

I think more egregious than anything, she has shown a repeated preference for our adversaries over the intelligence community and the United States of America. Most notably, a surprise trip to visit the now-ousted President of Syria, Bashar al-Assad.

Imagine the decision making that goes into planning a secret trip to visit a man who has killed thousands of his countrymen, thousands of relatives of Michiganders that I represent; a man who we know has used chemical weapons, violating international law, devastating communities; a man who has seemingly sat aside as insurgent groups, terrorist groups took territory in his area and allowed them to project attacks into neighboring states and to plot against the U.S. homeland.

She makes the decision to go and visit this man, throw flowers at his feet, do public TV with him, go publicly and show her support. Now, I don't know if she is just deeply naive. I don't know if in some twisted way, she thought that this was her way of being helpful. But whether she did it out of naivete or she did it knowing what this man has done and the implications of her actions, either way shows a complete lack of judgment.

The same goes for her seeming glorification of Vladimir Putin. It is hard to understand, coming from the country that defeated the Soviet Union in the Cold War, that we would put a woman in charge of our entire intelligence community who has shown over and over repeated interest in Vladimir Putin, taking his side of the argument, wondering what he has done right and our intelligence community has done wrong.

Can you imagine what it feels like to be a member of the intelligence community right now, with everything going on, with all of the discrediting of what they have done and what they do every single day, and now this woman is going to be in charge of this Agency? It is an insult to people who have dedicated their lives and put themselves in harm's way, to have her confirmed into this position.

Now, we have watched her flip-flop on a bunch of issues, right? Issues that Democrats and Republicans have concerns with. You know, she used to have a lot of concern about what is called section 702 of the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act. She fought against it. Now she is somehow for it. I am not saying people can't change, but I am just saying someone who doesn't have the backbone to stand up and be clear with their principles—I am having a hard time imagining them lead in the heat of the moment, when you are in the Situation Room and consequential decisions are being made.

I think the feeling that I have about where we are in this country right now is that we are sort of in this fever dream. There is this race to discredit, to attack, to cut. And, look, I will be the first person to say that there is fat on the bone in the Federal Govern-

ment. I worked in the Federal Government. There are plenty of things that can be reformed in the Federal Government. But the double whammy of attacking the people who keep us safe every day, of trying to push them out—I just had a Republican Member on my way here say: Hey, I just heard about what is going on at CIA. Are they trying to get everyone to leave? What about people who are in sensitive positions?

Great question. But the other punch is to put someone in charge of the intelligence community that has such disdain for our allies, for our intelligence officers, and such love for our adversaries.

So I urge all of my Republican colleagues to search their soul. Play the long game. Don't live in fear of the Trump administration and Donald Trump specifically. You know in your heart that these people aren't qualified and that the life and limb of American citizens is in their hands.

So I urge all of my colleagues to vote against Tulsi Gabbard. I will be voting against her here later today.

I hope that we as American citizens can come up for air from this fever dream and remember that reform of the Federal Government does not mean slashing the people that keep us safe every day.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Alabama.

KIDS OFF SOCIAL MEDIA ACT

Mrs. BRITT. Mr. President, I rise today to discuss an epidemic that is affecting our Nation's youth, a crisis each and every parent should be concerned about and one that so many parents I know already are.

Our kids' worsening mental health is an emergency, and it is an emergency clearly and undeniably linked to social media. Emergency room visits among adolescents for anxiety, mood disorders, and self-harm have all risen dramatically in the years since social media apps exploded onto the scene.

Over that same time period and during the second decade of this century, rates of depression amongst teenagers more than doubled. By 2019, 20 percent of teenagers agreed with the notion that "life often feels meaningless"—almost a 100-percent increase from a decade earlier.

According to the CDC, in 2021, and buckle up for this, one in three high school—young women said she actually considered death by suicide; 25 percent of teenage girls made a plan to do so; 9 percent of high schoolers and 13 percent of teenage girls actually attempted death by suicide.

As a mom, that is beyond horrifying. I worry for my own kids. I worry for their friends. And as a Senator, I worry about the future of the next generation of Americans.

To make matters worse, social media companies know the harm their platforms create. Instagram's parent company, Meta, conducted internal re-

search that showed that one-third of teenage girls who use the app report: It makes them feel worse, but they cannot stop.

