

many of these community health centers have had their funding cut temporarily, and too many are still unable to access funding. Some have even had to close. That means many working people suddenly have no option for high-quality, affordable healthcare near them.

Is this DOGE's idea of cutting wasteful spending—taking among the most effective, efficient parts of the healthcare system that deliver healthcare to people who need help with lower costs and cutting it without asking a question? Without examining what community health centers do? Meat-ax. Meat-ax. That is what they are doing.

Or let's look at programs like PEPFAR in the AID program. Again, they want to cut the whole AID. But what about PEPFAR? Do people at DOGE even realize what PEPFAR does? It helps combat things like AIDS. It has saved 25 million lives. Other programs stop things like Ebola in central Africa. If Ebola is left unchecked, it could, one day, spread to America—from Uganda to around the world today. There are flights from Kampala all over the world. So even if you oppose foreign aid on a policy ground, most people believe that PEPFAR and the programs fighting Ebola in central Africa are effective and cost-effective and make us more secure. God forbid Ebola would spread to the United States.

Do you want to see what government waste looks like? It doesn't look like those two programs. Thanks to DOGE, here is what government waste looks like that DOGE has created: Thanks to DOGE, half a billion dollars in food assistance through USAID is sitting in ports and ships and warehouses unable to move.

So the bottom line is simple: If you want to make cuts, you have sunlight, transparency, debate in Congress—not lawlessness; not breaking the law because you feel, well, that you know more than anybody else; not by implementing cuts and asking questions later. It is a formula for disaster when you do things like that. These policies will hurt children; they will hurt seniors; they will hurt veterans and so many other of our friends and neighbors.

#### RECONCILIATION

Mr. President, on reconciliation, today, Senate Republicans' scheme to pass tax cuts for the ultrarich takes the next important step. Later today, Chairman GRAHAM of the Budget Committee will hold a markup of the Republicans' first reconciliation bill.

Republicans claim that their bill will be fully paid for, but that means Republicans are laying the groundwork to gut things like nutrition assistance, funding for nursing homes, student debt support, and to kill clean energy jobs that employ Americans in red and blue States alike.

There has been so much focus on how Republicans are going to pass their sig-

nature bills—should it be one bill? Should it be two bills?—that at the end of the day, talking about process is a sideshow. This “one bill, two bills, or a hundred bills” is meaningless. What they are trying to do is give tax cuts to the very wealthy—further tax cuts to the very wealthy—who are doing just fine, and they are hurting average Americans by cutting programs—again meat-ax, slashing—across the board to do it.

They could carve up their bill. They could carve up one bill, two bills, five bills. As I said, it doesn't matter. They could carve it up in their agenda however they want, and they could change the order of policies they tackle first, but the endgame does not change. This is all about clearing the path to cutting taxes for billionaires and making the American people foot the bill.

The whole thing—the whole big enterprise—is aimed with one goal in mind: tax cuts for the wealthiest Americans—large tax cuts for the wealthiest Americans—who, as I said, are doing fine—not as fine as the average Americans, who just saw their inflation go up 3 percent.

Plain and simple: Again, what is their plan? To funnel more wealth to the ultrawealthy while slashing everything else to the bone: gutting Medicare and Medicaid; yanking school lunches from kids; blocking prescription drug reforms which make drugs cheaper for the average American; cutting funding for cancer research—one of the most popular things we do; cutting research for semiconductor manufacturing and letting China get ahead of us. No matter how they dress it up, no matter what spin they can put on it, the Republicans' agenda boils down to this: tax cuts for the wealthy and deep, deep painful cuts for everybody else.

#### NOMINATION OF TULSI GABBARD

Finally, Mr. President, on the nomination we are about to vote on in a little while, the Gabbard nomination, every single Democrat, I am proud to say, will oppose the nomination of Tulsi Gabbard because we simply cannot, in good conscience, trust our most classified secrets to someone who echoes Russian propaganda and falls for conspiracy theories.

So before my Republican colleagues cast their votes to confirm Ms. Gabbard, I hope they are going to think carefully one last time because America's safety—America's security—is at stake.

Is Ms. Gabbard really whom Republicans want leading intelligence Agencies? I will bet not.

Is she the best person we could find for the important position of Director of National Intelligence? Of all the people who know the intelligence world, I know some will be conservative like Donald Trump would want, but they wouldn't have the huge question marks about them that Ms. Gabbard has.

