

showed that it saved Iowans \$3,100. Either way, \$2,000 or \$3,000 is money that Iowans could not afford to pay in additional taxes.

But this bill does not include just taxes. It is a very comprehensive piece of legislation that increases support for family farmers. It has energy policy that has brought down gas prices tremendously since President Trump signed the bill. It has improvement in education programs. It has health issues in it. And it has law enforcement issues in it.

I am not sure I have named all of the parts of the bill, but I hope people who are filling out their tax forms in 2026, and who don't have to pay additional taxes, will understand that that tax bill has done a lot for many segments of the economy that the President ought to be complimented for. Those of us in the Senate who voted for it could, likewise, let them know that we were worried about the tax increase.

I yield the floor.

RECOGNITION OF THE MAJORITY LEADER

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The majority leader is recognized.

MEASURE PLACED ON THE
CALENDAR—S. 3627

Mr. THUNE. Mr. President, I understand there is a bill at the desk that is due for a second reading.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The leader is correct.

The clerk will read the bill by title for the second time.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

A bill (S. 3627) to require institutions of higher education to disseminate information on the rights of, and accommodations and resources for, pregnant students, and for other purposes.

Mr. THUNE. Mr. President, in order to place the bill on the calendar under the provisions of rule XIV, I would object to further proceedings.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Objection having been heard, the bill will be placed on the calendar under rule XIV.

COMMERCE, JUSTICE, SCIENCE;
ENERGY AND WATER DEVELOPMENT;
AND INTERIOR AND ENVIRONMENT APPROPRIATIONS ACT,
2026

VENEZUELA

Mr. THUNE. Mr. President, today, we expect a vote on a resolution to direct the removal of U.S. forces from hostilities in or against Venezuela, even though—even though—the United States is not currently engaged in hostilities in or against Venezuela. That is right. We have no troops on the ground in Venezuela. We are not currently conducting military operations there. But Democrats are taking up this bill because their anti-Trump hysteria knows no bounds.

Here are the facts. Nicolas Maduro is a narcoterrorist who helped lead the

so-called Cartel of the Suns. He advanced large-scale drug trafficking, armed an illegitimate militia, solicited arms for a terrorist organization, presided over unfree and unfair elections, targeted political opponents, and oversaw the killing of thousands, as a U.N. report outlined, to name just a few—just some of—his crimes. The United States did not recognize him as the legitimate leader of Venezuela. Neither did the European Union. And he was a fugitive of the U.S. justice system.

Back during the first Trump administration, Democrats were calling for the ouster of Maduro and for U.S. assistance in Venezuela and were criticizing the President for not going far enough in opposing the Maduro regime. President Biden raised the reward for information leading to the arrest or conviction of Maduro to \$25 million. But then President Trump directs an isolated Special Forces raid in support of a valid warrant to capture Maduro so that he can be tried for drug crimes, and Democrats are falling all over themselves to criticize the seizure and arrest of this international criminal. Talk about Trump derangement syndrome.

It is funny; I don't remember Democrats trying to tie the President's hands when Democrat Presidents took far more extensive military action that involved thousands of troops or airstrikes over weeks and months in Libya, Bosnia, Serbia, and Haiti. Most recently, in 2024, they locked arms and voted to turn a blind eye toward a monthslong deployment of troops for President Biden's disastrous floating aid pier to Gaza, even while Biden's own Defense Department called it an active war zone and the pier was fired upon twice.

They said those troops were not engaged in hostilities and therefore not subject to the War Powers Resolution, and yet today they are claiming the opposite for a couple hundred troops who were in Venezuela for a matter of mere hours and who have already returned to their bases in the United States or on U.S. Navy ships in international waters. But with President Trump, Democrats are incapable of deciding on the merits. They reflexively oppose anything he does or says, even when it contradicts or is in tension with their own prior opinions.

Whatever the outcome of this process, I trust that the Trump administration will continue to work to combat the terrible scourge of illegal drugs and to keep our Nation and our communities safe.

SENATE ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Mr. President, 2025 was a year of hard legislative work in the U.S. Senate. We passed once-in-a-generation legislation, the Working Families Tax Cut bill, which is currently putting more money in hard-working Americans' pockets. But we didn't just make the headlines legislatively. In addition to a packed legislative schedule, we consid-

ered and confirmed 417 civilian Presidential nominations—more than were confirmed in the first year of President Trump's first term or President Biden's. And while 417 would be an impressive number all on its own, it is particularly remarkable given the historic level of obstruction the President's nominees faced. I said "historic," and I mean historic.

When you look at this term, President Trump remains the only President on record—the only President on record—in American history not to have had a single nominee confirmed by unanimous consent or voice vote. Compare that to Presidents George H.W. Bush and Bill Clinton, who each had 98 percent of their civilian nominees confirmed by unanimous consent or voice vote in the first term of their Presidencies—98 percent. George W. Bush and Barack Obama each had 90 percent. And while Democrats substantially eroded this tradition of bipartisanship during President Trump's first term, both President Trump in his first term and President Biden each had more than half of their nominees confirmed by voice vote. So the Presiding Officer can see what I mean by historic obstruction.

Democrats, of course, attempted to justify themselves by claiming, in the words of the Democratic leader, that "historically bad nominees deserve a historic level of scrutiny." The only problem with that argument, of course, is that a lot of these supposedly historically bad nominees received Democrat votes. So either Democrats were supporting historically bad nominees or this wasn't about historically bad nominees at all, which, of course, it wasn't. The real reason Democrats were dragging out nominations for Assistant Administrator for the Office of Solid Waste and Director of the Office of Surface Mining Reclamation and Enforcement was nothing more than petty politics—because as we see with Venezuela and as we have seen with Presidential nominations, Democrats are incapable of fairness or nuance when it comes to President Trump. They can't deal with the fact that he was elected President, and so they reflexively oppose anything he does or says, even when it is something they might otherwise support.

The virulent partisanship Democrats have injected into our politics is deeply regrettable, but Republicans, of course, have not let it stop us from achieving things for the American people, whether that is passing the Working Families Tax Cut bill or confirming 417 Presidential nominees in the face of historic Democrat obstruction. And we are right back at it this year, confirming four nominees the first week of 2026.

The American people elected President Trump, and Republicans remain committed to ensuring that he has his team in place so that he can do the work the American people elected him to do.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant 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.

FEDERAL RESERVE INVESTIGATION

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, launching a criminal investigation to coerce the Federal Reserve is a dangerous crossing of the Rubicon—even for Donald Trump, who has crossed many Rubicons already, to his detriment and to the country's detriment.

America's economic stability depends on impartial, stable monetary policy. Our central bank must always operate free of coercion, free of intimidation, and free from short-term political calculation. But what Donald Trump is doing is the MAGA-fication of monetary policy—one of the last places we should have any kind of MAGA influence.

Anyone with two eyes and half a brain can see what this probe is—a brazen attempt to cannibalize the Fed's influence. It is monetary mob-boss thuggery.

If you are an American worried about costs—housing costs, car loan costs, any interest rate costs—what Donald Trump is doing should alarm you. If you are worried about bringing your mortgage rate down if you have a variable-rate mortgage, if you want to keep the mortgage down, if you are a new home buyer and want a lower mortgage, Donald Trump's assault on the Fed should alarm you because when there is chaos in the Fed, interest rates go up.

The banks and financial institutions, when they say "chaos," they grab on tightly and say "We better not lower anything. We better keep things high because we are not exactly sure what is going to happen" because when there is chaos in the Fed, there is chaos across the economy, and rates go up.

That is what financial institutions do in times of uncertainty. They ratchet rates up to avoid a pitfall of some kind of downward decline that chaos often brings. It becomes more expensive for people to borrow. It makes it harder to own a home. It makes it harder to build more homes. It raises car payments and credit card payments. It raises the price of almost anything.

So if Donald Trump is serious about bringing costs down, about fighting inflation, about showing the American people he cares about them, the last thing he needs to be doing is launching criminal investigations against members of the Federal Reserve Board. Congress should not—cannot—be silent in the face of such naked political attacks.

Now Republicans are whispering in the hallways to one another that they

are troubled about what the DOJ is doing against the Federal Reserve, but actions speak louder than words. It is not enough for Republicans to whisper their worry; Senate Republicans should act like they are in the majority and use their oversight powers to bring the DOJ to heel.

We must bring Department of Justice officials here to the Senate to testify in committee under oath and answer for their reckless conduct. We must hold the line against any Federal Reserve nominee from Donald Trump so long as this dark cloud hangs over the Fed.

If Senate Republicans are truly worried about the Fed's independence, if they are worried about what chaos at the Fed means for rising housing costs, rising borrowing costs, rising inflation, then they ought to conduct some oversight. Otherwise, their concerns are little more than hot air.

POPULISM

Mr. President, now on Donald Trump's fake populism, yesterday, in Michigan, Donald Trump once again tried to gaslight the American people about the affordability crisis in another rambling speech meant to prove he cares about the struggles of ordinary Americans. He mocked the word "affordability" once again. He called it a fake.

Maybe to Donald Trump, affordability is a fake because he is a billionaire. He doesn't have to go out and buy the groceries, by a car, sign up for a healthcare proposal that doesn't meet your family's needs. Donald Trump doesn't need to do those things; he doesn't have to worry. But tell that to a teacher, to a truckdriver, to a bartender, to a nurse, that affordability is fake. Tell it to anyone who actually has to work for a living. Affordability isn't fake; it is a very real nightmare. I am sure that last night, probably tens of millions of families gathered to decide which bills they could afford to pay and which bills they couldn't for necessities they need.

Like many Presidents before him, Donald Trump is falling into a classic trap. When times are tough, he ignores reality and tries to convince people that everything is actually going great. This has never worked, and it is not going to work now.

A year ago, Donald Trump stormed into office on the promise to lower costs, to fight for ordinary Americans, to unrig a rigged system. He ran, in other words, as a populist who promised to drain the swamp and end inflation.

But Donald Trump is not a populist; he is a posturer. He throws out these populist ideas to try to persuade people he is on their side, but he never does anything to get them done. He never lifts a finger or a phone. And the American people see that he talks a good game but never does anything to accomplish what he wants to do when it comes to lowering their costs. And the situation of the American people only gets worse.

To Donald Trump: Your posturing, your throwing out these ideas that people like and then doing nothing to actually make them happen, ain't gonna work, Donald Trump. Your posturing ain't gonna work when it comes to costs, when it comes to populism. You have to solve the problem.

What is Donald Trump doing now? He is throwing spaghetti at the wall. He throws a slew of half-baked proposals that are thin on substance—throws those out—in a desperate attempt to show Americans he cares about rising costs.

In the last week, he has talked about housing, credit cards, the price of beef, trade, and done nothing on any of them, and costs keep rising. The American people don't want a bunch of words that have nothing of substance behind them. They don't want pandering. They don't want posturing. They want Donald Trump to take action.

This is exactly Donald Trump's Achilles heel when it comes to costs and so much else. He talks about a lot of things that may sound nice, but he never follows through or delivers on any of his promises. Whether it is costs or Epstein or ending forever wars, the pattern is the same. Donald Trump talks about credit cards one day, food prices the next, housing the day after, but never actually follows through on getting his Republican colleagues to act.

So here is the reality for you, Donald Trump: It is not enough for you, Donald Trump, to just talk about a bunch of ideas to lower costs. You need to get your Republican colleagues to actually pass legislation, much of which we Democrats have stood for, for a long time.

Otherwise, what Trump is doing is not populism; it is simply posturing.

Actions speak louder than words. If Donald Trump is serious about costs, he needs to put in the work to get Republicans to pass legislation that actually will lower costs for America.

HEALTHCARE

Mr. President, finally, on ACA legislation, when it comes to lowering costs, Americans don't want nice-sounding statements; they want action.

Today, the Senate has a chance to take action to lower the cost of healthcare. In a few hours, I will come to the floor to seek unanimous passage of legislation passed by the House last week to extend ACA premium tax credits for 3 years.

Senate Democrats unanimously supported extending these credits last year. Some Republicans even joined us. But Leader Thune led the way to block this legislation, and it ensured that people's premiums are now skyrocketing.

Well, we have another chance to deliver relief for the American people, Republicans, by passing the same bill the House approved last week with bipartisan support. Time is of the essence.

The New York Times reported that nearly 1.5 million Americans already have lost coverage. Americans are in the middle of a healthcare emergency, all because the tax credits are not being extended.

The best, quickest, simplest thing Congress can do to lower premiums is to pass a clean restoration of the credits that expired last year.

So to my Republican colleagues: Do not block this legislation. Do not get in the way. The American people demand relief, and today, you have a chance to deliver it.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Republican whip.

THE ECONOMY

Mr. BARRASSO. Mr. President, you know, Republicans have a simple message for the American people, and that is, what we are doing here as Republicans is putting more money in your pockets, creating more opportunities for the American people, for American families, and families all across America are feeling it today.

Americans are no longer seeing these sky-high increases in prices like we experienced over the 4 years of the Biden administration—not at all.

Five years ago, inflation began to soar because of the Democrats' reckless tax-and-spending plan. As a result, we saw inflation hit 40-year highs, and people suffered all across this country as a result.

Well, over the last year, Republicans—now with President Trump and a Republican House and Republican Senate—have eliminated billions of dollars of wasteful Washington spending, and we are seeing that the pressure on prices is easing.

Families in more than 40 States are paying less than \$3 a gallon for gasoline. In the Presiding Officer's State of Oklahoma and in my home State of Wyoming, it is at \$2 for gasoline right now.

Lower gas prices, as the Presiding Officer knows, impact everything that a family does. It impacts everything in the country: the cost of groceries, the cost of commuting to work, or keeping going a ranch or family business. Energy prices affect all of it.

And lower prices are happening because Republicans are successfully changing the direction of the country. We promised to cut burdensome Biden regulations—regulations that have been punishing, penalizing—and we are getting it done. We promised to unleash American energy and we have done it. We have delivered on our promises.

You know, under the Trump administration, permits to explore for energy right here in America have gone way up. It has been successful. The United States has never produced more energy than we are producing today. Energy dominance is fueling our opportunity economy. It is making a difference in families and in their lives.

America is standing by our manufacturers and helping them. And, look,

our Working Families Tax Cuts law and the incentives in that are making a real difference for our economy. It is helping businesses build things, building them right here at home in America.

It allows for full expensing for factory improvements, new machinery, and farm equipment. We are seeing that in farms and ranches across Wyoming.

I heard it at the Farm Bureau. I heard it from our stock growers. It is encouraging businesses to innovate.

We have restored full and immediate expensing for research, for development, done right here in America. And we have made those savings permanent.

For businesses, that means it is more affordable to build at home in America, not 5 years from now but today, not overseas but in places like Wyoming.

And people are responding. These pro-growth policies are already driving a surge of business investment. More investment means more manufacturing at home and more American jobs—jobs that have been shipped overseas by the Democrats in the past. More manufacturing leads to high-paying jobs at home.

Construction sites are booming. You are seeing it there in the construction sites. You are also seeing it in the assembly line. More innovation, more production means prices go down.

And small businesses are the engine of Americans' prosperity. The Working Families Tax Cuts law helps small businesses all across America.

The law makes permanent the 20 percent small business tax deduction. Every Democrat voted against that. Republicans are focused on helping small businesses grow.

So American workers are the clear winners in what we have done with the Working Families Tax Cuts law.

You know, what we put in that law—no tax on overtime—that means a lot for the miners and the linemen in Wyoming. They are going to be able to keep \$1,400 more this year in their paychecks.

Now, the Democrat leader, Senator SCHUMER, was just on the floor, and he talked about firefighters. Well, firefighters work a lot of overtime. They need to stay on the job. They do that. No tax on overtime now—that means more money in their pockets to take home. Firefighters, the nurses in Wyoming—they are happy with what we have done.

CHUCK SCHUMER, who was just talking about it, voted against it. The Democrats wanted to raise taxes by \$4 trillion. How is that going to help our country? It is not.

And then I heard Senator SCHUMER talk about bartenders. Well, we say no tax on tips. Bartenders get tips as part of their pay, so do waiters, waitresses. Lots of people work with tips. No tax on tips—every Democrat voted against that. That was taking money—they would rather just take that money for

themselves. They like the tips. They want it to go to the tax so they can spend more. We said: no tax on tips.

Look, this is money that our workers in America have earned. They ought to be able to benefit from it. It is not going to be wasted away anymore by these unaccountable, unelected, heavy-handed bureaucrats who think they know better than the American people. And it is certainly not going to continue to be stolen like it has been by these fraudsters in Minnesota, while the Democrats look the other way.

In all, American workers are going to see higher take-home pay, more money in their pockets, thanks to what we passed with the Working Families Tax Cuts law.

Republicans are creating an economy that works for working Americans. We are creating a prosperous America, an America where citizens are free to use their money. If they want to save it, if they want to spend it, if they want to invest it, they get to decide.

They want to use it to build a small business, good. They want it to control their family's future, perfect.

It is no wonder that the University of Michigan found that consumer sentiment continues to go up. That confidence rose the most among blue-collar workers—the workers who were hit the hardest by the Democrats' unaffordable economy.

Republicans were successful in stopping the Democrats' \$4 trillion tax increase. We eliminated burdensome regulations. We unleashed American energy. We are getting America back on track. So that is why, today, Americans are seeing more money in their pockets. They are going to see bigger tax refunds. They are going to see more opportunities in their future.

That is what Americans voted for last November, and that is what Republicans have delivered. And this economic progress is just the start of the prosperity to come.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Democratic whip.

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, my friend and colleague from Wyoming mentioned many things about the Republican tax bill, but he failed to mention the most important part of it: It ended up giving tax breaks to the wealthiest people in America. It ended up cutting \$1 trillion from the Medicaid Program. Wait until that cut works its way through the economy to your local hospital and clinic, and watch what happens.

They have already warned us: Unless something is done, there is going to be a lot of closures and a lot of reductions of services in these hospitals in rural areas, in small towns, and the inner city. That is a fact.

If you want to give tax breaks to the wealthiest people and you don't care about the impact on the regular families of America, that is exactly what happened with the Republican tax bill, and that is the reason why Democrats

did not support it. We believe that tax cuts should be geared toward working families who are struggling with affordability.

President Trump gave a speech yesterday in Michigan and choked on the word “affordability.” He hates it. It is a Democratic word. It is a hoax. It is a fake.

It is reality. It is reality.

I don’t know how often the President of the United States—and I am sure he never has a chance—gets to go shopping at the local grocery store. I do so almost every weekend I am home. I see what has happened to prices. My wife reminds me; other families remind me. The cost of living has gone up, and you give tax breaks here and there and the other place and primarily to wealthy people. It is not going to provide the kind of relief that working families desperately need. That is one of the issues that will be decided by the voters in the next election.

IMMIGRATION

Mr. President, the year was 1939, and there was a ship that sailed from Germany destined for Cuba. It was bringing Jewish refugees from Europe, which was falling into Nazi control, to a free place to live in Cuba.

Unfortunately, as that ship, the *St. Louis*, approached Havana, Cuba, it was turned away. They wouldn’t allow those Jewish passengers to find freedom in Cuba at the time. They then appealed to the United States, to President Roosevelt and his administration, and they too turned them away. The ship got so close, according to press reports, that they could actually hear the bands playing in the nightclubs in Miami. But they couldn’t land the ship.

And so they took the *St. Louis* back to Europe with a thousand Jewish refugees. Many of them became victims of the Holocaust. It was a bitter lesson learned, particularly in time of war and strife, that there is a need for countries, where there is peaceful situation, to step up and do their part to try to help refugees, those seeking asylum.

After World War II, the United States decided that the *St. Louis* was a valuable lesson. We started leading the nations of the world in accepting refugees. It was an act of mercy, a humanitarian response to the reality that these people were facing. And we were proudly leading that effort for decades, until very recently.

Under this President, the whole situation and policy have changed. This administration, unfortunately, is highlighting a policy that turns away refugees. The Trump administration has diverted resources from law enforcement and national security efforts to focus on arresting immigrants who pose no threat to public safety. We have seen it in Chicago. We have seen it in Minneapolis and in other cities. This administration is targeting legal immigrants who followed every rule and regulation.

Over the past few months, the Trump administration has issued a flurry of

new policies effectively ending lawful—lawful—immigration for individuals from 39 countries. It harkens back to the bitter experience of the *St. Louis*.

In November last year, President Trump used the tragic shooting of two National Guard members to justify a freeze on all new visas of Afghan nationals. Many of these visa applicants fought against the Taliban, alongside American forces, and now must flee Afghanistan to avoid punishment or death for the crime of working for us. President Trump has abandoned them—so much for loyalty.

These men and women in Afghanistan decided they would risk their lives to stand by our soldiers during that conflict. They survived, and now they are asking us to protect them from the Taliban’s excesses. The President has decided: No, thanks.

He slammed the door on Afghan nationals who risked their lives to save the lives of American soldiers, and he didn’t stop there. In addition to suspending these applications for Afghan nationals, the Trump administration paused all asylum refugee decisions.

The Trump administration has extended broad immigration bans to anyone from 39 different countries, including individuals from those countries who are already in the United States. Going through an asylee claim, a refugee claim, playing by the book, takes months and sometimes years in refugee camps. People go through extensive background checks before they are even considered to come to the United States.

In this situation, those who have successfully made that journey are once again in jeopardy with the new Trump policy.

The administration is reviewing again all legal immigration cases already approved for individuals from the banned nations. To be clear, this expansion is not limited to nationals of countries on the list. It also includes anyone who has been born in any one of those countries, even if they lived the majority of their life somewhere else.

My office has received reports that Canadians—Canadians—born in Iran have been impacted by this new Trump ban. There have even been reports of the ban to stop parents who have completed every step of the adoption process from bringing their new babies to the United States.

The administration has claimed this is about vetting immigrants to protect public safety. But tell me: Does it make sense to deny entry for a baby for vetting reasons?

What the President has done to bring down the hammer on those who are legally immigrating from what he calls “s-hole countries”—remember that phrase, when the President, in his first term, referred to those from Africa and Haiti in profane and racist terms in the Oval Office? At the time, the White House denied having said that. But I was there, physically present, when the President made those statements, not

once but twice. I was in that meeting, and I confirm that he used those vulgar terms referring to people from other countries.

Two Republican Senators publicly accused me of lying. Well, in a rally in Pennsylvania, last month, President Trump bragged that he had indeed used that slur that I referred to earlier.

And at a Cabinet meeting, last month, he publicly called Somali immigrants “garbage.” The President of the United States referred to people from Somalia as “garbage.”

Just yesterday, the administration announced the termination of Somalis’ designation for temporary protected status. TPS allows immigrants from a country that is unsafe to temporarily remain in the United States.

Does the President really think Somalia is a safe or stable place for these individuals to return? I think not. He just doesn’t care.

These racist comments and policies have confirmed what we have known all along. The President has deep-seated animus for immigrants who are not White. Throughout this past year, he has harnessed tragedies to justify his anti-immigrant crusade, first with the National Guard shootings and now with many of his fraud allegations we heard here on the floor of the Senate day after day.

Last Friday, in the midst of Federal immigration agents’ assault on Minneapolis, Department of Homeland Security began arresting recently arrived refugees in Minnesota. These refugees have already gone through intense vetting, sometimes for years, before they have been allowed to come to the United States. They followed our laws, came here in the “right way.” Now their lives will be turned upside down again to serve the President’s political agenda.

The fraud in Minnesota is serious and warrants continued investigation, but punishing thousands of refugees because of crimes they had nothing to do with is just plain wrong and inhumane.

The Trump administration has tried to politicize this fraud investigation, but the first prosecutions for this fraud began in 2022 during the previous Biden administration.

The administration says their immigration policies are intended to protect America. I am calling their bluff. What they have done instead is to effectively halt legal immigration for a long list of countries, all of which have majority non-White populations. This was their real intention all along.

Already, the lives of people in our immigration system, particularly people of color, have been unfairly upended. Immigrants are seeing their long-scheduled green card interview canceled. Naturalization candidates have been pulled from their scheduled citizenship ceremonies.

I know this to be true because it happened to my constituents who reached out to our office. They are rightfully upset that the administration has

stopped them, these individuals, after already approving them for citizenship. They can't take the oath of allegiance to our country, and they don't know where this process is going to end.

My mother was a naturalized citizen to the United States. I keep her certificate framed in my office in the U.S. Capitol. Those who are willing to take the oath of allegiance to our country become some of our most loyal citizens. My mom was one of them. We cannot abandon them.

We must not allow America to turn its back on immigrants who followed every rule and make America stronger. It would be an affront to the Constitution and a retreat from our values and heritage as a nation of immigrants.

This is an awful situation where helpless people are being exploited for political reasons. It is time for both political parties to step aside from the campaign for a moment and speak to the values that make America a better country than most. I am proud to be part of this country, but we are a nation of immigrants and should never forget it.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. SHEEHY). The Senator from Michigan.

UNANIMOUS CONSENT REQUEST—H.R. 6019

Mr. PETERS. Mr. President, I am once again asking my colleagues to do the right thing and to unanimously agree to repeal a provision that was included in the government funding legislation in November.

You will recall that the funding bill included a provision that many Senators were simply not made aware of. It came in at the last minute. It set up a special payday of \$500,000, paid for by the taxpayers, for a select—a select—group of eight Senators. That policy is simply wrong. It goes against everything that we are supposed to be doing as elected representatives to make life better for the people who live in our States and in the country.

We have all heard a lot of excuses trying to justify why a handful of Senators deserves a big financial windfall. Let me remind you why they are wrong.