And while social media companies have taken some steps, it is clear that there is work for Congress to do. The last time a U.S. President signed a major piece of legislation addressing children and the internet was—wait for it—1998.

So you look. Almost 30 years ago, the Children's Online Privacy Protection Act was signed into law. For reference, at the time that the law was signed, MySpace didn't even exist.

It is time for an update, and there is a clear place to start. Studies have shown the most damaging time for an adolescent to use social media is during their preteen years. And the 1998 law tried to address that. The law says that websites and other online services cannot collect personal information from children under 13 years old without parental consent. Now, the catch is that those websites have to know that the child is under 13.

The standard minimum age for social media platforms is 13. But current law creates an obvious incentive for companies not to verify whether their users are old enough to be on the app. And because social media companies have to know that a child is under 13 for the law to apply, they simply choose not to verify this information.

Look, anti-child-sex-abuse organization Thorn actually conducted a study in 2021 that showed that 49 percent of respondents between the age of 9 and 12 years old said that they had used Instagram; 52 percent said that they had used Facebook; 58 percent said that they had used Snapchat.

And it was just last week, in a Senate Judiciary Hearing, where I heard not one but two parents tell about their painful story where their children had died of fentanyl poisoning from a pill that they had bought on Snapchat, thinking it was something else. They thought they bought a Percocet; they thought they bought an oxycodone. It was laced with fentanyl, and now they are dead.

Sixty-nine percent of these people in this survey, between 9 and 12 years old, said that they had used TikTok.

The age limits social media companies claim they have mean absolutely nothing. That is why I introduced the Kids Off Social Media Act, alongside Senators TED CRUZ, CHRIS MURPHY, and BRIAN SCHATZ. The four of us approached this not as Democrats or Republicans, not as someone who sits on the right or the left, but as four concerned parents that are raising teenagers right now and dealing with this issue.

Our bill would set a minimum age of 13 years old for social media platforms, but that is not the only thing that it would do. The Kids Off Social Media Act would also prevent platforms from feeding targeted content picked by an algorithm to users under the age of 17.

For anyone who is curious about why that is in the bill, all you have to do is ask a teenager, especially a teenage girl. Former U.S. Surgeon General Vivek Murthy wrote that nearly half of all adolescents say that social media makes them feel worse about their bodies. That doesn't seem like an accident.

If you read—and many people have—Jonathan Haidt's book "The Anxious Generation," you will learn that these apps use algorithms that "home in on and amplify girls' desires to be beautiful in socially prescribed ways, which include being thin."

Once that starts, once the algorithm starts feeding teenage girls images of increasingly thin and unhealthy women, the vicious cycle begins, and those girls end up finding images or videos promoting anorexia and/or, as Haidt says:

Emaciated young women urging their followers to try extreme diets like the "corpse bride" diet or the water-only diet.

These algorithms on social media platforms are not just leading our daughters to starve themselves; they are leading them to torture themselves as well.

By turning the Kids Off Social Media Act into law, we can put a stop to this. I am so grateful that Senator TED CRUZ, from the great State of Texas, prioritized our bill in the Commerce Committee, and I am sure that parents everywhere are grateful too. After all, parents overwhelmingly support our mission.

A survey conducted by the Count on Mothers group showed that over 90 percent of mothers agree that there should be a minimum age of 13 on social media platforms, and 87 percent of mothers agreed that social media companies should not be allowed to use personalized algorithms to deliver content to our children.

If there has ever been a theme of the legislation that my colleagues and I have pursued so far this Congress, it is keeping American families and children safe. The Laken Riley Act will help keep kids safe from criminal illegal aliens. The Halt Fentanyl Act, which I spoke about on this very floor just last week, will help kids be safe from deadly fentanyl and fentanyl poisons. And the Kids Off Social Media Act will help keep kids safe from mental health effects that these platforms and their algorithms produce.

There is nothing more important we can do as a body than protect the people we serve. So let's do it. Let's get the Kids Off Social Media Act through Congress and to the President's desk. There are parents across this country that are counting on us to step up to put the proper guardrails in place so their children can be safe and their children have an opportunity to both explore and to succeed.

All of our country's children are free to pursue their own American dream, just as our generations were, and this will enable them to do that.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Vermont.

