

Americans traveled for the holiday last week. And while most of them packed up the car and hit the road, about 6 million Americans boarded planes to spend the holidays with relatives and friends across the country. I am sure all of them were breathing a sigh of relief that the government shutdown was over and air traffic control had resumed normal operations before their trips.

The impact on air travel was one of the most visible aspects of the chaos that ensued during the Democrats' 43-day shutdown. Flights were snarled throughout the shutdown, but it got progressively worse as the shutdown dragged on. By the time Democrats' shutdown entered its second month, the FAA was forced to order cutbacks in air traffic as a matter of safety, and more would have been required if we hadn't been able to finally reopen the government when we did.

I am relieved that air traffic was able to get back to normal levels before the holiday travel surged. I am grateful to the thousands of air traffic controllers who were on duty during the shutdown without pay and who work hard every day to keep planes moving quickly and safely. They have an important job, and I know that every controller shares a commitment to putting safety first, whether it is a normal day, the middle of a snowstorm, or a government shutdown.

Even before the shutdown, our air traffic control system was facing challenges, and modernization efforts had been a priority for both the Trump administration and for Congress this year. Before the holiday, the Commerce Committee's Aviation Subcommittee held a hearing that examined operations during the shutdown, as well as the challenges that existed prior to the shutdown and that still exist today. I appreciate Chairman MORAN's attention to these important issues. I am grateful that my colleagues are taking the time to delve into the challenges facing air traffic control.

At least our Republican colleagues are taking the time. The lead Democrat on that panel called the hearing "political theater," and the Democrats' witness for the Aviation Subcommittee talked only about—get this—ObamaCare. That is right—ObamaCare. A hearing to examine air traffic safety and air traffic control, and that was the only witness the Democrats asked to come and testify.

I am hoping that this was a one-time political stunt and not an indication of the attitude Democrats are going to take going forward, because we have a lot more work to do on this issue. Republicans remain focused on improving air travel and safety, and that hearing was just one part of our continued efforts.

Earlier this year, Republicans took a major step forward in air traffic modernization with the One Big Beautiful Bill, which made a significant invest-

ment in technology improvements for the air traffic system. The systems being used in air traffic control towers today are in desperate need of an update. This funding will help to deploy state-of-the-art technology to towers across America.

One example of the need for modernization is what happened at the Newark airport—one of the busiest airports in the country—earlier this year. In April and May, Newark experienced equipment outages that led to major flight delays and significant disruptions in air travel. The Trump administration moved quickly to address these issues and bring Newark back to full strength, but the underlying issue is aging technology across the air traffic control system—issues that are only exacerbated when adverse conditions strike, such as severe weather or the recent government shutdown.

The investment from the One Big Beautiful Bill will go a long way toward solving the underlying technology problems and will strengthen the entire system.

Another challenge is the shortage of air traffic controllers. We are almost 4,000 controllers short of full strength, which means that controllers at a number of airports need to work longer hours and more shifts to keep the system going. Addressing the shortfall has been a priority for the Trump administration, which has devoted attention to hiring and training additional controllers.

I appreciate that the administration managed to keep hiring and training operations going throughout the shutdown, which lessened the potential long-term consequences for America's skies.

Republicans and Democrats here in Congress are focused, too, on supporting hiring and training efforts, and this year's transportation funding bill, which I hope to take up in the near future, supports sustained hiring and training to add 2,500 new controllers next year.

Upgrading outdated technology and adding new air traffic controllers will make a big difference for the traveling public and for supply chains that rely on air cargo, and it will help deliver a more modern air traffic system, capable of providing more efficient and safer skies for all Americans.

Things won't be fixed overnight, but thanks to the Trump administration and our continued efforts in Congress, we are making progress toward a state-of-the-art air traffic control system for America.

I am glad that the system is back at full strength after the shutdown, and we are working to make it stronger every day.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Democratic whip.

AIR TRAFFIC CONTROLLERS

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, let me pick up where the Republican leader left off on air traffic controllers.

The biggest, busiest airport in the United States is O'Hare, when you count both passengers and cargo traffic. After the government reopened, I went to O'Hare, and I met with the air traffic controllers. I have known them for years, dating back to the first government shutdown during President Trump's first administration.