This all began when President Trump and his political allies cooked up a scheme to try to overturn the result of the 2020 Presidential election, all so he could stay in power. You will remember that he lost the election, but instead of respecting our Nation's nearly 250-year history of peaceful transfers of power, President Trump and his allies launched a pressure campaign to try to install slates of fake electors to overturn the election results in several key States.

While Senators were here in this Chamber pushing back on those false efforts, President Trump instigated a riot, urged his supporters to come here and try to stop Congress from carrying out our sworn democratic responsibilities.

We just observed the fifth anniversary of that attack last week, where so

many Members came to the floor—I was here—and shared their memories of the horror and violence of that day.

Those actions, led by President Trump and his allies, were criminal—simply criminal. Those crimes were exactly what the Department of Justice was investigating when subpoenas were issued for certain phone call logs. These logs weren't being targeted for political reasons; they were part of a legitimate and serious investigation into criminal activity. The Justice Department followed standard legal practice in seeking those phone logs. This should be just common sense.

But, unfortunately, there are those who believe a select group of Senators have the right to profit from being caught up in a legitimate criminal investigation, and they are OK with American taxpayers footing the bill.

They have claimed that this provision was never meant to enrich Senators, but the reality is, there is nothing in the law to prevent that from actually happening.

They have claimed that the special counsel and the judge overseeing this matter acted in bad faith, but in reality, there was no departure—absolutely no departure—from established Department of Justice and judicial practice.

I am not opposed to debating the merits of this matter and determining whether there needs to be forward-looking changes. In fact, I would support some of those forward-looking changes. But that is not what is happening right here. Instead, without any thoughtful consideration, this body approved a provision to retroactively rewrite the law and set up the opportunity for special financial payments to a select group of Senators.

When our House colleagues learned of this, they were as surprised as most all of us that were here in this Chamber. Our House colleagues did the right thing. They quickly and unanimously—that is right, the House unanimously—that doesn't happen a lot—the House unanimously, 426 to 0, passed a bipartisan bill to repeal this provision because they knew it was wrong.

We should be here working to lower costs for our constituents and not using taxpayer dollars irresponsibly. I hope my colleagues will join me in righting this wrong today.

Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate proceed to the immediate consideration of H.R. 6019, which was received from the House and is at the desk. Further, I ask unanimous consent that the bill be considered read a third time and passed and the motion to reconsider be considered made and laid upon the table.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

The Senator from South Carolina.

Mr. GRAHAM. Reserving the right to object, as a matter of fact, I have been here a while. I can't think of a time that I felt the need to object.

You are entitled to your opinion of me.

How do you get in this group of eight people? Jack Smith went after my phone records. I am the chairman of the Judiciary Committee. We found out later that this politically motivated hit job against President Trump by Jack Smith got eight of us, and there are probably more.

What did I do to deserve this, Senator? I will just tell you. I don't know where you were at January 6. I was here. I was probably the leading voice on this side of the aisle to say the election is over; Biden won; Trump lost. But you keep talking about Trump because—if there is a case of Trump derangement syndrome, I think it has spread throughout the building.

I didn't riot. I didn't give cover to the idea that the election was stolen—quite the opposite. What was my big offense? Being a friend of Trump's.

What are you trying to do here? Do the right thing? The right thing is to continue to investigate Jack Smith for turning the law upside down, for creating a precedent that should scare every Senator in this body.

The law is pretty clear—there is a statute on point—that the Senate, even with a nondisclosure order, is supposed to notify the Members when somebody wants our phone records. We are a separate branch of the government.

You don't seem to be upset at all because they are coming after Trump and a friend of Trump's.

Now, when we do something, you know, we are out to destroy Trump. And anytime we look at what you all did, you know, we are, I guess, a bunch of crooks.

Now let's talk about me and enrichment. The Democratic majority leader, Senator SCHUMER, signed off on this. I want the world to know—and the world is paying no attention because it is blowing up right now—that this provision was coordinated between Senators THUNE and SCHUMER because a lot of people worried that if they can do it to Republicans, maybe they can do it to Democrats.

So the idea that eight of us cooked something up is ridiculous. We talked to your Democratic leadership. The fact that they didn't talk to you is your problem with them.

What happened? We sent to the Ethics Committee what we are doing, and they didn't send anything back. Now they have.

So the bottom line is, Mr. President, this provision was a result of "We are not going to take it anymore." The law was flagrantly violated, I believe, but he has already made a decision—Senator PETERS has—that Jack Smith was lawfully in the right here. Have a hearing. He has already decided that Jack Smith was right—right—to find my phone records. Based on what? Being a friend of Trump's?

I will take this to the court. If your goal is to intimidate me, boy, you don't know anything about me. If your goal is to try to cover up a valid inquiry and stop Jack Smith from being

looked at, it ain't happening. I am more determined than ever to find out how Arctic Frost got so off the rails.

Within 3 days of Trump's announcing "I am going to run again," the process started, and within 6 months, he had 91 felony charges in Manhattan; in Atlanta, GA; in Washington, DC; and in Florida. I had to spend \$1.2 million to go down to Georgia for the Fani Willis debacle. So this will be looked at.

Was there a coordinated effort between Jack Smith—the special counsel—and the most liberal jurisdictions in the country to knock Trump out of the race by throwing everything you could at him, whether it made sense or not, and his friends? See, I don't know, but we are going to find this out, Senator PETERS. We are moving forward.

You have made up your mind. If it were up to you, we would not be looking at Jack Smith. You made a mistake there by defending somebody when you had no idea, actually, what he did.

I think I pretty well know where you are coming from, so I object. I object because we did it in coordination with the Democrats. I object because we let the Ethics Committee know.

The House? The House did it quickly. There are provisions in this bill from the House that his amendment would strip out—the notification requirement. Every Member should want to be notified if anybody in the government, in the executive branch, is looking at your phone records. This provision would strip that out. A private cause of action would strip it out.

I live in America. We all live in America. If you cannot hold your government accountable for violating your rights or potentially violating your rights, you have a very dangerous government. I am no better than anybody else, but I am certainly—hell—no worse than anybody else. So I want to know why the government made a subpoena request that if you tell me about what is going on here, that I am likely to taint the witnesses and act irresponsibly. What have I ever done as a Senator to make you think that is me? There was no factual foundation that I would do anything illegal if you told me. I did nothing illegal except to be Trump's friend, apparently. I inquired as to whether or not I should vote to certify the election on January 6, and I did. I did not know this had happened, but if it can happen to me, then, to my colleagues over there, it can happen to you.

So this unanimous consent request would strip the notification out, and it would strip the private cause of action out. I think that is the wrong signal to send to a government out of control. With the private cause of action, the \$500,000 is to try to deter people from doing this again. The bottom line is the private cause of action needs to stay if anybody else in the future gets hurt like this or a private citizen.

There are a bunch of groups out there—all conservative—that have had

their phone records looked at, too, but we are not going to give up. No matter what Senator PETERS says, we are going to look at it. There is Turning Point USA. There are a lot of shenani-gans going on out there with Jack Smith, and we are going to look at it, whether you want us to or not. So I hope they can sue.

As to me, I am a Senator. If this provision—the private cause of action—is seen out of line with what the Senate rules now, I will gladly fix that. But you are off base if you think I am doing this for \$1 million. I am going to sue for much more than that, not just to try to make my life whole but to make people pay for trying to—you know, forget my phone records, for God's sake. That will be in court. I will have to prove that. I will make sure—and I will have that in just a minute. There is a provision to change the law so that there is no doubt that I and the eight others won't get a benefit from the \$500,000. It won't be personal. But we do want to proceed with our case, and I want other people to proceed with their cases. If we do this right now, Turning Point USA and a bunch of other groups will not have a private cause of action. I want to preserve that private cause of action for a lot of other people who are not Senators.

As to me, I don't know. You are implying that I did something to benefit me in the dark of night. You know, I will remember that, but life goes on. So I object. I object to what you are doing. I object to the fact that you think Jack Smith was legal when you have no idea what he did.

I object.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The objection is heard.

The Senator from South Carolina.

Mr. GRAHAM. Therefore, I ask unanimous consent that the unanimous consent request be modified to include the adoption of my substitute amendment, which is at the desk.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there an objection to the modification?

The Senator from Michigan.

Mr. PETERS. Mr. President, reserving the right to object, I want to say that I greatly appreciate Senator GRAHAM's proposal that he has put forward just now. We received this last night, but I think it is against the most critical issue here, which is the retroactive rewarding or awarding of \$500,000 per violation of damages to a handful of Senators. I very much appreciate Senator GRAHAM for doing that, but I don't believe that it gets to the full bipartisan-bicameral solution that we need.

Senator GRAHAM, I am sympathetic to the arguments you have made here. I can rebut some of them, but I don't want to get into that debate right now—back and forth—to do it. But I understand where you are coming from on a lot of those issues.

I think there are other concerns in this statute that were enacted in November that need to be addressed, including some potential for abuse for

the target of a criminal investigation provision that is in the statute that remains retroactive. That could create a lot of problems for Senators here on the floor, to Senator GRAHAM's point. Certainly, dealing with the damages provision, as my colleague proposes in this proposal that he put forward just now, is a significant part of the solution, but it is not the whole solution.

Senator GRAHAM, I just hope that this can be a very positive starting point. Thank you for making this offer here today. I would ask if we could get together and try to find some common ground here to make sure that some of the concerns that you have are addressed because I think those are reasonable. As to the part that you are pulling out, which I think is unreasonable, I appreciate that you now agree that that, too, is unreasonable. But let's have an honest, frank discussion about the rest because, certainly, the points you have raised are ones that I want to have the opportunity to talk about. I understand where you are coming from, and I think we can find a solution that will work for this body and for the American people.

With that, I object.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The objection is heard.

Senators are reminded to address each other through the Chair.

The Senator from South Carolina.

Mr. GRAHAM. OK. Sorry about that. So, Mr. President, the objection is heard.

Here is what the Ethics Committee said about my proposal, about my modification: that the amendment cures the Senate 37.4 issue previously identified in a letter sent to you.

So I asked the Ethics Committee: Will this amendment cure any concerns that people have about this provision regarding me or any other Senator? It does.

So, if that is what you want to do, I think we have fixed it.

However, with all due respect to my colleague, I am never going to agree to drop the notification requirement. I have had a ton of House Members say: Please, don't do that. All of us here should want to be notified if someone in the executive branch is looking at our phone records. That would be terrible.

The private cause of action goes away. I am never going to agree to drop that. Why? There are a bunch of people caught up in Jack Smith who are not Senators, who may have a cause of action, and they deserve their day in court. As to my cause of action under the statute, I am going to pursue it but in a way that is compliant with Senate rules.

I just want to put everybody on notice: The statute is just one avenue to finding out what happened. There will be others. I will go to the phone company. I will sue Jack Smith's and Biden's DOJ—that is where I am headed—but I will do it in a fashion that is consistent with the rules of the Senate.

But I am not going to drop the private right of action because there are a bunch of people out there other than me.

As to the notification requirement, given the environment in which we are all living, whether you are a Republican or a Democrat, I think we need to be notified if the executive branch is maybe doing something it shouldn't do.

So I look forward to working with you, and I appreciate ending this thing the way we have ended it. I will be pursuing my legal rights consistent with the ethics of the Senate, and maybe we could work something out. But, Senator PETERS, we live in pretty dangerous times now, and I can see it going bad on our side or on your side. We need to protect these institutions the best we can from things that may come our way. It is me today, but it could be you all tomorrow. And I love the institution. People want to change the rules, you know, to make it like the House. I don't.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Michigan.

Mr. PETERS. Mr. President, just in response to Senator GRAHAM, I appreciate the offer.

As for the notification requirement that you bring up, I believe in that. I think it is absolutely critical that we have that for the reasons that you cite. There are some problems in the provision in that we think there are some glaring exceptions to that that would allow folks to say: No, we are not going to notify you. That is unacceptable. We should make sure that that notification requirement applies without the abuse of the administration, regardless of who is there, on what side, because you are right.

Ultimately, our job is to protect this institution as a coequal branch of government, and you and I share that sincere belief. I think these are just some technical aspects we could work out, and I look forward to that opportunity.

Mr. GRAHAM. Mr. President, I do, too, and we will start it here soon.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant executive clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

H.R. 6938

Mr. MORAN. Mr. President, today, I have the opportunity to rise here on the Senate floor and speak in support of the appropriations package that is currently before the U.S. Senate, which happens to include funding for Commerce, Justice, Science.

I chair the Appropriations Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice, Science, and I am pleased that this legislation provides significant and important resources to support our Nation's Federal, State, and local law enforce-

ment in their shared mission to keep America safe.

The package that we will debate and discuss and vote on this week makes targeted investments in the Federal Agencies and Departments that conduct critical scientific research, bolster economic growth, promote U.S. energy independence, and strengthen our Nation's national security. These priorities are achieved while also making thoughtful reductions in spending to ensure that taxpayer dollars are being wisely spent.

Many rural and local law enforcement agencies continue to face resource and equipment gaps that limit their ability to respond effectively and keep their communities safe, and the fiscal year 2026 CJS appropriations bill addresses these needs by investing in crime-fighting technology and equipment for sheriff's offices and police departments in Kansas and across the country. The legislation also equips the Drug Enforcement Agency and the FBI with resources necessary to dismantle drug trafficking networks that have gained, unfortunately, a stronghold and a foothold in the United States and to combat the fentanyl crisis that continues to claim way too many American lives.

This bill contains funding for the national security and counterintelligence missions that counter foreign threats and protect U.S. interests. By investing in the Office of the United States Trade Representative, this bill strengthens its capacity to enforce trade agreements and expand markets so that American producers like my farmers back home in Kansas and manufacturers in my State can compete and sell their goods around the world.

Finally, this bill invests in our Nation's science Agencies—NASA, NOAA, and the National Science Foundation—to advance U.S. leadership in scientific discovery and space exploration. At NASA, it bolsters American leadership in human spaceflight, space science, and aeronautics at a very critical moment. This week, in fact, NASA is rolling out Artemis II, the next consequential step toward sending astronauts around the Moon for the first time in more than 50 years. That mission and future missions depend upon a strong U.S. aerospace industrial base made up of engineers, machinists, suppliers, and researchers. This bill makes certain that America remains on course to lead in space and does not cede ground to our competitors.

Through NSF, the bill prioritizes critical research and advanced manufacturing that bolster private sector innovation, strengthen university-industry partnerships, and train the next generation of scientists and engineers right here at home—investments that are essential to our long-term economic growth, to our national competitiveness, and to our national security.

At NOAA, this legislation bolsters critical weather monitoring services, increases resources for lifesaving func-

tions of the National Weather Service, and makes certain that the National Weather Service offices are staffed 24/7 to provide reliable forecasts to help keep America safe.

As a senior appropriator, I have long advocated for Congress to return to regular order in the appropriations process: debating, amending, and passing 12 separate appropriations bills that fund the Federal Government. I continue to be an advocate for that. This package reflects that work, and I commend Chairwoman COLLINS, Vice Chairman MURRAY, and my colleagues on the Appropriations Committee for their efforts. I also thank my colleagues in the Senate more broadly who have been so willing to allow us to proceed to get to this point today.

I want to thank the CJS Subcommittee staff for their hard work, dedication, and long hours. A lot of work has gone on throughout the year but with especially challenging time constraints within the last few weeks. This package would not be possible without those staff members.

I thank my staff: Kevin Wheeler, Brian Daner, and Rachel Taylor. I also thank as well the minority staff: Jessica Berry, Blaise Sheridan, Lindsay Erickson, and T.J. Lowdermilk.

This legislation that is Commerce, Justice, Science Appropriations Subcommittee work product strikes a careful balance, funding critical resources while also protecting limited taxpayer dollars. The spending that we always worry about being too much is addressed in this legislation to make sure that we are on a different path than continued borrowing and spending.

I strongly urge my colleagues to support this package to provide these Agencies with the resources they need to keep our Nation safe, promote U.S. leadership, and make certain that America remains a leader in space.

This bill funds the Department of Commerce, the Department of Justice, and a number of science Agencies, such as NASA and NSF. It is important to the country that this bill occur. It is also important to the country that we avoid a shutdown at the end of the month, and the bills that we pass this week go a long way in making that shutdown much less likely.

I thank the Presiding Officer for the opportunity to speak to you and my colleagues.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant executive clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

AFGHAN PAROLE PROGRAM

Mr. CORNYN. Mr. President, we all remember the tragic murder of SPC Sarah Beckstrom on the eve of Thanksgiving. She was, as we all will recall,

one of the National Guard servicemembers working here in the District of Columbia. We are continuing to pray for the recovery of Staff Sgt. Andrew Wolfe, who was injured in the shooting. But, of course, Specialist Beckstrom lost her life.

The news cycle moves very quickly, and it seems like while something happens today, tomorrow, it is something new. But it is important that we not allow the mistakes that were made by the Biden administration when it came to vetting Afghan nationals to be forgotten. We cannot ignore the reality that Sarah Beckstrom was another victim—an unnecessary victim—of President Biden's careless immigration policies.

The man who committed this heinous act was an Afghan national whom President Biden allowed to enter the country after our disastrous withdrawal from Afghanistan. Unfortunately, it is too late to bring Sarah's life back, but her death should not be meaningless, relegated to headlines with no action. It is not too late to look back on the flawed decisions that allowed her killer to enter the United States in order to correct these mistakes and to prevent future harm.

Furthermore, this crime at the hands of an Afghan national parolee was not a one-off occurrence. The following week, another parolee—and I will define that further, but this is not pursuant to any law actually passed by Congress, like the Special Immigrant Visa Program. This was done outside of that program, with even fewer protections and less vetting.

But the following week after Thanksgiving, another parolee nearly committed a terrorist attack in Fort Worth, TX. Thanks to the Federal and local law enforcement, they were able to apprehend him and prevent him from carrying out that attack.

I am grateful to the Department of Justice, including the FBI, and our State and local law enforcement officials who prevented this attack from happening. But the fact that the perpetrator is here in the United States in the first place underscores yet again the failure to vet the individuals who came into this country via the Biden administration's parole.

The repeated incidents—and there are many more—committed or attempted by Afghan nationals demonstrate that something has gone terribly wrong with the way government has been vetting or failing to vet aliens who have entered the country, and I believe that these questions deserve answers.

For that reason, I am chairing a Judiciary Committee subcommittee this afternoon, alongside our colleague Senator HAWLEY from Missouri, entitled "Biden's Afghan Parole Program—A Trojan Horse with Flawed Vetting and Deadly Consequences."

At this hearing, we will carefully examine the policies implemented or those failed to be implemented by the

Biden administration that led to these tragic events, particularly the flaws in President Biden's mass immigration and parole programs that were not just limited to Afghan nationals. As I have said, "parole" is a unique term under immigration law. But it is worth revisiting exactly how this happened, because, again, this happened not because of any program passed by the Congress but unilaterally by President Biden.

Under U.S. immigration law, "parole" in laymen's terms is kind of like an E-ZPass, like speeding through a toll booth. U.S. immigration service defines "parole" as "the discretionary decision that allows inadmissible aliens . . . [who] are not admitted to the United States . . . to be physically present in the United States." It is sort of like a permission slip.

Parole is an authority that allows the Department of Homeland Security Secretary to waive people into the country who otherwise would not be allowed in.

Under Operation Allies Welcome, President Biden extended this immigration E-ZPass to hundreds of thousands of aliens who weren't eligible to come to the United States. This discretionary authority was only supposed to be used on a case-by-case basis. It is an authority that President Biden repeatedly abused not only in this program but at the southern border as well to admit hundreds of thousands, even millions of individuals into the country during the Biden years and their open border policies.

But even though this authority is supposed to be used only on a case-by-case basis, the Biden administration turned this exception into the rule. Now we also know that when it came to the Afghan parole program, Operation Allies Welcome, the Biden administration allowed in many aliens who had not been fully vetted, including the man who drove across the country to murder this young National Guardsman and the man who threatened to carry out the suicide bombing in Fort Worth, TX, who were not eligible to enter the United States but for this discretionary E-ZPass issued by the Biden administration without adequate protections for the American people.

As we will learn at the hearing, in most, if not all, cases, the Biden administration did not know exactly who these people were. Many of them could not say when they were born or even their own last name.

I think we sort of fail to recognize that the population we are dealing with, the individuals in Afghanistan—many of them are functionally illiterate. And, of course, many of them are coming from this country that was war-torn and literally run by the Taliban, which is an international terrorist organization. Consequently, many of these aliens have likely committed acts of terror or have ties to terror groups.

In some cases, the U.S. Government was asking the Taliban to verify infor-

mation on these individuals. Now, that strikes me as rather bizarre. The Taliban, a terrorist organization that would kill many of the Afghans who cooperated with the U.S. military—we are actually asking them to verify the identity and eligibility of these individuals to enter the United States. In any event, the Taliban is hardly a reliable source of information.

The lack of information on these parolees also raises the possibility of a preliminary background check coming back clean because there simply wasn't enough information available to determine whether this person was safe or not.

Essentially, the policy of the Biden administration was—the default was, come on into the country, in the absence of derogatory information. But the fact of the matter is, in war-torn Afghanistan, now run by a terrorist organization, where you have literally functionally illiterate individuals, the absence of derogatory information is not any proof that these individuals could safely be allowed into the United States. So the default was, let them in, even in the absence of any information whatsoever.

At today's hearing, we will learn more about this and other problems with the Biden administration's mass parole of Afghan nationals into the United States.

Once again, let me just reiterate that tens of thousands, hundreds of thousands, even millions of individuals were admitted into the United States due to President Biden's open border policies, using this same claimed discretionary authority, which should be used only on a case-by-case basis. But the Biden administration opened its arms and allowed hundreds of thousands of individuals—indeed, more likely, a million or more individuals—to come in on the parole program.

So the Afghan parole program was simply a subset of the larger policy of the Biden administration to welcome foreign nationals with open arms into our country without our knowing enough about them to know whether they would be a threat to public safety.

We will hear from two panels of experts who will help shine a light on the missteps of the Biden administration. Our first panel will include Mr. Craig Adelman, deputy inspector general at the Department of Homeland Security; Michael Roark, deputy inspector general with the Department of Defense, and Mr. Arne Baker from the Office of Inspector General at the Department of State. We have a second panel where we will hear from researchers and policy experts who will speak to the nuances of the vetting—or the lack of vetting—that the Afghan parolees underwent.

While it is important to treat our friends and allies with proper consideration, assuming that they are not a threat to the American people, if we want the cooperation of other foreign nationals in the future in some of our

conflicts, the bottom line is the non-negotiable demand has to be the American people being able to sleep safe at night knowing they are safe from criminal aliens and terrorist sympathizers. That is the nonnegotiable bottom line.

They deserve to know—we all deserve to know what actions the Biden administration took or did not take that risked their safety. At this afternoon's hearing, we will give the American people the answers or at least begin to give them the answers that they and we deserve.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

REMEMBERING HORACE "JIM" SHARP

Mr. MORAN. Mr. President, today, I rise to honor the passing of a 101-year-old Kansan, World War II veteran, and American hero, Horace "Jim" Sharp.

Mr. Sharp was born in Morris County, KS, and he spent his early years tending to the family farm—not an unusual thing in Kansas, certainly not in his generation.

At age 19, Jim surrendered his farm deferment, courageously volunteering to serve his nation in the U.S. Army during World War II.

Through his service, Jim fought in the Battle of the Bulge as part of Company B, 18th Infantry Regiment, 1st Infantry Division. It was during that battle that Jim earned three Battle Stars and a Bronze Star. Although injured by shrapnel during battle, Jim never received treatment, thus never receiving the Purple Heart.

Following Jim's combat service, he served as a guard during the Nuremberg trials.

Shortly after returning home to Kansas following the war's end, Jim would marry his wife Marilyn, with whom he would raise their three children and enjoy 69 years of marriage.

Following the passage of the GI Bill, Jim attended Kansas State University, where he graduated with a bachelor's degree in business administration. Jim then applied his degree by building a career in data processing, eventually retiring as the information systems manager for the Kansas Farm Bureau while also teaching information systems classes at Kansas State University and at Fort Riley.

Jim's life of service continued well after his time in the military. His dedication to his faith and his community showed itself in so many ways. Jim was an active member at his local Methodist church. His accolades also include being a founding member and the first president of the Northeast Kansas Battle of the Bulge Organization where he raised funds to support the preserva-

tion of the Manhattan, KS, Peace Memorial Auditorium and the K-State World War II Memorial.

Jim's World War II service is also featured at Fort Riley's 1st Infantry Division Museum, honoring his story and his service in the Nuremberg exhibit there.

Jim was an active member of the Kiwanis, his local VFW and American Legion, and many other local organizations focused on improving his community and aiding those in need.

Living to be 101 is remarkable in and of itself, but Jim used that long life that he was given to accomplish so much more. His life of courage, sacrifice, and compassion served as an inspiration to all who knew him, and he is dearly, dearly missed.

My prayers and concerns and care are with his children Janet, Doug, and Brian, his many grandchildren, great-grandchildren, and great-great-grandchildren—the entire Sharp family. It was my honor to see them as we celebrated Jim's 100 birthday at the American Legion in Manhattan, KS, now just about a year ago.

Jim was an authentic American hero. Sometimes, I think we look for heroes, and we can't seem to find them. You do not have to look past Jim Sharp. He was a hero to his Nation, to his community, to his family, and to his friends.

