

So I announced in the hearing today that, similar to what I had to do to get the Homeland Security Secretary to even come before the committee—I had to put a hold on any sorts of nominations that went through Homeland Security. Maybe it had an influence. Maybe other pressures got her there. But now she is not answering my questions.

So, effective today, I will refuse to allow any en bloc nominations to go through this Senate floor until I get my questions answered—effective today. Effective on March 19, I will block any nomination, any markup of legislation that goes before Finance, Banking, Judiciary, or Veterans' Affairs. I will block my own nominations until I get the answer to the question—and every other one that goes through that—because my vote is necessary in any partisan votes to get it out of the committees.

I want answers to questions. That is what you give to a U.S. Senator. You don't treat us like some sort of person that you just placate in a committee and go on and do other things. I have the election certificate. I have people in North Carolina that want answers, and I want answers. If I don't get them, we are simply going to shut down the noms process until we can get somebody to answer my question.

Now, the questions I am not going to cover that have to do with the encounters—that is delineated in the letter. But these are five other questions that I want answered, and they go like this—because I want them in the Federal Register, and I will submit a document so the transcription is accurate. These are my five questions:

The Homeland Security Act of 2002 expressly prohibits the Secretary of Homeland Security from restricting or diverting FEMA resources from the Agency's mission. Based on your disaster response, I have reason to believe that she is violating the law, either knowingly or unknowingly, so I want to know what the total amount of FEMA reimbursements are that are currently being held by DHS for final approval to be spent by FEMA. I want the exact dollar figures, and I want a full list of the recipients.

Based on recent reports, I have reason to believe that DHS has delegated responsibilities of the FEMA Administrator to an outside contractor, who is Kara Voorhies. What is her official role in DHS? That is my second question.

My third question: Special government employees, SGEs, are prohibited by law from working more than 130 days during any 365-day period. How many days has Corey Lewandowski worked over the last year, and how many days does he currently have left under the SGE status?

No 4: Why does Corey Lewandowski have final signoff authority on internal DHS routing documents—these are internal routing documents—above the Deputy Secretary—a part-time, unpaid person—above a Deputy Secretary be-

fore documents are submitted to the Homeland Security Secretary for approval?

No. 5: Based on an unclassified letter submitted to Congress yesterday by the DHS Office of Inspector General—these are the people that keep us honest; they are a very important part of the role—I have reason to believe that the Secretary and the Department are obstructing at least one criminal investigation.

Not my words; these are the words of the Office of Inspector General, who published a letter yesterday. That is almost unheard of. Do you have any idea how bad it has to be for someone embedded in a Department to publish a letter about the obstruction of the Secretary of that Department? That is bad, folks.

So I want the Secretary to answer the question: Do you believe that restricting or delaying the inspector general's access to documents, systems, and witnesses reflects a direct violation of Federal law?

The OIG thinks she does, so I want to know.

Mr. President, I know we are 2 minutes away from going into recess, and I am not going to extend time.

The bottom line: This Secretary has done our President an injustice by some of the most incompetent execution I have had the displeasure to witness over the last 11 years and 2 months that I have been a U.S. Senator. It bears no resemblance to Trump 1 in terms of Homeland Security and in terms of FEMA response.

I am a Republican. I support this President. I believe deporting people illegally present here is critically important to our future. But I also believe you have to be able to execute, you have to be able to do your job, you have to be able to be responsible, and when you make a mistake, you admit it and move on. This Secretary has done none of that, and so I will be doing none of nominating and confirming and markups until such time as I get an answer to these critical questions—or her resignation or the answer to the question, whichever comes first.

RECESS

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senate stands in recess until 5 p.m.

Thereupon, the Senate, at 3:30 p.m., recessed until 5 p.m. and reassembled when called to order by the Presiding Officer (Mr. CURTIS).

HOUSING FOR THE 21ST CENTURY ACT—Motion to Proceed—Continued

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Oregon.

