

2021, and those ballots were being counted by the Vice President of the United States, Vice President Pence. He was sitting where the Presiding Officer is now. I was sitting at this desk.

It was 2 in the afternoon. We were counting the electoral college ballots brought in from around the country. It was a rather routine process hardly ever controversial, but in this one something happened we will never forget.

I watched as the Secret Service came up and literally dragged Vice President Pence out of that chair and through that door outside the Senate Chamber. The rest of the Senators were sitting here. We were looking at one another: What is going on?

We knew there were demonstrators outside. We could hear them. We knew there were a lot of them. They had gone to a rally with the President a few blocks away from the Capitol, and now they had marched on the Capitol.

So at that point a member of the Capitol Police, a wonderful group of law enforcement agents who protect all of the visitors, the Gallery, as well as the Senators and staff, one of the members of police in uniform stood before us and said: Don't worry. This is a safe place to be. Stay right where you are. Other people will come in and join you, and we will let you know what is going to happen next.

We said OK. Ten minutes later the same individual came and stood before us and said: Forget what I told you earlier. In an orderly fashion, leave the Chamber as fast as possible. The demonstrators are right outside the door.

So we all went through that door, ushered downstairs and outside along with Vice President Pence. It was a terrible scene. We had 150 law enforcement agents with the Capitol Police who were protecting visitors to the Capitol as well as Senators, Congressmen, and their staffs; and many of those people were hurt, physically hurt.

As a result of that, the Department of Justice under President Biden investigated and had over 1,500 of them who were arrested and prosecuted, and many of them were serving time in jail for what they did on that day.

You have seen the videotapes. I am not going to describe them. Draw your own conclusions. But I can tell you inside, I have never quite seen the Senate in that situation as there was that day.

What happened when President Trump was elected to a second term? The day he was sworn in, he signed a full and unconditional pardon for all of the 1,500 who had been arrested for descending on the Capitol on January 6.

Regardless of whether or not they had been found guilty of a felony for hurting law enforcement agents, regardless of that, he gave full and unconditional pardons.

The impact of that was significant. More than 1,600 people charged and convicted of offenses related to January 6 were subject to the President's

blanket pardon. The Department of Justice hired a pardoned insurrectionist named Jared Weiss. This man who on January 6 was berating officers and calling them Nazis and Gestapo repeatedly urged the violent mob to "kill them"—this is on videotape—as Capitol Police officers were being attacked. Thankfully, he left the Department the same day Attorney General Bondi was fired.

An individual who descended on the Capitol, urged people to harm law enforcement agents trying to keep it peaceful, was then prosecuted, then subject to a pardon, then hired by the Department of Justice to serve as a senior adviser. He is gone, thank goodness.

While the Department's leadership prioritized installing Trump cronies and forcing out experienced attorneys, they quietly closed more than 23,000 criminal investigations in the first 6 months of the Trump administration.

To prioritize Trump's unpopular and cruel mass deportation campaign, the Department declined to pursue prosecutions in hundreds of terrorism, drug, and white-collar criminal investigations.

The National Cryptocurrency Enforcement Team, which was dedicated to investigating crypto-related fraud and money laundering, was disbanded under the former Attorney General. All this took place while the President pardoned his wealthy allies who have defrauded Americans out of millions of dollars, founded notorious dark web drug markets, and supported President Trump's family businesses.

This drastic shift away from the Department's core public safety mission highlights the indifference to the rights and safety of Americans.

I tell you this story because we now have a vacancy in the Attorney General's position. Todd Blanche is there on a temporary basis. We have to decide whether to fill the ranks. I think Americans can agree on the basics.

We want a Department of Justice which is not run for political purposes but to keep us safe in America, safe in our homes, safe in our neighborhoods, safe in our Nation. That is the bottom line.

Getting even with people who are fair or unfair to the current President is not the mission of the Department of Justice. It is the administration of justice in a nonpolitical way.

I certainly hope that in the weeks and months ahead, while we debate this issue, that we can go back to a Department of Justice that we can trust as an apolitical Agency doing its best to bring safety and peace to America.

I yield the floor.

Mr. President, I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

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

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

The Democratic leader is recognized.

