

projects—and one that I was a small part of—in rewriting the laws creating intelligence Agencies and making sure that each of our intelligence Agencies, as good as they are, speak to one another.

It seems so obvious. They need to coordinate. But they had what they called smokestacks where they kept their information to themselves and didn't share it with other Agencies. Well, that changed. It changed the whole attitude towards intelligence and coordinating information.

We created the Office of the Director of National Intelligence. It oversees 18 different intelligence Agencies that span the CIA, Defense Department, State Department, Energy Department, and others. It is now essential to modern safety in America. Yet the President, Donald Trump, has selected a person to run this critical Agency, coordinating 18 different intelligence Agencies, who has little or no experience leading this critical American security apparatus. Her name is Tulsi Gabbard.

During President Trump's first term, he made clear of his fondness for certain leaders in the world that were controversial, such as Viktor Orban of Hungary, Vladimir Putin of Russia, and Kim Jong Un of North Korea. So he ends up picking a person to run his intelligence network who shares a similarly terrible judgment on critical leaders.

Tulsi Gabbard, a former Congresswoman, is infamous for spending time with despots and autocratic leaders of the world, including Vladimir Putin of Russia and Bashar al-Assad of Syria, and traitors to the United States like Edward Snowden.

Her fondness for these oppressive, anti-democratic regimes does not go unreciprocated. They know her, they like her, and they say quite a few things about her. Let me show you one of these posters.

Hosts of Russian state media have cheered her nomination. Russia is cheering her nomination as Director of National Intelligence because it will "dismantle America." Some on Russian state channels have even referred to her affectionately as their "girlfriend." Russian state TV also called her a Russian "comrade" in Trump's emerging Cabinet. A pro-Putin propagandist, Vladimir Solovyov, once called Gabbard "our friend." Later, when asked if she was "some sort of Russian agent?" he replied, of course, "yes."

What is going on here? This woman wants to head up the intelligence Agencies, and she is being cheered on by the Russians?

In a glowing profile in a Russian state newspaper, it said of Tulsi Gabbard, "The C.I.A. and F.B.I. are trembling," noting that Ukrainians consider her "an agent of the Russian state."

Imagine that—the person tapped to head America's intelligence commu-

nity being called a puppet of an adversary's country by that very same country. It seems too ridiculous to be true, but I am sorry to say that it is.

To merely join America's intelligence community, never mind lead it, candidates have to go through a vigorous background check and earn a security clearance. I will just tell you that based on what she has done since serving in Congress, she could not pass a routine security clearance. If Tulsi Gabbard were applying for an entry-level position, her relationship with Russia alone would disqualify her for the job. Why, then, would we trust our entire intelligence network to the No. 1 friend of our No. 1 enemy? Why, then, would we want to put that sort of person in charge?

Given the examples that abound of Tulsi Gabbard proving publicly, shamelessly, and carelessly her sympathies for nations that undermine U.S. interests and security, that is unexplainable and irresponsible.

Perhaps this is summed up best by one of her people who worked with her for years. Here is what he had to say, according to *The Atlantic* magazine:

She was willing to do or say whatever. It was [like] she had [absolutely] no moral compass.

And to head up all of our intelligence Agencies? It is as controversial as choosing Kash Patel to head up our Federal Bureau of Investigation—no experience which qualifies him, nor does she have any experience either.

You see, our allies depend on us as much as we depend on them for security and to share critical intelligence. Now they are looking at us in disbelief that we would let someone like Tulsi Gabbard, with such an appalling record, anywhere near the leadership of the intelligence community.

Intelligence professionals from Canada and the United Kingdom—members of the critical Five Eyes intelligence alliance along with the United States, Australia, and New Zealand—have expressed concern about even working with her if she is in charge. In order to keep Americans safe throughout the world, we need to have the trust of our allies and their cooperation.

This position she is aspiring to at DNI does not just impact the collection of intelligence; it also impacts the action taken on it. Because of this, I have great concern about the impact Tulsi Gabbard's confirmation would have on our support of Ukraine in defending itself against Russia.

Since Russia's full-scale invasion, Gabbard has taken Russia's side many times, claiming, in reference to Ukraine and Russia, "Russia had legitimate security concerns." The words of Tulsi Gabbard. And then she blames NATO, our alliance—one of the most significant security alliances in the world.

Let me be clear. Supporting democracies has not historically been a partisan matter. For example, contrast Tulsi Gabbard's nonsense with former

President Ronald Reagan's clear-eyed understanding of the danger of the communist Russia empire.

Nearly 40 years ago, Ronald Reagan stood at the Brandenburg Gate in West Berlin and famously challenged the Soviet Union to "tear down this wall." Reagan understood the true nature and threat of the Russians.

