

later. So he discredited himself in the eyes of the world community, and his country continued to suffer.

Hundreds of thousands, if not millions, of Venezuelans abandoned Venezuela, saying it was impossible to live there under his authoritarian rule without the basics of life: food, medicine, and shelter. So this decision to remove him is not one that causes tears in my household. We believe he was unfit for office. He was defeated in the election, and he had to pay a price for it. I am glad that he is not in power today.

During the course of our briefing this morning, our military leaders and others spelled out the details of how he was physically removed from office just a few days ago. He still is going to be held accountable in the courts of law in the United States—that is for sure—but there is also discussion about where we go from here.

If you remove the President of a country, what happens next?

Under their constitution, a woman named Delcy Rodriguez, the Vice President, was sworn in as his successor. I met her during my visit there. She is a hard-liner when it comes to the politics of the region and her brother even more so. We spoke for a period of time, and I became convinced that they would be difficult to deal with, although that is the reality of the moment.

Here is the point I want to make: I understand why our administration was very careful in disclosing information about the removal of Maduro from office. The lives and futures of the men and women in uniform from the United States were on the line, and we should not compromise their safety in any way to achieve our goal; but there comes a point—and that point should be immediately—when this administration decides to trust the American people and tell them the whole story. I believe there are things that can be said which will not compromise the safety of the United States or our friends but that explains to the American people what is at stake here.

What happened in that raid to remove Maduro from office?

Most of the details are an amazing display of military superiority, which the United States enjoys, but there were other questions that were raised, too, during the course of this.

In addition, the question is, Where do we go from here? What is going to happen to Venezuela's future? What is our responsibility? What are we accepting?

The American people need to be in on that conversation. It is easy, I learned in my time in the House and Senate, to get into a war but that it is far more difficult to get out of one. I worry that, many times, we have blundered into a situation which looks so simple in terms of nation building, and it turned out to be so complex. Then the war went on for years and years and years at the expense of not only American taxpayers but, more importantly,

American lives. It is time for the American people to be part of that conversation. Why do I think so? Because the Constitution explicitly says it.

The Constitution says that the power to declare war in the United States resides in this Chamber and in the House of Representatives. Congress has the only authority to declare war. This President, like many others of both parties, has ignored that requirement and, I think, at his own peril. They are engaging us in a long-term conflict which could cost us dearly, and they are not engaging the American people in the discussion and rationale of our ultimate goals in the region.

This briefing this morning was a good one. Senator TIM Kaine of Virginia asked a question, and I think it was the right question: When are we going to trust the American people enough to tell them exactly what happened in Venezuela leading up to the removal of Maduro and what is likely to follow? It is an important, critical question. It will be costly in terms of the future of the United States of America if we are not explicit and honest with the people of this country. Now is the time for that honesty.

I yield the floor.

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. RICKETTS). The Democratic leader is recognized.

VENEZUELA

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, I just got back from an all-Senators briefing with senior administration officials about what is going on in Venezuela. Again, another briefing. Again, no answers.

As before, we walked out of the room with far more questions than answers. It is not just the Senators and Congressmen in the SCIF, a classified room, who deserve answers, it is the American people who deserve answers.

The American people want to know: How much is this going to cost us at a time when we are seeing our costs rise for things like housing and groceries and healthcare? They want to know what kind of troops—how many troops are going to be needed there?

It is clear that the leadership's succession plan that the administration envisions now that Maduro—the awful person that he is—is gone, the people who are replacing him are just as untrustworthy, just as corrupt, just as bad as he is.

How is Trump going to run the country with these people as his underlings?

So the public deserves answers at this crucial moment because the American people are asking: What the hell is going on in Venezuela? And why is this President, who campaigned on "America First," now spending all his time and energy on escapades overseas?

What is going to happen next? The public is totally in the dark.

We need to know how long an involvement in Venezuela is going to last. Trump has said it is going to take some time. What does that mean? Iraq was more than a decade.

How many troops are we talking about?

How much money and what guardrails are in place?

