

## POLITICAL VIOLENCE

Mr. President, only 12 hours after this awful shooting in Chicago, our Nation watched in horror as a different gunman attacked the White House Correspondents' Dinner. Let's be clear. Whether right or left, political violence has no place in America—none. I am grateful no one was seriously injured at the Hilton.

This attack, however, shows a sobering pattern of escalating political violence. Last year, we witnessed the horrific assassination of Minnesota House speaker emerita Melissa Hortman and her husband Mark, the attempted murder of Minnesota State senator John Hoffman and his wife, and the assassination of Charlie Kirk.

These attacks have a chilling impact on politics. Townhall meetings now are requiring metal detectors. People are wary of open-air events.

Political violence is corrosive to democracy. It is an American crisis and one that is made worse by the growing arsenal of dangerous guns in our country. These weapons flooding our streets make what is already an incredibly difficult job for our Nation's law enforcement and security personnel even more dangerous. Our police are being outgunned by people who are fomenting violence.

For our communities and our law enforcement officers in our country, we have to do more to stop this gun violence. It is a national scourge.

## GOVERNMENT FUNDING

Mr. President, now on a totally separate topic, earlier this month, President Trump issued his fiscal year 2027 budget proposal. It includes a 42-percent increase in military spending for the war in Iran. That war is costing us, we estimate, \$1 billion a day. We are now into 2 months and even longer in that war at \$1 billion a day.

Meanwhile, as the President asks for more money for the military for his war in Iran, he is slashing billions of dollars in investments for medical research and disease prevention. What a senseless, reckless idea from the Trump administration.

Let me tell you a story about why this is so troubling. Over 10 years ago, I went to the National Institutes of Health—the preeminent medical research Agency in the world—and I met with Dr. Francis Collins.

I think Francis Collins is an American hero. He led the NIH through Presidents of both political parties—a real professional.

I said to Dr. Collins: I have been in Congress long enough to remember a time when a Congressman from Illinois named John Porter and two Senators, one Republican and one Democrat, came together and led a bipartisan effort to actually double the NIH budget of that date. I don't know if I can match that, Dr. Collins, but what can I do?

Here is what he told me. He said: If Congress could provide 5 percent real growth in the medical research budget

each year, we will light up the scoreboard.

He assured me there were so many great ideas just on the cusp of being realized—curing diseases, sparing suffering, giving families hope.

He said: If we can just let the researchers know that we are going to be there to help them year in and year out until they reach their goal, with that confidence, they can achieve greatness.

So we set out to do it. I came here to the Senate and put together a little team. It was easy in some respects. My partner in the effort on the Democrat side was PATTY MURRAY. PATTY MURRAY has been in the Senate longer than I have, and I will tell you something: She is a real dramatic leader when it comes to appropriations and is the ranking Democrat on the Appropriations Committee now. She was anxious to help to make sure medical research was funded.

Then I found a Republican who was a great partner—Roy Blunt of Missouri, chairman of the Appropriations Committee. I sat down with Roy, and he was sold instantly on making this 5 percent growth every year our cause. Roy was a great person.

Lamar Alexander from Tennessee, when he served here, was another one of our partners.

Since then, we have been joined by SUSAN COLLINS. She chairs the Senate Appropriations Committee and has a real commitment to medical research.

We grew the budget for NIH, from the time I visited Dr. COLLINS, from \$30 billion to \$49 billion today. The 5 percent a year was virtually guaranteed. And those aren't just numbers on a sheet; they consistently mean new cures and treatments. We have developed new, more effective ways to deliver chemo drugs directly into brain tumors, breakthrough treatments for sickle cell, and continued progress in the fight for patients with dementia, Alzheimer's, ALS, and Parkinson's. Those reliable funding increases gave confidence to our researchers, giving them the belief that they could continue and actually reach their goal of finding a cure.

Last year, President Trump's budget sought to cut NIH's budget by 40 percent—\$18 billion in 1 year. That is what the President proposed. Thankfully, this body on a bipartisan basis rejected President Trump's cuts in medical research and actually provided a nominal increase.

But this President is back at it again. A billion dollars a day for his war in Iran, but now he is knocking on Congress' door to cut \$6 billion from the NIH and \$3 billion from the Centers for Disease Control.