We have all seen the horrific costs of Russia's war in Ukraine and increasing attacks on NATO allies. Is there a deal to be made to end this war? Perhaps. Doing so must be with the best intelligence available, a clear eye about who we are negotiating with and for, and long-term guarantees of the security of Ukraine, of Europe, and the transatlantic alliance.

One would think any American President navigating such difficult waters would want a top official to serve as the head of National Intelligence. Tulsi Gabbard fails that test. She would not be qualified for an entry-level position within the intelligence community and is certainly not qualified to lead it, period.

Some of the President's Cabinet nominees are hard to imagine because they are so unqualified, but for the position of Director of National Intelligence, putting someone unqualified in charge is not funny at all; it is life-or-death dangerous.

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

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

The Senator from Vermont.

UNITED STATES AGENCY FOR INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Mr. WELCH. Mr. President, I want to speak about what Elon Musk is doing to destroy the U.S. Agency for International Development.

Here is what is happening. Mr. Musk—of course an unelected billionaire who knows really nothing and cares less about how the Federal Government works—is demolishing one of the most important Agencies we have for countering Russia, China authoritarianism, and anti-American extremism around the world, all being done in the name of "efficiency."

One former State Department official said:

Disbanding U.S. aid is the strategic equivalent of scuttling the Navy.

Mr. Musk bragged about feeding USAID into a wood chipper. What he is really doing, after locking USAID's staff out of their offices and blocking their access to email, is destroying the careers of thousands of professionals who administer programs that are critical to U.S. national security, not to mention the well-being of their families.

I want to acknowledge something. Many Americans ask me and they ask

the Presiding Officer, why should we send aid to other countries when we have so many problems here at home? And we do have problems at home, so that is a legitimate question. In my view, we haven't done enough in Congress to solve our own problems—the cost of food, housing, healthcare, or dealing with drug addiction, gun violence, homelessness, the challenges facing our farmers and small businesses, and the devastation to communities from wildfires, flooding, droughts, and other national disasters.

Both parties have an obligation to address these issues, and our citizens do come first, but we also have a role in the world that is absolutely vital to our own national security.

There is a sense—magnified by a lot of the misinformation Mr. Musk and others put out—that foreign aid is this huge component of our budget really compromising our ability to meet those needs that affect all of our citizens here in the country. People think it is like 25 or 30 percent of the budget. Foreign aid is less than 1 percent of our budget. So as a percentage, it is really quite modest. Incidentally, not that we necessarily want to compare, but as a per capita spending portion of our budget, what we spend in the United States on foreign aid is a lot less than our European allies and Japan. So it is modest but significant.

But even at this less than 1 percent, the foreign aid budget is very important to America, and it serves our national interest. Why is that? Our USAID program started 64 years ago under then-President John F. Kennedy.

He asked the question:

Is a foreign aid program really necessary?

His answer:

The answer is that there is no escaping our obligations: our moral obligations as a wise leader and good neighbor in the interdependent community of free nations . . . and our political obligations as the single largest counter to the adversaries of freedom.

There were adversaries then, and there are adversaries today.

President Kennedy went on to say:

To fail to meet those obligations now would be disastrous and, in the long run, more expensive. For widespread poverty and chaos lead to a collapse of existing political and social structures which would inevitably invite the advance of totalitarianism into every weak and unstable area. Thus our own security would be endangered and our own prosperity imperiled. A program of assistance to the underdeveloped nations must continue because the nation's interest—

That is, our Nation's interest—

and the cause of political freedom require it.

The words of John F. Kennedy.

But fast-forward. Only 5 months ago, George Bush's Secretary of State, Condoleezza Rice said about the need for continued U.S. engagement in the world:

[T]he United States has got to make both a statement and a reality of America's willingness to remain engaged in the world, because great powers don't mind their own business. And if we don't shape the inter-

national environment, then others will. And they are others that we do not want to cede the territory for our values and our interests, powers like China and powers like Russia.

The words of former Secretary Condoleezza Rice.

So the question that we need to answer today is not why we spend money on foreign aid. I don't believe we need to answer that because I think President Kennedy and Secretary Rice explained that very well. The question is, How can we make the best use of the 1 percent of the Federal budget to protect our interests in an increasingly unstable and dangerous world?

As Secretary Rice said, "if we don't shape the international environment, then others will"—because no matter how many times President Trump and Elon Musk say "America first, isolationism," this is a decision that each one of us in the U.S. Senate must make. Isolationism is not an option. What does happen in Central America, in Africa, in the Middle East, in Asia does threaten our own security, far more so today than in President Kennedy's time.

Our Secretary of State, Marco Rubio—a valued former colleague, someone we are all quite proud of—has said this administration is not going to eliminate foreign aid and that many of USAID's programs will continue. He and others in the administration have called what the administration is doing a "review."