There are roughly 10,500 air traffic controllers nationwide in America. We need 14,000. What does that mean if you are understaffed by that 40 percent figure?

It means that those who are presently working work extraordinarily long hours. In fact, the normal routine at O'Hare with the air traffic controllers who manage that airport is to work 6 days out of 7, 10 hours each day. So in one of the most stressful possible jobs in America, they are working 6 days a week, 10 hours a day. The stress is overwhelming.

I told them that, with the closure of the government behind us, we have to do something, and I hope we agree on a bipartisan basis to do it quickly. We need not only more air traffic controllers, well-trained and ready to work—and that will take some time to find those people—but we also need new technology. We waited too long. We have talked about this issue over and over again. It is time to do something.

I want to salute those air traffic controllers. They have gone through a tough weekend, with Americans traveling for Thanksgiving, and I know that many of them have worked hard to make sure we have safe air travel.

I want to echo the comments of the Republican leader. This is an issue that should not go away. It is an issue we should address.

HONORING SPECIALIST SARAH BECKSTROM AND STAFF SERGEANT ANDREW WOLFE

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, I want to start by acknowledging, as well, the horrific—horrific—shooting of two National Guard members in Washington, DC, last week.

As was reported, 20-year-old SPC Sarah Beckstrom tragically passed away on Thanksgiving Day, and 24-year-old SSgt Andrew Wolfe remains in critical condition. We pray for his recovery and, as one Nation, we send our deepest condolences to the Beckstrom family.

Whether or not you agree about the delegation of National Guard troops to Chicago or Washington or any other place, that is really beside the point. We should make a note today that this is an acknowledgement of the importance of the National Guard to America's defense at home and abroad many times.

Time and again, those guardsmen and guardswomen have served our country and served them well. Living proof of that statement is my colleague in Congress, TAMMY DUCKWORTH, who was injured in a helicopter incident

over Iraq and today serves with me as my colleague in the Senate. She speaks for all of the members of the National Guard when she says they are dedicated to our Nation and our States.

There must be a full investigation into the attack on Sarah Beckstrom and SSgt Andrew Wolfe. I implore the President to lower the temperature on political rhetoric and try not to exploit this to demonize immigrants, including many who make the ultimate sacrifice for our country. Instead, the President should work with Congress on commonsense and evidence-proven strategies to reduce crime and reform our broken immigration system.

My wife and I send our deepest condolences to the Beckstrom family, and we pray that Staff Sergeant Wolfe makes a full, speedy recovery.

THE ECONOMY

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, on an unrelated issue, last week, families gathered around the table to give thanks and enjoy a plate or two of turkey, mashed potatoes, casserole, cranberry sauce, and more. Except, this year, the Thanksgiving feast cost more than last year—because of what? President Trump's economic policies are driving up the prices of groceries. The President claims the opposite, but that is not a fact.

In a social media quote, President Trump said, "Prices for a Thanksgiving Dinner is now down 25% . . . since 2024." "AFFORDABILITY," he said, "is a Republican Stronghold."

Does the President of the United States actually have any conversations with families who are shopping for groceries?

Here is the truth: Costs are going through the roof because of President Trump and his MAGA policies. The American people know this. Recent polling from none other than FOX News shows that nearly two-thirds of Americans blame President Trump for higher prices—FOX News.

Listen to my constituent Tria, who wrote to me from Chicago. After experiencing the sticker shock at a South Loop grocery store, she said:

No matter if it's organic or not . . . it's still going to be an arm and a leg for it. It's like you're spending your soul on groceries.

Another constituent Esther said:

A loaf of bread costs us \$4, and it looks like it's getting smaller.

I know what she means. Tria and Esther are not alone in their shared frustration. Working families across the country are feeling the squeeze at the checkout counter and are having to cut back on spending for the holidays.

This struggle has been exacerbated for several reasons, one of them being the President's massive cuts to the SNAP program—used to be known as food stamps—in his Big Beautiful Bill—not so beautiful—that will reduce or eliminate food assistance for more than 22 million families. This is Amer-

ica. This President gives 20 million bucks to Argentina, but he can't find the money for American citizens.

