

but we need experienced people to administer these funds. So, to that end, while rejecting the administration's request to close USAID as an independent Agency, this bill sustains investments in our diplomatic workforce that provides new hiring authorities for the State Department in order to properly manage the additional assistance. And on oversight, we have closed loopholes and added new transparency requirements so that Congress can better track the use of funds and ensure that they are being spent as intended.

Just last week, Secretary Rubio committed to faithfully implementing this bill, and now it is on all of us to work together to make that true. There will be a lot more work to do in the months and years ahead to rebuild American foreign assistance, but this week marks a very important first step.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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 President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

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

IMMIGRATION AND CUSTOMS ENFORCEMENT

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, we had a hearing yesterday. It was an impromptu spotlight hearing, not in the ordinary course of Senate business. And we invited witnesses in to testify about what is happening in major cities across our country. Today, I am going to address one of those witnesses and her experience in the city of Chicago.

Her name is Marimar Martinez. She is 30 years old. She is a teacher in a Montessori school. In October, she decided that she was going to take some extra clothing that she had in her apartment to her church and leave it so that other people might be able to benefit from it.

Driving over there, she encountered a truck that was clearly being driven by ICE officials, Border Patrol officials. She beeped her horn because of their presence. They stopped the car, and the agents got out of the car with their guns. They started shooting her automobile. They ended up shooting her five times—five times. The agent who shot her, a 20-plus-year veteran of the Border Patrol, bragged on the text that he sent shortly thereafter that he caused seven holes in her body with five bullets.

What happened to her afterward is a grim story. She was able to drive about a mile to 35th and California in Chicago and got out of the car and passed out. And a fellow came to her aid and called an ambulance. They took her to the local hospital, where she was bleeding profusely. They were trying to save her life. Again, she was in and out of consciousness and asked to go to a second hospital when the bleeding wouldn't stop.

The FBI was then present, monitoring her every step of the way. This went on for hours and hours afterward: A victim with gunshot wounds. She was trying to survive, and they were trying to arrest her.

The charges, as I mentioned, were that she was ramming a Federal vehicle. She denied it. And this is an interesting part of the story. ICE and the Federal officials decided to move the vehicle from Chicago, IL, to the State of Maine—1,000 miles. Why would they take the vehicle, after this incident, 1,000 miles? Well, it turned out, they had some work to do on it so it wouldn't show that her damage was on the side of the car—on the side of their car and wasn't the result of any ramming whatsoever.

Of course, the Agencies involved described her as a domestic terrorist—this 30-year-old Montessori schoolteacher with no criminal record, born and raised in the United States. It took several months of hearings for the decision to be finally made by the government to drop all charges against Marimar Martinez.

Think of that experience for a minute: in America, driving your car, being shot five times by the Federal agents. That, unfortunately, is becoming commonplace.

We saw the terrible executions that took place in Minnesota—innocent people who were protesting within their constitutional rights are dead today, Alex Pretti and Renee Good.

What is going on in the streets of America does not reflect who we are and what our goals and values must be. I think about that repeatedly.

That young lady bears the scars of those wounds for the rest of her life and experience. She was asked: What does she want from this experience? What would she like to have, now that all the charges have been dropped?

She said: I want the government to clear my name. They branded me a domestic terrorist, and I am not one.

Is that too much to ask, for the government to say they were wrong, that they shot her five times in a car as she was leaving, and they were wrong in the charges they were bringing against her? I don't think it is too much to ask. What is too much to ask is that this continues.

There is a conversation underway between the leaderships of the House and the Senate and the White House about changing the rules when it comes to these ICE agents. The fact that they would wear masks is being argued as one of the points.

I have yet to meet a Senator or a Congressman arguing that they should be able to wear a mask, who tell me their State police wear masks on a regular basis. They don't. There may be a peculiar circumstance where it is required, but it is unusual. This Agency, ICE, wants to make this routine, that you could wear a mask and conceal your identity.

We believe that the masks should come off and video cameras come on.

The video cameras will tell us what happened, good or bad, for the officers involved. They are being used in police departments across America. Why wouldn't they apply to this situation?

