

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

NPR—major news outlets in our country.

In other words, we have a President of the United States who is using his incredible power and the power of his Agencies to go after media in this country that are saying and doing things he does not like. How are we going to have an independent media if journalists are looking over their shoulders, fearful that their reporting will trigger a lawsuit from the most powerful Executive in the world?

In the midst of all of this, I think that now is the time to ask a very, very simple question, something, I think, that is on the minds of millions of Americans: What do Mr. Musk, Mr. Trump, and their fellow billionaires really want? It is not really taking over Greenland or the Panama Canal and all of that stuff. The real question is, What is their endgame? What is their goal? What are they striving for?

In my view, the answer really is not complicated. It is not novel. It is not new. It is, in fact, exactly what ruling classes throughout history have always wanted and have always believed to be their right—their right—and that is more power for themselves, more control for themselves, and more wealth for themselves, and in their pursuit of more power, more control, and more wealth, they are determined to not allow democracy and the rule of law to get in their way.

For Mr. Musk and his fellow oligarchs, the needs, the concerns, the pain, the ideas, the dreams of ordinary people are simply an impediment to what they, the oligarchs, are entitled to, and that is really what they believe. They are entitled to all of the wealth and the power they have, and they are determined to stop anyone who gets in their way.

This process—this phenomenon—that is going on right now is not the first time that we have seen this in our country's history. As I think many Americans understand, in pre-revolutionary America—before the 1770s, before the creation of the United States and the writing of our Constitution—the ruling class of that time governed through a doctrine called the divine right of Kings—the belief that the King of England was an agent of God, that God appointed him, and that he was not to be questioned by mere mortal human beings. He was appointed by God.

In modern times, we no longer have the divine right of Kings. What we now have is an ideology being pushed by the oligarchs which says that, as a very, very wealthy group of people—often self-made, often the masters of revolutionary new technology—and as high IQ individuals, it is their absolute right to rule. In other words, the oligarchs of today are our modern-day Kings.

It is not just power that they want. Despite the incredible wealth they currently have, they want more and more and more. Their greed has no end. Today, Mr. Musk is worth \$402 billion,

Mr. Zuckerberg is worth \$252 billion, and Mr. Bezos is worth \$249 billion. With a combined wealth of \$903 billion, these three people own more wealth than the bottom half of American society—170 million Americans—and, not surprisingly, since Trump was elected, their wealth has soared. Musk has become \$138 billion richer, Zuckerberg has become \$49 billion richer, and Bezos has become \$28 billion richer since election day in November.

Meanwhile, while the very rich become much richer, 60 percent of Americans live paycheck to paycheck, 85 million Americans are uninsured or underinsured in terms of healthcare, 25 percent of our seniors in this country are trying to survive on \$15,000 a year or less, 800,000 Americans are homeless, we have the highest rate of childhood poverty of almost any major country on Earth, and real inflation-adjusted wages for the average American worker has not gone up in 50 years.

Does anyone really think that the oligarchs give a damn about ordinary Americans? Trust me, they don't. Musk's decision to dismember USAID means that tens of thousands of the poorest people in this world will either go hungry or die of preventable diseases—tens of thousands of people. But it is not just USAID and what is happening abroad. Here in the United States—mark my words—if we do not stop them, they will soon be going after the healthcare, nutrition, housing, and educational programs that protect the most vulnerable people in our country—all so that they can raise the money they need to provide huge tax breaks for themselves and for other billionaires.

As modern-day Kings who believe they have the absolute right to rule, they will sacrifice without hesitation the well-being of working people in order to protect their power and their privileges.

Further, they will use the enormous media operations they own to deflect attention away from the impact of their policies while they entertain us to death. Mr. Musk owns Twitter. Mr. Zuckerberg owns Meta, which includes Facebook and Instagram. Mr. Bezos owns the Washington Post and Twitch.

Further, they and their fellow oligarchs will continue within our corrupt campaign finance system to spend huge amounts of money to buy politicians in both major political parties.

The bottom line: The oligarchs, with their unlimited amounts of money, are waging a war on the working class of our country, and it is a war they are intent on winning.