May Jim's legacy not be forgotten, his service honored. And we say to him in these days: Thank you for your service. We respect you, and we are grateful.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. RICKETTS). The clerk will call the roll. The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

Mr. MORAN. I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Democratic leader.

UNANIMOUS CONSENT REQUEST—H.R. 1834

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, Americans across the country—they could be Democrats; they could be Independents; they could be Republicans; they could live in the north, the south, the east, or the west—agree on one thing: The cost of healthcare is at crisis levels, and families are struggling to pay for healthcare, such a necessity for their families and themselves.

Now, on January 1, as just about everybody knows, the ACA premium tax credits that lowered premiums for millions of Americans expired because Republicans chose to let them die. Republicans knew the crisis was coming; they knew the consequences, and they deliberately blocked relief from the American people.

Already because of the callous actions of our Republican colleagues, ACA enrollment has already dropped

by nearly a million and a half people. The average American with an ACA plan has seen their premiums double, and many have seen them much worse than that. It is outrageous; it is wrong, and Republicans know it.

There is a demand from one end of the country to the other to undo the crisis by very simple—there is a very simple way to do it. All Republicans have to do is join Democrats in voting for legislation that expands the credits by 3 years. It will be done. It passed the House. But mark my words, if Republicans don't do it, America will know, and the political price they pay will be severe.

And so to rectify this injustice, to rectify the fact that families are deciding whether to even have healthcare or not or to cut back on something else very important to pay for the increased costs of healthcare, families are deciding that right now.

Every night, millions of American families are talking about what to do with these new healthcare bills that have come through, which have doubled or tripled what they have to pay each month, which will cut back in so many instances on the kind of healthcare they get—make them switch hospitals, switch doctors, not afford the prescription drug that is desperately needed by their child who has cancer.

Every night, Americans are grappling with this horrible problem because there is nothing more important to a family than the health of its members; yet Republicans blocked it. But my fellow Americans, the fight to lower healthcare costs is not over. Today I bring to the floor a very simple request, that when this Chamber receives the bipartisan legislation that passed the House last week, providing a simple 3-year reinstatement of the ACA premium tax credits, that it be immediately agreed to in the Senate.

The Republican leader of the Senate could put this on the floor, and it would pass in the blink of an eye. Most Republicans would vote for it because they know how much the public wants to renew these credits. So there is no reason under Heaven for us to delay. The House passed this bill last week by 230 to 196, and 17 Republicans joined Democrats. That is not a fluke. That is a glaring signal to Republicans that Americans are demanding relief.

Fifty percent—55 percent of Trump voters want the tax credits extended, but the Republican Senate is blind, is in a bubble, is not even understanding the anguish of America about these increased healthcare costs. And they sit there and come up with one excuse after the other why they shouldn't do this. The House, fortunately, listened to the American people and acted, and the Senate should now do the same.

Leader THUNE knows that people back home are suffering. He knows that he can fix the problem by just putting the bill on the floor because it will pass. There is a lot to discuss and debate when it comes to fixing our

healthcare system, but right now, there is an immediate concern. Premiums are spiking across the country, so the most immediate thing we can do to lower healthcare costs for the American people is pass a clean restoration of these credits.

We offered the Republicans the chance during the so-called Big Beautiful Bill; they rejected it three times unanimously. But they went home over the summer and the fall and now into the winter and they hear their constituents clamoring for relief. Open your ears, open your minds, Republicans, listen to the American people. There is no doubt, you know it, that the majority of Americans, the overwhelming majority of Americans, even the majority of Republicans and Trump voters, want us to do this.

And frankly, to Americans back home, it is not a Democratic or a Republican issue. The only thing they care about is getting those costs lower. And they want to know who is going to step up and bring premiums down. Who is going to lower costs?

Senate Democrats say in one voice to Americans: We hear you. We have a plan to bring your premiums down. We can pass it through the Senate today, right now, if only the Republicans get out of the way.

We are going to keep at this. This issue isn't going away. We are going to fight and fight and fight until we achieve this for the American people because it is so important. There are other issues Republicans have out there. Some want to block it because they want to extend provisions that hurt women on the issue of abortion. Some want to block it because they want to privatize the system, which would only make it worse. But it doesn't matter; we can debate all those things down the road. The opportunity is now, right now, to allow this body to unanimously pass this much-needed proposal to extend the credits by 3 years.

I urge my Republican colleagues, let this bill pass. Let's give the American people what they so fiercely and rightfully demand. Most of all, let's give millions of Americans relief from the sky-high price of these premiums now that the 3-year extension has expired.

Americans need it. Americans want it. Americans demand it. It is the only humane and right thing to do. This is another chance for my colleagues across the aisle to rectify their mistake and help the American people with an issue that is at the top of the list for them.

And so I ask unanimous consent that when the Senate receives H.R. 1834 as passed by the House on January 8, 2026, that the Senate proceed to its immediate consideration; that the bill be considered read three times and passed; and that the motion to reconsider be considered made and laid upon the table.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

The Senator from Idaho.

Mr. CRAPO. Mr. President, reserving the right to object.

My colleague's proposal offers nothing new. The Senate has already rejected a so-called clean 3-year extension of the enhanced COVID credits in December. None of the reasons we rejected this measure then have changed. Perpetuating a fraudulent, failed system without reforms is not a solution. Declining to offer consumers more choice and control over their healthcare is not a solution. Handing insurers an additional \$80 billion of taxpayer money is not a solution.

Both sides agree that the costs of healthcare are too high. We knew that years ago when these credits were created and again when they were extended, but rather than fix that problem, the credits only exacerbated the underlying issues that are driving up the costs. We cannot continue to rely on the same broken policies to fix those systemic problems.

In December, Senator CASSIDY and I proposed to begin the process of true healthcare reform. Directing funds to HSAs controlled by patients instead of insurers would spur competition, prevent fraud, and reduce costs. Unfortunately, my colleagues on the other side of the aisle rejected this proposal. Each side knows what the other side cannot accept. A real solution must respect those boundaries and chart a new path forward.

Unfortunately, today's repetitive proposal fails to do so, and for those reasons, I object to the request.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The objection is heard.

The Senator from New Hampshire.

HEALTHCARE

Mrs. SHAHEEN. Mr. President, I come to the floor today to join Leader SCHUMER and others in requesting that this body address the healthcare disaster that is facing millions of American families. It is a disaster, sadly, that we have seen coming for more than a year. And if we are serious about protecting both the physical and financial health of Americans, we must restore the enhanced premium tax credits that expired on December 31.

Congress has not fulfilled its duty to protect Americans from rising healthcare costs. And at a time when so many Americans are worried about the cost of living, inaction is causing health insurance premiums to skyrocket for millions of Americans. More than 22 million Americans have already been affected by the expiration of the enhanced premium tax credits.

The Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services reported earlier this week that more than 1.4 million people, including tens of thousands in New Hampshire, have already lost their healthcare coverage because of the unaffordable cost increases of healthcare premiums without the enhanced premium tax credits. And unfortunately, that is just the beginning.

Insurers have told us higher prices and more losses are coming, as families realize they can't continue to pay their monthly premiums. The Urban Institute predicted almost 5 million people could lose their healthcare coverage. Families are being forced to reduce the quality of their coverage, and they are facing higher out-of-pocket costs.

Back in October, one of my constituents from New Boston, NH, Darla, contacted me with serious concerns about whether she and her husband would be able to afford healthcare coverage without the enhanced premium tax credits. This is what is so disturbing.

Last month, she reported that her family's monthly premium would go from \$100 a month to \$1,200 a month, so more than \$15,000 a year. She and her husband can't afford that kind of an increase. They are in their fifties; so they can't afford to go without healthcare coverage.

If we fail to act, we have failed Darla's family and millions of other Americans.

The crisis was avoidable. We knew that this would happen if the enhanced premium tax credits expired.

One year ago, on January 9, I introduced the Health Care Affordability Act, which would have made the enhanced premium tax credits permanent. There are 44 Democratic cosponsors on my bill.

Last week, we saw the House pass an extension with strong bipartisan support, and I applaud all those Members of the House who supported that 3-year extension and who worked hard to make it bipartisan.

I know many of our Republican colleagues agree that we need to restore the enhanced premium tax credits so people like Darla and her family can afford healthcare coverage. They know that Americans want Congress to act to bring down costs. And what Leader SCHUMER asked for today is straightforward: that the Senate allow an immediate extension of the enhanced premium tax credits to move forward without delay.

I am not surprised at the objection because we saw what the vote was back in December on extending the premium tax credits in this body.

I am hopeful that the bipartisan efforts that have been ongoing to try and find a compromise to address some of the reforms that Senator CRAPO referenced, but also to ensure that we can, both, lower the cost of healthcare and make sure we don't have millions of families who lose their health insurance—I am hopeful that bipartisan effort can continue, that we can reach a compromise, and that we can do what is in the best interest of the people of this country and the millions of Americans who are faced with losing their health insurance coverage.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Oregon.

Mr. WYDEN. Tomorrow is the final day for Americans to sign up for health

insurance through the Affordable Care Act Marketplace. After that, the doors slam shut, high premiums are locked in, and millions of families all across the land will be unable to afford essential care.

On this side of the aisle, we have been working for more than a year to develop bipartisan support to prevent this from happening. We told our Republican colleagues we wanted to work with them, long before Donald Trump was sworn in. Democrats spent the summer warning about the dangers of higher premiums, while Republicans were forcing through the largest cut in history.

We pressed for action before the sign-up period began. At every turn, Donald Trump and congressional Republicans slammed the door in the face of millions of Americans seeking premium relief.

This morning, it is clear why. Yesterday, the Republican Study Committee, which constitutes a majority of the House Republican conference, released yet another new plan to unleash another set of harmful partisan changes to Americans' healthcare. This is being done when millions are already reeling from the cuts that we saw to Medicaid and the Affordable Care Act in the last bill.

The new draft plan contains yet another trillion dollars in cuts to healthcare which, if passed, would represent a knockout blow to the American healthcare system. It is, once again, another hacksaw to Medicaid, targeting blue States and cities in yet another attempt to weaponize the Federal Government against the Republicans' political opponents. This new Republican plan would unleash insurance companies and shady brokers to push more junk plans that I can tell you aren't worth the paper they are written on.

Americans are fed up with high healthcare costs, and yet Republicans now want to double down on misery and, once again, allow these Swiss cheese health plans that don't cover healthcare like chemotherapy or prescription drugs.

This morning, the mask is off. It is clear Republicans haven't been serious about holding premiums down from the start. All the hemming and hawing about healthcare premiums and taking on big insurance has been for show, and the American people are fed up with excuses.

Today is an opportunity, finally, to do the right thing. Senator SCHUMER has made it clear that extending the tax credits for middle-class healthcare is a key first step—a first step—toward moving America toward a healthcare system that puts our families first. That is the priority, not helping giant corporations looking to do another stock buyback.

Unfortunately, it seems like Republicans, on healthcare, are focused on doubling down in the wrong direction. That is what this morning's developments say.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Kentucky.

NORTH ATLANTIC TREATY ORGANIZATION

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, for years, the most pressing concern about the future of NATO was whether and when European allies would take the obligations of collective defense more seriously.

But today, the biggest questions about the most successful military alliance in the history of the world would have to do with us, the United States: whether America still recognizes our country as an anchor of transatlantic security, an arsenal of democracy, and a global leader, not just a regional power.

I need to make a number of points here, and it would be useful to talk a little bit about its history.

The Second World War claimed tens of millions of lives, displaced tens of millions more, and left the old world crippled by food shortages and hyperinflation.

After defeating Hitler's genocidal bid for world domination, American leaders understood that our interests and those of our European allies were linked, whether we liked it or not. As George Marshall put it, back in 1947, "the United States should do whatever it is able to do to assist in the return of normal economic health in the world, without which there can be no political stability and no assured peace."

American security and stability depended on European security and stability, not least because conflict with Nazi Germany was succeeded immediately by the threat of conflict with the Soviet Union. Millions in Eastern Europe had gone from living under Nazi tyranny to living under Soviet tyranny.

The American people understood the stakes. Back in 1947, more than three-quarters of Americans rejected the idea that the Soviet Union was merely building its defenses against future attack. Instead, they thought that Russia was bent on conquest.

In 1948, two-thirds of Americans said America and Western European friends should join together for a mutual defense pact. By 1949, with the North Atlantic Treaty in the works, the question actually got more specific: Would the American people support "a promise of mutual aid from all the members of the alliance if any single member nation is attacked"—"if any single member is attacked"?

That was a higher bar—the commitment that would become article 5—and yet an even bigger majority of recipients again said yes.

Of course, there was some controversy and opposition. There were still isolationists ignoring lessons of the decade. But after years of neglect for the national defense, after the folly of appeasement and the failure of deterrence, after pouring the equivalent of 37 percent of America's GDP into the

"Arsenal of Democracy" and burying 400,000 Americans, the American people still knew the costs of war, and they knew they would rather preserve the peace.

Of course, they didn't intend to do it alone. Americans told pollsters that their early skepticism toward post-war alliance commitments stemmed from a fear that allies would rely too heavily on American leadership.

This would be a recurring theme. But, importantly, for much of NATO's history, the U.S. leaders most concerned about burden-sharing were also fierce defenders of the alliance. They criticized allies because they wanted NATO to work, not because they wanted to score political points here at home.

Let's just take, for example, our former colleague Sam Nunn. On multiple occasions, including the 1974 and 1985 NDAAAs, he pushed to force allies to carry more of the costs of U.S. forward deployment.

And yet, when a majority leader of his own party tried to force a phaseout of U.S. troops from Europe, our former colleague from Georgia fought back because he understood the value of American leadership and the importance of European security to our own.

The strength of the transatlantic alliance is contingent on its leaders taking collective defense seriously—taking collective defense seriously. That is why I have always called out laggards and urged European allies to share more of the burden.

But I have also given credit where it is due, and the simple truth is that our allies have undertaken a profound—profound—transformation. This year, Poland will spend 4.8 percent of its GDP on defense. Estonia and Lithuania will spend 5 percent, and Latvia will hit that goal in 2027.

Alongside Nordic neighbors like Norway and Denmark, which have deployed to harm's way alongside their American comrades, NATO's newest members, Sweden and Finland, are each on track to meet the alliance's new spending target years ahead of schedule.

Germany has dramatically increased defense spending, and the Germans have even amended their Constitution—amended their Constitution—to allow for deficit spending on defense. Whether Europe's largest economy is serious about its defense transformation is really no longer up for debate. That debate is over.

Not every ally is making such impressive progress, but no one can claim ignorance of what is at stake. As Poland's Prime Minister put it bluntly, the choice facing Europe is this: "money today or blood tomorrow"—"money today or blood tomorrow."

Perhaps that is why, in addition to investing heavily in their own defenses, European allies are continuing to dwarf America's assistance to Ukraine by a factor of 10 to 1. Let me repeat that. European allies are continuing to

dwarf—dwarf—America's assistance to Ukraine by a factor of 10 to 1.

Our allies' long holiday from history is over. That is good news, and it must continue.

Well, what about us—the Americans?

European allies continue to grow their defense budgets, but ours have stayed flat across successive administrations. We are the ones leaving capacity unused and political will untapped. We are talking, but we are not doing—talking but not doing.

The President was right to call for a major increase in defense spending, but the annual defense budget request from OMB this year doesn't even keep up with inflation. The fiscal year 2026 top line won't come close—close—to covering growing costs and requirements, like the multiyear munitions contracts the Department of Defense rightly wants to actually sign.

We should keep the cost and value of America's own commitment to the transatlantic alliance actually in perspective. Take the year 1982—right in the thick of the Reagan buildup that won the Cold War. In fiscal 1982, sustaining U.S. military operations in Europe accounted for less than 6.5 percent of defense outlays.

Now, remember: Winning World War II meant surging defense spending to 37 percent of our GDP. But at the climax of the Cold War, when we were spending only 6 percent, sustaining a deterrent military presence in Russia's backyard took up less than 6.5 percent of our annual defense budget. Now, that sounds a lot less like an entangling alliance than a smart investment in preventing catastrophic war.

Well, what did the American people say? How did they feel about that?

In 1989, with the Soviets on the ropes, 75 percent said that NATO ought to be maintained beyond victory—maintained beyond victory. Thirty years later, in 2019, an even greater majority gave the very same response, even before Putin's escalation in Ukraine.

What about now? With Russia waging a war of conquest and with China, Iran, and North Korea pitching in to help them, has NATO outlived its useful life?

Is the notion of U.S. interests in Europe just a relic from the Cold War?

Or, to paraphrase some of Moscow's most useful idiots, has NATO's existence and growth provoked Putin's aggression?

Let's get a few things straight.

For decades, America and our allies bent over backward to welcome Russian participation at NATO, including through the Partnership for Peace program, and to integrate Russia into the global economy. America sent billions of dollars in economic assistance and encouraged massive investment of private capital in the hopes that Russia would choose to live in peace with the nations it formerly enslaved and with the West.

In other words, the invitation was open to join us and be a part in what

we were doing. Putin has repeatedly rejected such peaceful coexistence. Instead, what he has done is he has chosen bloody, neo-Soviet empire-building instead.

To the extent that NATO has grown, it has been in response to Russian aggression. If Putin is looking for someone to blame for Sweden's and Finland's accessions to the alliance, he can simply look in the mirror. His own brutality has validated the decisions of sovereign nations to join NATO and align with the West.

As for the utility of the alliance for our interests, America's adversaries are choosing to work together. Responding by going it alone would be strategic malpractice.

We are courting Russia and its GDP of \$2.5 trillion at the expense of longstanding bonds with Europe and its GDP of—listen to this—\$27 trillion? Europe collectively has a GDP of \$27 trillion. Russia's is only \$2.5 trillion. That doesn't even align with U.S. economic interests, let alone our values.

Last year, Europe invested \$3.5 trillion directly in the United States—here. In recent years, two-thirds of our European allies' growing investments in foreign military technologies have been in American-made systems. Together, we make up nearly half of the global economy. Europe plus America make up about half of the global economy.

If we are serious about global competition with China, these are relationships worth tending. These are allies we ought to be working with, not against, which brings me to the matter of Greenland.

The President is right that Arctic security is a central concern in our strategic competition with major adversaries, and he will find similar interest in Arctic security among allies like Denmark, which is investing billions of dollars in its own capabilities in the region.

America's recognition of Denmark's political and economic interests in Greenland dates all the way back to World War I. The Danes have been close partners in the Arctic since World War II, and brave Danish soldiers fought and died in America's wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. There is no ambiguity here—no ambiguity. Close ties with our northernmost allies are what make America's extensive reach in the Arctic actually possible. And I have yet to hear from this administration a single thing we need from Greenland that this sovereign people is not already willing to grant us.

Unless and until the President can demonstrate otherwise, then the proposition at hand today is very straightforward: incinerating the hard-won trust of loyal allies in exchange for no meaningful change in U.S. access to the Arctic.

That is the definition of “allies”—plural—because this is about more than Greenland. It is about more than America's relationship with its highly

capable Nordic allies. It is about whether the United States intends to face a constellation of strategic adversaries with capable friends or to commit an unprecedented act of strategic self-harm if we choose to go it alone.

So let's make no mistake. All of the good progress the President has made in pushing allies to spend more on defense, the increased burden-sharing, the demand for American-made capabilities—all of it would be for nothing if his administration's ill-advised threats about Greenland were to shatter the trust of our allies. Following through on this provocation would be more disastrous for the President's legacy than withdrawing from Afghanistan was for his predecessor.

The American people know this. Just 17 percent think trying to take control of Greenland is a good idea. Seventeen percent think our taking Greenland is a good idea. Instead, they understand intuitively that strong alliances make America more secure—more secure.

The Reagan National Defense Survey, conducted late last year, found that 68 percent of Americans hold a favorable view of the transatlantic alliance—68 percent—and 76 percent support article 5 and a U.S. military response in the event of an attack on a NATO ally. In just 6 months, that measure grew by 5 percent.

Here is the most interesting finding. Among Americans who initially said they would support a U.S. withdrawal from NATO, nearly one in five changed their mind when they learned how our European allies are stepping up their commitments to collective defense.

I am happy to provide these findings to anyone in Washington who still bets against the future of the transatlantic alliance, but the American people, who already understand the stakes, may not be so patient. They are telling anyone who will listen that when they say “peace through strength”—when the American people say “peace through strength,” they mean what President Reagan meant: leading with moral clarity, distinguishing clearly between aggressors and victims, investing in the arsenal of democracy, equipping friends—friends—who fight for themselves, preparing to win wars, and upholding the alliances that deter them.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Mississippi.

UKRAINE

Mr. WICKER. Mr. President, we live in a dangerous time. There are a number of flash points all around the globe—in this hemisphere, in Europe, in the Indo-Pacific—but I want to remind my colleagues today that, still, the most dangerous thing going on around the world today is Vladimir Putin's war against freedom and the West in Ukraine.

I would point out that for the past year, Vladimir Putin has mocked the Ukraine peace process by steadily escalating his attacks on his neighboring country. He has recently launched the

biggest air attack the conflict has ever seen and shown repeatedly that he is not interested in peace talks. He gives lipservice to peace talks, but his acts show that he is not interested.

Now, by contrast, in the last few weeks, the United States, Ukraine, and our European friends have come together on a common negotiating position centered on several key principles. Here are the key points: Ukraine should not be forced to give up the sovereign territory it deserves and it currently controls. Also, Putin should not achieve through negotiation what he has not managed to achieve on the battlefield, and there have been great disappointments to Putin on the battlefield. In addition, the United States should play a role in Ukraine's security guarantees on a permanent basis. The Senate should ratify these guarantees if they are ever agreed to.

In the meantime, the Ukrainian people should be assisted in continuing to fight for their freedom.

I commend President Trump, President Zelenskyy, and European leaders for continuing to come together to reach a consensus. As we seek a just end to this brutal, unprovoked war, I urge everyone in Washington, in Kyiv, and in the great capitals of Europe to remain united and to remember who we are dealing with in the form and person of Vladimir Putin.

Vladimir Putin is unrepentant. He is ever and will always be the KGB agent. He is a dictator with decades of bloodshed on his hands. He is the biggest thief in the history of the world, a war criminal who should be behind bars at this moment. And, of course, Putin is a liar.

When Vladimir Putin smiles to American negotiators, he acts as our friend and he acts as if we believe he is our friend. We have no reason to smile back at Vladimir Putin or trust him with anything but caution and contempt.

After 4 years, Putin knows a Russian victory is not inevitable. More and more, the American people see and know this. A November poll found that 70 percent of Americans do not trust Putin to honor any peace agreement with Ukraine.

He is cut from the same cloth as terrorists all over the world and terrorists down through history. In Putin's attack on civilians, for example, we see parallels with the Hamas terrorists who rampaged through Israeli neighborhoods on October 7. The terrorists are Putin's friends. And don't forget this, and sometimes it is not publicized as it ought to be: Putin has abducted 20,000 Ukrainian children and subjected many to brainwashing schemes. In these horrors, we see the likes of Xi Jinping and his Uighur reeducation camps. Putin routinely locks dissidents in jail, just like his kindred spirits in other censorship regimes.

This tyrant who wants to be treated as a peer in the world's great halls of democracy should be known by the company he keeps.

When the brutal Syrian dictator Bashar al-Assad was toppled, thankfully, where did Bashar al-Assad run? He ran for safe haven to Moscow—that is where he went—to be under the protection of Vladimir Putin, who seeks to make us believe that he is an honest negotiator. Nicolas Maduro was wisely counseled to flee Venezuela. If he had run, where would he have run? He would have run straight to Moscow. For decades, Russia has been a friend to the murderous Cuban regime. And now, as the Supreme Leader in Iran considers his options, where might he go for refuge? The only place he could go is Moscow. So that is the company Vladimir Putin keeps in current day.

But Putin even echoes the likes of Adolf Hitler. Putin routinely talks about "liberating" the Russian-speaking Ukrainians living in the Donbas and other areas of Ukraine. This is the same vile, absurd pretext that Adolf Hitler used when he invaded the German-speaking regions of neighboring countries in Europe, including Poland. That is who Vladimir Putin is.

Regrettably, the people of Russia are led brutally by Putin, this world-historical villain.

Ukrainians will continue fighting against his unprovoked attacks but not because they hate peace. The Ukrainians will continue to fight because their alternative is the extinction of their country.

The West needs to stand with them. We need to stand with Ukraine, and we must keep assisting our friends. We need to send a clear message that Putin cannot wait us out.

In December, I am grateful to say to my colleagues that Congress overwhelmingly passed and President Donald Trump enthusiastically signed the National Defense Authorization Act. That law extends Ukraine's Security Assistance Initiative and our commitment to sharing intelligence with Ukraine. Good for the President, and good for our friends in the House and Senate.

Our allies across the Atlantic are taking the lead now, as my colleague from Kentucky just pointed out, in financing security assistance for Ukraine. NATO allies are buying equipment from us in the United States and giving it to Ukraine. I certainly applaud that, as all Americans should.

The United States should increase the air defenses and long-range strike capabilities that we are sending to Kyiv. More than any other capabilities, these will help show Putin his military aims are not achievable.

For nearly 4 years, Ukrainians have demonstrated their resolve, as they will continue to do. The West must continue to stand resolved with them.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant executive clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. SHEEHY). Without objection, it is so ordered.