Do Republicans truly believe, I say to my colleagues, that someone who has so carelessly and repeatedly echoed

Russian propaganda and sympathized with the likes of Putin and Assad is the right person for this job?

I ask my Republican colleagues to think about the safety of the American people and the concern of our allies—and the threats posed by Vladimir Putin—before casting this vote.

Objectively, I think most Senators would agree there are better choices to lead National Intelligence. Do you know what my guess is? If we had a secret ballot, Gabbard might get 10 votes and 40 against her from the other side. People know—that is why they raised so many questions—but Donald Trump and Elon Musk, evidently, threatened them, and they are changing their views.

The Director of National Intelligence must be strong against America's adversaries. This is an amazing one. How could we put someone in when you hear about this? After Assad used chemical weapons against his own people in 2017 and 2018, Tulsi Gabbard turned against U.S. intelligence—by the way, at that point, Donald Trump was President—and sided with fringe conspiracy theorists to cast doubt on these two specific incidents.

I want to be clear about how strange and troubling this episode was. On one side, you had the entire U.S. intelligence ecosystem, the intelligence system of the French Government, and the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons all saying the same thing: that Assad used chemical weapons against his own people in 2017 and 2018. The findings were not speculation. They were based on satellite imagery, witness accounts, medical experts—in other words, the kind of intelligence data that Ms. Gabbard would be responsible for evaluating if she—God forbid—gets this job.

On the other side were all these experts and all this evidence—fact-based—and you have Tulsi Gabbard relying on the judgment of an individual who had appeared on Russian-funded propaganda outlets, questioning those findings and shielding Assad for his inhumane conduct.

I have to say, I have never heard of a DNI nominee who was so ready and willing to question the findings of America's own intelligence operations and yet accept Russian disinformation so easily. And, of course, I am troubled by her long record of showing weakness against Russia when it came to Putin's invasion of Ukraine.

On the night Russia invaded Ukraine and launched the first full-scale invasion of a sovereign nation in Europe since World War II, what was Ms. Gabbard doing? She was on Twitter at 11:30 p.m., blaming NATO and the United States for starting the war in Ukraine when Putin invaded Ukraine. She said the war could have been avoided had NATO and the U.S. just accommodated Putin.

That is who we want as head of National Intelligence?

By the way, Russian state TV gleefully aired these comments shortly

thereafter. And now Republicans want to make this person top U.S. intelligence chief. Can you believe it?

I really don't believe my Republican colleagues believe she is the right choice. I really don't. I know the pressures that have been placed upon them. There is word in the newspapers and other places that people were told their elections would be opposed, et cetera. Who knows? But we do know that there was tremendous pressure on Republican Senators.

But sometimes, my Republican colleagues, you have to buck and stand up to the pressure and say no, this is the wrong choice—definitely the wrong choice—for America.

Again, I would repeat: If there were a secret ballot, I would bet that Gabbard would get no more than 10 votes in the Senate—10 maybe.

The nomination of Ms. Gabbard is one of those moments. Again, before Republicans cast their vote to confirm Ms. Gabbard today, please, please, please answer one simple question: Do you care more about doing the right thing for our national security or doing whatever is necessary to keep Donald Trump happy?

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The majority whip.

#### ECONOMY

Mr. BARRASSO. Mr. President, I just heard the minority leader, the senior Senator from New York, Senator SCHUMER, on this floor talking about today's Consumer Price Index data. Stunningly, he points to President Trump as the reason for it.

Let me just correct the record. The price data that Senator SCHUMER is complaining about is from the final days of the Joe Biden administration. Those are the numbers that are out today from the final days of the Biden administration.

Certainly everyone in Wyoming and everyone in your home State of Oklahoma knows that under the Biden administration, the Democrats, prices of goods and groceries, gasoline—the things that we need in our everyday life—prices rose more than 20 percent under Joe Biden.

High prices are Joe Biden's parting gift and his lasting legacy. They are the party of open borders and high prices. That is why they lost the election.

So here we have the Senate minority leader—now in the minority. He used to be in the majority. The reason he is in the minority is because of the high prices brought on the people of this country as a result of that administration. The numbers out today are reflective of the final days of that administration.

Painfully high prices—they came from Democrats' reckless overspending. And their policies—we are from energy States—were anti-American-energy policies. Those are the things that Senate Democrats voted for repeatedly and stood behind and supported.