TRUMP ADMINISTRATION

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, over the last 2 weeks, Americans were aghast watching two disasters unfold simultaneously: one abroad, one right here in this Chamber. Abroad, Donald Trump is escalating his ill-conceived Iranian incursion, threatening to wipe out an entire civilization, driving up gas prices with no plans and no end in sight.

And right here at home, congressional Republicans are keeping the Department of Homeland Security shut down because they cannot govern themselves, let alone govern this country.

Why? Because Stephen Miller won't let them. Stephen Miller, an unelected ideologue, is calling the shots on immigration policy in this country, not Congress, not Senators, not the Appropriations Committee—Stephen Miller.

Here is the bottom line: Stephen Miller and Donald Trump refuse to accept commonsense, bipartisan reforms to ICE and Border Patrol. Republicans would rather keep DHS shuttered than cross the man who has made cruelty the centerpiece of this administration's immigration agenda.

Republicans are rejecting bipartisan reforms—reforms rooted in transparency and oversight and rule of law—because they refuse to cross the one man whose agenda is built on cruelty.

So let's be clear: What have Republicans chosen? What have Republicans chosen? Not a clean funding bill with commonsense reforms, not bipartisan solutions. They have chosen—the Republicans have chosen chaos. They are dragging the Senate through a painful, arduous, and partisan reconciliation process, not because it is the best path but because it is the only way they can avoid accountability for how ICE and Border Patrol operate.

They would rather walk the plank politically, vote after vote, amendment after amendment, than show a shred of independence from Stephen Miller. That is not leadership. That is not governing. That is dysfunction, plain and simple.

And to make matters worse, they can't even agree among themselves on how to do it.

On the SAVE Act, Republicans continue to push forward on their effort to pass the SAVE Act. While Republicans claim it is a voter ID bill, the insidious truth is, it is a subterfuge for a voter suppression law that would disenfranchise millions of Americans.

The SAVE Act purges millions of Americans from voter rolls. The SAVE Act kills online mail-in voter registration. The SAVE Act rejects common IDs to register, forces Americans to register in person, and punishes married women. The SAVE Act does all of that.

This isn't about protecting elections. That is a lot of bull. Republicans are

going all out to pass the SAVE Act because they are afraid they will not win the midterms and are trying to cheat to get ahead. If Republicans can't win over the voters, they just don't get to write American voters out of the system.

Instead of reversing course on their unpopular agenda, the Republican answer to their political problems is to make it harder for people to vote.

Senate Democrats will continue to fight this SAVE Act with everything we have.

IRAN

Mr. President, on Iran, and all the while that that is happening, Trump took America to war. He did it without consulting Congress. He did it without an authorization of the use of military force. He did it without a plan, without a strategy, and without so much as a clear definition about what winning even looks like. That is the war that Trump is putting us into.

Now, 44 days later, everything is worse than when Trump started this war. His leadership of the war might as well be called "Operation Epic Failure." The Strait of Hormuz, chaos; the Iranian regime, still standing; gas prices at the highest level in years; Iran's nuclear ambitions, exactly the same; American credibility in the world, worse.

The war planning is an epic—this war planning is an epic failure, and it all belongs to Donald Trump.

Just look at what the war has done to the American economy. Energy costs surged in March, led by a more than 20-percent increase in the price of gasoline, accounting for roughly three-quarters of the entire month's inflation increase.

Gas prices remain above \$4 a gallon nationally. Oil is over \$100 a barrel, and U.S. inflation is soaring on higher energy costs—far ahead of where it was before this war started. Companies are adding fuel surcharges. Small businesses across the country are being squeezed between rising costs and customers they cannot afford. Now it looks like, as long as oil prices keep driving up inflation, interest rates are going to remain higher for longer.

This is the Iran war tax. American families are paying every time they fill up the tank, every time they buy groceries, every time they book a flight. This is one of the very worst military and foreign policy operations that the United States has ever taken.

And now let's talk about the Strait of Hormuz, because nothing captures the chaos of this administration's non-strategy better than what happened this weekend.

Donald Trump spent weeks demanding Iran reopen the strait. He threatened to bomb powerplants. He threatened to bomb bridges. He issued ultimatum after ultimatum. Then, this Sunday, he announced that the United States would begin blockading the very strait he was demanding remain open—what folly.

But it gets worse. While all of this was playing out, the Trump administration was quietly allowing Iran to sell its own sanctioned oil on the global market, actively financing the war being waged against us.