Another is the administration's attacks on immigrant workers, which is fueling a labor shortage, thereby hurting farmers in Illinois and across the Nation, who are already struggling, and driving up prices on the products they grow. Even President Trump's own Labor Department agrees, saying that his war on immigrant workers is "threatening the stability of domestic food production and prices."

Now let's get to the bottom line here and be honest about it. The farmers in my State are great men and women, and I thank them for what they do. When it comes to the political scene, after a lifetime of dealing with them, I know that they are very courteous and kind, come to see me with regularity, give me a lot of things to seriously consider, and usually vote for the other party. I get it. They are more conservative, and they just don't see things politically the way I see them. But when you close the door and there is no press around and you ask them what is going on, they are scared to death.

They see China stopping purchases of soybeans. Why is that important? Illinois is the No. 1 soybean-producing State in the United States, and it is a major cash crop for farmers all across the country. So when China stops buying, what do we do? Unfortunately, our buyers, like China, turn to other countries, and they use those countries as sources when they used to rely on us. That worries these farmers behind closed doors, but they don't say much publicly.

They don't like tariffs. They tell me that behind closed doors too. They don't want to be open in public about their criticism of President Trump, but the tariffs are taxes that they know are going to make it difficult for them and their exporters and importers of important goods.

In addition to all of that, they need workers on the farm. It is a fact. Whether it is an orchard or a dairy farm or any other farm operation, many of them need workers on the farm, and there aren't a lot of local people volunteering for that job. The President's policies against immigrants are not only denying them the source of these workers, but they are also creating an attitude in other adjoining countries that have served us in the past that it is too dangerous to try to come and work in the United States. That is the reality.

Nationwide, for example, the costs of a lot of basics just keep going up. Orange juice is up 29 percent compared to last year. Ground beef is up 14 percent. Coffee is 26 percent more. None of these developments have occurred in a vacuum. They are a direct response to the President's chaotic tariff policies. He changes his mind every 15 minutes. Is it 10 percent? Is it 15 percent? Is it 100 percent? Wait a minute. The Premier of Ontario just ran an ad during a base-

ball game. Let's raise tariffs on products from Canada by 50 percent. Is that any way to run a country? Already, families in Illinois have paid more than \$700 just this year, on average, because of these policies.

In a Supreme Court hearing last month on the legality of these tariffs, Justice Sotomayor said to the lawyers defending the President:

You say tariffs are not taxes, but that's exactly what they are.

Justice Sotomayor is absolutely right.

We are paying for Donald Trump's failed economic agenda—an agenda which runs back and forth, helter-skelter, day by day. The President recognizes it too, really. That is why a few weeks ago he watered down his own economic proposal when he suspended certain tariffs on bananas, coffee, beef, and clothing. You just can't keep up with him. Why backtrack? Because he knows that the voters and consumers in America are fed up with rising costs and place it by a factor of 2 to 1 at his feet. My source again? FOX News. The President sees the writing on the wall, and he is scrambling to undo the damage he has caused, but it is too little, too late, unless he moves quickly and changes dramatically.

The damage goes beyond food prices. Thanks to this President, Americans are now confronting higher utility bills. Just ask them. On the campaign trail, the President promised to slash electricity prices in half. "Drill, baby, drill" will take care of everything. It ain't working. On average, Illinois households are paying more than \$1,500 annually for lights and heat in their homes—up more than 15 percent from last year. Cause and effect.

Under President Biden, with the support of a Democratic Congress, we signed into law the Inflation Reduction Act. This historic law provided tax credits to help households and businesses install energy-efficient windows, insulation, HVAC, and solar panels to lower their bills. I know because I put solar panels on my home in Springfield. Our monthly electric bill was cut dramatically because of that policy decision from the Biden administration.

Earlier this year, President Trump and congressional Republicans scrapped these credits for solar energy with their so-called Big Beautiful Bill. So while utility bills go up, people who want to go to cheaper forms of sustainable energy, such as solar, are told the tax incentives are no longer there, which is just the opposite of what we should be doing. Then they went further, eliminating incentives for wind and solar projects, meaning fewer jobs and less power to the grid. It is supply and demand. Less power equals higher prices. And the consequences of these policies are already taking effect.

According to the Century Foundation, past-due utility balances have jumped 10 percent this year. They are 10 percent more than they were the year before. People can't afford to pay these utility bills.