

stand adjourned until 10 a.m. on Thursday, December 4; that following the prayer and pledge, the Journal of proceedings be approved to date, the morning hour be deemed expired, the time for the two leaders be reserved for their use later in the day, and the Senate be in a period of morning business, with Senators permitted to speak therein for up to 10 minutes each; I further ask that the previous order with respect to S.J. Res. 91 be vitiated and, at 11:30 a.m., the Senate proceed to the consideration of H.J. Res. 131, the joint resolution be read a third time, the Senate vote on passage of the joint resolution, and, if passed, the motion to reconsider be considered made and laid upon the table, and S.J. Res. 91 be indefinitely postponed; further, that notwithstanding rule XXII, following the disposition of H.J. Res. 131, the Senate proceed to executive session and the Senate vote on the motion to invoke cloture on Executive Calendar No. 3, S. Res. 520; finally, that at 1:45 p.m., the Senate execute the order with respect to the Rodriguez nomination, and if confirmed, the motion to reconsider be considered made and laid upon the table, and the President be immediately notified of the Senate's action.

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

#### ORDER FOR ADJOURNMENT

Mr. THUNE. Mr. President, if there is no further business to come before the Senate, I ask that it stand adjourned under the previous order, following the remarks of Senators KENNEDY and REED.

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

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Louisiana.

#### WELFARE FRAUD

Mr. KENNEDY. Mr. President, as you well know, the American people are the most generous people in the entire world. In our country, when you are hungry, we feed you; when you are homeless, we house you; when you are too poor to be sick, we will pay for your doctor. We spend trillions of dollars a year helping our friends and neighbors who are less fortunate than we are, and that is rare in this world.

I have been all over our wonderful world. You have, too, Mr. President. In many countries, if you get down on your luck, they will let you die in a ditch. But not in America. Not in America. We take care of our fellow citizens. But it is expensive. We spend trillions of dollars a year to do this, and that money we spend didn't just fall from Heaven. We thank Heaven for it, but it came out of taxpayers' pockets, and we shouldn't lose sight of that fact.

That is why I get so irritated—"irritated" is the wrong word—angry when I find out that people take advantage of the American people's generosity. It

makes me want to knee someone in the groin. It just makes me furious, and I think the American taxpayers feel the same way.

What I am about to tell you, Mr. President—let me apologize in advance—is deeply disgusting. It is deeply disgusting. I mean, it is clown world on steroids. When I first read about this, I read it a second time because I experienced slack-jawed astonishment. When I read it a second time and I realized it was true, I just wanted to run away screaming.

What am I talking about? We have discovered—the Federal prosecutors have discovered that for the last 5 years, there has been massive welfare fraud in the great State of Minnesota—massive. Over \$1 billion of American taxpayer money has been stolen—just stolen. They can call it fraud, but a better term would be "stealing."

This fraud has been centered in the Somali community in Minnesota. Now, I am not here to criticize the Somali community; I am here simply to describe what happened. The Somali community in Minneapolis is about 80,000 people. They are centered around Minneapolis. And let me say it again: I am not here to denigrate the Somali people or people of Somali ancestry just because of the actions of a few, but it is a fact that this \$1 billion in welfare fraud occurred almost exclusively in the Somali community in Minnesota and was orchestrated by people of Somali ancestry. That is a fact. Facts aren't racist; facts are facts. So far, 59 people have been convicted, 86 have been charged, and 78 of them are of Somali ancestry. That is just a fact.

Now, what these criminals did was they had three very elaborate schemes. The first scheme was centered on supposedly feeding hungry children in the Somali community. A group, a nonprofit run by some people of Somali ancestry—the name of the nonprofit was "Feeding Our Future." Feeding Our Future went to the welfare authorities in the State of Minnesota, which, of course, was administering Federal taxpayer money, and Feeding Our Future said: We want to feed hungry children in the Somali community.

The welfare people and State government in Minnesota gave them the money to do that. It started out very small. The idea was that Feeding Our Future, the Somali nonprofit organization, would take this Federal taxpayer money, American taxpayer money, and go to businesses—most of which were Somali businesses in the Somali community—and set up feeding sites where they supposedly would take children to get a hot meal.

On paper, it sounded great. As I say, it started out very, very small—just a few million dollars—but eventually it got bigger and bigger and bigger, and more businesses in the Somali community signed up to be feeding sites. Feeding Our Future, the Somali nonprofit, kept going back to the Social Services Department in Minnesota and saying:

We need more money. We need more money.