IMMIGRATION

Mr. GRASSLEY. Mr. President, many times, under both Republicans and Democrats, I have come to the Senate floor to raise concerns and warnings about how immigrant children called unaccompanied children are handled by Republican and Democrat Departments of Health and Human Services. When immigration people don't have the capabilities or probably the legal right to determine where unaccompanied children should be handled, they are turned over to a division in the Department of Health and Human Services to do it.

In the recent 4 or 5 years, we have had lots of cases where the lives of these children aren't protected because the Department of Health and Human Services isn't properly vetting the adults these children are placed with.

So once again, I am here to give you some updates on my concern about that and an update today on investigations that I have followed up on.

As we start a new congressional session, I am here to discuss, as I have just said, an oversight topic of significant importance.

For over a decade, I have investigated the government's mismanagement of migrant children and related matters. My work covers both Republican and Democrat administrations.

During the Biden administration, the vetting process to safeguard these children barely existed, putting them in harm's way. Today, I am making public records obtained from the Trump Department of Health and Human Services which illustrate the dire consequences of weak Biden administration vetting policies. These records show terrible cases of fraud and exploitation involving vulnerable children, and the public needs to know that this is probably just the tip of the iceberg.

I will give you three examples.

One sponsor allegedly applied to take in two migrant children as their father—and as I will show you today, I have two other examples of a person pretending to be a father who was not a father.

Later, this first father I am telling you about allegedly assaulted these brothers on a regular basis. He reportedly didn't allow the brothers to contact their mother, and he didn't enroll them in school. Instead, the brothers lived in a trailer without heating or cooling. The brothers worked 7 days a week until 10 p.m. and lived on one meal a day. The brothers' sponsor also reportedly withheld the wages that the brothers earned so that smuggling fees to get into this country could be paid.

The brothers' sponsor reportedly had a violent criminal history, which could have been revealed through fingerprinting background checks, and these background checks are now required by the Trump administration. They were assumed to be followed by

the Biden administration and obviously were not.

The Trump Health and Human Services told my office that they sent this evidence to law enforcement for, hopefully, prosecution.

My second case describes the mistreatment of two other migrant children placed into the care of another sponsor who applied to take them in as their father. One of the children was reportedly forced to sell drugs.

The records show this sponsor was later known to have used multiple aliases as far back as 2015. In addition, records show this sponsor has past convictions for fraud, which should have been caught by fingerprinting checks. This sponsor reportedly later kidnapped his wife for 24 hours and threatened to kill her.

Thankfully, the Health and Human Services Department told my office the children have been removed, and HHS has transmitted this evidence to law enforcement.

The final case I am going to bring to you today concerns a 4-year-old boy who was released to someone who claimed, as you could expect, to be his father. According to Health and Human Services' records, nearly 6 months later, the boy's sponsor called to say that he had taken another job and that his mother would take care of the 4-year-old.

Approximately 1 month later, the sponsor's mother allegedly confessed that her son was not actually the boy's real father. Instead, it was later revealed that the sponsor allegedly colluded with the boy's biological mother to obtain a fraudulent birth certificate to get the boy into the United States.

Health and Human Services told my office they have sent evidence of this fraud to law enforcement.

As these records indicate, the Trump administration has created new DNA testing policies to verify sponsor parents. Now any sponsor of a migrant child claiming to be a biological parent should undergo DNA testing to confirm they are actually related.

Sadly, these stories were all but inevitable because the Biden HHS prioritized speed—getting these people out of the immigration system, getting them out of the authority and the responsibility of HHS. That speed was all prioritized over the safety of the children. Thankfully, the Trump administration put new policies in place.

I greatly appreciate the cooperation with my oversight from Health and Human Services. Specifically, I appreciate the cooperation of Secretary Kennedy, Assistant Secretary Adams, and Director Salazar of the Office of Refugee Resettlement.

As the record states, this administration has made efforts to expand DNA testing to help ensure sponsors are, in fact, who they claim to be. In addition, fingerprinting checks should reveal if new sponsors have a criminal or a violent past.

It is pretty simple: Get the background work done to protect these kids.

Together, these new policies represent important steps needed to correct the mistakes of the Biden administration.

More can always be done to safeguard the welfare of vulnerable children. For these reasons, my oversight will continue.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Ohio.

MARCH FOR LIFE

Mr. HUSTED. Mr. President, as we approach the March for Life, an annual celebration of life held in cities across America, I want to share what choosing life means to me and, for the many others who share my similar story, what it means to them.

When my birth mother became pregnant with me, she faced an incredibly difficult choice—a choice that I know thousands of women across our Nation are facing even as I speak today. Her husband had passed away, and she was already raising two young boys. After starting a new relationship, she found herself pregnant with me. Money was tight. She had little support. And she soon found herself being pressured to have an abortion.

Over the years, I have reflected on just how tough and courageous that decision must have been for her. I always try to think about what it would have been like to have been in her shoes and how difficult that must have been. Fortunately, she chose life and the path of adoption for me, which was just an amazing blessing.

After a brief stay in foster care, I received the greatest blessing of my life. I was adopted by my loving parents, Jim and Judy Husted.

I spoke with my mom and dad last night. My dad is amazing, and he is about to turn 88 years old. He and my mom have always given me the gift of unconditional love—the greatest gift any parent could give to their child.

I share my story because I want women to know this: You are not alone. Others have walked the road that you are on, if you find yourself pregnant and without the support you need—you think you need—to make it, and there is a grateful child, one day, who will, hopefully, tell you that.

You don't have to walk that road by yourself. There is support out there for you. In Ohio alone, women have access to nearly 200 pregnancy help centers and maternity homes that serve expectant mothers. I have visited many of them. They want you to go see them, if you are in need, if you are scared, if you need someone to talk to. They are there to help, not to pressure, not to judge but to provide love, care, and support. Many of the women who staff these pregnancy resource centers have faced the very same challenges that you are facing right now.

I know that my birth mother somehow found her way to Catholic Social

Services and had that support. I hope, if you are struggling and you feel that aloneness out there, that you know there are people out there who want to help and that you won't feel alone. I know being alone in a tough situation is the worst thing that you could possibly feel, but there are people out there who want to help you.

So, as we prepare for another March for Life this year, I hope we can remember a few simple truths.

First, the March for Life reminds the country that this cause is ever-present; that laws may change but that culture only changes when people are willing to stand up publicly and peacefully for the cause of life.

Second, unborn children cannot march. They cannot vote. They cannot advocate for themselves. They rely on you to do that. So thank you for continuing to be a voice for them.

And, third, the pro-life movement is not just about opposing abortion. It is about supporting mothers, families, and children with real help and real hope. The March for Life shines the national spotlight on that lifesaving work that people at pregnancy resource centers and places like that are doing across our country every single day.

So, as I reflect on my own good fortune and the courageous strength of my birth mother and the gratitude I have for my mom and dad, who adopted me and gave me a great life—full of love, full of support—and as we prepare for the March for Life, I hope that we will remember those sacrifices, will remember the challenges, and do all we can to support those expectant mothers and the children of our Nation.

Thank you for the opportunity to share my story, and may God bless America.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. BANKS). The Senator from Oklahoma.

50TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE HYDE AMENDMENT

Mr. LANKFORD. Mr. President, this year, 2026, is the 50th anniversary of the Hyde amendment. Now, that may not mean a lot to a lot of people, but 50 years ago, the U.S. Senate and the U.S. House and the President of the United States came to a compromise agreement over the issue of abortion. It was a long, drawn-out process. At the end of that long, drawn-out debate, they came to a compromise agreement that Americans would not have to pay for elective abortions. It didn't outlaw abortion in America, but it said: We have disagreements on abortion as Americans, but at a minimum, we should agree American tax dollars should not pay for the taking of human life; that healthcare is about protecting life, not taking life; that in a controversial issue like abortion, at least we should all agree we don't use tax dollars to pay for abortion. That was 50 years ago this year.

It is amazing to think about how many things have changed in American attitudes in 50 years. But what hasn't changed is we still haven't come to an

agreement about abortion. We still haven't been able to resolve that issue.

Now, science has resolved that issue, but we in American values and culture have not. Science would say that a child's life begins at conception, that that is the moment the DNA is different than the mom's DNA. Every single cell in the mom's body has the same DNA except for those cells. Those cells are different. They have a unique DNA in the world because that is a different person that is there. The cells are dividing and growing. There is no difference between a child in the womb and a child outside the womb other than time. That is a separate child.

Science has settled that issue, but, culturally, we haven't been able to settle this issue: Are some children valuable and are some children disposable? Our culture still believes there are some children that are disposable. I don't. I think every child is valuable. Whether you are a child born in a wealthy household or in poverty, that child has opportunity in America if they are allowed to live.

It is this ongoing dialogue that we have as a country: Do we value the most vulnerable in our society? It is a conversation that has been going on now five decades, and next week, there will be tens of thousands—probably, actually, hundreds of thousands—of students and adults that will all come to Washington, DC. I am sure, as it always is on that January day, it will be cold outside. And they will walk down the Mall and gather for a rally that is simply called the March for Life. They will talk about the beauty of life. They will talk about the value of every child. There will be testimonies of people that their family has personally experienced abortion. There will be testimonies of folks that they directly have experienced the pain of abortion. There will be folks who will stand up as physicians and talk about the medical issues. But, ultimately, there will be conversations about every single child being valuable and beautiful.

There will be people in the crowd that were born in poverty, people in the crowd that were born in wealth—just like every other child in America that is in the womb—except those folks that will be at the rally will be celebrating the fact that they were born, No. 1, and that they had an opportunity to be able to speak out for the next generation of people that so much desires to be born and to have the same opportunities all of us in this room have: to grow, to learn, to love. That is all that child wants, and they had the opportunity to be able to have that.

As I mentioned, 50 years ago, the Hyde amendment was put in place. Every single part of our healthcare operation with Federal dollars is all covered by the Hyde amendment. Whether it be Department of Defense healthcare, whether it be Veterans' Administration, whether it be Indian healthcare services, whether it be CHIPS services for children, all of

those are covered by Hyde protections with this basic compromise agreement that we will not fund abortions with American taxpayer dollars—well, except for one area, and that is actually ObamaCare.

When the Affordable Care Act was passed, there was an attempt to be able to have the Hyde amendment actually included in that. That was actually put in in the House of Representatives when they sent it over to the Senate to say: No, let's include the Hyde amendment in this like we do every other part of our healthcare agreement.

When it came to this body, though, my Democratic colleagues stripped that out, and they included in a different section saying: No, we are actually going to create a workaround around the Hyde amendment so that we can quietly fund elective abortion, for the first time, with Federal tax dollars. That workaround still exists today.

The original agreement and the conversation was that every State would allow some options that would have elective abortions for your healthcare coverage and some options that you could choose without that—except now that there are 12, maybe 13 States working that don't allow any option of the Affordable Care Act, of ObamaCare, to be in their State that doesn't also require abortion coverage. So even people that are morally opposed to abortion and the taking of human life don't have an option to buy coverage in their State for healthcare without having abortion coverage built into it.

Now, the issue became, well, there will be some kind of set-aside dollars that will be separate, that you will have a separate premium that you will have to pay, and that separate premium will pay for the abortion coverage—except the insurance companies can't actually show where that separate premium is. In fact, after the law passed that required a separate payment for abortion coverage there so there would be a type of Hyde, is what they called it, the Obama administration immediately came out and said: Actually, the word "separate" actually means "together"—I am not making this up—and so you now have your premiums together, but it is defined as being separate.

Only in government can you define "separate" as meaning "together."

So we still have this one form of healthcare in America that violates this 50-year-old compromise: We don't use taxpayer dollars and compel Americans who actually value children to pay for the taking of the life of a child.

We are still working on that. Ironically enough, there is still an ongoing debate on the Affordable Care Act—on ObamaCare—still raging in this body, even this week, and much of it circles around "Is this going to be about healthcare or is this going to be about the taking of human life?"

I have no issue if we are working on a healthcare policy. I have a big issue

if we are working on taking the life of an innocent child.

There is also an ongoing debate that is happening right now over chemical abortions—"mifepristone" if you want to use the medical term, and there are several generics that are out there as well. This is an abortion drug that is literally now mailed to you without seeing a physician. Now, that didn't used to be so. It is a prescription drug; it is not an over-the-counter drug. It is a prescription drug for a reason—because it has very, very serious side effects.

But this prescription drug—during the COVID time period, the Biden administration said: You know, there is a COVID crisis. People can't get in to see their doctor right now, so we will allow them to call in, and there will be this medicine mailed to them.

So for the first time, suddenly mifepristone, which actually causes an abortion for a woman—that drug is now being mailed without ever seeing a doctor.

Now, some folks have alleged "Oh, that is no big deal. It is used all the time, so it must be completely safe." In fact, my favorite term that I hear—I hear it even from some folks in this body—is that mifepristone is as safe as Tylenol. I have heard that so many times: It is as safe as Tylenol. It is as safe as Tylenol. It is as safe as Tylenol.

Let me start with some basics. When you take Tylenol, it doesn't take a child's life. Mifepristone, by design on the label, takes the life of a child. So let's just start there.

The second issue, though, is also interesting. If you follow the label instructions for mifepristone and take it exactly as it is labeled and if you take a Tylenol and take that exactly as it is labeled—if you take mifepristone, though, you are 8,000 times more likely to end up in the hospital than taking a Tylenol.

Let me run that past you again. For all the folks that say it is as safe as Tylenol, mifepristone, according to the stats that we have that are public—you are 8,000 times more likely to end up in the hospital taking mifepristone than you are taking a Tylenol.

Stop saying it is as safe as Tylenol. The facts do not bear that out. It is not.

Mifepristone also has a strong likelihood of and a side effect of causing infertility among women. If the baby has a different blood type than the mom and if the combination is not correct, the mom then suffers from infertility the rest of her life. Now, if you go see a doctor, they can tell you that, but if you just get it in the mail, you have no idea.

How about this issue: If you have an ectopic pregnancy, which you don't know unless you have an ultrasound, taking mifepristone can not only kill the baby but could also kill the mom.

This is a big issue. The Biden administration became flippant about this chemical abortion drug because the

Biden administration was focused on having more abortions in America. They weren't just pro-choice; they were pro-abortion, trying to increase the number of abortions in America, but to do that, they did not take into account the health and life of the mom because they were so eager to increase the number of abortions.

Even in my State—in my State, we made a decision based on the Dobbs decision from the Supreme Court that now each State can make their own decisions about what they are going to do about this issue of life. After decades under *Roe v. Wade*, the Court has now said that this is up to every State.

So in my State, we would say this is a settled issue, except for doctors out of State now were mailing abortion pills to women my State, intentionally going around our State laws—intentionally.

This morning, the Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions Committee, chaired by my friend Dr. BILL CASSIDY, held a hearing talking about mifepristone.

One of the witnesses that was there was the attorney general from Louisiana talking about the number of women who have experienced coercive abortions, where a parent or a boyfriend or some other loved one compelled them to be able to take these chemical abortion drugs against their will—compelled them to do that—or slipped it into their food or into a drink to be able to sneak it into their system, literally taking the life of that child.

Do you know how they could do that? Because you don't have to see a doctor to get access to these drugs. They can just be mailed to you as if they are a Tylenol when they are not.

We have to have an ongoing conversation here. Decades into this dialogue about the value of children, we are still talking about this issue. Are children valuable? Let's keep talking about it because at some point, as a country, we have to resolve this most simple, scientific, ethical decision: Are some children valuable and some children disposable or is each child valuable?

I am going to stand with the marchers that are coming in next week to joyfully celebrate the beauty of every child.

Yesterday, I was emailed the photo of a longtime friend of mine who just had her first child. It has been a long process for her and her husband. I got a beautiful picture of baby Benjamin yesterday, and he is adorable. I know you are not supposed to say that about a boy, but he is adorable, and we are excited to see him.

Last year, there were a million abortions that were done in America—a million. We will never see their faces. Those children either were thrown away in the trash or ended up in a toilet after a chemical abortion. What is the difference between those two children? Not a thing. Not a thing.

All children are valuable, all of them, and I pray for the day when all of them have an opportunity to live, to experience this glorious Nation that we get to experience the freedom of every day.

Thanks to the marchers who will speak out next week for life and for all those around the country that continue to look at the science and continue to look at the face of a child and say: You are beautiful.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Maryland.

APPROPRIATIONS

Mr. VAN HOLLEN. Mr. President, I rise as the ranking member of the Commerce, Justice, Science, and Related Agencies Appropriations Subcommittee—known around here as CJS—to discuss the funding for critical national programs provided to those Agencies for fiscal year 2026.

This is one of the appropriations bills that is before the Senate right now.

I want to thank Senator MORAN, the chairman and my partner on the CJS Subcommittee, and his staff Brian Daner, Kevin Wheeler, and Rachel Taylor, for working closely with me and my team to produce this important final bill for consideration of the Senate. I want to thank House CJS chairman HAL ROGERS and ranking member GRACE MENG and their staffs as well.

This bill is the result of many long days and nights of tough negotiations over the holidays, including a very productive call among the four of us on New Year's Eve to broker a final deal on the bill's remaining and outstanding items.

This bill has already overwhelmingly passed the House of Representatives. The CJS appropriations agreement meets the allocation that was given to our subcommittee of \$78 billion in discretionary spending. It rejects the very deep and reckless cuts proposed in the President's budget. At the same time, it is not much higher than the 2025 continuing resolution—so basically flat funding even as needs have grown in these important programs.

We had to make tough decisions when it came to what programs to cut and what to protect. Senator MORAN and I were able to work together with our House colleagues in a bipartisan way to do our best to make those decisions.

I must say this is not the bill I would have written if I were doing it on my own, but it is the result of negotiations. Republicans currently control every branch of government—majorities in the House and Senate and, of course, control of the White House. But this bill, while not what I would have written alone, will ensure that Congress—and not Donald Trump or Russ Vought—decides how taxpayer dollars get spent for the Agencies covered in this bill.

So I am happy to report to my colleagues that the CJS conference bill before us is a strong bipartisan one that rejects the very devastating, mis-

guided funding cuts and program eliminations that had been advanced and suggested by President Trump, and it rejects dozens and dozens of extreme poison pill riders that had been proposed by our House Republican colleagues.

It makes smart and targeted investments in a wide range of critical initiatives that affect the lives of all of our fellow Americans. It prioritizes keeping our communities safe. It advances American leadership in science and innovation. It boosts economic opportunities around the country, including through the Manufacturing Extension Partnership Program. It funds vital initiatives at Federal Agencies in my home State of Maryland, from scientific research at NASA Goddard, to operations at NOAA and NIST, to preparations for the next census.

Through the Department of Commerce, we maintain the current generation of NOAA weather and climate satellites, and we invest in next-generation satellites that will track severe weather. We also promote American businesses and exports through Department of Commerce efforts. We also help Agencies like NIST that are creating cybersecurity and AI standards for the future. Through NOAA, we are also enabling sustainable management of ocean resources that are so vital to our fisheries and to commerce throughout our country.

To promote American innovation and scientific discovery, the bill provides \$8.75 billion for the National Science Foundation, sparing it from the 57-percent cut sought by President Trump.

Colleagues, we cannot expect to maintain our cutting edge in science and discovery and stay ahead of our competitors if we are not making the vital investments in research through the National Science Foundation.

The bill funds NASA at \$24.4 billion to explore the solar system, to advance our understanding of climate change, to promote innovation and sustainability in aeronautics, and to protect our planet. This is another area where we rejected very deep cuts proposed by the Trump administration, including the 47-percent cut they had proposed to NASA's Science budget.

Colleagues, we won't have a space program if we don't understand what is happening in space and get to the fundamentals of science in space. You cannot have one without the other. So we reject those cuts.

The President's budget would have wrecked the exciting work being done right now at Maryland's Goddard Space Flight Center, where they are completing what is known as the Nancy Grace Roman Space Telescope. It is on time—in fact, ahead of schedule—and, right now, under budget, and is expected to launch later this year to investigate dark energy and the formation of galaxies and stars—all things that will add to the body of human knowledge and help the United States remain a leader when it comes to space discovery exploration.

The next step will be the development of the Habitable Worlds Observatory that can answer the fundamental question of whether we are alone in the universe.

That is another exciting project where America will take the lead, but only if we provide the resources to get it done, and that is another important program led by NASA Goddard.

I also included language directing NASA to preserve all the technical and scientific world-class capabilities at Goddard during any consolidation of the campus and calling for a National Academy of Sciences study to make sure that NASA Goddard is set up for long-term success. It is a national treasure, and we need to preserve it.

Reform, yes, but let's make sure we reform it in a way that can allow it to continue to be a leader when it comes to space science, Earth science, and the American enterprise.

Funding in this bill will also help better protect American communities. It invests in lifesaving grant programs from State, local, and Tribal law enforcement, to advancing criminal justice initiatives, to providing the highest level of funding ever for the Office on Violence Against Women.

In addition to these funding priorities, the bill also includes language I worked on to address the Trump administration's ongoing efforts to set aside and ignore the decades-long site selection process for a new FBI headquarters. The language in this bill requires that prior to spending any reprogrammed construction funds on a new headquarters, the FBI must submit the contracted and completed architectural and engineering plan for any new building, including the security plan, for review by the Appropriations Committee.

I think we would all agree that it is essential that the men and women who work at the FBI have a headquarters that meets the security requirements that have been set out for it over the last 15 years to two decades, which is Level 5 Security. It is the highest level of security and needed given the very sensitive work that the FBI does on behalf of our country.

This language is important to reasserting Congress' oversight role in a large and expensive project and ensuring that the new headquarters meets the mission and security needs of the men and women of the FBI. And I want to thank Senator MORAN for working with me on this provision.

As I said earlier, this bill is not perfect. It does, however, include guardrails to safeguard the Congress' powers when it comes to spending the taxpayer dollars, at least within the domain of the Agencies in this particular appropriations bill. And that is one of the very important features of this legislation compared to what we would otherwise see in a straight continuing resolution. In this bill, we make sure that congressional prerogatives are protected, not just in report language, but in the statute itself.

As I said, the bill is not perfect. There are many things that I would have chosen to do differently if I was doing this on my own. I will say one problem with the bill before us is that a provision that had been unanimously adopted in the Senate Appropriations Committee regarding the Epstein files was taken out of this bill. That provision would have required the Department of Justice to retain those records.

It also required them to submit not just the files, but a report that provided information and analysis on various aspects of the Epstein files, from financial questions to links regarding foreign intelligence, anything that the documents reflected. And I will say, at a time when we have seen just a small percentage of those files actually released to the public and to the Congress, we need to do much better, which is why I have filed an amendment to this conference bill to restore the identical language that the Senate Appropriations Committee unanimously adopted.

Despite those shortcomings, I do think if you look at its full scope, that this bill is something that is worthy of bipartisan support. I think it will advance very important national interests, both when it comes to science and discovery, when it comes to law enforcement, and when it comes to other major national priorities.

The funding in this bill and the resources it has provided will, in my view, strengthen our country, especially at a time when we are facing so many challenges around the world from competitors and adversaries, including China and others. We need to make sure that the United States invests in the future of our people and the future of our country. This bill is a positive step in that direction, and I urge my colleagues to adopt it.

If I could, I did want to thank some of the folks on my team. And I want to thank them for all of the work that they did, including Jessica Berry, who is the lead Democratic clerk on the committee, as well as other members of our committee, Lindsay Erickson, TJ Lowdermilk, and Blaise Sheridan. I thanked the Republican staff members, Senator MORAN's staff, who worked with us, and I want to thank my own team as well.

And in closing, I also do want to thank the chair and vice chair of the Appropriations Committee—Senator SUSAN COLLINS and Senator PATTY MURRAY—for their work in getting us to this point, and, again, I urge adoption of this legislation.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from North Carolina.

TRUMP ADMINISTRATION

Mr. TILLIS. Mr. President, I will get to the primary reason that I asked for time on the floor today. I did want to say that, if it was within the rules and I would be able to acknowledge people in the Gallery who happen to be my great staff who have done extraor-

dinary casework for years and years, and they are visiting here—if it was within the rules for me to recognize them—I would. I understand the rules, and I will not. But I do welcome them, nevertheless.

I am here because yesterday, the President had a tour up in Michigan, I believe, and a reporter asked him a question about me in particular. He said: How do you feel about Senator TILLIS saying that the potential indictment of the Fed Chair seems a bit excessive?

I didn't use those words, but that was how the question was postured.

The response to that was the President said: That is why THOM is not running for office anymore.

He went on to say very nice things, that he likes me and we work together. I like the President. As a matter of fact, I know many people would be shocked to hear this, but I never had a cross word with the President. We never had an elevated discussion in either direction. I suppose if it came from one direction, it would have ended up that way, but it never has.

As a matter of fact, the President has a quality to him that I find really endearing. When I called him out of the blue because my mom was talking about him—she is a big fan of the President. So I called him out of the blue on a Saturday afternoon, and he picked up the phone, and I said: Mr. President, would you speak to my mom? She loves you.

He got on the phone and graciously spoke to her for about 5 minutes.

A few months later, I was down in Florida. I had an aunt and uncle—the same thing. I called him up—the same thing. He can be a gracious person.

The President, though, got it wrong. He was right in saying that I am not running anymore. But the reason that I made the decision not to run again—and I decided it was just easier to do it here versus answer the callous questions out in the hallway—is because in the moment where he and I had a disagreement, I had to make a decision about how I could be most helpful to him.

If I ran for reelection, I would necessarily always have to think about what boundaries I should have in expressing my concern, and that created complications for my campaign. There are redlines. There are just certain things I would disagree with and would have to take the heat in a campaign.

