

The debt to the truth will come due. And when it does, our country will pay an enormous price.

CLIMATE CHANGE

Mr. SCHIFF. Mr. President, just more than a year ago, Los Angeles County faced one of the most destructive disasters in the Nation's history. Entire neighborhoods torched and torn apart by wildfires, the magnitude of which we haven't seen on suburban streets of the Southland. The loss of loved ones, of homes, of businesses, the precious memories—all gone in mere moments—still weigh heavy upon us.

Since then, I have talked to survivors of those fires who have gone on to rebuild, or tried to, only to see their insurance coverage dropped. With worsening drought and prolonged dry seasons, insurance companies are refusing to cover the same homes and businesses they covered just a few years ago. They are seeing what we are seeing; that this may not be the last of these tragedies in our hills in our lifetimes. This is the climate crisis in human terms, and this administration's response has been to make it catastrophically worse.

President Trump has rolled back fuel efficiency standards, withdrawn from international climate agreements, opened pristine Federal lands to more drilling, and—as we saw last week's repeal of what is known as the endangerment finding—gutted the EPA's authority to regulate carbon emissions.

A New York Times headline last month actually read "E.P.A. to Stop Considering Lives Saved When Setting Rules on Air Pollution." It sounds like parody but, sadly, these destructive efforts are real. All of this while summers grow hotter, some winters grow colder, wildfires rage, hurricanes intensify, and insurance markets collapse. The President calls this energy dominance, but dominance over what? the laws of physics? the carbon cycle?

Here is what has actually happened: We are sacrificing long-term prosperity for short-term profit. We are driving up costs for American families through higher insurance premiums, higher food prices, and higher disaster recovery expenses.

We are ceding global leadership in clean energy and technology—the defining economic opportunity of the 21st century—to China and to Europe. And we are doing it all while pretending that the house isn't on fire. Angelinos know better, so do millions of Americans living through droughts, floods, and heat waves that would have been impossible a generation ago. The climate doesn't care about your politics. The debt comes due whether you believe it or not.

Our change in climate is not the only threat our communities face in Donald Trump's America. In the aftermath of January 6, 2021, there was a brief moment when Americans of all political

persuasions condemned political violence. The attack on the Capitol was so brazen, so shocking, that even some of the President's allies momentarily found their moral bearings and said "count me out." That moment has clearly passed.

We now have a President who has pardoned January 6 rioters, calling them patriots, and brought them into his administration, including one caught shouting "kill them" at police officers that day.

We have an administration that treats White nationalist extremism as a core competency in the hiring process and an administration that focuses Federal law enforcement resources, not on violent offenders but on prosecuting political opponents, unleashing masked ICE agents on innocent people, and deporting children and grandmothers.

At the same time, we have seen the gutting of public health infrastructure that was built over decades to protect Americans from pandemics. We have seen emergency preparedness budgets slashed and the people who ran them driven out of government.

The message is clear: If you are a violent extremist who supports the President, you get a pardon, but if you are a public health official who takes your job seriously, you get a pink slip.

This makes Americans less safe from terrorism, from disease, from domestic threats that don't care about party affiliation. Security and attacks against police officers aren't partisan issues—at least they shouldn't be. But when the President treats loyalty as more important than competence, when he treats protection as something selectively offered to supporters rather than universally provided to the people, he fundamentally misunderstands the first duty of government. And the need to protect the public is certainly not the only thing he misunderstands.

From the birth of our Nation, our Founders were obsessed with preventing tyranny and the emergence of another King, another despot. They created checks and balances, separation of powers, an independent judiciary. They understood that the greatest threat to liberty wasn't foreign invasion; it was the concentration of power in the hands of one person or faction.

This President has systematically dismantled these safeguards in his second term. The Justice Department is supposed to be independent, pursuing justice without fear or favor, but under this administration, it has become an instrument of Presidential revenge, a sword and shield for the President launching investigations of critics and dropping cases against allies.