Now, I am not going to kid anybody. The problems that our country faces right now are enormously serious, and they are not easy to solve. Our economy is rigged—the rich get richer, the poor get poorer, and the middle class struggles. Our campaign finance system is totally corrupt. Billionaires can now pour as much money as they want into both political parties. And climate

change is ravaging our country and the world with unprecedented levels of extreme weather disturbances, among many other crises our country faces.

In the midst of all of these crises, this is what I do know, and this is what I do believe, and that is that the worst fear of the ruling class of our country is that the American people, whether they are Black or White or Latino, whether they are urban or rural, whether they are young or old, gay or straight—whatever—the fear of the ruling class is that the American people will come together to demand a government that represents all of us, not just the people on top.

Their oligarchs' nightmare is that we will not allow ourselves to be divided up by race, religion, sexual orientation, or country of origin and will come together and have the courage to take them on.

Will this struggle be easy? No, it will not, and one of the reasons that it will not be easy is that the ruling class of this country will constantly remind us that they have the power. They control the government. They own the media.

But our job right now, in these difficult times, is to go back and remember the great struggles and sacrifices that millions of Americans have waged over the centuries in difficult times to create a more democratic, just, and humane society. Think about all of the sacrifices and the struggles that Americans went through to create a more democratic, just, humane society, and think about trying to put yourselves where they were in those times of crisis.

Think about what was being said at those times. Think about the 1770s. Overthrowing the King of England—the most powerful person on Earth—the British Empire, to create a new nation and have self-rule here in the Colonies—impossible. So many people thought it could not be done.

Establishing universal suffrage, the right of all people, whether they were wealthy or not, to vote—imagine that. What a radical idea: extending the right to vote to poor people—impossible. It couldn't be done. But it was done.

Ending slavery and segregation, taking on all of the power of the slaveholders—impossible. But it was done.

Granting workers the right to form unions and ending child labor, taking on the power of big business—impossible. But it was done.

Giving women control over their own bodies, taking on sexism, taking on the powers that be—it couldn't be done—impossible. But it was done.

Passing legislation to establish Social Security, Medicare, Medicaid, a minimum wage, clean air and water standards—impossible. It couldn't be done. But it was done.

In other words, I think back to what Nelson Mandela told us, and he said: Everything is impossible until it is done.

So in these difficult days, when we find ourselves arrayed against the wealthiest people in the world, the most powerful people in the world, people who want to expand the power of the oligarchy, people who want to move us toward authoritarianism—I know. I know that people get discouraged that we can't take them on; that we cannot create a government that works for all and not just the few; that we cannot do what every other major country on Earth does—guarantee healthcare to all people as a human right—that we cannot raise the minimum wage to a living wage so that tens of millions of people do not earn starvation wages; that we cannot make sure that all of our kids get the quality education that they deserve; that we can't expand Social Security or lower the poverty rate among seniors. I know that, in this moment, people say: Well, that is an impossible dream; it can't be done.

But I think, if you look back on American history, you will find that, in very difficult and dark days, when people came together, they did the impossible.

This ain't going to be easy. We are taking on enormously powerful people who really do not believe in democracy or the rule of law. But if we stand together, we are going to win this fight. And not only will we save American democracy; we are going to create the kind of Nation that I think most of us know we should become.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Delaware.

NOMINATION OF TULSI GABBARD

Mr. COONS. Mr. President, trust—trust is at the very center of our national security: the trust that we share with allies and partners around the world; the trust that the American people have in us and in our armed services and in our intelligence services; the trust that vital allies have that causes them to share with us information about threats, challenges, opportunities. That is the very foundation of our national security.

And today, I rise to warn my colleagues about the risks to our national security posed by the nomination of Tulsi Gabbard to be the Director of National Intelligence.

As ranking member of the Senate Defense Appropriations Subcommittee, I have a significant involvement in our Nation's intelligence apparatus. And over the course of the confirmation hearings and the debate here on the floor about former Congresswoman Gabbard, I have concluded that she has an alarming record, revealed more fully in her confirmation hearings but also in a review of her speeches, her travels, her positions.

As a Democrat, as a Congresswoman, as a candidate for President, as a supporter of President Trump, she has gone quite a distance. She has defended Edward Snowden. Snowden is widely viewed by folks in our intelligence

community, our national security apparatus, our Armed Forces, and many here as a traitor who betrayed some of the most important secrets that are critical to keeping the United States secure.