UNANIMOUS CONSENT REQUEST—S. 2746

Mr. WYDEN. Mr. President, late last week, when I first scheduled this consent request that is relating to Jeffrey Epstein's bank records, I was not ex-

pecting it to be set against the backdrop of Donald Trump dragging America into yet another war in the Middle East.

I will address the horrific crimes and worldwide financial network of Mr. Epstein in a minute. Right at the outset, I need to address the actions of the Trump administration this past weekend.

This is a war the American people do not want, a war that has already cost American lives, a war the President and his scheming advisers have not even tried to justify, a war Donald Trump kicked off at his private club minutes before stepping out to celebrate at a glitzy fundraiser where attendees spent \$1 million per plate.

Now, I remember the debate about the Iraq war 20 years ago, including the bad faith attacks against those of us who opposed it from the start.

No doubt there will be a replay of that debate. There will be some who say: War is on. It is time for everybody to line up behind the President and every other issue has got to go by the wayside. That is wrong.

It has been clear from the beginning that the core principle for this administration is that Donald Trump gets to do what he wants, no matter the cost, when he wants to. It doesn't matter to him how many American soldiers die as a result of the war. It doesn't matter how many people lose their health insurance or their livelihoods as a result of his policies.

And in the case of Mr. Epstein, it doesn't matter how many pedophiles and sex traffickers continue to walk the streets and prey on the vulnerable while the Trump administration hides essential Epstein files from the public.

The position of this administration is that Donald Trump can't do anything wrong. He gets to do what he wants, and everybody else has to obey. Ultimately, the American people aren't going to have it. I won't either, and that was the message in my town meetings this past weekend.

The last thing that I am going to do is to slow down or walk away from our 4-year investigation into Epstein's trafficking network because Donald Trump decided to kick off another open-ended war in the Middle East. So I am going to take just a few minutes to lay out why the Senate needs to pass my legislation demanding the release of the Epstein bank records that are at the Treasury Department.

Here is what Americans needs to know. Four years ago, my investigators on the Finance Committee began digging into the so-called tax planning that Jeffrey Epstein performed for one of the titans of Wall Street. That man was Leon Black. That relationship spawned sprawling financial ties, and Black had a curious story about their relationship. Here was a guy worth billions and billions of dollars, really a money-making machine.

He already employed the best tax and estate planning experts in the Nation.

But over the course of several years, Mr. Black paid Jeffrey Epstein \$170 million for what he claimed was tax and estate planning advice.

Keep in mind that Jeffrey Epstein wasn't a tax lawyer or an accountant. The rates Black paid him were astronomical compared to what he was paying the experts that he already employed. So my investigators kept digging. What we found and what has been confirmed in more recent Epstein reports is that this story is a sham.

Jeffrey Epstein wasn't really doing serious tax and estate work, and Black's lawyers had to keep tabs on the advice he did give, which was often shoddy.

Our investigation grew. In late 2023, we reached out to the Biden Treasury Department and sought copies of the bank records that it had on Mr. Epstein. The Biden Treasury Department wouldn't give us the files, but they allowed my investigators to review them in-person and to take notes.

That is how I am aware today that there is a massive file of Epstein records at the Treasury Department. These are detailed bank records, a roadmap of Epstein's financial history.

In fact, they are filings made by banks specifically to alert Federal law enforcement to suspicious payments—evidence of possible financial crimes. They are designed to help the Treasury investigators in the Justice Department root out crimes like money laundering and trafficking.

My investigators reviewed a large portion of them on Valentine's Day 2024. We learned that Jeffrey Epstein made 4,725 wire transfers adding up to more than \$1 billion in and out of his JPMorgan bank accounts in the decade after 2003.

We learned that he moved hundreds of millions of dollars more through accounts at Bank of New York Mellon and Deutsche Bank. We learned that he used Russian correspondent bank accounts to process hundreds of millions in payments associated with trafficking in Russia and Eastern Europe.

In the portion of the Epstein bank records that my investigators saw, there could be more than \$1.5 billion in suspicious Epstein transactions laid out for law enforcement to review.