His Justice Department—and I say "his" because it no longer represents the public or justice but is run by his former criminal defense lawyers and represents only his personal interests—sought to indict two of my Senate colleagues for stating the plain truth that members of the military may refuse an illegal order. Indeed, they have a duty

to do so. Their oath, after all, is to the Constitution, not to the person of the President.

It is difficult to overstate what an abuse of power the pursuit of that indictment represents. The effort to jail one's opposition is a hallmark of dictatorship, not democracy.

Career civil servants from all across the Federal Government—people who have served under both Republican and Democratic administrations with professionalism and integrity—are being purged for insufficient loyalty to the person of the President. Inspectors general who uncover wrongdoing and expose corruption are fired; whistleblowers, intimidated. We are witnessing the conversion of the Federal Government from a public trust into a personal fiefdom.

Here is the thing that should terrify every American regardless of party: Once these norms are broken, they are immensely difficult to restore. Once you establish that a President can use the Justice Department to punish enemies, every future President will face that temptation—pressure, even. Once you establish that civil servants must demonstrate personal loyalty rather than professional competence, you have replaced the rule of law with the rule of one.

The Founders warned us about this. Their pursuit of a more perfect Union was dependent upon a calculated departure from consolidated power. Now we are living the fears of our Founders and seeing that threat expand rapidly.

With the President's weaponization of our institutions comes a parallel and equally disturbing trend. America has always had a secret weapon in global competition. We attract the best and the brightest from around the world. Nobel Prize winners, startup founders, groundbreaking researchers—they come here because America offers something unique: freedom, funding, and the belief in science. The ultimate intellectual melting pot. That is being attacked on a daily basis.

This administration has slashed funding for the National Science Foundation, the National Institutes of Health, and the Department of Energy's research programs. It has attacked universities as "indoctrination centers." It has made it harder for foreign students to get visas or stay after graduation and start a business.

I have spoken with researchers at Caltech, UCLA, Stanford—you name it—world-class institutions in my State. They tell me the same story: Graduate students from abroad are choosing to study in Europe or Canada, even China. Postdocs are leaving. Even American-born scientists are considering opportunities elsewhere because they can't count on research funding, because they are tired of political attacks, because they don't want to work in an environment where basic facts are treated with partisan hostility. America is now, for the first time, losing the race for talent, and in a knowledge economy, talent is everything.

China isn't attacking its scientists. Europe isn't defunding its research universities. They are doing the opposite because they understand what this administration apparently doesn't: The future belongs to nations that invest in intellectual and creative talent, not to the nations that drive it away.

When the next breakthrough treatments, the next transformative technologies, the next generation of innovation comes from Shanghai or Berlin instead of San Francisco or Boston, we will know why and who is responsible.

In 1783, George Washington wrote:

For if Men are to be precluded from offering their Sentiments on a matter, which may involve the most serious and alarming consequences, that can invite the consideration of Mankind, reason is of no use to us; the freedom of Speech may be taken away, and, dumb and silent we may be led, like sheep, to the Slaughter.

Washington understood that the rule of law, the principle that no one—not even the President—is above the law is fundamentally what separates democracy from despotism.

President Trump has spent his whole career evading the rule of law. He has refused to comply with congressional subpoenas. He has ignored court orders. He has pardoned conspirators and dangled pardons in brazen attempts at witness tampering. He has attacked judges who rule against him as “biased” or “partisan.” He has called for the prosecution of political opponents without evidence. He has treated the justice system not as a neutral arbiter but as a weapon to be captured and wielded. And, increasingly, he is succeeding.

We have seen this partisan and dangerous Supreme Court grant Presidents sweeping immunity from prosecution. We have seen judges appointed based on loyalty rather than jurisprudence. We have seen the normalization of conduct that in any previous administration would have been utterly disqualifying.

After 2½ centuries of American life, we came to believe that the rule of law was so well entrenched in this country as to be sacrosanct, beyond reproach or repeal. We were wrong. It depends on norms; on shame, even; on the willingness of people in power to accept limits on that power. When those restraints disappear, when corruption becomes routine and impunity becomes expected, the Republic is in deep danger.