At the height of the fraud, they were spending about \$100 million a year—not over the lifetime of the program, \$100 million a year.

There is just one problem: There were hungry children; they just weren't getting any of the money. The businesses, many of which were Somali-owned, which were getting some money to feed the children from Feeding Our Future, the nonprofit that was quarter-backing this whole thing, weren't giving any of the money to hungry children. They were spending it. These businesses were spending it on yachts and vacations and jewelry and furniture for their homes.

That was scheme No. 1. But it got worse. The second scheme was supposedly to help people who are homeless. Remember I said that in America, when you are homeless, we will house you? Well, that is what they were trying to do in Minnesota.

A nonprofit was set up—again, run by someone of Somali ancestry—and this nonprofit went to a bunch of providers who supposedly were going to provide housing, and they told the welfare authorities in Minnesota that they needed millions of dollars to house people who were homeless.

Once again, the program started out small. When they started it in 2020—these crooks started it in 2020—they said "We only need \$2.6 million," but then in 2021, they said "We need \$21 million." In the following years—they said "We need \$42 million" the next year, then \$74 million to house the homeless, and then \$104 million a year—not the total scheme, a year.

There is just one problem: None of the money was going for housing. None of the money was going to help people who were homeless. These providers and this nonprofit that was coordinating it just put the money in their pockets.

But there is more. They came up with a third scheme. This one makes you want to throw up in a potted plant. This one is centered around autistic children. Once again, in this third program, a group of providers—supposedly medical providers—got together, and they went to the welfare authorities in Minnesota and said: We need money to help autistic children.

They said: Well, that is a wonderful thing to do.

Then these providers, once the welfare department at the State government in Minnesota gave them the OK, went out and started recruiting autistic children. They say: Well, OK. We have to get the word out somehow.

But they couldn't find very many autistic children, so they started going to parents in the Somali community and saying: Can we call your child autistic? Can we certify that your child is autistic? If you let us do that, we will pay you a bribe, anywhere from \$400 to \$1,500 a child.

Now, once again, the program didn't start big. These were sophisticated

crooks. Its leader was a woman by the name of Asha Farhan Hassan. She was also in, by the way, on the feeding of the children scam as well.

As best we can tell, they approached parents only in the Somali community, but once again, they couldn't find enough autistic children, so they bribed many parents in the community, gave them money to certify that their children were autistic.

In the first year, they were clever: They only asked for \$3 million. The second year, in 2019, they asked for \$54 million. Then in 2020, they went up to \$77 million. Then in 2021, they really got greedy: They went to \$183 million. In 2022, \$280 million; and in 2023, \$400 million.

All told, in these three fraud schemes, these crooks stole \$1 billion of taxpayer money.

The worst part—what I started to say is the worst part, but let me amend it. The equally bad part: Hello, how could this happen? Why didn't the people in the Department of Social Services and the Welfare Department and State government, when they saw these claims arising, why didn't they say something? Didn't they go out and check these businesses that were supposedly sites to feed homeless children? Didn't they go talk to some of the children and their parents to see if some of the children really were autistic? Didn't the State authorities say: Show us one of the homes you are providing to the homeless people? After all, we are spending \$1 billion.

They didn't because the politicians wouldn't let them. And the crooks who were setting all this up, they were pretty smart. I will give you one example. Remember, I talked about the non-profit involved in feeding the so-called hungry children called Feeding Our Future. The rank-and-file employees in the Welfare office started getting suspicious when the claims went up, and they contacted Feeding Our Future. They said: Hey, what is going on here? We are going to start cutting off these claims because it is getting a little bit expensive.

You know what Feeding Our Future did? They threatened the employees. They said: If you cut off our money—they sent them an email, and they did it by phone. They told the State agency that failing to promptly approve new applicants from minority-owned businesses would result in a lawsuit—a lawsuit—feeding accusations of racism that would be scrawled across the news—scrawled across the news. Feeding Our Future went to the State and said: If you stop giving us this money, we are going to call you racist and we are going to sue you and you don't want to be in the news.

You say: Why didn't the employees do something? They did. They told the people higher up, the people with the flags in their office. And you know what they did? Nothing. Do you know why?

