

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.

Why are they feeling that? It is called inflation. And the inflation started under President Biden. As we know, it got to 9 percent. I won't go into the reasons why. We are doing better. We got it down to 3 percent. When you get inflation down from 9 percent to 3 percent, that is called disinflation.

What is disinflation? It just means disinflation is when the rate of inflation decreases, in this case from 9 percent to roughly 3 percent. Disinflation doesn't mean prices are going down. It just means that prices are rising less quickly. Under President Biden, they were rising at 9 percent. Now they are only rising at 3 percent.

In order for prices to actually go down, we would have to have deflation—not disinflation but deflation. We have to be careful what we wish for because deflation comes with some pretty severe consequences. We can get prices down through deflation, if we go into a recession, if you raise unemployment, allow unemployment to rise to about 8 or 9 percent where people lose their jobs. We are witnessing deflation right now in China. For kids in China who just got out of college, their unemployment rate is 25 percent. That is why their prices are going down.

There is a better way to help people deal with disinflation. That is to get their incomes up through tax reform, through regulatory reform, through designing a healthcare delivery system that looks like somebody designed the damn thing on purpose. And that is what we ought to be working on. If we—I don't have control of the floor. If I had control of the floor, I would be here every single day introducing bills. I see Senator REED here. He would be doing the same thing, introducing bills to help the American people. But I don't have control of the floor.

I am not criticizing the people who do. That is above my pay grade. I am labor. They are management. But I know this, first, if we will ever get to do that, I will ask our Democratic friends to join with us. They may or may not. I don't know. But if they decline to join with us, then through reconciliation, which is how we passed the One Big Beautiful Bill, we can pass these measures to increase wages for the American people with a majority vote. We won't need Democratic votes. That is what we did with the One Big Beautiful Bill, and we can do it two more times before the midterm elections. We passed the One Big Beautiful Bill on July 1.

In the meantime, I am not saying we haven't been doing important things, but we haven't been working on a plan to help people deal with the cost of living, and we should be.

So I am going to end like I ended the last time. I am saying to the powers that be: Pretty please, with sugar on top—I will add a cherry. I have even got an old McDonald's McRib coupon somewhere, and I will throw that into the mix too. Please bring another reconciliation bill. Please. Let's deal with

the problems that are causing moms and dads to lie awake when they lie down to sleep at night and can't.

I went on too long. I apologize to Senator REED.

I yield to my friend Senator REED from the wonderful State of Rhode Island.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. JUSTICE). The Senator from Rhode Island.

CARIBBEAN BOAT STRIKE

Mr. REED. Mr. President, I rise today to address a matter of grave concern regarding the Trump administration's military operations in South and Central America and specifically the September 2 strike on a suspected drug vessel that has now been the subject of deeply troubling press reporting.

The facts as we understand them are these: On September 2, U.S. forces conducted a strike on a vessel in the Caribbean. From his own public statements, we know that Secretary Hegseth authorized and oversaw the strike. According to press reports, the initial strike left survivors in the water, clinging to the wreckage. Then U.S. forces carried out a second strike on the vessel, which killed the survivors.

Initially, as he often does, the Secretary of Defense and his office denied the reporting when it broke last weekend. But then, on Monday, White House Press Secretary Karoline Leavitt confirmed that, in fact, Secretary Hegseth did authorize these strikes and that Admiral Bradley, the operational commander, did order a second strike. The White House has admitted what the Secretary denied, and we cannot ignore what that means.

The Department of Defense's Law of War Manual states that members of the Armed Forces must refuse to comply with clearly illegal orders, including law of war violations. It even provides a definition and an example to avoid confusion:

For example, orders to fire upon the shipwrecked would be clearly illegal.

This is not a complex legal theory. This is not a gray area. The manual addresses this exact situation with crystal clarity. Orders to fire upon the shipwrecked are clearly illegal, and this principle has been long ingrained in the Department of Defense and the Navy.

Multiple legal experts, including former Judge Advocates General, have stated that if this reporting is accurate, this strike appears to constitute a war crime. Indeed, many of my Republican colleagues have joined Democrats in recognizing that the reported facts of this strike would be clearly illegal. Yet, in his own words yesterday, the Secretary of Defense claimed that the second strike was the "correct decision." This by itself is an alarming admission.

But I am, frankly, not surprised by the Secretary's statements. For years, he has expressed contempt for the law

of armed conflict and has championed servicemembers convicted of war crimes. During the first Trump administration, he lobbied for the pardoning of several military personnel who were turned in by their own teammates for war crimes as well as military contractors convicted of killing 14 Iraqi civilians. He has also called for reinstating waterboarding and other forms of torture.

In his book "The War on Warriors," he wrote:

Should we follow the Geneva Conventions? . . . If our warriors are forced to follow rules arbitrarily and asked to sacrifice more lives so that international tribunals feel better about themselves, aren't we just better off in winning our wars according to our own rules?

Since then, Secretary Hegseth has acted exactly how we might expect. In October, at Quantico, he told hundreds of generals and admirals:

Don't fight with stupid rules of engagement. We untie the hands of our warfighters to intimidate, demoralize, hunt and kill the enemies of our country. No more politically correct and overbearing rules of engagement, just common sense, maximum lethality and authority for warfighters.

He then gave them an ultimatum:

If the words I'm speaking today are making your heart sink, then you should do the honorable thing and resign.

Secretary Hegseth demands military leaders conform to his interpretation of the law or be dismissed. This is profoundly dangerous. It contradicts the ethic and the ethos of the American military that is sworn to uphold the Constitution, sworn to obey the laws of armed conflict. That dedication is to ensure that when our personnel are disabled in the water, when they are prisoners of war, they are treated with the legal requirements of the Geneva Convention and of other legal constraints. If we kill people with impunity, how can we object to the same behavior from our opponents?

Now, when he first came to the Department of Defense, he dismissed the Judge Advocates General of each service—the TJAGs. These are officers with more than 30 years of apolitical service providing legal oversight on military justice, operational law, and adherence to the law of armed conflict. Without these decades of military experience, the services seem to be losing their way and not supporting the men and women in uniform as these men and women deserve.

When this latest story came to light, the Secretary immediately began pointing the finger at others. He and the White House have repeatedly attempted to place responsibility for the September 2 strike squarely on Admiral Bradley's shoulders.

I served in the Army on Active Duty for 12 years, and one of the first and most important lessons I learned is that a military leader can delegate authority, but you can never delegate responsibility. You give the orders. You own the results. Every officer knows this, but Secretary Hegseth is once