The American people want to know, is there a place where you say no more? Nobody knows. On something as risky and as different as this—differently bad as this—people need real answers. That is how our system is set up, but this administration is totally—totally—opaque and, frankly, dishonest with the American people when it comes to Venezuela.

We discussed so many things in the room. And in the room, there was a bipartisan sense of concern with America simply plunging into other countries. I did not get adequate answers.

Are we planning on going into Greenland? Are we planning on going into Colombia? Mexico?

The answers were very unsatisfying.

So this escapade is fraught with huge peril that history teaches us we should avoid. There is chaos in the streets of Caracas right now. Organized gangs are patrolling the streets, oppressing the rights of citizens. At any moment, the interim government's grip on power could deteriorate. The Vice President—former Vice President under Maduro, who is now the President—is totally unreliable, is corrupt, and hates America. That is whom we are relying on. What kind of plan is this?

Again, it is not enough for Senators to walk into a classified briefing and hear the administration's sales pitch. The public has to hear it. I am certain that the public, once they hear it, is going to be as angry, as skeptical, as unconvinced as we are.

The American people need answers and facts presented in public.

My Republican colleagues: Don't you have an obligation to hold hearings—public hearings—and bring Hegseth and Rubio before you and ask these tough questions, not in the closed quarters of a SCIF, where no one is allowed to repeat what they say, but in public?

Where are our chairs of the relevant committees? Not to hold a hearing on something as momentous and potentially destructive as this—where are our Republican colleagues?

We need administration officials to come testify and to answer the tough questions in public. That is what this Republic is all about. That is why we have three branches of government. That is why the Founding Fathers said the war power, as important a decision as going to war is, should be in the hands of the Congress, a public institution, not in the hands of just an Executive.

And yet, right now, it is in the hands of an Executive because our Republican colleagues are supine. They just aren't demanding hearings, aren't demanding that the President come clean in terms of talking to the American people.

Looming over all of this, the American people are asking: What the heck does this have to do with “America First?” How does spending years and potentially billions of taxpayer dollars in Venezuela help families pay their rent, their mortgages, their grocery bills, their electric bills, their healthcare bills?

It has nothing to do with it. In fact, it takes money; it takes attention away; it diverts attention away from the No. 1 thing the American people care about: affordability, costs of living, being able to pay the bills of things you very much need.

Bombing Caracas and bragging about oilfields are not going to lower people's rents. Even in this cockamamie plan they have, the money would go back to Venezuela. The American people are saying: That is “America First?” Spend all this time, effort, and dollars getting rid of Maduro and then sending all this oil money back to Venezuela when America needs help?

Threatening Greenland is not going to make groceries cheaper. Military threats against NATO are not going to help families pay the bills. The American people did not sign up for this kind of military adventurism when they voted for Donald Trump, and Republicans who go along will be betraying the American people.

Donald Trump doesn't realize any of this. Why? He is focused on his Big Oil buddies and personal vanity projects like renaming the Kennedy Center and choosing which marble armrests to install.

Just listen to what Donald Trump said yesterday at the Kennedy Center to House Republicans. Once again, he showed everyone he is trapped in a billionaire's bubble. Donald Trump told Republicans, “I wish you could explain to me what the hell is going on with the mind of the public,” because he can't understand why people are souring on his agenda. He can't understand that when you can't pay the groceries or your car breaks down and you can't afford to get it fixed and you can't get to work, that troubles people? He can't understand that?

He doesn't have a clue. He talks to his limited circle of rich friends. They don't have to worry about the things 95 percent of Americans worry about. He is in a bubble, and when Presidents are in bubbles, it is the American people who get hurt.

He cannot wrap his mind around the fact that his very own policies have made life worse for ordinary people. But the average citizen knows it. That is why his numbers are plummeting.

Again, yesterday morning, he slammed “affordability” as a buzzword and said no one knows what it means. Well, he doesn't know what it means because he has enough money to pay for all the things he needs.

Donald Trump, “affordability” is not a buzzword. It is not a con job, and it is not a mystery concept to most people. “Affordability” means you can af-

ford to make trips to the doctor when you or your child is sick. It means you can go to the grocery store and not have to worry: Well, should I buy eggs or cheese or milk? I can't afford all of them.