Well, here is what the legislative auditor in Minnesota said: He said that

the threats of litigation and the negative press affected how the State politicians used their regulatory power. Here is what a fraud investigator in the attorney general's office said. She said:

There is a perception that—

I am quoting now.

—that forcefully tackling this issue would cause political backlash among the Somali community, which is a core voting bloc [for Democrats].

In fact, one of the other witnesses in the fraud investigation said: Look, you told the prosecutors—let me just give you a cold dish of truth—the 80,000 voting bloc of folks with Somali ancestry, you have to have their votes to win in Minneapolis. If you are a Democrat and you can't win Minneapolis, you can't win the State. So the politicians did nothing.

Don't just take my word for it, and don't blame the State employees. They tried. In fact, recently, the State employees, they just said: Look, we have had enough. They posted this. These are several hundred employees from the Minnesota Department of Human Services who administered this program, who just get up every day and go to work and do their job and want to help people. This is what they posted on social media. I am quoting now:

Governor Tim Walz is 100% responsible for massive fraud in Minnesota.

I am sure he wasn't the only one because this fraud was an open secret. But I am quoting from what the employees said.

Governor Tim Walz is 100% responsible for massive fraud in Minnesota. We let Tim Walz know of fraud early on—

That is the employees talking—

hoping for a partnership in stopping fraud, but no, we got the opposite response. Tim Walz systematically retaliated against whistleblowers using monitoring, [using] threats, [using] repression, and did his best to discredit fraud reports. Instead of partnership, we got the full weight of retaliation by Tim Walz and an indifferent mainstream media. It's scary, isolating and left us wondering who we can turn to.

And now, there are reports coming out. I don't know if they are true, but I know the prosecutors are desperately trying to get to the bottom of it. And I don't want to say that this is true, but a report came out in a publication called City Journal, which is published by the Manhattan Institute. They are alleging that money—part of this billion dollars that was stolen—they are alleging at least a portion of it went to a terrorist organization in Somalia that we have all heard of. It is notorious. It is an organization called al-Shabaab. They hate Americans. They are terrorists. They want to kill Americans and drink their blood out of a boot. They were taking a cut, according to this claim.

Again, I don't know if it is true, but the prosecutors are trying to get to the bottom of it.

There have been a lot of allegations about racism in these reports. They are saying: Oh, you are just picking on the

Somali community. I am not, and I don't think the American people are. I think what they are picking on are crooks. They are picking on crooks. Everything I just gave you is facts. It has nothing to do with race.

But it is a fact that these \$1 billion schemes were cooked up by leaders in the Somali community in Minneapolis and in Minnesota. It is a fact that most of the businesses that participated in this fraud—in this thievery—were run by people of Somali ancestry. I am not saying that is a good thing. I am not saying that is a bad thing. That is just a fact. And I don't think we ought not to talk about it.

And it is a fact that the kickbacks paid to parents to allow their children to be signed up as autistic in order to get the Federal taxpayer money—the parents were of Somali ancestry. It doesn't give me any pleasure to say that, but it is a fact.

And it is a fact that the politicians, not the employees—the rank-and-file employees in the Welfare offices—but the politicians in Minnesota let this happen.

It is disgusting—disgusting.

We are trying to put together a budget right now, and we have State officials in Minnesota—because they wanted votes—that are allowing people in their State who are crooks to steal \$1 billion from the American taxpayer, money that could have gone to people who really were homeless and children who really were hungry and kids who, through no fault of their own, really were autistic, instead of stolen—a portion of which allegedly was sent to a terrorist organization in Somalia.

Man, these people ought to all be put in jail, including the politicians. It makes me want to stick my head in an oven.

I want to end on a less negative note. I am sorry to talk about this, but the American people need to learn the truth. A lot of members of the media won't report this. They say you can't talk about it because it is racist. This has nothing to do with race. Everything I said is factual. What is racist about facts?

I don't want to end on that kind of note. I have been to this floor before. I will be back.

#### THE ECONOMY

Mr. KENNEDY. Mr. President, moms and dads across America are having a little trouble sleeping these days. And when moms and dads in America lie down to sleep at night and they can't, they are worried. They are worried about things like the cost of living. They are worried about things like the cost of housing. They are worried about things like their insurance premiums going up. They are wondering if it is ever going to get any better. They are tired of having to pay more, live worse. They are worried that eventually they are going to have to sell blood to go to the grocery store.