HHS Secretary Kennedy struggled recently to defend his budget request. Why would he want to fund 4,600 fewer research grants across the Nation? That is potentially 4,600 cures. Those cuts would extinguish hope for patients and devastate America's standing as the world leader in medical research.

America has been lucky. As a country of immigrants, our immigrants have made this a better life for America from day one. We have attracted the best and brightest minds from all corners of the globe. In case it needs to be stated, it is a good thing, not a bad thing.

When you or a loved one has a medical emergency, you go to the hospital. Oftentimes, you will see nurses and staff from all over the world. A doctor's name badge might indicate they aren't originally from this country. That is no coincidence. Sixty-four percent of foreign-trained physicians are practicing in areas of this country where there is a shortage of healthcare professionals.

Unfortunately, President Trump's current crackdown on legal immigration—legal immigration—has closed the doors to many of these bright, young people who want to come to practice medicine in America. This administration has indefinitely paused most immigration processing for high-skilled visa applicants from 39 countries. Imagine that—categorically saying: If you are from country X, you are not welcome in America.

What is worse, the administration has not provided any timeline or criteria for lifting these holds. It has a really personal impact.

Let me tell you a story. My staff recently met with a doctor from Iran. Her name is Dr. Mehrnoosh Ebadi. She is a foreign medical graduate and research associate at Northwestern University working on advanced cancer therapies. She recently matched into a family medicine residency at the University of Illinois College of Medicine in Bloomington, IL, but her residency position and legal status are at risk as a result of the processing hold President Trump has put on Iranian nationals. She is not a combatant. She is not involved in politics. She just happens to be a brilliant cancer researcher who wants to help the people of America. She says she came to the United States to "contribute to science and patient care." She may not be able to begin this residency in Bloomington on time, if at all. She described it as "incredibly difficult."

Does this sound like someone who is one of the "worst of the worst"? Should we turn ICE loose on this hospital to arrest her and detain her? Absolutely not.

What is happening to her is happening in hospitals all over the country, in blue States and red States. Especially at a time when Republicans' Big Beautiful Bill is making a trillion-dollar cut in Medicaid over the next several years, which will devastate rural hospitals, what sense does it make to close the door to this doctor whom we so desperately need?

When we shut down legal pathways for qualified international students and professionals, do you know who loses? We lose. Americans lose.

You are not making America any safer, Mr. President, by telling this

wonderful, talented, willing-to-serve person that she is not welcome in America.

Are we willing to walk away from this talent and disrupt the scientific progress so we can say we stopped another person from a foreign country from coming into the United States? These are exactly the immigrants we need.

What message are we sending to families and researchers by doing this, by the President's budget dramatically cutting medical research and the President's immigration policies willy-nilly hurting innocent people, like this doctor?

During Secretary Kennedy's testimony last week, he justified the proposed NIH cuts by saying that "a lot of money was wasted" on so-called "insane" studies. Do you know who disagrees? The parents of a 3-year-old in Southern Illinois who have waited for more than a year to enroll their daughter with a rare genetic disease into an NIH-funded clinical trial. It could be their last hope. The chaos of the Trump administration has delayed the grant award, and their daughter waits day after day after day for this clinical trial which has been held up by the Trump administration.

Medical research is vital to the safety, security, and prosperity of this Nation, and we ought to encourage the best and the brightest to aid us in these noble pursuits.

Let me close by saying that last year we came together despite President Trump's calls for cuts in medical research. Democrats and Republicans ignored his request and actually gave more money for medical research.

I want to salute the two Senators on the Senate Appropriates Committee—SUSAN COLLINS, Republican of Maine, and PATTY MURRAY, Democrat of Washington. They were determined to make sure that we kept hope alive by putting this money in medical research.

We need their leadership again, and we need the American people to say to the Trump administration: Enough. Stop this. This notion of cutting medical research is hurting America and American families. Give these doctors and researchers a chance to make this a better, safer nation.

I yield the floor.

THE PRESIDING OFFICER (Mrs. BRITT). The Senator from Vermont.

LOW INCOME HOME ENERGY ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

Mr. WELCH. Madam President, the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program, known as LIHEAP, is a life-saving program with a long history of bipartisan support from its very first days. LIHEAP was started in the administration of Ronald Reagan, and the program helps people in need heat their homes in the winter and cool their homes in the summer.