Let's talk about that a minute. If this were a review, I would be all for it. We should always be looking at the best way and the best use of taxpayer dollars to get the best outcomes from the programs we fund. I have been calling for a review of FEMA, an organization that was very helpful to Vermont to recover from the floods of 2023 and 2024. In my view, we should be doing a review of every Agency—from food stamps to the Pentagon. So if it were a review, I would be all in favor of it. But it is not a review. It is a frontal assault to destroy USAID.

Just consider: Emails go out telling people not to go to work. Emails go out telling people in foreign lands they have got to come home. Websites are closed down. Work is stopped in its tracks. That is not a review. That is a decision. It is an action to dismantle and destroy an organization. By the end of the so-called 90-day review, people in Africa working for USAID will be in the United States. There won't be anything left.

And the administration really makes no secret about it. It acknowledged that it has decided to reduce the number of USAID staff from 14,000 to a few hundred. That is not a review; it is a decision.

Many of us know a lot about USAID. Bring on reform, yes. But this organization has helped our country by doing good work in other countries. Many of us have met USAID staff at posts overseas, often in some of the world's most

dangerous places. The folks in that organization are serious, purposeful, and patriots. They put their lives at risk every day, and they don't have body armor.

If the goal really is reform of USAID, then I say to Secretary of State Rubio and I say to my Republican colleagues: I want to work with you. Anything we can do to make any program that we are responsible for better, I am absolutely all in. And we know there are ways we could make USAID better.

But what Elon Musk is doing is dangerous. It is cruel, and it is illegal. It is illegal because this Congress has appropriated money for these programs, and Elon Musk is making a unilateral decision, without any congressional oversight or authority, to discontinue those authorized programs.

Also, you know, what does it really say to the millions of people and governments around the world, when we have made a commitment, whether it is one that you agreed with or I did—but as a body, as a country, we made a commitment. And then, suddenly, there is an email out saying: We are just kidding. We are not going to follow through.

And what does it mean, when you think about it—that because of, in effect, this stop-work order, we have food for hungry people that is not being delivered? We have vaccines, medicines that can save lives, avert injury, and they are not being delivered. Why are we doing that? Why would anyone do that? It would be like your neighbor's house is on fire, you have a hose, and you won't let them use it. That is not the way we operate—at least, I hope so.

And, you know, the USAID work is invisible to most people. It shouldn't be invisible to us. We are supporting civil society leaders who are inspired by our own Declaration of Independence. These folks fight for human rights and democracy, and they do that in the face of corrupt and abusive governments that imprison their political opponents. These programs have been stopped. There are programs that have strong bipartisan support and have had it for decades. And I want to acknowledge many of my Republican colleagues who have done so much—in particular, Senator LINDSEY GRAHAM, who knows this does protect our national security, and they present the best face of America that the rest of the world sees.

You know, the administration talks about waste, fraud, and abuse. And when they talk about that, I ask myself the question: Is there a single American any of us can identify that is in favor of waste, fraud, and abuse?

So they raise the question without proof of where that waste, fraud, and abuse is found. And instead of looking to identify it specifically so they can actually take action to eliminate it, they just leave it out there as an explanation to justify shutting down a valuable program and not doing the hard work of reform.

That is applying not just as an approach, not just to USAID, but to many other programs, like farm programs, where I am getting calls from farmers: What happened to the agreement I had with the Federal Government, the U.S. Department of Agriculture, about doing a new type of crop rotation in exchange for getting a contract price?

What has happened to folks running domestic violence shelters who can't get on the portal to get money paid to them that they are owed?

This is happening throughout our non-profit systems, including at our community health centers. We had a woman who had an appointment with a dentist at a community health center and got a notice that it was closed because of the order that went out from the administration.

So I believe in USAID. I believe it is wrong for the administration to essentially make the decision to feed it to the wood chipper. I believe in reform, but I do not believe that this is a serious effort at reform. It is a serious effort to destroy the program started by President Kennedy that has been embraced by Republican and Democratic Presidents since President Kennedy started it 64 years ago.

And while there is a perception that it is 25 to 30 percent of our budget, it is 1 percent. And it is at a time when the reputation of the United States as a country that is going to stand behind the commitment it has made is being jeopardized.

So my hope is that all of us, whether we agree or disagree about the ultimate value of USAID, will stand up for protecting what we have already committed ourselves to, and that to the extent there is reform to be made, we work together on that so that the American taxpayer and American national security interests can continue to be served by the men and women of the U.S. Agency for International Development.

Mr. President, I conclude my remarks on USAID.

