

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

again giving orders and rejecting responsibility when bad results come in. I can guarantee that every combat leader under his command is taking careful note of his behavior. It is not the behavior they have dedicated their lives to perform.

More broadly, what troubles me most is the administration's refusal to explain itself to Congress and the American people. This suggests they know this operation and the tortured legal rationale they use to justify it cannot withstand scrutiny.

Chairman WICKER—and I applaud him for his very forceful determination to investigate this situation. We both have formally requested the Executive orders that guide these operations and the full, unedited videos and audio from each strike. We have asked for the intelligence that identified these vessels as legitimate targets. We have asked for the rules of engagement governing these operations. We have asked for casualty assessments and the criteria used to distinguish combatants from civilians. And my Democratic colleagues and I have asked that the legal documents justifying these operations be declassified and shared with the public.

These are fundamental questions that any lawful military operation should be able to answer clearly and definitively. These are not courtesy requests; they are statutory requirements under multiple laws, including the War Powers Resolution and several National Defense Authorization Acts. But after 3 months of asking for material that legally should have been provided to us promptly, the Pentagon has provided only limited information while it has refused to answer basic questions about even that limited material.

Legal experts across the political spectrum have nearly unanimously denounced these operations as unlawful. Yet, rather than provide justification, the administration withholds information.

If this operation serves vital American interests, if it can achieve its stated objectives, and if it is legal under domestic and international law, then

why won't they defend it before Congress and the American people? The stonewalling suggests they lack genuine answers. The secrecy suggests they know that this operation does not make sense, is not good policy, and, indeed, is quite illegal in many respects.

Now, Mr. Hegseth's credibility is not the exclusive issue here—the issue is the law—but his repeated dishonesty makes oversight even more essential. I am calling for immediate action.

First, the Department of Defense must initiate an investigation into the September 2 incident. This is standard military practice for accountability and establishing lessons learned. The investigation must include a thorough review of the orders and chain of command decisions. This is how we ensure procedures were followed and prevent future violations.

Second, the Pentagon must declassify and publish the full, unedited video of the September 2 strike. If they followed the laws of war, it will be clear for all of us to see. If they have nothing to hide, transparency would be welcomed and obvious. The American people deserve to see what is being done in their name, and I can only say their reluctance to do so suggests that they are reluctant for a reason. These films could be highly incriminating. The American people deserve to see them.

Third, the White House must declassify the Department of Justice's Office of Legal Counsel's opinion underpinning their legal argument for this operation. There is no reason for this document to remain hidden. The American people deserve to know why this administration believes it has a license to kill in their name and what parameters govern that authority. If the legal reasoning is sound, it should withstand public scrutiny. If it cannot, then these operations should not continue.

These are not unreasonable demands. They are basic requirements of democratic accountability and the rule of law.

I have spoken with General Caine, and I will speak with Admiral Bradley later this week. It is imperative that the military personnel involved be

truthful and forthright. The truth will come out—maybe not this week or next week. But it will come out. It always does.

The problem, regrettably, is that I do not believe Mr. Hegseth. He has lied repeatedly about this operation and others, claiming news stories are false, only to be contradicted by the White House or other sources. His argument boils down to: Take him at his word; trust him. But, frankly, I cannot—not when the law is this clear, not when the stakes are this high.

Shamelessly violating the laws of armed conflict puts our own service men and women at risk of receiving the same treatment in the future by our adversaries.

My colleagues and I are actively gathering more information about the September 2 strike. If the reported details are true, they represent a grave breach of the laws of war. There must be bipartisan oversight actions taken, committed to facts, truth, and the law above all else.

Chairman WICKER and I have given the Department more than enough time to respond in good faith to reasonable questions. Secretary Hegseth has refused. But the law demands better. The American people deserve better. And, most importantly, our servicemembers deserve better.

I yield the floor.

ADJOURNMENT UNTIL 10 A.M. TOMORROW

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate stands adjourned until 10 a.m. tomorrow.

Thereupon, the Senate, at 6:43 p.m., adjourned until Thursday, December 4, 2025, at 10 a.m.

CONFIRMATION

Executive nomination confirmed by the Senate December 3, 2025:

THE JUDICIARY

MATTHEW E. ORSO, OF NORTH CAROLINA, TO BE UNITED STATES DISTRICT JUDGE FOR THE WESTERN DISTRICT OF NORTH CAROLINA.