It means you can pay the rent, pay your mortgage.

What “affordability” doesn't mean is sending helicopters over Caracas and saying we have the right to attack NATO allies. It doesn't mean bailing out Argentine farmers. It doesn't mean giving away critical chips to China so that they can use them against us.

Now, if Donald Trump and Republicans won't focus on lowering the cost of living, Democrats are happy to do it for them. Later today, I am joining with Senators WARREN, SMITH, and KLOBUCHAR and housing experts from around the country to talk about this horrible housing crisis, one of the worst manifestations of rising costs.

Today's housing roundtable is a kickoff event for our Senate Democrats and our cost initiative, which will be our North Star for the year and beyond. We are going to be focused like a laser on the increased costs Americans face to pay the necessary bills that they must pay to live a decent life.

And just as we talked about for months, about helping people to afford healthcare, we are going to continue to focus on helping people pay the rent, keep up with their mortgage, and be able to afford a home for the first time.

In the coming weeks, Senate Democrats are going to lay out the many things Congress could do right now, if only the Republicans were serious about lowering costs, when it comes to food, childcare, energy, home ownership, healthcare, childcare, and more. These are things the American people care about: paying the bills, buying a new car, going on one vacation a year with your family—not invading Venezuela, not invading Colombia, not thinking about invading Greenland.

Donald Trump doesn't get it. He admits he doesn't get it. He doesn't understand why the American people are mad at him when it is as plain as could be.

But Democrats get it. We are going to focus like a laser on costs today, next week, next month, and all year long. The Republicans and Donald Trump will be hearing plenty more from us.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Texas.

TRUMP ADMINISTRATION

Mr. CORNYN. Mr. President, we are back for a short workweek, following the holidays, and, boy, is our plate full. But I think it is appropriate to take just a few minutes to reflect on the incredible progress we have made last year under the leadership of President Trump, Senate Majority Leader THUNE, and Speaker MIKE JOHNSON.

Of course, one of the most important things we had to do in the Senate was

to confirm the President's Cabinet and various nominees. Of course, our Democratic colleagues resisted at every turn, requiring that we actually change some of the rules of confirmation to allow the President to fulfill his mandate following his election and to get his team on the field. Democrats not only were sore losers when it came to the election of President Trump, but they wanted to deny him the team he needed in order to actually do what the American people elected him to do.

The most important piece of legislation we passed—actually, there are a couple that come to mind, but one is the working family tax cuts act. I heard the Democratic leader talk about all sorts of “affordability” issues, and, of course, that has now become the buzzword. Affordability is really nothing new in politics, as the Presiding Officer knows. It is all about kitchen table issues. That is what people care the most about. And there are a lot of things that we have already done, without any Democratic help, to try to make life more affordable for working families in Texas, in Nebraska, and across the Nation.

But, obviously, we have a lot of work left to do. First, we have to finish a full year of government funding. Democrats have prevented us from passing normal appropriations bills, which have caused us to lurch from potential shutdown to shutdown. And, indeed, they ultimately pulled that trigger to the detriment of the American people and shut down the government for a historically long period of time.

And for what effect? Well, a lot of people got hurt. A lot of people got inconvenienced. Many people didn't get paid.

And what did the Democrats get? A talking point about healthcare. That is all they care about. They did not care about solving any of these problems, working together in a bipartisan way, which is what I believe we should do, but rather to try to score political points and try to embarrass the Trump administration and Republicans.

But we have to finish that full year of funding because we do have another short-term continuing resolution deadline that expires on January 30. But I know Senator COLLINS, chair of the Senate Appropriations Committee, and Senator MURRAY and their counterparts in the House have been working very diligently to try to get the first tranche of appropriations bills across the floor so we can avoid staring another government shutdown in the face on January 30.

Can you imagine how much actual work we could get done if we didn't exhaust ourselves in the fights over shutdowns and lurching from one deadline to the next? Well, maybe that is something we ought to think about, and that is the opportunity cost of going from shutdown to shutdown and all the spending cliffs.

I would hope our Democratic colleagues have learned a lesson from