Mr. President and colleagues, this is a staggering amount, and it is inexplicably high based on what is currently known about Epstein's sources of income. These Epstein records are not among the files the Justice Department has released over the last few months.

The bill Congress passed requiring the release of the DOJ Epstein files doesn't affect the records at the Treasury Department at all. And the kicker, Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent is hiding these bank records from Senate investigators.

The Secretary refused repeatedly to turn them over, and he has refused to let us see what we already know is there. The administration came in with

a whole lot of bluster about whether they were going to release the Epstein files. So I wanted to give them a chance to make good on their word.

I requested the complete set of files from the Treasury multiple times last spring and summer. Both times, I got denials. Secretary Bessent has even gone out in public and downplayed their significance. He has denied the Treasury has any investigative role with the Epstein files at all.

At an appearance last summer, he said the Epstein files were "sitting there" at the Treasury Department and that the Department's job was only to "collect them."

He said "there were no files, per se, just hundreds and thousands of reports" and "our job is simply to collect the reports."

Let me be clear on this: Secretary Bessent is not telling the American people the truth. A person with his background in finance absolutely knows perfectly well what the Financial Crimes Enforcement Network is all about. That is the law enforcement office within the Treasury Department that collects the bank records.

And the Secretary hasn't shied away from getting involved in other investigations. He has the Treasury Department launching all kinds of efforts to help the Trump administration's deportation campaign in Minnesota.

So the Secretary wants to have it both ways. When it comes to investigating people in communities the Trump administration considers to be adversaries, the Treasury Department and Mr. Bessent are totally aggressive. When it comes to investigating pedophiles with connections to Donald Trump, the files remain locked away.

So let me explain why it is important to break the Bessent hold on these documents. They would help investigators learn who funded and who enabled Epstein. They would help us see where his payments went. They would help us identify any connections to organized crime. They would help us learn more about Epstein's patterns, for example, how he controlled women and girls by controlling their accounts.

They would help reveal how Epstein's henchmen, including those who still control his estate, assisted in his crimes. That is the kind of information the Treasury Secretary's stranglehold on these documents is hiding from investigators. We have waited long enough.

But a week ago, there was a stunning news report that prompted my decision to come to the Senate floor with the unanimous consent request I will make today. CBS News reported on the existence of a mystery Epstein investigation going back to 2010, an investigation the public knew nothing about until now. It was spearheaded by the Drug Enforcement Administration, and its targets were Epstein and 14 others. It dealt with drug trafficking and money laundering in New York and the Virgin Islands.

The existence of this probe was revealed by a long memorandum prepared by one of the law enforcement agencies involved. That is an agency that specialized in breaking up transnational organized crime. Most of the 69-page memo was redacted, but the outlines are there. This was a major investigation that began in 2010 and ran at least into 2015.

So now, I am working on obtaining an unredacted copy of this memorandum from the Drug Enforcement Administration. There is no reason for the Trump administration to withhold it. It literally says "unclassified" at the top of every page. I have got several other questions about the investigation's conclusion and its findings.

One obvious takeaway is that the Senate cannot allow the Treasury Secretary to keep the Epstein bank records hidden any longer. The evidence out in public is clear. This wasn't some small-time operation run by Epstein and Maxwell. It is a miscarriage of justice that they are the only two persons who face prosecution in the United States.

Epstein's network spanned the globe. It involved extraordinarily powerful and wealthy people. It involved serious financial crimes and huge flows of money. And now, based on the revelation of a Drug Enforcement Administration investigation, we now know as we stand here today it may have involved drugs and drug cartels.

The Treasury Secretary in an administration that was interested in justice would have a team of highly skilled investigators digging through the Epstein bank records to assist with prosecutions.

Instead, Mr. Bessent, Pam Bondi, the entire Trump group in Congress, and the administration is covering up for pedophiles, sex traffickers, and, quite possibly, drug cartels.

