit funding for the United Nations Relief and Works Agency. This agency not only has a history of anti-Israel sentiment but has a number of workers with ties to terrorist groups and actually, if you can believe this, had workers participate in the October 7, 2023, attack.

I was also pleased by President Trump's decision to withdraw the United States from the so-called Human Rights Council at the United Nations, which unfairly targets Israel.

And I am grateful that President Trump is taking a strong stand against one of the greatest enemies of peace in the Middle East—Iran. Iran has spent decades fomenting unrest and terror, including providing funding and training to Hamas, Hezbollah, and the Houthis; and the President's recent national security memorandum was a welcomed statement that Iranian aggression will no longer be tolerated.

The President has restored the maximum economic pressure campaign to

bankrupt Iran's nuclear ambitions and its terrorist proxies. It is good to see this kind of leadership.

I want to thank Prime Minister Netanyahu for meeting with us and assure him of the United States' continued support for Israel, and I look forward to working with President Trump to defend our allies and to protect our Nation.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

NOMINATION OF RUSSELL VOUGHT

Mr. REED. Mr. President, I rise today with grave concerns about the nomination of Russell Vought to be the Director of the Office of Management and Budget, or as it is more popularly known, OMB.

If confirmed, this would be Mr. Vought's second time in this role, and based on his past performance and his radical views, I believe it would be reckless to confirm his nomination.

Most Americans will be unfamiliar with OMB and the work that it does, but OMB touches every major government policy and every cent of Federal spending. OMB sits at the center of the budget process, overseeing everything from the initial development of Agency budget requests all the way through executing funding appropriated by Congress.

OMB also plays a critical role in the regulatory review process. It ensures that Agencies' reports, rules, and testimony are consistent with administrative policies.

All of that is to say that every regulation and every investment in the American people—our infrastructure, domestic manufacturing, small businesses, healthcare systems—you name it—goes through OMB. That role as a central clearinghouse of all executive branch spending and regulation comes with significant authority and requires a high level of trust, as well as fidelity to the Constitution and to the law.

Unfortunately, the Trump administration's OMB has already broken that trust with Congress and the American people and the Constitution.

While not yet confirmed as OMB Director, Mr. Vought's influence over the Agency can be felt even now because, in part, he played a central role in developing the Trump administration's policy agenda in Project 2025 and also because of the way he ran the Agency as Director and Deputy Director during the first Trump administration.

As Senator PETERS, the ranking member of the Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee, pointed out during Mr. Vought's confirmation hearing, there are numerous examples of OMB flout-

ing the law during Mr. Vought's previous tenure.

The nonpartisan Government Accountability Office found that OMB broke the law eight times under Mr. Vought's leadership by directing certain Federal Agencies to continue to operate during the 2018-2019 shutdown.

GAO also found that under his leadership, OMB violated the law by withholding vital security assistance to Ukraine that Congress explicitly provided, putting our national security at risk.

The Trump-appointed inspector general for the Department of Housing and Urban Development found that OMB, under Mr. Vought's leadership, inappropriately delayed disaster relief funding for Puerto Rico following the devastation of Hurricane Maria.

With the level of natural disasters that are unfolding, no Senator—Republican or Democrat—should empower someone who delays and denies disaster relief.

This record is troubling, and it has set the stage for the actions taken by the Trump administration in its first few days in office.

Last week, the Acting OMB Director issued a memorandum instructing Federal Agencies to freeze funding that had been authorized and appropriated by Congress until it could be determined that the programs aligned with Donald Trump's ideological views—views espoused in Project 2025—again, a manifesto that Mr. Vought helped write.

That means that President Trump's OMB, just days into a new administration, has wasted no time in usurping Congress's congressional authority over government spending by withholding funding previously approved by Congress on a bipartisan basis. This illegal action, initiated through OMB, demonstrates just how important and powerful the OMB Director position is.

With Mr. Vought at the helm, everyone should fear that OMB will zealously pursue a radical agenda that includes withholding funding from Americans based on their religion, their thoughts, their appearance, or political affiliation.

In evaluating Federal spending for ideological purity under the Federal funding freeze, the Trump administration cast a wide net, scrutinizing funds for grants for law enforcement, veterans care, disaster relief and mitigation, and even the 988 suicide prevention lifeline that has proven to be extremely effective in dealing with the epidemic of suicide we have seen in the nation over the last few years.

Even for a time, Medicaid funding was held up. And that funding is not just for low-income Americans. It is one of the major sources of funding for nursing homes throughout the country that are taking care of the parents of working men and women all over this country. To shut those funds off means literally to push those people out of those homes.