Trump is financing the war that Trump started. He is giving finances to be used against us in the war he started because they had no other way to keep gas prices from rising even further.

And guess who gets a hall pass to sell gas and oil: another active enemy—Russia and Putin—who are giving battlefield intelligence to Iran to target and kill our troops and use the billions they get from the Trump oil sanction exemption to finance their war of aggression against our ally Ukraine.

This is not a strategy. This is not a diplomatic solution. That is not a plan. That is chaos, and it is an epic failure.

Talks with Vice President JD VANCE and Iranian officials in Islamabad fell apart in less than a day, with each side blaming the other.

And what has the Republican majority in this Chamber chosen to do while this dramatic, dramatic disaster of a war that Trump started unfolds? Absolutely nothing. They are silent, and their silence is deafening. There have been no hearings. There have been no investigations. There have been no attempts to stand up to Trump.

Well, our servicemembers deserve better than this. Republicans have had three opportunities to stop this war by passing a War Powers Resolution. Republicans have fallen in behind Donald Trump, and they own "Operation Epic Failure" as much as Trump does. That is why, again, this week, Democrats will force a vote on a War Powers Resolution to stop hostilities in Iran and return the power to go to war back to Congress, where it always should be. Republicans will, once again, have the chance to do the right thing and vote to end this war.

To my Republican colleagues, history is going to record this moment. It is going to record whether you stood up for the Constitution or whether you handed your power away to a President who threatened to wipe out an entire civilization and then turned around and blockaded the very strait he demanded Iran open.

And this Chamber is not a spectator. Congress must do its job and make sure that no President—not this one, not the next one—can drag this country into war alone and without consequence. It is time to put an end to "Operation Epic Failure."

POPE LEO XIV

Mr. President, on Pope Leo, last night, Donald Trump reached a new low when he insulted Pope Leo—the first American Pope—by calling him, among other things, weak on crime and too liberal.

What is going on in that man's head? Trump said this in response to the Pope's comments during Easter Sunday, calling for peace. It is the same Donald Trump who has called the Bible

his favorite book on the campaign trail but can't name a single verse, who sells a Trump-branded "Presidential Edition" of the Bible made in China for \$100, and who we all remember held up a Bible in front of St. John's Episcopal Church here in DC after ordering protestors for racial justice to be tear-gassed. Maybe Trump has forgotten what is written in that Bible or, more likely, he never knew it in the first place.

Trump followed up his criticism of Pope Leo by posting an AI-generated image of himself as a Christlike figure. Can you believe this? Can he get any lower?

This sort of behavior makes a mockery of millions of Christian Americans, many of whom voted for Trump and who fervently believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. More broadly than that, it is a disgusting affront to anybody who expects an American President to lead with dignity.

Trump's defenders, no doubt, will manage to find a way to hand-wave or ignore this latest temper tantrum—his blindly loyal and devoutly Catholic Vice President included.

Can you imagine, if a Democrat had done this, the outcry we would be hearing?

But, really, how much clearer could it be that the despised villains we read about in the New and Old Testaments—power-drunk and violent authoritarians like the Babylonian King Nebuchadnezzar or King Herod of Judea—bear many parallels to Donald Trump, who—let me repeat—has viciously attacked Pope Leo for calling for peace in the world.

If King Herod had had a Truth Social account in the first century, I think he would have probably described Jesus Christ, who saved the penitent thief crucified alongside him, as weak on crime as well.

The shortest verse in the Bible is "Jesus wept." Maybe Donald Trump can manage to remember that one.

(Mrs. BRITT assumed the Chair.)

TRIBUTE TO ALEX NGUYEN

Madam President, finally, last but certainly not least is Alex—my dear Alex.

In May of 2019, I hired a new national press secretary to join my leadership team. He had a strong resume, and he had glowing recommendations, but I will admit the fit took a little getting used to. I am from New York. He is from Los Angeles. I have been in the Senate a long time. He came straight from the House. He wears his glasses properly. I never have. And when things got stressful, he somehow got calmer, which I never quite understood. But over the next 7 years, that press secretary from LA became one of my most trusted advisers and closest confidants.

His name is Alex Nguyen. After 7 remarkable years—7 great years—where he not only was a great press leader but just somebody who helped shape our office, shape our policy, guide us,