But I thought, in the moment, I would be far better equipped to give the President my advice on policy matters. So I removed any doubt, whatsoever, that my decisions would be based upon the consequences of either getting his support or not having his support in a campaign.

When I did my announcement and said I was wanting to put myself in a position where I could call balls and strikes, it was so that I could do something that I believe some people in the White House are not particularly concerned about.

The night that I told the President he should find a replacement—the press has gotten this wrong. The President did not ask for people to replace me, and then I decided to retire. The President and I were having a dialogue that night. I told the President that I thought it was time for him to look for a replacement; that I had decided not to run for reelection.

My last communication that night with the President—this is not verbatim, but pretty close—I said: Mr. President, if I prove anything else to you in the next year and a half, I hope that I can prove to you that I care about your legacy, and you have people around you who don't.

There are people who are surfing his wave until they go to the next one. They are young people who have never served in office and don't understand the consequences of looking around corners and protecting this President. There are people that are more concerned with their next job and the next Presidential campaign they may be able to get on than making sure this President is as successful as possible.

So I decided, by just making the decision not to run for reelection, I can speak truth to a President that, I hope, goes down in history as the most successful Republican President in the history of this country. He has that potential, if he starts to recognize advice that he is getting that I think is bad advice and won't age well.

I will get to a few. I am going to keep my temperature down. I told everybody, this isn't cranky THOM; this is THOM trying to explain a very serious subject.

Ladies and gentlemen, the thought of the United States taking the position that we would take Greenland, an independent territory within the Kingdom of Denmark, is absurd. Somebody needs to tell the President that the people of Greenland, up until these current times, were actually very, very pro-American and very, very pro-American presence. We had as many as 17 military installations in Greenland at our height.

Frankly, I bet that once we get through this tension we have today, they would be willing to accept us. We have the power to project some capability in Greenland, and we haven't necessarily put a 75-year alliance in NATO and dissolving it in the mix. That is the smart, sustainable way to achieve the President's goal of securing the Arctic.

The not smart, unachievable way is whoever told the President that this was a viable path. It doesn't make sense.

I will give you another example. Over the weekend, the President—the question yesterday had to do with Chair Powell. I made the statement that I felt like now that the Fed Chair is potentially under indictment, I will not support any vote for any Fed Board member until this matter is decided. Why? Well, because the whole argu-

ment about Fed independence comes into question, right? If all of a sudden, the Justice Department, apparently—according to the President, unknown to him—he reported it was a surprise to him. Since then, he has been briefed. He is standing by the Justice Department on this indictment.

Ladies and gentlemen, unless there is a really compelling reason, unless the prosecution succeeds—and I think it is unlikely, virtually impossible, that Chair Powell will be found guilty of anything. This is all about the testimony in a Banking Committee hearing. That is all it is. If they succeed, then they have created a device that really will put the Fed's independence in question and can cause serious problems for us in the future.

I think one of the reasons why the financial markets did not react precipitously in a negative way with the revelation of Chair Powell is because many people stood up in Congress and said this seems to be crossing a line.

I believe, if the financial markets thought it was almost certain that Jay Powell was going to resign or be prosecuted, I believe we would have a very different reaction.

This is another example of where—Jay Powell, I think, has made decisions that I disagreed with, similar to decisions that have been made by conservative Justices that I disagreed with, but I think they did it for the right reasons. It is just another example of where—in this case, according to the President's public comments, he was surprised about the indictment. It is another example of who in there thought this was a good idea?

Now, because it is a current investigation, we will just have to wait and figure it out after they either proceed with an indictment or they decide to dismiss it.

Then the final thing is, I am in a position now, without question, to say that anyone who thinks that President Trump adopting ELIZABETH WARREN's idea on capping credit card interest rates—it is literally what the President said over the past week. They are not the conservatives that I thought they were. Anybody that thinks this is a good idea will not speak truth to this President to say: You can't do that. If you want to unbank or underbank people, then not allow interest rates to be set based on the risk, and you will see what will happen.

I told Senator WARREN on the floor yesterday: Good on you.

Senator WARREN and I have a good relationship. We don't hardly ever vote on the same stuff, but I said: Good on you. You convinced the President of the United States to actually embrace something you have been pitching for as long as I have been here.

She said: Are you going to set the policy?

I said: No, I will work hard to kill it. I like good execution, even when it is not policy I like. And that was good execution. You convinced the President to embrace your policy.

Then, finally, there is the Credit Card Competition Act, which is another example, ladies and gentlemen, that other countries have tried, and it has failed. The industry is trying to come up with a compromise that works, but once again, somebody in the President's orbit thought capping interest rates was a good idea and told him. I don't expect him to be an expert in the consequences of that. Somebody thought to do the Credit Card Competition Act after it was unsuccessful here because Republicans thought it was a good idea, but it is still a bad idea.

So, to the President: Mr. President, I am going to live up to my promise. I am going to do everything I can to point out advice that you are being given by people who are not thinking about your legacy, who are not thinking about good policy, and from time to time, they are fading far out of the realm of what I consider to be good, conservative, free-market ideology.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Tennessee.

FRAUD ACCOUNTABILITY ACT

Mrs. BLACKBURN. Mr. President, with all of this upheaval in Minnesota and certainly with some other States, Tennesseans are learning a whole lot more about what is happening in this country with fraud and how people are defrauding not only the Federal Government but many State and local governments as well.

The calls that are coming into our office and the emails that we are getting show that this is an issue that has really grabbed the attention of Tennesseans. I think that one of the reasons is that people have seen fraud play out in their local communities. They have seen title theft, where forgers go in and steal properties. Then someone finds out their property is going to be sold on the courthouse steps. They all know of contractors who take deposits. They are fly-by-night, and they never show up to do the work. They know senior citizens who are being defrauded out of life savings. They have seen kickback schemes in their local counties and cities, where local officials go hire a friend and make a contract there at these enormous rates.

I do think that what has happened in Minnesota has caused the American people to look more closely at what is happening with their hard-earned taxpayer dollars and how these are being stolen through fraud.

We know that this issue goes far from Minnesota and into every corner of the country. The Government Accountability Office—and this report, I think, is significant—estimates that each year, each and every year, our government is losing between \$233 billion and \$521 billion to fraud—fraudulent programs, fraudulent claims.

So think about that. You have individuals and entities which willfully misrepresent themselves so that they can get taxpayer benefits—taxpayer dollars. They are stealing up to \$521 billion a year of your money, and that

\$521 billion could be an underestimation. We have a former Assistant Director for the Government Accountability Office who believes the number is actually closer to \$750 billion a year. For context, that \$750 billion is more than the entire amount of money we spent on Medicaid in fiscal year 2024.

That is \$750 billion—estimate—that is going to fraud that would have more than funded everything we spend on Medicaid, and it is just shy of the \$850 billion that we spend on defense. Those are some of the biggest components of our Nation's budget—Medicaid and defense—yet the estimate is that money is being spent via fraud.

Now, these figures don't include the taxpayer dollars that are lost through improper payments. These are payments that go to the wrong person or that maybe exceed the correct amount. Since fiscal year 2003, the GAO estimates that the Federal Government has lost \$2.8 trillion to improper payments.

So you have to say "Where is the money going?" when you look at these numbers. According to the GAO, in fiscal year 2024, more than half—\$85 billion—were improper payments under Medicare and Medicaid. That is called sloppy bookkeeping. And this should come as no surprise: In Minnesota, this is where much of the fraud has been occurring, including through the Medicaid housing program. This fraud could help explain why Minnesota saw the second highest in per-enrollee Medicaid spending under the ObamaCare expansion, where Federal dollars are underwriting nonexistent services and treatments. So Minnesota, with all of the fraud going on there, has the second highest cost per enrollee, and it shot up during the ObamaCare expansion.

We learned even more about the fraud occurring in blue State Medicaid Programs and in ObamaCare during the Schumer shutdown. Last month, the GAO released findings that showed just how easy it was to commit fraud with the Biden bonus credits under ObamaCare. It is the same program that the Democrats fought to bankroll with another 450 billion taxpayer dollars.

To test the program's safeguards against fraud, the GAO said: We are going to conduct an experiment. So they decided to make up 24 fictitious applications, and they did these quite sloppily. They made up names, addresses, information. They left out some required information on these 24 applications. So they are all false, and they are all missing information.

How many of those applications do you think were approved for ObamaCare? There were 23 of the 24 that were approved. They were fake, but they got approved anyway. So the Federal Government was paying more than \$10,000 a month each and every month to insurance companies to provide coverage for enrollees who did not exist. That is a lot of money being wasted.

It gets worse. A preliminary analysis by the GAO found that there were at least 190,000 applications between 2023 and 2024—that is that fiscal year—that had unauthorized changes by agents or brokers. That means the individual—of course, we now know that many of these are fake—they didn't approve this or submit it or ask for it; it was the agent or the broker, without permission, who made that change.

Over the same period, there were close to 100,000 duplicate Social Security numbers enrolled in the program. In 1 case, there was 1 Social Security number that was used to apply for more than 125 policies. And guess what. They got approved. And guess what. All fake.

It is the insurance companies making the money every month, and it is your tax dollars at work for what is a fraud scheme.

Despite all of this fraud, the Democrats this week demanded a vote to overturn the Trump administration's Marketplace integrity rule, which protects consumers from the fraud that plagued the system under President Biden and his administration. I can't believe they wanted to overturn Marketplace integrity, but, oh, they did.

This is just one part of the puzzle. Every year, we spend more than \$4 trillion on more than 2,400 aid and subsidy programs. Get that? More than 2,400 aid and subsidy programs. And almost all are vulnerable to fraud—housing subsidies, student loans, childcare programs, food stamps, unemployment insurance, and the list goes on.

We should be grateful that President Trump is working to root out this widespread fraud. The American people expect the government to work for law-abiding citizens, not criminals, and ensuring these scammers face justice is crucial to restoring trust and accountability.

To support his efforts, I recently introduced the Fraud Accountability Act. This legislation would amend the Immigration and Nationality Act to explicitly make clear that fraud is a deportable offense. This will provide another tool for the President to deport or denaturalize scammers who have come to our country to steal from the American people—to steal from the U.S. taxpayer; to steal from the Federal Government—and pad their pockets.

Hard-working taxpayers deserve to know their money goes to those who truly need it. It should not be going to criminals who are choosing to game the system. I know the Fraud Accountability Act will help and assist in holding these individuals to account.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Connecticut.

MINNESOTA ICE SHOOTING

Mr. BLUMENTHAL. Mr. President, the American people can be forgiven for wanting to turn off their computers or TVs and feeling a sense of abhorrence and repulsion at what they are seeing again and again and again as the

video of Renee Good's killing is replayed for them.

What it shows is a horrific tragedy—a mother who was 37 years old, an American citizen, subjected to alleged murder. I use the word "alleged" because I have spent most of my career in law enforcement, and the word "alleged" before a conviction is always mandatory. But what is on that tape is there for everyone to see—the absolutely needless, reckless use of excessive force with a firearm, without any apparent need for self-defense.

We are seeing a surge of violence in this country that is not only from private individuals but now from supposed law enforcement—ICE—which has a responsibility to uphold the law and respect norms that protect everyday citizens.

We are a country built on due process and the rule of law, and we were founded on the idea that we resist tyrannical monarchs; that we fought a war, in fact, against a tyranny that used totalitarian, Gestapo-type tactics. And now we see them on the streets of our own country.

Yes, Americans have a right to be repulsed by these videos and outraged, angry, but also saddened and grief-stricken because the killing of Renee Nicole Good last week at the hands of an ICE agent showed the tragic outcome of abuse of power. This death was preventable and predictable. It was preventable. It needn't have happened.

But it was also predictable because it is only an example of the rising tide of lawlessness and recklessness on the part of ICE that has been documented, in fact, by my report on the investigation we did, as ranking member of the Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations, and the report that was the result of that investigation. We released it several weeks ago, and it can be found at <https://www.hsgac.senate.gov/wp-content/uploads/2025.12.8-ICE-Report-revised-FINAL.pdf>.

I released this report, which documents firsthand accounts of 22 U.S. citizens in 10 different States who were physically assaulted, pepper-sprayed, denied medical treatment, detained, sometimes for days, by Federal immigration agents. And we did a hearing with a number of those American citizens who were injured, denied medical care, prevented from contacting their families or lawyers, some of them for days on end, while detained under very harsh conditions. And it was graphic; it was gripping. But it was only 4 or 5 examples of 22 individuals we interviewed who themselves were only a subset of hundreds of American citizens who were physically assaulted, detained, and many of them injured.

This pattern and practice is not coincidental. It is the result of an apparent policy on the part of this government Agency that involves agents who are masked, unidentifiable, who turn violent without provocation, crashing their government vehicles into citizens' cars, dragging them from those

cars, slamming them to the ground, violently assaulting them, often leading to lasting injuries, including trauma.

One of the individuals who appeared at our hearing was a veteran who served and sacrificed for this country in the belief that he was helping to preserve the very liberties that he was denied when he was arrested.

Now, every one of these people sought to tell the agents that they were an American citizen. They offered their passports or their driver's license or other identification to show they were American citizens. There was no reason to assault them in this way.

In California, they beat a 79-year-old man so badly that they broke his ribs, and they slammed another man's head into the ground so hard that he was concussed. In Illinois, a woman was shot five times, while, in Indiana, a man was punched in the face and dragged outside his family home in the early morning hours. It didn't matter whether children were present; agents acted with reckless disregard for their safety and well-being. In Idaho, children were taken from a car at gunpoint and later zip-tied. In Massachusetts, an autistic child was deliberately taken from her parents and used as bait by law enforcement to try to lure their parents out of the house.

These detentions were not limited to one State or a few States. They spanned the Nation—from Idaho to Alabama, from California to Illinois. And we know there are so many stories that haven't been told because people fear retaliation and retribution—American citizens fearing their own government retaliating against them for speaking truth to power about physical assaults by their own government.

These ICE agents have been trained and they have been recruited by the Department of Homeland Security, which is complicit in this misconduct—complicit because it has failed to provide the right training and perhaps has recruited people who are wrongly in these roles, and it has failed to either provide protocols or to enforce them.

What became clear through our interviews and across the stories that keep emerging is that the Department of Homeland Security does not have just a few rogue agents. It has become a lawless force as an Agency of the government. It is engaged in a coordinated, nationwide effort using the same tactics, the same violence wherever they are deploying.

So after months of investigating these kinds of lawless abuses, I am really saddened to say that Renee Good's death came as no surprise. It was predictable, and it was preventable. And also preventable are the injuries and the deaths and the lawlessness that are happening every day, right now, in the streets of America, in the neighborhoods of our great country.

They are a betrayal of the rule of law that is the foundation of our Nation. It should shock America's conscience,

and I believe it has, as it has shocked mine. These kinds of brazen, abusive, lawless tactics do not represent our Nation. Americans will have a hard time—and they should—recognizing our great Nation in what they are seeing hour after hour, day after day—right now, in realtime—in those abuses and in so frequently used Gestapo-type tactics.

I initially thought: I don't want to go there. My father escaped Germany in 1935 and came to America after seeing what was to come in those same Gestapo-type tactics in Germany. He came here speaking no English, having not much more than the shirt on his back and knowing virtually no one. If he had stayed in Germany, he would have seen a paramilitary force going door to door, rounding up people just like him, exactly the kinds of tactics we now see unfolding: ICE as a paramilitary force going business to business, door to door, church to church, school to school, seizing people, dragging them out of their cars or homes without much more cause than the fact that they are people of color or they speak a different language or they are working in a place where undocumented immigrants are thought to be working.

In this country, now, decades after that time in the 1930s, in the pinnacle of democracy, what we are seeing is a paramilitary force stopping people in this same way, searching them and assaulting them. And the parallels are unmistakable and frightening. We cannot, in this body or anywhere in our great country, stand idly while our fellow citizens are rounded up and subjected to this treatment. We should not be standing idly as any human being, whatever their status, is subjected to this kind of abuse.

I will continue, on my subcommittee, the Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations, the work that we have done, the investigation that is ongoing right now. We will press for accountability. We will press for the facts, the truth. And we have a lot of it already. We will not sit idly and watch as the Nation I love—all of us in this body do—demean and betrays our Constitution. We have all taken an oath to uphold it. So have those ICE agents that are betraying it. Our Constitution will crumble unless we fight for it.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Nebraska.

IRAN

Mrs. FISCHER. Mr. President, since December 28, Iranian civilians have taken to the streets to protest the bleak economic conditions and the daily hardships imposed on their families by the Iranian regime. Local protests have spread across the country to all 31 Provinces, drawing tens of thousands of citizens into the streets. These men and women are rightfully calling for accountability, freedom, and an end to authoritarian rule.

I stand in solidarity with the people of Iran. They have endured decades of

brutal oppression, corruption, and economic mismanagement. They want to live with dignity, to provide for their families, and to secure a better future for the next generation. These are universal aspirations, and they deserve the support of the international community. And the people of Iran deserve liberty.

The regime's response has been swift and ruthless. In an attempt to silence dissent and conceal its abuses, Iranian authorities have shut down the internet and the phone service. They have cut citizens off from one another and from the outside world. Peaceful protesters have been met with lethal force.

Although the regime has shut down nearly all communications, we are seeing reports estimating that over 12,000 innocent civilians have been killed. More than 18,000 individuals have been arrested. This level of violence against Iran's own people is indefensible.

I commend President Trump for imposing economic pressure on those who continue to support and sustain that regime. These measures send a clear message: The United States will not ignore the suffering of the Iranian people, and the exploitation of the Iranian people must end.

The newly imposed 25-percent tariffs on countries doing business with Iran are designed to strike at the economic lifelines that enable this repression. Some of Iran's largest trading partners unsurprisingly are our adversaries. It is both in the interest of our national security and in the interest of the Iranian people to hold these enablers accountable. The courage of the Iranian people deserves nothing less.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Arizona.

CAMPAIGN FINANCE

Mr. KELLY. Mr. President, 16 years after the Supreme Court's disastrous Citizens United decision, families across Arizona are paying more for groceries, rent, gas, and healthcare. And they are wondering why the people they elect to represent them always seem to have time for the priorities of billionaires and big corporations but not enough time for them.

That question did not come out of nowhere; it came from lived experience. Hard-working Americans are doing everything right. They are working longer hours. They are budgeting carefully. They are raising their families. And they are just trying to stay afloat, but they are still falling behind. That is why we are here today.

In 2010, the Supreme Court handed down a decision that put a "for sale" sign on our democracy. The Citizens United ruling opened the door for corporations and billionaires to spend unlimited amounts of money to influence our elections, often without the public ever knowing who is behind it.

The Court decided that spending money on elections is the same thing as political speech and that corporations should have the same political

rights as individual Americans. Does that make any sense?

The results of this were somewhat predictable, and it wasn't limited to a courtroom. It changed how this place, the U.S. Senate, works. The loudest voices in Washington became billion-aires and not everyday Americans.

It led to the rise of super PACs and dark money groups. These groups come out of nowhere, and they spend millions and millions of dollars attacking one candidate or cause or supporting another. They organize around what benefits them financially, and they pour massive, massive amounts of money into securing a specific outcome that benefits them. They aren't subject to the same transparency or accountability of the campaign that a candidate runs.

It created a system where power shifts away from everyday Americans and towards the people who can write the big, giant checks. That shows up in the policies politicians fight for and the ones they block. It is no surprise.

Right now, under Donald Trump and Republicans in Washington, we are seeing this dynamic play out very clearly.

Last year, Republicans passed a bill to hand out massive tax breaks to billionaires and giant corporations, paid for by throwing 300,000 Arizonans off of their healthcare and slashing food assistance for families who need it.

He has stacked his Cabinet with billionaire friends who are completely out of touch with everyday, working Americans who are often living paycheck to paycheck.

Early in his term, he tapped an unqualified person, Elon Musk—the wealthiest man in the world—who spent more money than anybody else to get Donald Trump elected. He hired him to oversee an effort to recklessly fire thousands of hard-working Federal employees and shut down entire Agencies, undermining our national security.

Americans are living through a serious cost-of-living crisis right now. Families are struggling with rising expenses for healthcare, for housing, for utilities, for groceries, just about everything. What I hear from my constituents is that they want relief. They want their government to help bring down costs and help make their lives more affordable, but time and again, the policies that would do exactly that stall or they just die right here in this Chamber and down the road at the White House.

Sixteen years after Citizens United, this is not about relitigating a court case; it is about recognizing how deeply money and politics affect people's lives and about drawing a clear line between a political system that serves billionaires and one that serves people.

Americans see this clearly. They are demanding transparency. They are demanding accountability. They are demanding a government that answers to voters, not to the billionaires and not to the special interests.

That is why from day one I have approached this job differently. I have never taken a dime of corporate PAC money, and I never will, and I have introduced legislation to ban corporate PACs.

I publish my schedule online so that everybody can see what I am working on, who I am meeting with, and how I am spending my time in this job, and I have introduced legislation to require all Senators to do the same exact thing.

I have also led on legislation to ban Members of Congress from trading stocks. Let me be clear. Nobody should be able to use this job to profit personally. It is horrendous, and it is a huge problem. One of the first things I did after being elected was move all of my assets and those of my wife Gabby Giffords to a qualified blind trust—the best standard identified by Senate ethics—and I think all Members of Congress need to do that.

These are not radical ideas; they are about restoring trust and making sure that this place works for people who don't have lobbyists, who don't have super PACs, who can't write a seven-figure check.

These shouldn't be radical demands. They are basic expectations. And here is why this matters so much right now. As long as big money and billionaires dominate our politics, it will continue to block progress on the issues that people care about most: lowering skyrocketing healthcare costs, making housing more affordable, increasing competition so families aren't left paying more every single month. Those fights all run straight through the influence of corporate money. It is very clear.

So let me be clear. Money is not speech. I mean, who came up with that? And corporations are not people.

So this moment isn't just about looking backward at a Court decision. That is not what we are getting at. It is about deciding what kind of Congress we want to be moving forward. Do we accept a system where access is bought and outcomes are shaped by the wealthiest members in our society or do we set a higher bar and say that democracy should work for the people who vote, not the people who spend millions of dollars of their own money in elections? That is the choice right in front of us.

I am proud to be joined by my colleagues today, as we mark 16 years since the Citizens United ruling, to make clear that the damage from that decision is real, and it is ongoing, and it is standing in the way of progress on the issues that people care most about.

This conversation should not end here. It should continue with action, with accountability, and with a commitment to put people back at the center of our democracy.

Thank you, Mr. President.

With that, I want to welcome my good friend and colleague the Senator from Rhode Island, SHELDON WHITEHOUSE.

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

Mr. WHITEHOUSE. Mr. President, let me first thank Senator KELLY for coordinating this unfortunate commemoration of a truly disgraceful decision by the Republican appointees of the Supreme Court 16 years ago.

This decision opened the floodgates of our politics to billions and billions of dollars in dark money, and those billions and billions in dark money have distorted our political process in ways that are obvious and evident to everybody who works in this building. Some are winners from that dark money spent, and some are losers from that dark money spending, but everybody sees it.

Billionaire spending in our elections is up 160 times. That is 160 times more billionaire spending in our elections now that billionaires can pump money in by the millions. Just 100 families poured a recordbreaking \$2.6 billion into Federal elections in 2024. I don't know how democracy survives in an environment in which 100 superwealthy families are dumping \$2.6 billion in special interest spending, influence spending, into our elections.

This is not a hypothetical problem.

I care a lot about climate change, and I see what is happening to our coasts, particularly in Rhode Island. I was here before the Citizens United decision, when robust, meaningful, bipartisan climate legislation was constant here in the Senate. I can think of four major bipartisan bills here in the Senate. And I remember my friend John McCain running for President, carrying the Republican banner into that Presidential election with a completely solid and respectable climate platform.

Well, right after Citizens United, all of that stopped. The barrage of fossil fuel dark money into our politics killed bipartisanship on climate change instantly.

It is still a problem today. Just yesterday, I asked to move a resolution that declared that climate change is not a hoax, that climate science is sound science, and that research into the effects of climate change should continue, and Republicans objected to that simple resolution.

The fossil fuel industry bought that obstruction of climate legislation for 16 years now with money. They poured \$450 million into political influence spending during the 2024 cycle, and that is only the identifiable money. Then there is the dark money, and we don't know how big that number was.

We are already seeing the climate problem cascade into a homeowners insurance crisis, cascade into a crisis of mortgage unavailability and ultimately home value losses. It is already happening in Florida, for instance. So this is real, with real consequences for regular Americans.

There was a big flaw in the Citizens United decision. The Citizens United decision hung on two assertions of fact

by that slim Republican majority that warped our politics for the billionaires. Those two false facts were that all of this new spending was going to be independent of political campaigns—that was never tested, never vetted, never litigated. That was a fact that was invented behind the curtains of the Supreme Court by those five Justices. History shows since then that had a real factfinding effort been undertaken, it would have been clear that this spending is not at all independent of political campaigns.

But here is where it is indisputable. The Court also held—those five Judges—that all of this unlimited billions that they were letting loose into our politics would be transparent, that voters would know who was behind the money. Well, in 2024, \$1.9 billion in money was spent in elections that we don't know who is behind. That is a \$1.9 billion factual rebuke to the Supreme Court's Citizens United decision. It simply isn't true.

So that decision hangs on a false fact that was found by a Court that shouldn't even be doing factfinding and which for 16 years those five Justices have scrupulously refused to correct even as the falsity of the fact upon which their decision depended has been proven over and over and over again.