When it comes to the right of individuals to be safe in their homes, that is one of the basics of the Fourth Amendment to the Constitution. The home is, in fact, a critical symbol of that constitutional right.

I think back to my courses that I took in law school on the Bill of Rights and the circumstances involving the British and the monarchy that led to the Bill of Rights. One of the things was that people wanted to be safe in their homes.

Now, it is being argued by these Federal Agencies that they don't need any warrant to batter down your front door and enter your home, and look and see if someone who is suspicious is inside. That is just unacceptable and unconstitutional.

A year ago, the U.S. Senate voted to confirm Pam Bondi as Attorney General. As I said during her confirmation hearing, last year, the Attorney General must be committed, first and foremost, to the Constitution and the American people, not to the President and his political agenda. I was unconvinced then that Ms. Bondi shared that view. Over the course of the last year, my concerns sadly have been borne out.

Even before Attorney General Bondi was installed atop the Justice Department, Donald Trump had moved swiftly to purge DOJ and the FBI of senior career law enforcement officials. In their place came partisan hacks, including a January 6 rioter who encouraged his fellow insurrectionists to murder law enforcement officers protecting the Capitol. He was shouting the words "kill em" when he came to the police who were defending this Capitol Building. That person ended up being pardoned and then becoming part of the Department of Justice staff. Can you believe it?

Under the direction of Attorney General Bondi, these MAGA loyalists pounced on President Trump's perceived enemies. In addition to the now-dismissed indictments against former FBI Director James Comey and New York Attorney General Letitia James, Federal prosecutors have opened criminal investigations into Federal Reserve Chairman Jerome Powell, Governor Lisa Cook, and others.

The list goes on and on of the enemies of the President who are being prosecuted by the Department of Justice. Why? Not because they broke the law but because the President believes they are his political enemies.

And it begs the question: If the President can turn the Department of Justice and the FBI into his own personal police force to target his personal and political enemies, what is stopping him from targeting ordinary Americans?

Tragically, we are already seeing the answer to that question in the Department of Justice's partisan response to

the Homeland Security Department's abuses in Chicago and Minneapolis. The Department of Justice has sought to press charges against Americans who peacefully protest, like Marimar Martinez in Chicago.

In addition to state-sponsored violence against its own citizens, the country is less safe as the DOJ has redirected thousands of law enforcement agents to immigration-related initiatives and away from gun violence, drug trafficking, and child exploitation.

When this President, through his Department of Justice and Department of Homeland Security, announced that they were going after the "worst of the worst"—rapists, murderers, terrorists, the criminally insane, criminal children's predators, and the like—the "worst of the worst," remember that?

We didn't think it was Marimar Martinez, a 30-year-old Montessori teacher with no criminal record, born and raised in the city of Chicago, an American citizen. That was one of the victims they shot five times, trying to kill her when leaving the scene of a confrontation.

On day one in office, Attorney General Bondi created the so-called Weaponization Working Group, a task force to investigate the investigators and prosecute the prosecutors. Recent reports suggest the group will soon meet daily with the goal of producing results in the next 2 months that re-energize the partisan criminal probes that only exist for the sake of one sad man's ego and to revitalize his dangerous conspiracy theories.

But in the quest to pursue the President's political enemies and rewrite history, Attorney General Pam Bondi has tripped over her own feet repeatedly, the most recent example being her mismanagement of the Epstein files.

Let's take a trip down memory lane. Last February, the Attorney General claimed she had Epstein's client list "sitting on [her] desk right now to review." Several days later, in a media event the White House staged, she released a number of binders of files to conservative influencers and commentators that were already largely publicly available.

Then, as a whistleblower disclosure to my office revealed, in the wake of public criticism, she pressured 1,000 FBI agents to comb through thousands of pages of documents in the Epstein files and to flag any mention of President Trump.

This effort resulted in an unsigned memo released by DOJ and the FBI that walked back Attorney General Bondi's claims and concluded there was no "incriminating 'client list'" despite the statement to the contrary.

Then, in December, the Attorney General broke the law when her Department failed to release the entirety of the Epstein files by the date mandated by Congress and signed into law. DOJ continues to slowly walk the release, and what they have released has

harmed survivors by not appropriately redacting their names, images, and other personal information.