TRUMP ADMINISTRATION

Mr. SANDERS. Mr. President, we are living in an extremely dangerous time. Future generations will look back at this moment—what we do right now—and remember whether we had the courage to defend our democracy against the growing threats of oligarchy and authoritarianism. They will remember whether we stood with President Abraham Lincoln at Gettysburg who, in 1863, looking out over a battlefield where thousands of people had died—thousands of soldiers died in the fight against slavery—and he stated that "this Nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom, and that a government of the people, by the people, for the people shall not perish from the earth."

Do we stand with Lincoln's vision of America, or do we sit idly by and allow this country to move into a new vision, and that is a government of the billionaire class, by the billionaire class, for the billionaire class?

But it is not just oligarchy that we should be concerned about, not just the reality that today three people own more wealth than the bottom half of American society, 170 million—three people, more wealth than the bottom 17 million Americans. It is not just that the gap between the very, very rich and everyone else is growing wider. And it is not just that we have more income and wealth inequality today than we have ever had.

On top of all of that, the reality is that today we are moving rapidly under President Trump toward authoritarianism, more and more power resting in fewer and fewer hands.

Mr. President, as we speak, right now, Elon Musk, the wealthiest man on the planet, is attempting to dismantle major Agencies of the Federal Government which are designed to protect the needs of working families and the disadvantaged. These Agencies were created by the U.S. Congress, and it is Congress's responsibility to maintain them, to reform them, or to end them. It is not Mr. Musk's responsibility. What Mr. Musk is doing is patently illegal and unconstitutional and must be ended.

Mr. President, 2 weeks ago, President Trump attempted to suspend all Federal grants and loans, an outrageous and clearly unconstitutional act. As I hope every sixth grader—every kid in the sixth grade—in this country knows, under the Constitution and our form of government, the President can recommend legislation, he can support legislation, he can veto legislation, but he does not have the power to unilaterally terminate funding passed by the Congress. It is Congress—the House and the Senate—that controls the purse strings.

But in this move toward authoritarianism, it is not just the Congress that is being attacked; it is our judiciary.

This weekend, the Vice President of the United States—a graduate of Yale Law School who clerked for a Supreme Court Justice—said:

Judges aren't allowed to control the executive's legitimate power.

Really? I thought that one of the major functions of the Federal courts was to interpret our Constitution and, when appropriate, serve as a check on the unconstitutional power of the Executive. That is not just what I believe; that is what I suspect every legal scholar and lawyer in America understands to be the case.

Further, Mr. Musk, meanwhile, has proposed that the "worst 1 percent of appointed judges be fired every year," and he demanded the impeachment of judges who have blocked him from accessing sensitive Treasury Department files. No doubt, under Mr. Musk's rule, it will be him and his billionaire friends who determine who the worst judges are.

And no, Mr. Musk, I must tell you: You don't impeach judges who rule against you here in the United States. You may or may not know this, Mr. Musk, but under the U.S. Constitution, we have a separation of powers, brilliantly crafted by the Founding Fathers of this country in the 1770s, and it has worked pretty well throughout our country's history. We have an executive branch, we have a legislative branch, and we have a judiciary.

What we are seeing now is not just an organized attack on the power of the Congress and the responsibility of the judiciary; Mr. Trump and his friends are not just trying to undermine two of the three pillars of our constitutional government—the Congress and the courts; they are also going after the media in a way that we have never seen in the modern history of this country.

Trust me that every Member of Congress will tell you that the people working in the media and media organizations are not perfect. We have all had our experiences with the media. Media, like everything else, makes mistakes every day. But I do hope that every Member of Congress understands that you cannot have a functioning democracy, that you cannot have a free-flow of information, that you cannot have the pursuit of truth without an independent press—a press not intimidated by Presidents of the United States but a press who writes it and sees it the way they understand it to be.

In that regard, I want to mention to my colleagues what President Trump has done just in recent months.

Mr. Trump has sued ABC and received a \$15 million settlement. He has sued Meta, the parent company of Facebook and Instagram, and received a \$25 million settlement. He has sued CBS and its parent company, Paramount, and is right now in negotiations over a settlement. He has sued the Des Moines Register for poll results that he didn't like, and his FCC is now threatening to investigate PBS and