I will close by pointing to the DISCLOSE Act—a bill that can remedy this by requiring contributions over 10 grand into a political race to be disclosed by the actual donor. No more hiding behind a 501(c)(3) that converts to a 501(c)(4) that sends it to a super Pac that sends it to the election. No, you go all the way back to the actual, real donor.

We should pass that bill. Every time we brought it up, every Republican has voted to defend dark money, and every Democrat has voted to rid our politics of this corrupting scourge. Every time, every Republican, every Democrat. It is a clear divide, a clear difference between us. And the public is with us. The public is infuriated that big, secretive special interests can control our politics from behind the scenes with massive dark money contributions.

Last point. If you can make an enormous dark money contribution, you can threaten or promise to make an enormous dark money contribution, and those threats and promises will never be seen. It is the core of political corruption to make decisions based on secret threats and promises about massive political spending.

We have to get rid of this. The decision was ill-founded, factually wrong, and needs to be corrected.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Oregon.

Mr. MERKLEY. I thank my colleague Senator WHITEHOUSE, who has been pointing out that we have a money and politics system that is corrupting the vision of government by and for the people and is replacing it with government by and for the powerful. Who in

America wants a governmental system, designed and intended to be a reflection of ordinary citizens' desires and aspirations and opinions, to simply be a country run by oligarchs, by billionaires? Yet that is where we have arrived.

We absolutely need to change this campaign system—moneys in the campaign—in order to save any possibility of a republic by and for the people.

What we really have now are two campaign systems—one for ordinary citizens and one for the megarich that gives the megarich extraordinary power.

If you or I make a donation to a candidate, well, first of all, there is a cap on it of several thousand dollars. I know nobody in my blue-collar community donates several thousand dollars to a campaign, but there are upper middle-income families that do donate thousands of dollars, but it is thousands, not millions, not tens of millions, and it is completely disclosed. You can look up who gave to the candidate. It is disclosed. It is capped. That is the system for ordinary Americans.

But then there is the system for the powerful that every single Republican in this Chamber keeps voting to defend. It is called the dark money system. There is no cap on the amount that can be donated. There is no public disclosure to the American people.

The Supreme Court created this dual system, saying: You know, a cap on money to the candidate—well, that could produce a conflict of interest or appearance of corruption, so you can cap it. But if you give it to the friend of the candidate to run a parallel campaign, well, that is suddenly white-washed or washed clean and no influence on the candidate. The candidate probably won't even know about it.

Well, everyone knows that is a complete fallacy, complete and totally. Somebody gives \$10 million to the friend of the candidate to run a parallel campaign, the candidate knows that is happening. They know the ads. They hear about the source. Even that parallel campaign—they can still share staff. I mean, there is no real division between them.

So that was a completely phony distinction created by the Court to create a system of corporate and billionaire power in America. As my colleague pointed out in the context of climate, we saw a radical change immediately.

Well, the growth in dark money has been stunning. Because there is so much money among the oligarchs and billionaires, they want to spend it to create laws that favor the oligarchs and billionaires, and they are spending at an extraordinary rate.

Six years ago, it was about \$300 million. That is a lot of money. But according to the Brennan Center article from May 7—Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to have this Brennan Center article printed in the RECORD.

There being no objection, the material was ordered to be printed in the RECORD, as follows:

[May 7, 2025]

DARK MONEY HIT A RECORD HIGH OF \$1.9 BILLION IN 2024, FEDERAL RACES

(By Ian Vandewalker)

The 2024 federal election cycle was the most secretive since the Supreme Court's Citizens United decision in 2010. Dark money groups, nonprofits and shell companies that spend on elections without revealing their donors, plowed more than \$1.9 billion into last year's election cycle, a dramatic increase from the prior record of \$1 billion in 2020.

Citizens United, which allowed corporations and unions to raise and spend unlimited amounts on elections, was premised significantly on the Court's assumption that all of this newly permitted election spending would be transparent. In reality, many of the groups the Court allowed to spend money on elections were not required to disclose their donors. Since Citizens United, dark money groups have spent at least \$4.3 billion on federal elections.

As dark money has proliferated, it has also evolved. Immediately after Citizens United, many newly empowered groups purchased their own ads to influence elections. Some of these purchases were reported to the Federal Election Commission (FEC), which makes such information publicly available. However, since at least 2020, dark money groups have largely shifted toward making large transfers to allied super PACs—in amounts that far exceeded any previous direct ad spending. These totals can only be tabulated by reviewing each super PAC's campaign finance reports. Dark money groups also increasingly run ads, including many online ads, that are worded and timed such that they do not trigger FEC disclosure requirements.

This analysis offers the first comprehensive accounting of dark money in the most recent federal election cycle.

It combines publicly available FEC data with data on otherwise undisclosed television spending from the Wesleyan Media Project, a research institute that tracks political advertising, and data on digital political ad sales that certain online platforms voluntarily make public. Some other categories of undisclosed political spending cannot be reliably tracked. Therefore, the \$1.9 billion figure reported in this analysis necessarily—and perhaps substantially—underestimates the true scale of dark money spending in 2024.

TYPES OF DARK MONEY SPENDING

The term dark money as used in this analysis refers to election spending and contributions by nonprofits and shell companies that are not legally required to—and do not—disclose the identities of their donors. The lack of transparency does not make the spending analyzed here illegal, although the Brennan Center supports legislation to require full disclosure of more of it. Dark money flowed into the 2024 elections in four ways that can be tracked: contributions to super PACs, direct spending reported to the FEC, TV spending, and online spending.

CONTRIBUTIONS TO SUPER PACS

During the 2024 election cycle, shell companies and 501(c) nonprofits that did not disclose their funding sources gave \$1.3 billion to super PACs—more than in the prior two election cycles combined.

Citizens United and later court cases led to the creation of super PACs, which can receive contributions of any amount, including from corporations and unions. Although

super PACs are supposed to operate independently from the candidates they support, many are established by candidates' close allies or run by former staff or party operatives. Many share consultants with campaigns and even enlist candidates to help them fundraise.

Recent FEC rulings have opened the door to even more direct cooperation between candidates and super PACs in certain critical areas—including canvassing and get-out-the-vote efforts.

Donald Trump's 2024 campaign outsourced many of these activities in swing states to a super PAC run by his largest supporter, tech billionaire Elon Musk, while Kamala Harris leaned heavily on a super PAC run by Democratic Party operatives.

Super PACs are required to report their donors, but they can easily hide the original sources of their funds by taking money from dark money groups. This practice has exploded in recent elections. Many of the top-spending super PACs in 2024—including Future Forward USA, which worked to elect Harris, and the Senate Leadership Fund, which is tied to Republican Party leaders—had affiliated dark money groups that provided eight- or nine-figure sums.

The chart below shows how dark money has evolved since 2010 according to FEC data. Direct ad spending by dark money groups used to be the main reported funding avenue, but its 2012 peak is now eclipsed by dark money contributions to super PACs in each of the previous three elections. (For the purposes of this analysis, the term super PACs includes groups called Carey committees or hybrid PACs that have both an independent expenditure arm and an arm that takes limited contributions.)

TELEVISION AD SPENDING

Dark money groups spent approximately \$242 million on TV ads targeting federal candidates during the 2024 election cycle, according to new Wesleyan Media Project research. The vast majority was not reported to the FEC. As explained in the methodology below, this study's dark money total of \$1.9 billion avoids double counting the small amount of spending that may be included in both data from the Wesleyan Media Project and FEC data.

Federal rules only require certain campaign ads to be reported to the FEC. Ads that do not expressly advocate for the election or defeat of a candidate using unambiguous phrases like "vote for" or "vote against" are generally not subject to reporting requirements, except for TV and radio ads run within 30 days of a primary or 60 days of Election Day.

By running ads that avoid explicit calls to vote for or against a particular candidate outside of the mandated reporting windows, dark money groups can bypass FEC disclosure rules. Some of this spending can still be tracked because it is available through TV ad tracking services, and those ads are reflected in this analysis. But additional TV spending on streaming applications like Hulu and local TV ad buys means the actual total exceeds the \$242 million discussed here.

ONLINE AD SPENDING

Digital ads are another form of dark money spending that is often missing from FEC data, and data from the largest online platforms shows that hidden sources spent \$315 million. Like TV ads, online ads can avoid disclosure requirements if they do not explicitly advocate for the election or defeat of a particular candidate. Unlike TV and radio ads, online ads that mention candidates are not subject to FEC reporting regardless of proximity to Election Day.

Nevertheless, some major online platforms voluntarily maintain databases of political

ad sales. These datasets indicate that about 320 groups that do not disclose their donors collectively spent more than \$281 million on online ads during the 2024 election cycle without disclosing any spending to the FEC. Another 38 nonprofits that do not disclose their donors but reported at least some spending to the FEC spent an additional \$34 million on online ads. (As with TV spending, this analysis does not double count spending that appears in both data from online platforms and FEC data.) Without standardized disclosure regulations for online political advertising, however, the full extent of digital election spending remains difficult to quantify.

The major platforms that reported political ad sales for 2024 are Facebook, Instagram, Google, YouTube, X, and Snapchat. Spending totals for Facebook, Instagram, Google, and YouTube were collected by OpenSecrets, and spending totals for X and Snapchat were obtained directly from those platforms.

Social media platforms owned by Meta, the parent company of Facebook and Instagram, attracted the majority of documented online spending by dark money groups for the 2024 cycle—about \$238 million.

Google and YouTube, which are owned by Alphabet Inc., attracted about \$66.2 million in dark money over the same period. Snapchat documented about \$7 million. X reported around \$3.9 million in dark money ad spending, though analysts have raised questions about the completeness of its data.

Importantly, each online platform makes its own decisions about how to define reportable political advertising, and these definitions can shift over time. Other practices, including what information is provided for ads and the format in which it is presented, also differ considerably. Researchers have documented significant gaps in multiple political ad archives. And even the most comprehensive archives generally exclude certain categories of spending, such as payments to influencers for content or political endorsements, further obscuring the whole picture.

DIRECT SPENDING REPORTED TO THE FEC

Nonprofits that do not disclose their donors reported about \$43 million in direct spending to the FEC during the entire 2024 cycle. That amounts to less than 2.5 percent of all dark money in last year's election. A small portion of this FEC-disclosed spending went to ads that are also included in TV and online ad data discussed above, but this analysis avoids double counting those expenditures.

The \$43 million in direct spending is an increase over the prior cycle. During the 2022 midterms, dark money groups reported less than \$25 million in spending to the FEC, the lowest total since the Citizens United decision. Spending reported to the FEC peaked at around \$309 million in 2012. However, as groups switched to a strategy of largely funding allied super PACs, direct spending reported to the FEC gradually dropped.

SPENDING THAT CANNOT BE TRACKED

Several other types of election spending by dark money groups have not been included in this analysis because they are difficult or impossible to track. As noted, not all online platforms release spending data, and none publishes data on certain forms of expenditures, like paid influencers.

This analysis also does not include data for radio ads that are not reported to the FEC, and, as mentioned above, streaming video applications and some TV spending. Other forms of communication, like billboards and flyers, are also generally left out of FEC data unless they expressly advocate for or against a candidate.

DARK MONEY BY PARTY

Both Democrats and Republicans benefited from hundreds of millions of dollars in dark money in 2024. More spending backed Democrats, as has been the case since the 2018 midterm elections (before which more dark money typically favored Republicans). The presidential race was the source of much of this disparity in last year's cycle.

Overall, dark money groups boosting Democrats put up about \$1.2 billion to influence 2024 elections, while groups boosting Republicans accounted for about \$664 million.

THE PRESIDENTIAL CONTEST

The presidential election attracted more super PAC spending—totaling around \$2 billion—than any other race in the 2024 cycle. Political committees supporting Trump or Harris collectively received more than \$500 million from dark money groups.

Future Forward USA Action, the main dark money group supporting Joe Biden and then Harris, gave the most. The 501(c)(4) nonprofit poured more than \$304 million into spending on ads and contributions to its closely tied super PAC, Future Forward USA. That means that \$1 out of every \$6 from undisclosed sources in the 2024 election cycle came through a single dark money group.

At the same time, multiple dark money groups also worked to elect Trump, and the flow of money increased substantially in the final months of the election cycle. Securing American Greatness, after its incorporation in March 2024, spent more than \$81 million, about \$67 million of which went to super PACs.

Another major supporter of Trump's presidential bid was Building America's Future, a 501(c)(4) nonprofit that reportedly received funding from Musk. It contributed more than \$35 million to super PACs that spent heavily on seemingly pro-Harris ads falsely suggesting that her campaign supported divisive policies.

CONGRESSIONAL LEADERSHIP

The presidential election was not the only race to attract large sums of money from secret donors in 2024. The main dark money groups aligned with the Democratic and Republican Parties in Congress spent more than \$432 million, up from about \$346 million during the 2022 midterms and \$320 million during the 2020 cycle. These groups are 501(c)(4) nonprofits that each have ties with party leadership and share staff and resources with an affiliated super PAC.

Majority Forward, a dark money nonprofit affiliated with Senate Democratic leadership, poured more than \$136 million into key Senate races. More than \$81.7 million of that money went to Senate Majority PAC, the main super PAC aligned with Senate Democrats in recent cycles. But unlike prior cycles, Senate Majority PAC did not spend the funds directly. Instead, it seeded a new super PAC named WinSenate that spent the money on ads to influence Senate races.

One Nation, the main dark money group with ties to Senate Republicans, spent about \$123 million in 2024. Of that, \$59.3 million went toward advertising, mainly to TV ads. More than \$53 million worth of airtime made One Nation the top dark money spender on TV ads during the 2024 election cycle, according to research by the Wesleyan Media Project. One Nation also steered more than \$63 million to an allied super PAC, the Senate Leadership Fund.

House Republicans' dark money group, the American Action Network, poured \$69 million into the 2024 elections. The main dark money group affiliated with House Democrats, House Majority Forward, gave about \$61 million to influence congressional races.

CONCLUSION

Dark money spending in federal elections broke records in 2024, even as it became harder to track. Fueled by Citizens United, secretive political spending has eroded accountability and Americans' trust in the political process. The trend toward secrecy in U.S. campaigns is likely to continue until Congress takes action to require disclosure of large political contributions and expenditures.

METHODOLOGY

The methodology for this analysis yielded a conservative estimate of dark money in 2024 federal elections by building on a system created by OpenSecrets to measure dark money in 2020. This approach included an examination of spending reported to the FEC by groups without disclosed donors, TV ad data from research conducted in partnership with the Wesleyan Media Project using Vivvix CMAG data, and online ad data from major platforms. Spending totals were obtained directly from Snap and X, then analyzed by the Brennan Center; spending totals for social media platforms affiliated with Meta and Google were provided by OpenSecrets, then analyzed by the Brennan Center. OpenSecrets' viewpoint coding system was used for any groups that reported independent expenditures or electioneering communications to the FEC. Some dark money groups report ad spending to the FEC. To avoid double counting the amounts reported to the FEC, this analysis followed a methodology similar to the one applied by OpenSecrets in 2020: Both online and TV ad spending were combined into a total figure for each group, which was then compared against the FEC-reported spending. Only the larger of the two amounts was used.

Mr. MERKLEY. Dark money hit a record-high \$1.9 billion in the 2024 races. That is a sixfold increase in 6 years. That is the rich and powerful buying their government. It is an absolute travesty.

No one in the founding community of our Nation who wrote the Declaration of Independence, who wrote the Constitution, wanted to design a system where the megarich ran the place as a cabal of elites, but that is what we have, and that is what we have to change.

We saw this with President Trump. On April 11 in 2024, he met with the fossil fuel executives. He had dinner at Mar-a-Lago. His pitch was simple: In exchange for \$1 billion, he told them, he promised to prioritize their preferences in the next election.

Well, those fossil fuel leaders delivered hundreds and hundreds of millions of dollars in election spending and lobbying. And what did Trump do? He delivered for them. He gave them \$18 billion in new and expanded tax breaks. A pretty good deal, huh? With hundreds of millions of dollars invested, you get \$18 billion in tax breaks.

He penalized their competition. The renewable energy that is cheaper and cleaner? He put up all kinds of obstacles to favor dirty, more expensive fossil fuels. He green-lighted LNG terminals. He blocked new solar and wind. He took the United States out of the Paris climate accords. That is the example of how this money corrupts.

So everything we are fighting for, for the ordinary person, is being torched

by these megadonations. You saw what Trump calls this Big Beautiful bill. It was really a big, ugly betrayal of American families. It proceeded to cut nutrition. It proceeded to cut healthcare to deliver, well, trillions of dollars of tax breaks for the richest Americans, and it even will run up the debt by \$30 trillion in the next 30 years for those richest Americans. If we are going to change this, we have to change this dynamic. If we fail, we have really failed in our oath to the Constitution.

I invite my Republican colleagues to start fighting for a vision of government by and for the people, not by and for the elite—oligarchs and the billionaires. Let's save our Republic.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Minnesota.

Ms. KLOBUCHAR. Mr. President, I am here today to mark 16 years since the Supreme Court's decision in Citizens United, which opened the floodgates to unlimited special interest money in our elections.

We had a campaign finance system. It wasn't perfect. There was a bipartisan effort to put some limits on things. The problem with the way it is now is that it opens it up, and it is impossible to even trace what money is coming in and from where.

I want to thank Senator KELLY for bringing us to the floor today to discuss such an important issue for our democracy and thank my colleagues who are here today.

In the 2024 Federal election, secret money groups spent \$1.9 billion, nearly double the amount spent just one cycle before. This undermines our democracy and shakes the public's trust because unlimited, anonymous Federal spending in our elections doesn't encourage free speech. It drowns out the voices of the American people who are seeking to participate.

I have long supported a constitutional amendment to overturn Citizens United and restore the authority of Congress and the States to establish reasonable limits on campaign spending, and I will keep making the case to build support for that effort. In the meantime, there are things that we can do to make our campaign finance system stronger and more transparent.

That is why I have led the effort, alongside Ranking Member PADILLA, to advance commonsense bills, including the Freedom to Vote Act, to shine light on secret money and make sure Americans know who is trying to influence their votes. We came very close to passing my bill in the last Congress. The Freedom to Vote Act would provide important new tools to rid our politics of Big Money and root out foreign interference.

It includes the DISCLOSE Act, which I have cosponsored—Senator WHITEHOUSE's bill—in every Congress since 2012, to end secret money in our politics. The DISCLOSE Act also makes it harder for billionaires and others to hide their contributions by ending the

use of transfers between organizations in order to cloak the identity of donors. It requires organizations that spend money on political activities to disclose the true owner.

The Freedom to Vote Act also includes my Honest Ads Act, bipartisan legislation that I first introduced with Senator John McCain, whom we miss very much and his leadership when it comes to campaign finance. This bill would require online platforms to take steps to prevent foreign nationals from buying ads. It would ensure that all online platforms disclose their buyers of digital political ads if the platforms reach 50 million or more unique U.S. visitors per month, meaning online platforms would finally have to follow the same rules that TV and radio stations already follow for political ads.

It is simply insane that, in one medium, there are some rules and, in another, there are not. These changes will increase transparency while including commonsense exemptions to protect the First Amendment rights of websites that are simply part of traditional media.

Third, the Freedom to Vote Act would strengthen rules banning the coordination between candidates and super PACs to make sure candidates cannot evade contribution limits by working with their super PACs.

Finally, the Freedom to Vote Act includes important reforms to the Federal Election Commission to improve the enforcement of our campaign finance laws. Since the Citizens United decision came down, 16 years ago, new technologies have emerged that only make the need for reform more pressing. AI videos are making their way into political ads, giving dark money groups a new and cheaper tool with which to influence politicians and mislead the public.

That is why I lead bipartisan bills to ban the use of AI to create deceptive campaign ads—that is a bill that Senator HAWLEY and I lead—and to require disclaimers on political ads that have content substantially generated by AI.

Think about it. If they are blatantly deceptive and are not satire or parody, which is allowed by our Constitution, then they are banned. Otherwise, at least there is a label that says "Created by AI." That will let the voters know something is up. Maybe this isn't really the politician I love or the politician I don't love.

Whether it is a question of who is funding an ad or whether or not the content of the ad is real, voters deserve transparency. We need to end secret money in our politics to make sure the American people know their elected officials work for them, not the wealthy and the powerful few, and to make sure we have a government that works for everyone.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from New Jersey.

Mr. KIM. Mr. President, I rise today with such deep concern about the state

of our democracy. Why have we let the scourge of money in our politics get this bad? Why have we ignored the vast majority of Americans who want us to get it under control? Why have we ceded our democracy to the highest bidder? I am not alone in feeling exasperated and feeling frustrated and being angry.

As we look back at 16 years, in the wake of the Citizens United decision, we should be honest with ourselves: Our politics were never truly fair. Voters were marginalized or excluded because of the color of their skin. Machines and bosses took advantage of everyday people. The powerful thought they could decide for the rest of us.

But we made progress. We took steps forward. So much of it was reversed with one swoop of Citizens United. Now we are awash in money and influence, living through politics where the new bosses hide behind a Supreme Court decision that allows them to pump unlimited money into elections without the risk of exposure or accountability. It feels overwhelming. But to understand how bad the amount of money in politics has gotten, you just have to look at the numbers.

According to OpenSecrets, during the 2008 election cycle, outside spending totaled about \$574 million. Two years later, the Citizens United decision came down. Just 2 years after that, during the next Presidential election cycle, outside spending topped off at nearly \$1.3 billion. And just 2 years ago, in 2024, it came close to \$4.5 billion. Those numbers are disgusting. The American people are sick and tired of this, being bombarded with ads.

But it is not just about that. It is worse. The American people know that they are being purposely manipulated, fed lies. The amount of money—untraced, unaccountable, undemocratic money—is beyond comprehension.

To me, what is even more unbelievable is that it is insanely unpopular. Last year, the group Issue One conducted a poll on the 15th anniversary of the Citizens United decision. Nearly 80 percent said that unchecked spending gave rise to corruption. More than 75 percent said that the amount of money in politics was causing them to lose faith in democracy itself, while 77 percent said that, when we tackle Big Money in our politics, we make our democracy stronger. These numbers are across the political spectrum, and these numbers are borne out in survey after survey. Pew, in 2023, showed that nearly three-quarters of all Americans just want us to put limits on what can be spent.

We live in a time when there is the greatest amount of distrust in our government in modern American history. Now, I decided to run for office nearly a decade ago because I saw what Citizens United did and how the unchecked money in our politics was impacted. It was one of the first things I talked about on the campaign trail. It was one of the first things I pushed to introduce

and spoke out about on the House floor, and every year, we have carried the fight forward to reverse it.

It is important for us to remember not to feel helpless. I have often said that the opposite of democracy is apathy. And too often, we say of money in politics that this is a problem too big, that we can't solve; or that the challenges are too entrenched and that we are not going to be able to mobilize to fix it. I would just urge us, on this anniversary of Citizens United, to keep in mind that it doesn't have to be this way. We don't need to have a politics that is exasperating. We can have one that is empowering. We can have one wherein the voices of voters, not the endless bank accounts of the well-off and the well-connected, decide who represents us, and we can have a politics that restores and grows trust rather than actively degrades.

This year is the 250th anniversary of the independence of our Nation. We will be referencing that a lot in this Chamber because this is our moment to free Americans from the influence of Big Money and to give them back their voice in a democracy. Let us come together and get it done.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from New Jersey.

Mr. BOOKER. Mr. President, I want to thank Senator MARK KELLY for bringing people to the floor to talk about that which is, unequivocally, the greatest threat to American democracy right now. It is the cancer that is metastasizing more and more and more.

Since the Citizens United decision, I have watched as to how this body has seen clearly corrupt forces beginning to overrun the common sense and the will of the people in policy. More and more are being bent to the whim and the will of the wealthiest of the wealthy in our country and the world, as well as to corporations—many of them, multinational corporations.

We are in crisis—our Nation is in crisis—as more and more Americans lose trust and lose faith in our country, in our democracy, in the people who serve—the 535 Members: the 100 Members of the Senate and the 435 Members of the House of Representatives. They feel more and more that they are in it for themselves and for the corporations and not to do the hard work of the people.

Trust is vital for a democracy to thrive, and there has been nothing more powerful in the undermining of that trust, in the years that I have been in the Senate, than what I have seen in the destructive force of money in our politics. We know that the decision that was made by a conservative majority of five Justices—three of whom are still on the Court—permitted those billionaires and corporations to pour unlimited, unchecked money into our elections, drowning out the collective voices of the people.

Let me give you an example, a sobering fact. In 2024, about 44 percent of all

of the money raised to support Donald Trump came from 10 individual donors.

Think about that for a second. Of the billions of dollars that were spent on this election for the President of the United States right now, 44 percent of that money was contributed by 10 people. This is not just a purview of any party, though; this is something that is infecting our entire system.

People ask the question rightfully: What does all that influence and money buy? Well, right now, we are seeing it. Individuals like Elon Musk and other billionaires are exercising an outsized influence on our party, threatening people in this body and other bodies to drop millions and millions of dollars against them. And to say that doesn't have an influence is wrong. Unlimited corporate cash literally buys policies that put even more money in the pockets of the wealthiest, allows them to rig the system to benefit them, while working-class Americans more and more get a raw deal.

We are seeing a virtual welfare state for the wealthiest of the wealthy in our policies that benefits and protects the wealthiest, that serves the largest corporations, that is designed to line the pockets further and further of the wealthy. It is a tax cut for corporations that we have seen in policies, while Americans and their most important issues—whether it is their healthcare, whether it is their ability to make a living—are further and further undermined.