The American people deserve answers about the conduct of the Nation's leading law enforcement officers. No public servant who respects constitutional checks and balances would behave the way she did. According to an academic analysis of 400 cases involving the Trump administration, as of October 2025, at least 35 times courts have found the Department of Justice under President Trump has provided false or highly misleading information, including false sworn declarations.

It makes you wonder: What is the Attorney General concealing? What kind of precedent is the Department creating for itself under this leadership?

We cannot allow the Trump administration to stonewall and lie to its co-equal branches of government, Congress and the judiciary.

The announcement today that 700 Federal agents are going to be removed from Minnesota is a minor relief to the beleaguered State. There are 3,000 agents already in place. So to take 700 away, this is still a massive force, larger than the local police force in Minnesota.

And my question for the State of Illinois is, How many of these agents are headed to my State? Who will be the next beneficiary of this outrageous conduct?

Leaders in Congress, Democrats and Republicans, have a responsibility: Hold ICE and the Border Patrol to the same standards as every other police force in America. Don't give them special privileges. Give them only their rights under the law, and make them hold to them.

That is one of the cruelties and realities that we face today—that the standards are being changed so that these people can harass innocent individuals like Marimar Martinez. That is unacceptable.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Tennessee.

NASHVILLE ELECTRIC SERVICE

Mrs. BLACKBURN. Mr. President, 12,937 is the number of homes and businesses in Nashville that are still without power in the wake of Winter Storm Fern.

Eleven days after the storm hit, still, 12,937 customers of Nashville Electric Service are still in the dark. At its peak, hundreds of thousands of Tennesseans were without power. The consequences have been unimaginable. Many residents have had to leave their homes; others have struggled to power their life-sustaining medical equipment. Across Nashville, there have, tragically, been five fatalities linked to the storm, including some that occurred days after the storm hit the State.

One 92-year-old man, James Mitchell, passed away in his home after the generator powering his space heater stopped running. When a family mem-

ber found him, it was 47 degrees in the house.

Two days later, 79-year-old Betty Doss, she passed away in her home after losing power for her HVAC system—her thermostat, 44 degrees in her home. I join all Tennesseans in mourning the tragic loss of every person across our State.

By failing to properly prepare for Winter Storm Fern, the Nashville Electric System, the 11th largest electric utility in the Nation put Tennesseans in harm's way.

In fact, in recent years, the company slashed funding for one of the most important ways to prevent power loss. Across Nashville, hundreds of tree branches have broken off into power lines due to the ice buildup. It is the main reason for power loss, and it is the responsibility of NES to trim trees around power lines to ensure this does not happen.

But between 2023 and 2025, the utility's leadership cut funding for tree-trimming services by \$7 million dollars. The reason, as the NES CEO told local media in August:

We care about the tree canopy. We have to live here too.

Instead of funding tree trimming, the utility has focused on DEI. Between 2023 and early 2024, NES held 102 DEI training sessions for employees. It should be no surprise that when disaster struck, the utility was unprepared. In many cases, it offered completely contradictory information to customers.

People would get notices that their power was back on, but electricity was not restored. People would try to call NES and report an outage, but the phone system, it was not working.

They would pull up the website, but their online reporting was down. Yes, this is a failure. It is a failure for all 470,000 customers of NES. Half of them lost power. That is a 50 percent fail rate. When half of your customers lose power, then your system is not resilient. You do not have redundancies, and you are not able to provide the service that you are there to perform.

On Friday, I sent a letter to NES demanding a clear explanation for why it failed to prepare for the storm and prevent massive power loss for thousands of Tennesseans. In response, the company refused to take any responsibility and said that power should be fully restored by—get this—next week.

That would be a full 2 weeks of no power for many Nashville homes and businesses—businesses that have lost a lot of money.

So let me be clear, whomever is responsible for the disaster should be fired and should be replaced with competent leadership. This can never happen again.

In the meantime, I am incredibly grateful for the linemen who were on the ground making repairs and working in frigid temperatures to restore power. We thank them. They are the unsung heroes of the emergency response, along with our National