She would not, in her confirmation hearings, answer the question: Is Edward Snowden a traitor?

Ms. Gabbard bemoaned the rise of HTS in Syria, which recently overthrew the brutal dictator Bashar al-Assad, without mentioning the fall of Assad. She talked about how tragic it was that HTS overran Damascus, without mentioning the side benefit of the fall of a brutal dictator. And in her confirmation hearings, she repeatedly dodged pointed and relevant questions about FISA and section 702, key tools for our intelligence community.

All of this is in keeping with a long-standing record as an apologist for authoritarians and even enemies of the United States. She has repeatedly blamed the United States and NATO for Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022.

And I will tell you, as someone who is about to go to the Munich Security Conference this weekend with a broad and bipartisan delegation from this body and from the House: I will never forget being at the Munich Security Conference just before Russia invaded Ukraine broad spectrum. They had been in eastern Ukraine at that point for years. They had occupied Crimea and then launched a war into the Donetsk, the Donbas, the eastern part of Ukraine.

But it was just days after the Munich Security Conference, in February 2022, that tens of thousands of Russian troops—whole divisions—poured over the line in a broad-spectrum invasion that included brutality against civilians, bombardment of the entire nation—ultimately, cruel acts of violence against women and children, fully documented in the press and courts around the world.

And yet Ms. Gabbard blamed the United States and NATO for provoking this invasion by Russia of a sovereign nation—a nation where the United States, in writing, guaranteed its territorial sovereignty in the 1994 agreement that led to them giving up their nuclear weapons.

Ms. Gabbard visited Syria and met with Bashar al-Assad for several days, in 2017, and relied on pro-Assad sources to cast doubt on accounts of his use of chemical weapons against his own people.

She has a long history of repeating pro-Kremlin talking points and has become a favorite on Russian state media. She appears frequently because she frequently is attacking the United States in Russian state media.

Mr. President, this body will all too soon take up the confirmation of Tulsi Gabbard. We should not proceed. We should not vote for her. Our Nation faces massive threats that are growing day by day. Our Nation is facing

threats around the world—from North Korea and Iran, from China and from Russia—and we need an intelligence service equipped to respond to these challenges.

Can we trust Tulsi Gabbard to lead our intelligence services and to respond to these threats? I cannot. We cannot, and we should not. This body should not vote to confirm Tulsi Gabbard as the next Director of National Intelligence.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Democratic whip.

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, do you remember where you were on September 11? Most Americans do. I do. I was right outside that door. I was in a meeting at 9 in the morning. And as we had the meeting, we looked down the Mall. We were watching a little television set, and we saw these planes flying into skyscrapers in New York.

Nobody could quite understand what was going on. First, we thought it was an accident, as most people probably felt the same way. Then, when the second plane hit, we knew there was more.

Then, there came a moment when somebody said: Look down the Mall.

We looked down the Mall and saw black smoke billowing across the Mall here in Washington from the Pentagon, because a plane had crashed into the Pentagon.

And there was this moment where people didn't know which way to turn, where to get answers, what was going on. Someone came racing into the room and said: Evacuate the Capitol Building. Another plane is coming directed toward this building.

We all raced out down the steps and stood on the lawn outside, didn't know which way to turn, had no idea what was going on.

Tourists were coming up to me because I had a suit and tie on and saying: Where are we supposed to go?

I told them where the Metro stations were and pointed in several directions.

That is a day you won't forget.

Most of us, I am sure, felt at that point that we had to figure out what happened first and to stop it from ever happening again.

So where did we turn? First, we turned to law enforcement, for obvious reasons. That is who you call—9-1-1—to see if they can give you any information, give you any advice, keep you safe.

But also in this town, you think: We hope our intelligence Agencies, the ones that collect information, know who those people were so we can stop them from ever doing this again.

Those intelligence Agencies are critical, not just for the security of this country but the survival of this country.

In the wake of September 11, the most historic terrorist attack in our Nation's history, we learned the hard way that Agencies within the intelligence community need to be good, effective, and coordinate what they are doing. So we embarked on several