Citizens United has created a system where Presidential pardons are pay-to-play, where environmental regulations that keep us safe and healthy are slashed, where corporate mergers are rubberstamped by Federal regulators.

For 16 years now, we have seen the slow, cancerous corruption of American democracy. We have seen how folks who pay the price get outsized influence, that a small group of billionaires and corporations wield enormous power over elections and, in turn, over the policies that all Americans have to live under. And this has fueled what is growing to be a growing discontent.

Ending Citizens United is wildly popular on both sides of the aisle. The majority of Americans want to see an end to this cancerous decision. Americans are sick and tired, and they are demanding that we act.

I believe this body should come together in a bipartisan way to end the nightmare that has been unleashed on America by Citizens United. I know from private conversations with people on both sides of the aisle that it would be a relief not to have this outsized influence of money and power on this body. It would allow us to focus in an undeterred way on the business of the people.

I am proud to cosponsor bills that would end this nightmare like Democracy for All, the amendment to overturn this misguided decision. I am proud to champion commonsense reforms like the Freedom to Vote Act

and—God—the DISCLOSE Act, which would ensure that the dark money pouring into our elections, the cancerous resources unleashed by the wealthiest of the wealthy—that at least they could not pour that money in and then hide their identity. It would shine light on what is a dark, dark process.

I urge my colleagues on both sides of the aisle but particularly my Republican colleagues to listen to the overwhelming majority of Americans who just not only want to avoid the dark, cancerous reality that Citizens United brought to us but are hoping and yearning for our democracy to get back to the ideals that we all share, that we pledge allegiance to, that could make this 250th anniversary of our country something truly to celebrate: that we are a nation free from this cancer, free from the dark money that is flooding our politics; that, indeed, we are free at last to see what can happen in America that focuses on the people and the power of the people and not just the power of the wealthiest.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Democratic whip.

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, I want to thank Senator MARK KELLY for bringing us together on the floor to talk about Citizens United.

Senator KELLY has the honor of representing the State of Arizona. When I was a Member of the House of Representatives, I served with a Congressman from Arizona named Morris Udall. He was a great guy. He ran for President. He was, I guess, the source of more jokes and comedy than any politician of his day. He used to say: If you have politics in your bloodstream, only embalming fluid will replace it.

I am living proof that he was right. In 1982, I decided to run for the U.S. House of Representatives for the first time. This was after I lost three straight elections. My wife said this is my last chance. So I took on an incumbent in 1982 for the U.S. House of Representatives. He had been in that seat for 22 years. But because of the quirky law in Illinois, the Democrats got to draw the map, so I got a map against the Republican incumbent which was 40 percent new territory. I had a chance. And 1982 was a big year for Democrats. I remember it. I still remember my fear: Would I raise enough money to be a viable candidate? Nobody knew for sure.

The average cost of a congressional campaign in 1982 was \$215,000, for a campaign to run for the U.S. House. I raised and spent, as did my opponent, \$800,000. We set records—\$800,000.

If you say that today—“Would you start off and wage a campaign for the House with \$800,000?”—they would say “Well, that is just for the announcement, right? You are going to need a few more dollars if you are serious about a campaign.” The number has grown dramatically and now is in the millions for candidates for the House and for the Senate.

You are looking at the last open, public sponsor of public financing of campaigns. Nobody else has tackled it since I stopped introducing it. At the time I introduced it, Arlen Specter of Pennsylvania, a Republican, was my cosponsor. We had a bipartisan bill. I still believe it is the right way to go, but it doesn't have a chance.

Under the current system that has been described by my colleagues here on the floor, there is so much entrenched money that they virtually control the agenda and scare the living hell out of average individuals who don't have a fortune to spend. That is the reality of what we face.

Senator BOOKER is a member of the Senate Judiciary Committee. It is an interesting world we live in. There is a group—I won't name their names on the floor, but it would be easy to figure out who I am talking about—that admonishes me regularly, as the chairman and ranking member of the Senate Judiciary Committee, that I am just not progressive enough; I am not doing enough.

This influence group here in Washington is a dark money operation. We don't know where their money is coming from. They are the reformers, this dark money operation.

We now have, currently, a debate going on on the floor about cryptocurrency. Remember what happened in the last campaign on cryptocurrency? The industry decided that they would pick out one or two Democrats and make a point that they were in the wrong position when it came to cryptocurrency. So they spent \$40 million to defeat one of our colleagues here in the Senate, and they succeeded. That is the kind of thing that happens now: 40 million bucks. That is more than a good day raising money for most candidates, but that is the reality of what we face.

This decision that we face today—Citizens United—was mindless. To say that a business has the same rights as individuals under the Constitution is a mindless conclusion. And it is no surprise. If I am not mistaken—I will double-check—if I am not mistaken, not a single Supreme Court Justice who ruled in that case had ever stood for office, ever had a fundraiser, ever had to go through it and understand what it does to you.

I think ethical reform that is meaningful requires a scandal that is earth-shattering. I am not sure what is left by way of scandal. What is going on with corruption in this business has become almost routine. And I am sorry to say that because so many people on both sides of the aisle are good, honest people who are public servants trying to do their best. But this Citizens United decision and where we are in politics today have changed this business so much, I am not sure we can ever reclaim the kind of idealism that we all aspire to as public servants in this institution.

I thank the Senator for drawing us to the floor today. There is a lot of work

to be done, and I may not be around for some of it. But I will still remember that \$800,000 when I first ran was a record. Now it is rather routine.

Let's make sure that if you have politics in your bloodstream, it doesn't take embalming fluid to replace it. Let's replace it with the ideals that we all aspire to.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Connecticut.

Mr. MURPHY. Mr. President, I thank Senator KELLY for bringing us down to the floor today.

It is hard to believe it has been 16 years since our politics were upended, since the floodgates were opened to corporate money in an unlimited way, in an anonymous way, coming into our elections.

Senator DURBIN, of course, has been a hero, as he mentioned spending much of his career trying to introduce legislation and pass legislation that would put citizens in charge of our elections rather than Big Money.

So let's just for a few minutes here, because I know there are others who want to speak—I just want to make maybe three points.

The first is to just give you the scope, if we haven't put this information on the record already, as to how things have changed. Senator DURBIN was doing some of this already in referencing how little elections used to cost compared to how much they cost today, but let's just talk about the full amount of money that is in politics today as compared to let's say 1976—a few years before Senator DURBIN was first running for Congress.

In 1976, total Federal election spending by candidates and committees was \$160 million. In the last election, in 2024, candidates and committees together spent \$15.9 billion. OK. Now, it is a long time between 1976 and 2024, so let's adjust that for inflation. Adjusted for inflation, it is still 100 times more money. That is stunning. That is stunning in and of itself, but here is what makes it corrupt. What makes it corrupt is that prior to the Citizens United decision, outside groups, non-candidate groups, were spending about \$144 million in elections annually. In 2024, outside groups spent \$4.2 billion.

When Senator DURBIN was first running, he was raising money from individuals, folks who were spending \$25, \$100, maybe a couple hundred dollars on campaign contributions. Individuals today make up just 16 percent of total spending in elections—16 percent. Eighty-four percent of all the spending in elections today is not done by citizens; 84 percent of spending is by corporations and organizations. Most of that money—maybe not most. Much of that money is anonymous; you have no idea where it comes from.

So let me tell you what the impact of that is. The impact of that is corruption. Let's just call it what it is. When a handful of billionaires and corporations have that much influence on our

elections, an unaccountable influence—you have no idea who is spending all of that money, who is throwing these ads on TV that are being produced by PACs with innocuous sounding names like Save Our Future, Build Our Future, This Is Our Future—the impact of that is just—it is corrupt. It is corrupt.

There is a group that is being formed right now called Leading the Future—another one of these innocuous sounding PACs. It is promising to spend \$100 million in the election this fall, and it is being funded by a group of AI companies—companies that are trying to get the Congress to pass legislation to essentially give these AI companies a free ride—no protection from deepfakes, no protection from the poison they are feeding our children. They want free rein, so they are putting up \$100 million in this next election.

I just did the math, sitting at my desk, quickly. The average individual contribution today is about \$25. That is a lot of money for some people, to give \$25 to an election. If every single resident of my State—every single resident—gave \$25, that wouldn't equal the \$100 million commitment that one super PAC has made to this next election. That is stunning. That shows you how much power a handful of these companies have.

The only way that this group Leading Our Future can put \$100 million into this next election to try to stop Congress from regulating artificial intelligence is because of the Citizens United decision, because that decision allows those companies that are swimming in money right now to be able to write an unlimited check into this next election.

So you can understand why people feel powerless today, why people feel like this whole system is rigged because even if they give \$25, it just doesn't make a difference when a handful of companies can, with the snap of their fingers, muster \$100 million to try to change the impact of an election on public policy.

The last point I want to make is this: This fight that we are having now in which only Democrats care about changing our campaign finance laws, in which Republicans almost to a person have no interest in trying to decrease the influence of corporations and billionaires in our elections, it is ahistorical. In fact, this has not historically been a particularly partisan issue except for the last 25 years.

There is a giant, cult-like poster of Donald Trump on the Department of Labor that I drive by every day in and out of the Capitol. It is super creepy, the idea that we have Mao- and Stalin-like banners of the President of the United States surrounding the U.S. Capitol. But next to the banner of Donald Trump on the Department of Labor building is a banner depicting the image of Teddy Roosevelt. I guess it is an attempt by the President to draw an equivalency between himself and Teddy Roosevelt. That is a pretty—that is a stretch.

But Teddy Roosevelt was a Republican, a Republican who in the wake of a pretty minor scandal, in 1904, when a couple of companies sent secret checks to his campaign and to other Republican campaigns, came to Congress and said: We have got to ban corporate money from elections.

He had trouble getting Republicans to do it at first. So he reached out across the aisle and worked with a particularly vile Democrat, a guy by the name of Benjamin "Pitchfork" Tillman—just a bad, bad guy. Actually, our rule XIX, which we use against each other occasionally to try to settle the tone of debate, it is in our rules because of Benjamin "Pitchfork" Tillman.

Anyway, Roosevelt—a Republican—and Tillman—a Democrat—got together and said: Let's ban corporations from being able to influence our elections. That is the Tillman Act that was the law of the land in practice until the Citizens United decision. For 100 years until that decision, Republicans and Democrats actually worked together pretty well to say: You know what, the people should be in charge, not corporations. That wasn't a partisan idea. It is now, unfortunately.

I am grateful to Senator KELLY for bringing us down to the floor to talk about the way our citizens feel like they don't have power, the way that the Citizens United decision has left our voters feeling like the game is rigged. But it is kind of sad that it is only Democrats down here talking about the impact that that decision has had on the influence of corporations and billionaires in our politics. For a long time, Republicans cared about trying to make sure that our democracy was fair. That is not the case any longer.

I thank Senator KELLY for allowing us to come down and have this discussion.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Kentucky.

WAR POWERS RESOLUTION

Mr. PAUL. Mr. President, we are here on the floor of the Senate today to discuss the War Powers Resolution, to discuss the recent war activities in Venezuela, and yet there still is a debate. Some say there is not a war; some say there is a war; some say we won't know for a while if there is a war or isn't a war.

Last year, we had this debate. The junior Senator from Texas came forward and presented a War Powers Resolution for Gaza. He said that President Biden's decision to send U.S. troops in to build a beachhead, to build a pier, was sending them into a war zone.

Interestingly, every Republican Senator at that time voted against a point of order, and the point of order said no hostilities existed. The point of order at the time said Gaza is not a war. And every Republican voted against that point of order because every Republican considered that Gaza was a war zone and that the War Powers Resolution applied.

Fast forward to today, the proposition that the majority of Republicans will put forward is a point of order saying there isn't a war in Venezuela. So they all believed that there was a war in Gaza, but they all now believe that there is not a war in Venezuela.

Now, there are arguments, I think, actually for both being war. In Gaza, the troops that were building the beachhead were fired on multiple times, so I think U.S. troops under fire sounds a bit like you are putting them into a war.

Now, we have a situation in Venezuela where hundreds of troops were sent in—dozens and dozens—and pilots and planes were sent in. You bombed a nation's capital. You had extraordinary rendition of the nation's President, and now, we have a blockade involving hundreds of ships and thousands of sailors, but that is not a war.

It is somewhat boggling to the mind that almost every Republican Senator believed there was a war when a few soldiers were shot at in Gaza trying to build a pier. I agreed with them. I think that was putting U.S. troops into war.

But now every Republican—not every Republican—virtually all Republican Senators who believed that it was a war in Gaza now believe it is not a war in Venezuela.

Now, some of them on the quiet will tell you: Well, it was a war, but it is all over. It is all done. Yeah. We are not going to quibble. We really weren't arresting somebody. It wasn't a drug arrest. It was a war. It is a mini-war. But it is all over, so the War Powers Resolution doesn't apply because the war is over.

And yet, we still have an entire military blockade of a country, and that is not a war. This is a real question.

So we have been given a legal opinion by the current administration, and we had one of their assistant attorneys general come and explain to us why this is not a war. You have to realize this is an important part of the debate because, if it is a drug bust, it is not a war. So they told us this is really just a drug bust. We had to bomb the entire capital. We had to remove all their air defenses. We have an armada of 20,000 ships and hundreds of airplanes flown from all over the world, but it really was just a drug arrest; it really isn't a war.

But this young man came in to us, and he explained to us that we probably don't know yet whether it is a war. The way we will know it is a war is by the scope, the extent, and the duration, including how many people die in the war.

So the problem we have, though, is the Constitution gives us the power to initiate war, to declare war. But if we don't know if it is a war until after all the people die and we add up how many people died and they call it a constitutional war because a lot of people died, wouldn't it then be a little bit late to vote on initiating a war?

See, this is an enormous debate. This is an important debate, and this should not be sluffed over as, Oh, no big deal. The war is already over.

Well, we actually don't even know if the war is already over. We are under a blockade. The current administration has said they will send troops back in if they need to. They said they will send troops into other countries if they need to. The blockade is said to be, Oh, we are going to control the ships, and we are going to sell the oil, and we are going to run. We are in charge. It is our oil. We are going to be in charge of Venezuela.

But that sounds to me like a military blockade, a long-term military blockade, and I don't know how we argue that that is not war. But the position of the administration and probably the position of other Presidential administrations—because this isn't really and shouldn't be Republican versus Democrat—this should be legislative prerogative versus Presidential prerogative, and it should be about the Constitution.

The Constitution specifically, thoughtfully, vested the power of initiating war and declaring war to Congress. They talked about it. They talked about it in the Constitutional Convention. They wrote about it in the Federalist Papers, and from Hamilton to Jefferson, the spectrum of our Founding Fathers concluded they didn't want the President to have this power. They said the initiation—the declaration of war shall be vested by Congress in the legislature.

So what we have is an elaborate song and dance. They know the declaration of war resides here. They know initiation of war—so they argue first that it is not war; it is a drug bust. But then they say: Well, internationally, people say it probably is a war, so in case you think it is a war, we are going to tell you that it is not really a war because we won't know if it is a war until it is over. We will tell you more about it. We will know when the war is over whether it actually was a war and whether we should have voted to initiate war when the war is over depending on how many people die.

And then they say: Well, we are going to look at the scope, extent, and duration of the war, but since we don't know what that is, we are going to guess based on what the policymakers say. And they say to us now we are not going back in, so we don't have to vote on whether or not we are going to war with Venezuela.

This, to me, is an absurdity; it is logic that runs in circles, and it doesn't get us any closer to where we need to be. The reason the Founding Fathers gave this power to the legislature is because they wanted to make war less frequent, they wanted to make war hard to initiate, they wanted to see war more as a defensive notion, not as an offensive enterprise.

During the debate over whether Gaza was a war, the resolution was intro-

duced by the junior Senator from Texas, and virtually every Republican voted for it. Interestingly, Marco Rubio voted for it. The Secretary of State actually voted to say that the war in Gaza where troops were being shot at that were building a pier was a war. But now, things seem to have reversed, and all those who thought Gaza was a war where there were some shots being fired at the people trying to build a pier—which by many people's interpretation would be a lot less than an entire invasion of a capital and removal of a President and a blockade of an entire country—every Republican in this body, including the current Secretary of State, voted that Gaza was a war.

In making the arguments that Gaza was a war, the junior Senator from Texas expressed the reality that the Senate had abdicated its constitutional responsibility. So at that time, the junior Senator from Texas argued that Gaza was a war. He said:

Over recent decades, we have seen the Senate hand away much of our responsibility on foreign policy and national security to the Executives. That is contrary to the design of our Constitution, and it is frankly harmful to the Senate and harmful to this country.

I couldn't agree more, but I don't understand how it was harmful when we were talking about Gaza and it is no longer harmful when we are talking about arguably a much greater military incursion into a country. It seems as if—and I know this would be shocking to people—that there is some partisanship here, that there is a different definition of war under Democrats than there is under Republicans.

My colleague from Texas went on to highlight the flagrant hypocrisy of both parties, saying on the Senate floor:

[Now], far too often, the Senate has stepped out of our historic role in foreign policy and [has] said: Whatever the President wants, we, the Senate, aren't going to say anything about it.

When there is a Republican President, Democrats suddenly discover their voice and say: Hey, the Senate ought to say something.

But when it is a Democrat President, it seems no matter how incoherent and disastrous the foreign policy from the Democrat President, [the] Democrat Senators don't want the Senate to exercise its authority.

I would argue today is evidence that both sides are guilty of this. I would argue that if Gaza was a war, that bombing of the Venezuelan capital and removal of the President and the blockade of an entire country might qualify as a war.

If a few soldiers shooting at our soldiers who are trying to build a temporary pier or a temporary port in Gaza is war—which every Republican in the body voted for—certainly they must think the invasion of a capital is a war, that removing a President is war, or that blockade of a country.

So even though the first incursion, the first invasion, may well be over, is the blockade of a country not a war? Are we not at war when we have a military blockade of a country?

The American people are sick and tired of their elected officials disregarding the Constitution when their party is in power and then becoming ardent defenders of the Constitution when the opposing party is in power. Each of us took an oath to the Constitution to defend it that applies at all times, not just when it is politically convenient.

Congress maintains a constitutional duty to debate matters of war. Playing politics when the lives of our brave servicemembers are on the line and our country is at risk of being entangled in yet another foreign conflict is an inexcusable dereliction of duty.

At this point, I think we need to have a fulsome debate—a debate in the country, a debate in the Senate—over what war is. But I think anyone who accepts the ludicrous notion that they will tell you what war is after the war is over should not be treated seriously.

How can we do our duty? How can we do our duty to initiate and declare war if we don't know what war is until it is over?

If after the war we can count the casualties, and there are a significant amount of casualties, or the incursion took a significant amount of time, then there is war. Or some will say: Well, we can just defund the war. You know what, it has never happened.

Find me the Senator or Congressman who wants to vote against money for our troops who are being shot at. It is very difficult to stop funding a war once we start because a nation's patriotism rises up naturally.

The time to start a war is before it gets started. But if they are telling you they define war by how many casualties there are, you have got to wait until the war is over to determine whether it was a war, to determine whether we should initiate the war. This is an absurdity.

Both parties, frankly, have been guilty of hypocrisy on this, but the order today that we will be voting on is whether or not the point of order says that this is not a war.

Well, invasion of another country, blockading of a country, and removing another country's leader, to my mind, clearly is war, and I will vote against this point of order.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Virginia.

Mr. KAINE. Mr. President and my colleagues, last week, the Senate agreed to discharge our bipartisan War Powers Resolution from the Foreign Relations Committee so that we could finally, after months, debate military action against Venezuela and Venezuelans, on the floor of the Senate, and not just allow the administration to wage combat on its own with no information shared except in classified settings.

I thank my colleagues, two of whom are here on the floor today, who voted for this resolution. They did not vote to rebuke a President, although, for some reason, he has chosen to see it

that way. Instead, they voted to uphold a basic constitutional principle that we should not be waging offensive hostilities without a debate and vote in Congress.

As I described last week, the reason for that principle is clear: Don't send our sons and daughters into military hostilities without the debate and vote in Congress that would put the thumbprint of the Nation's leadership on the validity of the mission.

I believed that today we were going to have a debate about the War Powers Resolution, possibly consider amendments to it, and then hold a vote on final passage. But I have now learned that some want to foreclose the possibility of a debate and allow the President to carry out this unauthorized campaign with no public debate and no vote. And they are apparently preparing a parliamentary move to deprive our resolution of the privileged status given it under the War Powers Resolution and, thus, shut debate down.

First, an effort to declare this resolution not privileged—apparently, by arguing that the campaign in and against Venezuelans is not hostilities—is something that the House has actually been doing, but the Senate should not emulate.

Some of you remember that the Senate has passed a number of resolutions against President Trump's unilateral tariff taxes that are privileged. They are also privileged—or they used to be—in the House, but the House was so afraid to even have a debate or vote about this matter that they used a procedural parliamentary trick to turn off the privilege. I don't think that is worthy of emulation by the "greatest deliberative body" in the world. We shouldn't be afraid to debate or discuss anything, especially matters of war and peace.

Second, an argument that the Venezuelan campaign is not "imminent hostilities" within the meaning of the War Powers Resolution is a violation of every reasonable meaning of that term.

Let's begin with the boat campaign against boats with Venezuelans on it, starting in mid-September, that has now killed more than a hundred designated combatants; the amassing of U.S. military assets, what the President calls an armada in and around Venezuela; the President's authorization of covert action in Venezuela; the U.S. military's use in the interdiction of oil from Venezuela; the attack, over two weekends ago, to seize the Venezuelan President, President Maduro, and his wife, where more than a hundred combatants were killed, where U.S. troops were injured; and now ongoing control facilitated by the U.S. military.

The United States is determining who can govern Venezuela. We have tapped the Vice President of Venezuela and determined that she is somebody who should be the leader, rather than the opposition who won an overwhelming election, just a year ago.

We have said we can determine when Venezuela will finally be entitled to have its own election, saying that they are not going to be ready for that for some long period of time.

We are seizing the nation's primary economic asset, its oil. We are deciding how the oil revenues—every penny of the oil revenues—of this nation should be spent, and President Trump is even saying that he gets to determine which U.S. companies can even invest in the Venezuelan oil economy.

And it is all being done with the active participation of the U.S. military. The U.S. military assets in place around Venezuela are, as President Trump said, an armada, 16,000 U.S. personnel. This is open source reporting as of 2 days ago, arrayed around Venezuela:

The USS *Gerald R. Ford* Carrier Strike Group; Carrier Air Wing 9, the USS *Winston Churchill*, the USS *Bainbridge*, and the USS *Mahan*.

The Iwo Jima Amphibious Readiness Group, which includes: the USS *Fort Lauderdale*, the USS *San Antonio*, and the 22nd Marine Expeditionary Unit.

The USS *Thomas Hudner* (DDG-116), the USS *Stockdale* (DDG-106), the USS *Lake Erie* (CG-70), the USS *Gettysburg* (CG-64), the USS *Wichita* (LCS-13), the USNS *Waters*, the USNS *Joshua Humphreys*, and the USNS *Kanawha*.

And that is in addition to air assets that are arrayed all around the region that have been used and are likely to be used in the future.

Everything that is being done to control Venezuela, its politics, and its economy are being facilitated by the U.S. military, but it is more than assets in place. Operation Southern Spear, the boat strikes of Venezuelan boats in international waters, is still being carried out by the U.S. military. The U.S. military is engaged in a naval blockade of Venezuela, transit out and transit in. Would we think that was an act of war if Russia was blockading the United States and not allowing commerce to come into or out of our ports?

The U.S. military is engaged in active interdiction of Venezuelan oil in the Pacific and the Caribbean and elsewhere in the world, and the United States is threatening future military action.

President Trump said about Vice President Rodriguez, if she didn't act well, she would have a fate worse than President Maduro. President Trump was going to do a second invasion, last Friday, that he called off after our vote Thursday afternoon—threats of future invasion.

If this is not "imminent hostilities" with the death now of more than 200 combatants, with U.S. troops injured, with an armada arrayed around, a naval interdiction of oil, and a blockade of this country's economy, it would violate every reasonable meaning of this term, and to pretend otherwise would weaken the respect that this institution should aspire to.

Finally, to my colleagues, there has been some recent correspondence be-

tween the chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Senator Risch of Idaho, and the Secretary of State, Marco Rubio, that basically underlines my points.

Some Senate colleagues wanted to use this procedural maneuver today, and they felt that it would help if they could have a clear definition or description from the administration that the military operation is over.

And so, I have the letter here that Senator Risch wrote to the President of the United States yesterday, and he asked two simple questions: First, "provide Congress with an official correspondence confirming that Operation Absolute Resolve has ended"—first request—and second, specify "that U.S. military personnel are no longer involved in hostilities in Venezuela."

Two simple questions. I don't know that those questions would have been sufficient for me, but, apparently, Senator Risch thought if he could get "yes" answers to both of those questions, it would be sufficient for him.

Secretary Rubio sent a response today and would not answer yes to either of the questions. The letter from Senator Secretary, dated earlier today, January 14, very explicitly does not say that Operation Absolute Resolve is over. He was asked to say that it ended; he would not say that it has ended.

How could it be ended when the President is still threatening other sanctioned and indicted Venezuelan officials with a fate worse than Maduro's if they don't meet the U.S. standards?

So in this letter which my colleagues sought to justify this parliamentary maneuver that is coming up, Secretary Rubio would not specify that Operation Absolute Resolve has ended.