The health of our democracy is at risk, but so, too, is the health of our Nation.

Let me tell you about a constituent of mine. Her name is Catherine. She wrote to me last November. She shared that she is a retired teacher, but earlier in her career, when she was working, she had trouble getting health insurance because she had a preexisting condition that made insurance unobtainable for her until we passed the Affordable Care Act. The ACA changed that. It literally saved her life.

Now the President is trying to dismantle the ACA again. The “Big Ugly

Bill” repealed its tax credits and took a trillion dollars from Medicaid to give the rich in this country a tax cut. He has systematically attacked the healthcare system Americans rely on to give more tax breaks for corporations, and all the while he has driven up costs so that he can claim the system is broken and then privatize it. It is not hard to see.

The pattern with this administration is to promise relief but deliver crisis, promise lower costs but drive them up, promise to protect people then cut their care. But those broken promises will also mean shattered families, deeper uncertainty, and an America that is sicker and poorer.

This is what is happening to Catherine right now. She is on a fixed income—roughly \$45,000 a year—with a house payment and two kids in college. Because of the “Big Ugly Bill’s” failure to extend the ACA tax credit, her premiums have gone up \$800 a month this year—nearly \$10,000 over the course of the year—almost a quarter of her annual income. She has relied on the good will of her neighbors and of her local hospital, but her words still ring in my ear:

I am not going to make do. I don't know what I'm going to do.

In Trump's America, the economy of opportunity is only for those on the inside—the billionaires and big corporations that can afford to donate to Donald Trump's ballroom, buy his meme coins, or pay a million dollars to stand at his side while he takes the oath of office or celebrates the 250th anniversary of the Nation. And the rest? Let them eat the cost of mounting tariffs.

Remember when Trump said his tariff wars were going to be easy to win? Well, how is that working out for us? Tariffs, which are taxes on American consumers, not on foreign countries, have driven up the cost of everything, from groceries to electronics. Retaliatory tariffs from other countries have devastated American farmers and manufacturers. And he is fighting a Court decision that should force him to pay those taxes back to the people. Business investment has stalled because no one knows what the rules will be from one month to the next. The President promised to bring down inflation. Instead, his tariffs have made it worse.

Of course, it is not just the tariffs. Tax cuts to the rich people and corporations have exploded the deficit. Regulatory rollbacks have boosted corporate profits but created long-term risks. And attacks on the Federal Reserve's independence have undermined the Nation's economy and driven prices even higher.

Trump promised to bring back manufacturing jobs. We have lost them. He promised to bring down inflation. It has gone up. He promised to reduce the trade deficit. It has reached a record high.

Americans literally cannot afford 3 more years of this, which brings me to the heart of the matter, the No. 1 way

President Trump has worsened the state of our Union. He has taken a diverse, complicated, and sometimes fractious country—which has always been diverse, complicated, and sometimes fractious—and instead of trying to unite it, he has done more than anyone else in our history to break it apart. He governs through fear and scapegoating. Immigrants are “invaders.” Vulnerable kids are a “lie.” Political opponents are “enemies from within.” The media is “fake news.” Anyone who disagrees with him is a traitor.

Think about what this has meant for all of us, what it has meant for you. There are family members who are no longer speaking to one another, friendships that have ended. Communities are turning inward or turning on each other. The basic trust that allows democracy to function—the assumption that even when we disagree, we share certain values and commitments—is coming apart.

I have been in public service long enough to remember when Democrats and Republicans could team up with each other without suffering political attack, when we could disagree without questioning each other's patriotism or humanity, when we could make progress on matters big and small. That world has grown very small indeed, in no small part because of this President.