You know, it is a beautiful day here in DC, but across the country, in many places, it is still very cold and still very hot. LIHEAP was established, as I

mentioned, in 1981, by President Ronald Reagan, and it provides funding to States to help low-income households with their energy costs. The program originally just covered heating, but in 1984, it was expanded to cooling, as it should be, because people in the Presiding Officer's State, people in Arizona, Nevada, and many other States are threatened by extreme heat, just as those in cold-weather States, like Vermont, are threatened by extreme cold.

This program has been reauthorized many times since its inception, and I am so pleased that it has always been bipartisan, because the folks we represent, whether it is in cold- or warm-weather States, know that people need the security that they are not going to freeze to death or that they are not going to die of heatstroke. And that happens; that is real.

And the Americans that rely on LIHEAP to heat their homes in the winter and cool their homes in the summer are very scared. They need help, and their neighbors and friends need help and assurance that this program will continue.

President Trump, in his budget, has proposed to zero out the budget for LIHEAP—literally, to end what Ronald Reagan began.

And when we are talking about those who do get some help with their heating bills, we are talking about folks who are barely able to pay their bills at the end of the month and often can't. And, again, this is in the Presiding Officer's State and in my State.

For a family of four, the eligibility limit is \$61,000. For a single mother and a child, it is \$40,000. For a single person just trying to get by, it is \$29,000.

So Vermonters who are struggling to pay their bills themselves but are thinking about neighbors across the country are concerned about this. I had a constituent from Essex, VT, urging me to protect LIHEAP because "I know it gets awfully cold in North Dakota and . . . Minnesota."

People in all our States understand how their neighbors and, in many cases, they themselves need this. This is not a luxury. It can be a matter of life and death for hundreds of thousands of Americans, from Montpelier to Fairbanks, AK.

You know, this year, Burlington, VT, had its coldest weather in 17 years, with more than 20 straight days of below freezing temperatures. In Fairbanks, Alaskans endured more than 89 days below zero, many days below 30 to 40 degrees below zero.

And LIHEAP also provides cooling assistance to families in warm weather climates, like Phoenix, AZ, where more than 100 days a year saw temperatures of 100 degrees.

You know, I have gone on some fuel deliveries with the fuel dealers who have a program to provide assistance, and what I know is, Vermonters, when they see that fuel truck show up, are terrified because that is a big, big

monthly bill. And without the assistance that we have been providing to people around the country to help them with this, they literally are facing freezing or heatstroke.

That is also at a time when our heating bills are going up, and our cooling bills. In December, household energy bills were up by more than 13 percent. The war in Iran has absolutely exacerbated that problem. Gas prices are up more than 30 percent, over \$4 a gallon. They are approaching \$5 a gallon. More and more commentators believe that the Strait of Hormuz will be closed for much longer, indefinitely. We don't know when. And that is also going to continue the pressure on the price of home heating fuel.

You know, I do have a real contention with the administration when President Trump, on the one hand, is zeroing out the home heating assistance program, and cooling assistance as well, but on the other hand, is pursuing policies that are driving up energy costs, as we saw and are seeing with the war in Iran, which has closed the Strait of Hormuz and is crippling the economy but is leading directly to higher home heating fuel costs.

And that is in contrast with some of the comments that I can only characterize as cruel and totally "out of it" by some of his advisers. Kevin Hassett made a very telling remark to CNBC. Here is what he said:

While it's very frustrating to go to the pump and see what the price of gasoline looks like . . . the benefit for oil producers is significant.

Seriously? What about your constituents and mine, who are paying the price that is of benefit to the oil producers and then find out that the home heating and cooling assistance help that they had last year is going to be zeroed out this year. That is absolutely outrageous.

The only people benefitting from this energy crisis are people in Big Oil. They are making an estimated \$30 million windfall every hour.

The price goes up. It is painful for consumers and for businesses and for farmers, but it is a windfall for the oil companies.

So shouldn't this Congress stand up and provide some help to maintain some sense of security for the people we represent?

But by proposing a 100-percent cut to Federal LIHEAP funding, President Trump has made it clear what his priority is. It is accelerating the profits for the oil industry at the expense of people who have absolutely no control over what the price is at the pump, what the price is when that home heating gas or oil is being delivered to their homes.

All of us are here and believing that we are fighting for the families that we represent in our States, and I am fighting for Vermont families. Last week, Senator REED and I filed an amendment to the Republican budget resolution that would protect LIHEAP from this zeroing out in the Trump budget.