Well, how about the second question: Please specify "that U.S. military personnel are no longer involved in hostilities in Venezuela."

Secretary Rubio would not say that either. "There are currently no U.S. Armed Forces in Venezuela." He didn't say U.S. forces aren't involved in hostilities in or against Venezuelans because he couldn't say that with the interdiction, with the blockade, with the boat strikes.

And so even the effort of my colleagues to try to find a parliamentary escape hatch—oh, there is no hostilities—and softball set of two questions to the Secretary of State to justify their position produced a response where he would not agree that the operation is over—the military operation—and he would not agree that the United States is now not in hostilities in or against Venezuela.

This is the third vote we have had on Venezuela in the last 3 months. Only now—only now—does the administration and its supporters make the claim that there are no hostilities. They didn't make that claim in the first 2 months, as the armada was amassing, as we were killing people in open

waters, as we were committing to covert action, as we were preparing and practicing for an invasion.

They knew that it was hostilities, and that is why they didn't challenge it. But only now, on the third vote, are they challenging whether this is or is not hostilities, and they are doing so to avoid public debate. That is the reason they are doing this.

If this cause and if this legal basis were so righteous and so lawful, the administration and its supporters would not be so afraid to have this debate before the public and the U.S. Senate.

For that reason, I urge my colleagues to avoid a parliamentary gag rule on discussion of this military operation and support the bipartisan War Powers Resolution.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. MORENO). The Senator from California.

Mr. SCHIFF. Mr. President, this year our Nation will celebrate its 250th birthday—250 years in which our country has built on the foundation that is our Constitution.

The Framers could not conceive exactly what the future would bring, but they did anticipate a great deal, in significant part because they could count on some of the immutable characteristics of human nature, of institutions, of communities—like the attraction of the accumulation of power—and how, unless that gravitational force is counterbalanced, one institution or one man can come to dominate the life of a country.

One power in particular concerned our Founders, and that was the power to make war. They had seen and been the victims of a monarch who used the power of war against them. So they made the radical decision—so contrary to all the precedent at the time—not to invest such a vital attribute of state sovereignty in the Executive but to grant the power to declare war to Congress.

In April 1798, a future President, James Madison, wrote to another future President, Thomas Jefferson, underscoring the danger and the decision. He said:

The constitution supposes, what the History of all Governments demonstrates, is that the Executive is the branch of power most interested in war and most prone to it. . . . It has accordingly with studied care, vested the question of war in the Legislature.

“[M]ost prone to it”—words written more than 200 years ago and so fitting for today, when in but his first year in office, the President used military power in Iran, Nigeria, Syria, Yemen, and most significantly, in Venezuela.

After months of escalating military action against boats in the Southern Caribbean, after amassing a massive military armada on the doorstep of a foreign nation, the administration dispatched American servicemembers to invade and arrest the corrupt leader of Venezuela, Nicolas Maduro—military action that we were repeatedly told

would never come to pass, by a President who promised to avoid starting new foreign wars, engaging in nation building, or conducting regime change operations.

This operation was not about narcotics, nor was it about democracy, nor was it about oil. The military occupation in Venezuela captured the country's corrupt dictator but has left the corrupt drug-running regime in place instead of turning over the reins of governance to that country's legitimately elected leadership of Maria Corina Machado and Edmundo Gonzalez. And now our President has committed to running Venezuela for years in order to exploit its oil resources.

Today, we have the opportunity to exercise the power bestowed on us by our Framers to authorize the use of force—or decline to do so—but to reassert some constraint on an Executive grown too fond of the use of military power.

We took the first step last week when a bipartisan majority of this body voted to set before the Senate a War Powers Resolution on Venezuela. That was a strong bipartisan signal that this Chamber was unwilling to let the war powers of this body atrophy to the point where they are no more substantial than air.

Now we are on the precipice of that debate—whether we should again risk the lives of our servicemembers to procure access to another nation's oil—and the American people should see us weighing that cost.

The President has threatened the possibility of additional strikes in Venezuela if Venezuela does not “behave.” And by “behave,” I think we have to acknowledge that the behavior the President expects is for that country to share access to its oil wealth with American oil companies. Many of those companies are dubious about investing in Venezuela. Some believe it would take years or more than a decade to make that profitable.

Whether it makes good business sense to them is their decision, but whether we use the military might of the United States of America to safeguard their investment is our decision, and I say it is not worth risking the lives of our troops.

There are some deeply important questions as to the use of American military power that are implicated in this debate—questions that deserve answers.

Will we see years of American gunships parked off of Venezuela as part of some new, amorphous “Donroe Doctrine”? How do we expect to run another country of more than 20 million people? Will U.S. forces be used to protect oil infrastructure in Venezuela? Will our President continue to stand by the illegitimate regime that Maduro's capture has left in place or will we support the outcome of the last election in which Maduro's opposition was triumphant? Are we better off spending our Nation's time and taxes

on Venezuela or should we spend them at home to bring down costs and address the affordability crisis?

Our servicemembers and their families deserve answers to these questions before we ask any servicemember to put their life on the line. Let us make sure they get those answers. Let us have this debate. Let us move beyond a parliamentary point of order designed to hide from the American people the cost of our military involvement in Venezuela, the continuing cost of it. Let's have the fulsome debate that deserves because at the center of this debate is a question of whether we want to risk our servicemembers' lives in order to secure the oil resources of another country.

I do not believe it is worth doing so, but let those who believe that it is worth the risk and the danger to our servicemembers and their families—let them come to the Senate floor and make that argument. Let us have this debate. Let us not hide behind some parliamentary maneuver to even avoid a conversation here.

There hasn't been a single hearing in committee, an open hearing, on this subject, not a fulsome debate over the use of our military power. Let us do so now.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Democratic leader.

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, the need for this resolution is simple. It is clear. The American people do not support another forever war with Venezuela. The American people don't want Donald Trump sending our troops into harm's way without so much as a debate in Congress.

Today, the Senate has a chance to move forward on asserting Congress's constitutional authority on matters of war and peace. We can tell Donald Trump: Enough with foreign adventures. It is time to focus on lowering costs here at home. That is what the American people want.

This resolution is necessary right now because Donald Trump has made clear that what happened in Venezuela is not a one-and-done operation—not at all.

Last week, the New York Times asked him: Are we going to be there a month? 6 months? a year?

Do you know what his answer was? Donald Trump said:

I would say much longer.

He said: We want to give money to Venezuela.

Here we are. People don't have enough money for healthcare, for housing, for so many other things, and we want to give money to Venezuela? How is that “America first?”

Trump threatened further military action if the current government doesn't cooperate with the United States. The administration is trying to concoct an argument that we are not engaged in hostilities, but that is absurd. You don't have to be a great expert on military affairs to know that

we are heavily engaged. Donald Trump says we are not engaged in hostilities? Tell that to the 16,000 U.S. servicemembers currently deployed in the Caribbean. Tell that to our servicemembers on the Ford Carrier Strike Group. Look at the Marine Expeditionary Unit operating in the region.

Donald Trump is turning the Caribbean into a dangerous powder keg, and Congress must rein him in before one mistake ignites a larger, more unstable conflict.

So the Senate needs to exert its constitutional role when it comes to the use of military force.

I know that there are Senate Republicans acting in good faith who are worried about Venezuela getting out of hand. I urge them to reject this point of order, to provide a necessary backstop, a necessary check, a necessary guardrail on Executive power. It is the right thing to do for the American people. That means no more forever wars, no more military escapades without congressional authorization, no more tens of billions to prop up foreign regimes while American families struggle right here at home.

I want to thank Senator KAINE, I want to thank Senator SCHIFF, and I want to thank Senator PAUL for joining with me in this very necessary resolution. Of course, I thank our great ranking member of the Armed Services Committee for his good work as well.

I yield the floor.

THE PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Rhode Island.

Mr. REED. Mr. President, last week, this body advanced a War Powers Resolution to rein in President Trump's unauthorized military actions in Venezuela. This week, we will vote on final passage. I urge my colleagues to support it.

It is important to recall how we arrived here. What happened on January 3—the military raid in Caracas, the capture of Nicolas Maduro, and the President's declaration that the United States will “run” Venezuela and seize its oil—was not an isolated incident; it was a culmination of a monthslong campaign built on dubious legal arguments, institutional failures, and Congress' willful abdication of our constitutional duties.

For months, my colleagues and I warned that President Trump's military campaign against the alleged drug boats was strategically incoherent and legally questionable. We warned that the massive military buildup was not about narcotics trafficking. We warned that this campaign was always directed at military action against Venezuela.

At every turn, this body had the opportunity to exercise oversight and demand accountability, and at every turn, we failed to do so. Now we must correct that failure.

President Trump began laying the foundation for this operation—all the operations in Venezuela—the moment he was sworn in. On his first day in office, he designated multiple drug car-

tels as terrorist organizations. Shortly thereafter, he ended temporary protected status for some 350,000 Venezuelan migrants and authorized holding some at the naval station at Guantanamo before deportation.

On March 15, the President invoked the Alien Enemies Act—a wartime authority that had not been used since World War II—and declared that Tren de Aragua, or TdA, was a cartel plotting to invade and actively invading the United States as an “invading force.” He did this despite a National Intelligence Council assessment in April of 2025 that concluded the Venezuelan Government was not directing an invasion of the United States by TdA.

It would not be the last time President Trump disregarded the law and the facts to achieve his policy goals.

Also, by last summer, it was clear that, in addition to Secretary Hegseth, Deputy Chief of Staff Stephen Miller and Secretary of State Marco Rubio were engaged in planning these various proposed operations, and their personal agendas converged. Their goal was ultimately to destabilize and depose Maduro and secure access to Venezuelan's oil reserves.

Over the summer and fall, the Department of Defense flowed massive military assets into the Caribbean: the Iwo Jima Amphibious Ready Group, the 22nd Marine Expeditionary Unit, attack submarines, P-8 Poseidon aircraft, Aegis destroyers, F-35 fighter jets, and eventually the USS *Gerald R. Ford* Carrier Strike Group. The administration never explained why this buildup was necessary other than vague references to drug interdiction. It was clear then and it is perfectly clear now that they were preparing for an attack on Venezuela.

By late summer, President Trump had signed a secret directive ordering the Pentagon to conduct maritime strikes on drug boats. Secretary Hegseth then signed an execute order, or EXORD, directing lethal military strikes against alleged drug boats. He has refused to submit that EXORD to Congress despite legal requirements for him to do so. By not following a statutory requirement to submit these EXORDs to Congress, Secretary Hegseth and the President are breaking the law.

On September 2, the U.S. military carried out its first strike, killing 11 individuals on an alleged drug boat. Additional strikes continued throughout the fall and winter, and to date, the U.S. military has conducted 35 known strikes, killing at least 120 people.

President Trump tries to justify these lethal attacks by creating a new term—“designated terrorist organization”—a term that does not exist in U.S. law or anywhere else, so far as we have been able to determine. What does exist in law—authorized by Congress—is the “foreign terrorist organization” designation, which authorizes legal and

economic sanctions. In other words, designating a cartel as a foreign terrorist organization limits that group's financial, property, and travel interests. It does not authorize lethal military action. We have searched high and low for a designation authorized by Congress of a group that would automatically allow lethal action, and we have not found it. Congress is still waiting for the President to publicly release the legal opinion underlying these legal actions preceding the recent operation in Venezuela, Operation Absolute Resolve. They have not done so yet, although they have released the latest legal opinion.

Even more troubling is that, in the process of conducting these strikes on the alleged drug boats, the JAGs—the judge advocates general—who had to opine on the legality, did not have access to this controlling legal opinion by the Department of Justice. They didn't get access to it until November, which was long after many of these strikes took place.

The legal foundation for this campaign and the operations that President Trump engaged in became extraordinarily tenuous during the September 2 strike. According to numerous public reports, after the initial attack, two survivors were left floating on the wreckage of their boat, miles from land. The United States had complete control of the skies and waters for miles around. Yet, after monitoring these survivors on video for the better part of an hour or at least 40-some-odd minutes, the order was given to fire lethal rounds at these survivors.

Even if one accepts the President's determination that we are in an armed conflict with cartels, the Geneva Conventions still apply. Article 12 of the second Geneva Convention defines “shipwrecked” persons as those “in peril at sea or in other waters from any cause.”

The U.S. Navy's “Commander's Handbook on the Law of Naval Operations” makes clear that “following each naval engagement at sea, belligerents are obligated to take all possible measures to search for and rescue the shipwrecked.”

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.

That is our law. That is the manual of the Department of Defense.

The administration has released a video of all of these attacks except this one, and I think it would be helpful to the public—to all of us—to make that video available.

As we all know, on January 3, this campaign reached a climax. U.S. forces conducted airstrikes to neutralize anti-aircraft systems, carried out cyber operations to shut down power in Caracas, and executed a helicopter assault

on the Presidential compound to seize Maduro and his wife. The tactical success of this mission is a testament to their capabilities and also to the incredible courage and quality of the men and women of our Armed Forces.

However, military skill is not the same as strategic wisdom. Executing a successful raid does not constitute a plan for governing a nation. Indeed, alleviating the plight and misery of the Venezuelan people appears nowhere in the administration's stated plans for the future of Venezuela.

Instead, President Trump announced that the U.S. was "going to run the country" and seize control of Venezuelan oil production. He stated that "we are ready to stage a second and much larger attack if we need to." So the possibility of hostilities certainly still exists in the President's mind, and he expects to be involved in Venezuela for years to come. This is not really a plan; it is an aspiration. Even the experts in the oil industry suggest that it is not one that is feasible at this moment.

Under international law, the raid on January 3 violates article 2(4) of the United Nations Charter, which prohibits the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any state. The United States is bound by treaty to follow the U.N. Charter. The Constitution makes treaties part of the "supreme law of the land," and the President is bound by his oath to ensure the laws are faithfully executed.

The administration, however, seems to have determined that it can ignore the supreme law of the land because it claims it was simply enforcing the law. That is wrong and cynical, and we are in a situation where the President continues to assert that we can use hostilities at any time. In fact, on January 9, he said, "We are not afraid of boots on the ground."

Let me, for a moment, point out another great hypocrisy that has arisen in this situation. This all began as a way to prevent drugs from reaching this country and affecting families throughout this country. The President was standing up and down, spouting about how he has gotten rid of fentanyl. Of course, fentanyl does not come out of this area of the world.

But this is one of the interesting things that happened just last night: President Trump canceled \$2 billion in grants for the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. These were grants intended to fund overdose prevention work in communities, to provide lifesaving reversal drugs, and to fund treatment for people with opioid addiction. These are the very programs that put people on a path toward long-term recovery to avoid deaths through drugs. The Trump administration is prepared to commit billions of dollars to attack Venezuela but will take it from those people who are suffering from drug addiction in the United States.

It is our duty to ensure that the United States engages in armed conflict only after having the approval of Congress. This body has had every opportunity up until now to demand accountability, and too many of us have refused. The President has flouted the law, and we have failed in our duty to correct it. So we must, I think, vote for this resolution. It is our responsibility. It is the oath we took, and it is the oath, tonight, that we must follow.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Idaho.

Mr. RISCH. Mr. President, I rise today to raise a point of order on the War Powers Resolution before the Senate, which I reserve the right to do at the close of my remarks and after Senator KAINE moves the matter forward.

I understand many of the sentiments people have about war powers and the balance between Congress and the President. There is truly clear tension between the branches and the Constitution on this matter, and, of course, that has reared its head many, many times during the existence of our country.

Putting U.S. troops in hostility is an incredibly serious matter. These are American lives on the line, and we should not expose them to danger unless there are vital national interests, and, of course, we should not ask them to engage in endless wars.

We are not debating those issues here today. What we are debating is trying to stop something that is not happening. Let me say that again. The objective of this resolution is to stop something that is not happening.

The resolution is relatively short—three pages long. It is full of the usual whereases, wherefores, et cetera, et cetera. But this is the operative language. It is very clear:

Congress hereby directs the President to terminate—

terminate—

the use of the U.S. Armed Forces for hostilities within or against Venezuela.

That is what we are voting on today. We are attempting to direct the President to terminate the use of the U.S. Armed Forces for hostilities within or against Venezuela. Only Congress can dream this up.

Now, I know there are a lot of people who think this is a very powerful institution, and it is, indeed, but even this institution cannot stop something that isn't happening, and that is exactly what the resolution directs the President to do.

Currently, there are no U.S. forces engaged in hostilities in Venezuela. The President did authorize actions that were limited in scope, short in duration, and done to protect U.S. interests and citizens. The operation only saw 200 troops, and they were inside Venezuela, on Venezuela's soil, for less than 2 hours. Those troops engaged with some unfortunate Cuban guards, who are no longer with us, for 27 minutes. That is what this was made up of.

It was incredibly brief, targeted, and very successful.

The War Powers Act requires a President to submit a report to Congress within 48 hours of "introducing U.S. forces into hostilities." The President did that. If U.S. troops stay in hostilities, the President is required to submit reports to Congress "periodically," is the word used. Sadly, the War Powers Act never required the President to submit a report to Congress when hostilities ended. It should have been in the bill; it wasn't.

For this reason, I sent a letter to the President asking him to confirm that there are no U.S. forces engaged in hostilities in Venezuela. Now, I knew that. You all knew that. You were all in the briefing when we got it. However, since this was raised and people were trying to stop something that isn't happening, I asked the President of the United States to confirm that it is not happening. Obviously, they responded—the administration responded and said clearly that there are no hostilities and no troops in Venezuela.

I sent a letter to the President, and the response confirmed that the operation has ended, that it is over, that there are no troops there, that there is nothing to terminate.

There are no U.S. forces in hostilities.

Now, I know some of my colleagues will argue that a vote for this resolution is a prospective statement about limiting future action in Venezuela. That is not what it says. They argue we still have ships in the Caribbean. Clearly, the President is ready to invade again, they say. But, again, that is not what the resolution says. It says cease the hostilities that are going on. No language in this resolution addresses future action, and, indeed, the War Powers Act doesn't allow that unless there are ongoing hostilities.

As we have seen in the days since the operation, the administration is enforcing U.S. sanctions and seizing vessels that are violating them. Many of those sanctions were created by the laws passed by Senators voting here today, and the War Powers Act has no binding authority to constrain the President's Commander in Chief powers before U.S. forces are put into hostilities. Nothing in the act does that, nor does the Constitution allow it.

If the President was to deploy U.S. forces again, the administration has committed they would require, as is required by law, to send a new report under the law, and Congress could then act. That is the law.

Let me be clear. No President, Republican or Democrat, will ever consider a prospective War Powers Resolution vote as binding on the President's constitutional article II powers as Commander in Chief, and they shouldn't. Having 535 "Commanders in Chief" is a really, really bad idea, and our Founders knew that.

President Trump is laser-focused on protecting American interests while

also avoiding costly and life-threatening conflicts. The recent actions in Venezuela were limited in scope, short in duration, and done to protect U.S. interests and citizens. What President Trump has done in Venezuela is the definition of the President's article II constitutional authorities as Commander in Chief.

Similarly, President George H.W. Bush authorized limited military operations to arrest and bring Panama's Manuel Noriega to the United States to stand trial for drug-related charges. Interestingly, that lasted 2 weeks, and there were thousands of troops involved—not done in a very short period of time with only a handful of troops—and the Democrats applauded President Bush for his action.

For years, my Democratic colleagues have called for Maduro's removal. You heard me the other day read statements that my Democratic colleagues have made. But when President Trump actually made that happen, now they say: How dare he do this. This is TDS, Trump derangement syndrome, at its obvious worst.

I firmly believe the operation in Venezuela was a good thing. I understand that some of my colleagues disagree with me, but that does not give this body the right to block the Commander in Chief's article II authority and defy every law of gravity and try to stop something that isn't happening.

I yield the floor to my friend from Virginia.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Virginia.

Mr. KAINE. Mr. President, in a moment, I will make the motion that my colleague from Idaho mentioned, the motion to proceed to Calendar No. 298, but I do want to just address the points that he made very briefly.

My colleague from Idaho had said there is no current use of U.S. hostilities in Venezuela, and he has also said that the military operation Absolute Resolve is over. That is what he has just told this body. And he has said, because of those two facts, he is making the motion that we will hear in a moment, the inquiry.

I just want to refer my colleagues to the letter exchange between Senator RISCH and Secretary Rubio because that is not what the letters say. The letters do not say what has been represented by my colleague.

Let me read what Senator RISCH asked the President, and then let me read Senator Rubio's response.

Senator RISCH said: I respectfully request that you provide Congress with an official correspondence confirming that Operation Absolute Resolve has ended and that U.S. military personnel are no longer involved in hostilities in Venezuela.

Those were the two questions posed to the President.

Let me read you Senator Rubio's answer. He did not confirm in his answer that Operation Absolute Resolve has ended. The letter does not mention Op-

eration Absolute Resolve because it hasn't ended. The President himself has said that he is holding out the possibility of doing the exact same thing that he did to President Maduro to other Venezuelan officials who have been indicted by the United States, and that is why Secretary Rubio, in the letter, could not give an affirmative answer to Senator RISCH's question. Operation Absolute Resolve has not ended.

There was a second question Senator RISCH asked: Confirm that U.S. military personnel are no longer involved in hostilities in Venezuela.

Secretary Rubio wouldn't confirm that either. All Secretary Rubio says is: There are currently no U.S. Armed Forces in Venezuela.

What about the boat strikes? What about the naval blockade? What about the naval seizure of Venezuelan oil? Those are all hostilities under domestic and international law. They are all hostilities. And that is why Secretary Rubio, I think, being intellectually honest, refused to give an affirmative answer to my colleague's question. He said there are no troops currently in Venezuela, but he would not say that the U.S. military is not involved in hostilities.

So even on this record, with my colleague posing two questions to the administration—tell us the operation is over; tell us the United States is not involved in hostilities—the administration would do neither. And for that reason, I ask that we proceed on the path we are on to have this debate finally before the American public.

DIRECTING THE REMOVAL OF UNITED STATES ARMED FORCES FROM HOSTILITIES WITHIN OR AGAINST VENEZUELA THAT HAVE NOT BEEN AUTHORIZED BY CONGRESS—Motion to Proceed

Mr. KAINE. Mr. President, I therefore move to proceed to Calendar No. 298, S.J. Res. 98.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will report.

The senior assistant executive clerk read as follows:

Motion to proceed to Calendar No. 298, S.J. Res. 98, to direct the removal of United States Armed Forces from hostilities within or against Venezuela that have not been authorized by Congress.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Idaho.

POINT OF ORDER

Mr. RISCH. Mr. President, I make a point of order—raise a point of order—that this joint resolution is not entitled to privilege under 50 U.S.C. 1546a due to U.S. troops not being engaged in hostilities.

VOTE ON POINT OF ORDER

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Chair submits the question to the Senate for its decision.

The question is, Is the point of order well taken?

Mr. RISCH. I ask for the yeas and nays.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there a sufficient second?

There appears to be a sufficient second.

The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk called the roll.

The yeas and nays resulted—yeas 50, nays 50, as follows:

[Rollcall Vote No. 9 Leg.]

YEAS—50

Banks	Graham	Moran
Barrasso	Grassley	Moreno
Blackburn	Hagerty	Mullin
Boozman	Hawley	Ricketts
Britt	Hoeben	Risch
Budd	Husted	Rounds
Capito	Hyde-Smith	Schmitt
Cassidy	Johnson	Scott (FL)
Cornyn	Justice	Scott (SC)
Cotton	Kennedy	Sheehy
Cramer	Lankford	Sullivan
Crapo	Lee	Thune
Cruz	Lummis	Tillis
Curtis	Marshall	Tuberville
Daines	McConnell	Wicker
Ernst	McCormick	Young
Fischer	Moody	

NAYS—50

Alsobrooks	Hickenlooper	Reed
Baldwin	Hirono	Rosen
Bennet	Kaine	Sanders
Blumenthal	Kelly	Schatz
Blunt Rochester	Kim	Schiff
Booker	King	Schumer
Cantwell	Klobuchar	Shaheen
Collins	Luján	Slotkin
Coons	Markey	Smith
Cortez Masto	Merkley	Van Hollen
Duckworth	Murkowski	Warner
Durbin	Murphy	Warnock
Fetterman	Murray	Warren
Gallego	Ossoff	Welch
Gillibrand	Padilla	Whitehouse
Hassan	Paul	Wyden
Heinrich	Peters	

(Mr. JUSTICE assumed the Chair.)

The VICE PRESIDENT. On this vote, the yeas are 50, the nays are 50.

The Senate being equally divided, the Vice President votes in the affirmative and the point of order is sustained.

MORNING BUSINESS

MEASURES PLACED ON THE CALENDAR

The following bill was read the second time, and placed on the calendar:

S. 3627. A bill to require institutions of higher education to disseminate information on the rights of, and accommodations and resources for, pregnant students, and for other purposes.

EXECUTIVE AND OTHER COMMUNICATIONS

The following communications were laid before the Senate, together with accompanying papers, reports, and documents, and were referred as indicated:

EC-2459. A communication from the Director, Office of Surface Mining Reclamation and Enforcement, Department of the Interior, transmitting, pursuant to law, the report of a rule entitled "Rescission of Portions of Permanent Program Performance Standards Related to Siltation Structures" ((RIN1029-AC92) (Docket No. OSM-2025-0010)) received in the Office of the President of the Senate on January 7, 2026; to the Committee on Energy and Natural Resources.

EC-2460. A communication from the Director, Office of Surface Mining Reclamation