The great tragedy, of course, is that America has real challenges that require real solutions. The cost of everyday life, housing and healthcare, education and energy costs, infrastructure and the imminent challenges of the climate crisis—these are hard problems. Reasonable people can disagree about how to solve them, but we can't solve them or prepare for the problems of the future if we can't talk to each other. We can't solve them if we treat politics as warfare rather than negotiation. We can't solve them if the President of the United States purports to love America but spends all of his time attacking Americans.

“A house divided against itself cannot stand.” Lincoln said that. It was true then; it is true now.

So, tonight, President Trump will deliver his State of the Union Address. He will claim that America is strong, prosperous, and united, but, sadly, he has made us weaker abroad, more divided at home, less trusted, less prosperous, less safe, and less free than when he took office. The state of our Union now is not strong, thanks to him. It is fragile—deeply, deeply fragile.

But we cannot forget that fragility is not the same thing as frailty. We have been broken before and found ways to mend ourselves. We have lost our way before and found somehow the courage to chart a new course. We have forgotten our highest ideals before and yet always eventually remembered who we are.

We cannot think of “a more perfect Union” as a destination. “A more perfect Union” is a direction. It is the

choice we make generation after generation to see each other not as enemies but as friends, as partners in the boldest experiment in democracy the world has ever known. It is the work of building longer bridges instead of higher walls between parties, between communities, between the America we are and the America we could be. It is the recognition that our Nation's diversity isn't our weakness; it is the very source of our strength, our creativity, our resilience.

"A more perfect Union" means families who don't go bankrupt because someone got sick. It means kids who can breathe clean air and inherit a livable planet. It means immigrants being welcomed for their contributions, not vilified for their origins. It means learning from our history and charting a more equitable course for the future. It means justice that applies equally to the powerful and the powerless. It means scientists free to pursue truth without fear. It means alliances that multiply our influence instead of isolation that diminishes it. It means an America where disagreement doesn't mean demonization, where debate doesn't mean destruction, where we can be fierce advocates for our beliefs while still recognizing the humanity in those who disagree.

None of that is easy, and if the last 10 years of American life are any evidence, none of that is guaranteed. The Constitution gives us the tools, but we have to do the job. The Founders lit the flame, but we have to keep it burning. They started the work, and we must continue it.

Tonight, the President will try to convince you that everything is fine. I am asking you to trust your own eyes, to trust your own experience, to trust the evidence, and then I am asking you to trust something else: your own power—the power to organize, to vote, to speak truth, to run for office, to hold leaders accountable; the power to look at what we have lost and decide we are going to fight with everything we have to get it back.

Because a more perfect Union doesn't depend on any one person or President, as much as he may want it to. It depends on teachers who refuse to teach lies. It depends on students who refuse to abandon their dreams. It depends on journalists who refuse to stop asking questions, on scientists who refuse to abandon facts, on neighbors who refuse to turn against each other, on Americans who refuse to accept that this is as good as it gets. It depends on you, on me—every single one of us.

The work is hard. The progress is slow. The discouragement is real. But so is the possibility. So is the promise. So is the extraordinary, improbable, beautiful experiment that is America if we have the courage to believe in it again and the determination to make it real. The pursuit of a more perfect Union has to continue. It must, and it continues with us.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Utah.

WAIVING QUORUM CALL

Mr. CURTIS. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to waive the mandatory quorum call with respect to the cloture motion on the motion to proceed to Calendar No. 311, H.R. 7147.

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

CLOTURE MOTION

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Pursuant to rule XXII, the Chair lays before the Senate the pending cloture motion, which the clerk will state.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

CLOTURE MOTION

We, the undersigned Senators, in accordance with the provisions of rule XXII of the Standing Rules of the Senate, do hereby move to bring to a close debate on the motion to proceed to Calendar No. 311, H.R. 7147, a bill making further consolidated appropriations for the fiscal year ending September 30, 2026, and for other purposes.

John Thune, John Barrasso, John R. Curtis, Bill Hagerty, Tim Sheehy, Thom Tillis, Tom Cotton, Joni Ernst, Jim Banks, Markwayne Mullin, Tommy Tuberville, Steve Daines, Josh Hawley, Tim Scott of South Carolina, Jon Husted, Pete Ricketts, Susan M. Collins.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the mandatory quorum call under rule XXII has been waived.