Republicans are focused on making life more affordable for families all across this country, hard-working families. We have a plan to unleash American energy, and that way, we can keep lowering prices for American families.

I can just never forget when Joe Biden said he wanted to prioritize climate over energy that was available, affordable, and reliable. It was a disaster for the country and resulted in the defeat of the Democrats.

#### NOMINATION OF ROBERT F. KENNEDY, JR.

Today, Mr. President, I come to the floor also to talk about confirmation votes. The Senate will soon vote on the confirmation of Robert F. Kennedy, Jr., to be the Secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services.

America needs to be healthy. I am a doctor. I have worked with patients for over 20 years, was a surgeon in Wyoming. The problem is, our Nation faces a chronic disease epidemic—chronic disease, including diabetes, cancer, obesity, heart disease, and high blood pressure. Chronic diseases are so widespread that managing them accounts for almost 90 percent of the Federal healthcare spending in this country. We spend a lot of our gross national product on healthcare.

Nearly three in five American adults and one in four American children are impacted by this. Our healthcare system tries to address the problem. Yet, by incentivizing procedures over prevention and paying for that, well, it often fails to address what we need to do effectively as well as economically. As a result, Americans are actually becoming less healthy.

We need to put America on the path to good health. President Trump has selected Robert F. Kennedy, Jr., to do just that, to make America healthy again. Mr. Kennedy will bring a fresh set of ideas and eyes to important debates surrounding our Nation's public health. He is going to be a voice for the vast number of Americans who were failed by the previous administration. The previous administration silenced reasoned debate.

I believe Mr. Kennedy is going to deliver accountability and transparency. For Americans, that means more choices and better information. It means healthy foods and healthy competition for patients. It means lower costs and higher quality. It means increased access to care. Access is so critical in my home State of Wyoming, with so many rural and frontier communities, people going long distances for healthcare. It also means honest, unbiased, and trustworthy scientific research that is both innovative as well as accountable to the American people. People want the truth. They want to know what the facts are. They want to make decisions for themselves.

This is Mr. Kennedy's bold vision to revitalize America's bill of health. He is very clear about his mission, has been throughout. The mission, as he told the Finance Committee, is "to end the chronic disease epidemic and make America healthy again."

Apparently, that is not enough for the Senate Democrats. Senator CATHERINE CORTEZ MASTO of Nevada was actually dismissive of him at the Senate Finance Committee. I heard her say to Mr. Kennedy:

So that's the only reason why you're at HHS? To address this one issue.

This one issue—chronic disease epidemic that is plaguing our Nation—is the key issue to our healthcare. Respectfully, addressing chronic disease is what we ought to be talking about for healthcare for the people of our country.

Mr. Kennedy had to testify and did testify before two separate Senate committees as part of his confirmation. Most people being confirmed come to the Senate and only testify at one committee. He responded to rigorous questions from both Republicans and Democrats, and he answered those questions with candor and with clarity.

He told the Senate HELP Committee that his leadership approach was collaborative. He pledged to "empower the scientists to do their jobs," not to impose, as he said, "preordained opinions on anybody at HHS."

He was also clear that he supports vaccines. He told the Finance Committee:

I support the measles vaccine. I support the polio vaccine. I will do nothing as HHS Secretary that makes it difficult or discourages people from taking . . . those vaccines.

The Senate has every reason to take him at his word.

Mr. Kennedy is a bold choice. He is pro-health, pro-vaccine, and pro-transparency. He is the right choice to make America healthy again. I look forward to voting to confirm him.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Virginia.

Mr. WARNER. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that I be permitted to speak for 6 minutes, followed by Senator WYDEN for 5 minutes, Senator CRAPO for 5 minutes, and Senator SCHUMER for 2 minutes, prior to the scheduled vote.

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

#### NOMINATION OF TULSI GABBARD

Mr. WARNER. Mr. President, I rise once more to oppose the nomination of Tulsi Gabbard to be the Director of National Intelligence.

As I have said repeatedly, I have great respect for Ms. Gabbard's over 20 years of service to our Nation both in and out of uniform. I am, however, profoundly worried that she lacks the qualifications or judgment to be DNI.

The job of the Director of National Intelligence is not a duty to be taken lightly. The incumbent serves as the principal intelligence adviser to the President and also bears the weight of responsibility to prevent another 9/11.

The DNI must also represent the tens of thousands of intelligence professionals around the world who often toil in anonymity. They serve as America's first line of defense against terrorists,