NOMINATION OF TULSI GABBARD

Mr. President, as you know, the Director of National Intelligence is a very critical position. The Director is the primary intelligence officer serving the President. She or he is tasked with managing America's 18 intelligence community Agencies and more than \$100 billion—\$100 billion—in the national and military intelligence program budgets. It is an awesome responsibility.

The DNI also has access to information about literally the most sensitive programs within the U.S. Government. These programs are so sensitive that most Members of Congress and Senators are not briefed about them, including even rank-and-file members of the Intelligence Committees. That alone indicates the magnitude of this responsibility.

And my view, on the basis of everything I have seen, is that the nominee

will put loyalty to Donald Trump first. And my apprehension is that, if there is information that he does not want or wants it interpreted a certain way, there will be excessive deference to the pressures that the President has shown he has the capacity and the inclination to exert.

Also, in the hearings, Ms. Gabbard did not reflect independent thoughts about the security of issues like Taiwan, the territorial integrity of Ukraine, nor the endless ongoing theft of U.S. data by the Chinese Government. She was asked, quite rightly: Where are you on this? What should we be doing?

She indicated she would leave that up to Donald Trump.

Now, I get it that, as someone who is serving the President, it is ultimately his decision. But a person who is in the highest level of national security, I would expect, would have opinions from prior experience, and Ms. Gabbard did not disclose what those opinions were at all.

My concern, as well, is that Ms. Gabbard does not have the sober experience where it is needed most. We are a few weeks into the second term of President Trump, and there is an immense amount of disruption. And depending on the point of view, disruption is a good thing. I actually see the argument for it. But what I am seeing is that it is done in such a meat-cleaver way that it is much more about destruction.

And I want to make certain that whoever is the Director of National Intelligence has the experience and the credibility within the intelligence community to defend the legitimate role that that intelligence community plays in our national security.

Ms. Gabbard has maintained a security clearance for many years. However, this job is much more than about having had a security clearance. It is about judgment and character and integrity that must go along with that. You are required to form a clear-eyed policy position free of politics and not just give the seal of approval to absolute poor judgment. That is a very, very challenging task for a person who serves in the Trump administration.

I have also been concerned about some of the judgment calls that Ms. Gabbard has made, refusing to acknowledge what we all know: Edward Snowden broke his oath to protect classified information. He betrayed the trust given to him and every other American who holds a security clearance. By the way, Mr. Snowden had a whistleblower protocol he could have followed but chose not to. People's lives were put in jeopardy.

Mr. Snowden, as you know, intentionally gathered and deliberately walked out the door with more than 1.5 million classified files. He went to China and eventually found safe harbor in Russia.

Also, I have some concern about where Ms. Gabbard is getting her news.

I have grave concerns that giving access to our Nation's most tightly held secrets to an individual who has amplified Russian talking points—and that is the spread of misinformation; that is what Russia does—and who watches Russia state-owned TV, which is a propaganda organization—I have concerns about that, as well as the trip to Syria to see Bashar al-Assad who was in the process of murdering his own people.

Of course, Ms. Gabbard said she was skeptical that his government was responsible for the 2017 chemical weapons attack that killed dozens of Syrians. Our intelligence community was not skeptical about that. Both sides of the aisle hold our national security in high regard, as you do, Mr. President, and I do, as well.

On the basis of the lack of experience, the questionable judgment, lack of confidence that I think many of us have in the capacity of this person to be the Director of National Intelligence, I urge that we vote no on her nomination.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from New Hampshire.

Mrs. SHAHEEN. Mr. President, I come to the floor this afternoon to join a number of my colleagues because of my concern for the national security of the United States.

Whether it is a terror attack, a cyber attack from a nonstate actor, whether it is a threat from Russia or China or Iran, we in the United States are the targets of foreign adversaries every single day.

But thanks to our intelligence community and the thousands of Americans who dedicate their lives to our security, we are safe. These brave men and women are counting on us to have their backs, which is why the nomination of Tulsi Gabbard is so concerning. Our adversaries will be thrilled if we confirm Tulsi Gabbard as Director of National Intelligence—none more so than Russian President Vladimir Putin.

Ms. Gabbard has not hidden her positive views of Russia and President Putin. While Ukrainians fight valiantly to protect their homeland and defend freedom and democracy, Tulsi Gabbard cozies up to Putin and publicly defends Russia's brutal invasion. The former Congresswoman has parroted Russian propaganda, saying that the war could have been avoided if NATO and the Biden administration had "simply acknowledged Russia's legitimate security concerns."

We know that the nominee is problematic when the Kremlin has such nice things to say about her. On November 17, 2024, a major Russian state-controlled news agency called Tulsi Gabbard "superwoman" and noted her past appearances on Russian TV. I don't relish the idea of America's Director of National Intelligence, a role that includes such sensitive responsibilities as producing the President's