The question is, Is it the sense of the Senate that debate on the motion to proceed to H.R. 7147, a bill making further consolidated appropriations for the fiscal year ending September 30, 2026, and for other purposes, shall be brought to a close?

The yeas and nays are mandatory under the rule.

The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk called the roll.

Mr. BARRASSO. The following Senators are necessarily absent: the Senator from Nebraska (Mrs. FISCHER), the Senator from Kentucky (Mr. PAUL), and the Senator from North Carolina (Mr. TILLIS).

Mr. DURBIN. I announce that the Senator from New Hampshire (Ms. HASSAN) and the Senator from Rhode Island (Mr. WHITEHOUSE) are necessarily absent.

The yeas and nays resulted—yeas 50, nays 45, as follows:

[Rollcall Vote No. 39 Leg.]

YEAS—50

Banks	Cramer	Hoeven
Barrasso	Crapo	Husted
Blackburn	Cruz	Hyde-Smith
Boozman	Curtis	Johnson
Britt	Daines	Justice
Budd	Ernst	Kennedy
Capito	Fetterman	Lankford
Cassidy	Graham	Lee
Collins	Grassley	Lummis
Cornyn	Hagerty	Marshall
Cotton	Hawley	McConnell

McCormick	Ricketts	Sheehy
Moody	Risch	Sullivan
Moran	Rounds	Tuberville
Moreno	Schmitt	Wicker
Mullin	Scott (FL)	Young
Murkowski	Scott (SC)	

NAYS—45

Alsobrooks	Hirono	Rosen
Baldwin	Kaine	Sanders
Bennet	Kelly	Schatz
Blumenthal	Kim	Schiff
Blunt Rochester	King	Schumer
Booker	Klobuchar	Shaheen
Cantwell	Lujan	Slotkin
Coons	Markey	Smith
Cortez Masto	Merkley	Thune
Duckworth	Murphy	Van Hollen
Durbin	Murray	Warner
Gallego	Ossoff	Warnock
Gillibrand	Padilla	Warren
Heinrich	Peters	Welch
Hickenlooper	Reed	Wyden

NOT VOTING—5

Fischer	Paul	Whitehouse
Hassan	Tillis	

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. CURTIS). On this vote, the yeas are 50, the nays are 45.

Three-fifths of the Senators duly chosen and sworn not having voted in the affirmative, the motion is rejected.

The motion was rejected.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The majority leader.

MOTION TO RECONSIDER

Mr. THUNE. Mr. President, I enter a motion to reconsider.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The motion is entered.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

EXECUTIVE CALENDAR

Mr. THUNE. Mr. President, I move to proceed to executive session to consider Calendar No. 651.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The question is on agreeing to the motion. The motion was agreed to.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will report the nomination.

The senior assistant executive clerk read the nomination of Ryan McCormack, of Virginia, to be Under Secretary of Transportation for Policy.

CLOTURE MOTION

Mr. THUNE. Mr. President, I send a cloture motion to the desk.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The cloture motion having been presented under rule XXII, the Chair directs the clerk to read the motion.

The senior assistant executive clerk read as follows:

CLOTURE MOTION

We, the undersigned Senators, in accordance with the provisions of rule XXII of the Standing Rules of the Senate, do hereby move to bring to a close debate on the nomination of Executive Calendar No. 651, Ryan McCormack, of Virginia, to be Under Secretary of Transportation for Policy.

John Thune, Katie Boyd Britt, Jim Banks, John Barrasso, John R. Curtis, Tim Scott of South Carolina, Kevin Cramer, Joni Ernst, Pete Ricketts, Bernie Moreno, Rick Scott of Florida, Markwayne Mullin, Mike Crapo, Ted Budd, Roger F. Wicker, James Lankford, Chuck Grassley.