If they are not going to do any investigating, the Senate ought to be able to step in. That is what my bill is all about. It mandates that the Treasury turn over these Epstein bank records to Senate investigators.

We will do the job the Trump administration should have started on day one. And there is an important new reason to pass the bill. There is a lot of Epstein-related news that breaks nearly every day.

I would wager that a lot of banks where Epstein and his network did business are following the news, maybe following this discussion, and taking a second look at his transactions.

It is entirely possible that there are new bank filings coming in today, and they are flagging a new set of suspicious transactions that deserve investigation. The Treasury Secretary is blocking that investigation from happening.

Before I wrap up, I just want to note this: I first sought these documents in 2023, and that was under a Democratic administration. I requested copies of

them again in 2024 after my investigators reviewed a portion of them in-person at the Treasury Department.

I am still frustrated that the Biden administration didn't provide them. So nobody has a right to claim that we didn't come out on this issue in a bipartisan way.

My investigation will move forward in other directions as well. I continue to believe that some of the biggest banks on Wall Street were among Epstein's biggest enablers. JPMorgan, BNY Mellon, Deutsche Bank, and others had opportunity after opportunity to blow the whistle, and they just kept looking the other way.

These aren't itty-bitty banks in Utah or Oregon. These were big Wall Street banks, and they looked the other way.

And particularly in the case of JPMorganChase, the evidence shows they knew what Epstein was up to, and they looked the other way because he brought in mountains of cash. They waited until after he died to flag more than 99 percent of his suspicious payments. By then, it was too late to do any good in terms of stopping him.

So now, Congress must change the rules, and I intend to push this to make sure that this kind of bank reporting to prevent this kind of horrendous situation where so many young women and families were hurt—I am going to make sure that this situation doesn't happen again.

There is a lot more to come from my investigation. From the beginning, I have welcomed participation from both sides, and that still stands. And my colleagues here in the Senate, Democrats and Republicans, know that my door is open to all of them.

We are going to stay at it until we have all the facts because they are not blue and red. And then I am going to have a major reform effort so the Wall Street banks can never, never, never hurt the American people the way they have by handling the Epstein investigation.

I strongly hope my colleagues will support my request to pass my bill, the Produce Epstein Treasury Records Act. There is no excuse for the Secretary of the Treasury to continue blocking our access to the Epstein bank records.

So, therefore, Mr. President, notwithstanding rule XXII, I ask unanimous consent that the Committee on Finance be discharged from further consideration of S. 2746 and the Senate proceed to its immediate consideration; that the Wyden substitute amendment, which is at the desk, be considered and agreed to; that the bill, as amended, be considered read a third time and passed; and that the motions to reconsider be considered made and laid upon the table.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there an objection?

The Senator from Idaho.

Mr. CRAPO. Mr. President, reserving the right to object, there is no debate that Jeffrey Epstein's crimes of sexual abuses and other crimes are appalling.

And the investigation there is, ongoing, must focus on bringing those who participated to justice.

The Justice Department already has been tasked and has tasked about 500 lawyers to publicly release over 3 million pages, 180,000 images, and 2,000 videos in response to President Trump having signed the Epstein Files Transparency Act into law on November 19, 2025.

According to one New York Times article, the current pile of pages would reach to the top of the Empire State Building.

Since the House of Representatives took the lead on moving the Epstein Files Transparency Act, it is not surprising that the House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform and the House Judiciary Committee are now leading the congressional review of the millions of pages of documents from the Justice Department. The House Oversight Committee is particularly busy reviewing documents relating to corporate, nonprofit, academic, and governmental entities with known or alleged ties to Epstein's web of financial networks that were turned over by the U.S. Justice Department on January 31, along with documents turned over earlier by the Epstein estate.

The House Oversight Committee also specifically requested these Treasury documents that have been talked about here today from the Department of Treasury and requested that the Department provide all suspicious activities reports, or SARS, and accompanying material filed relating to the investigation and prosecution of Jeffrey Epstein for its independent review.

That is these very files that the Treasury Department was asked to release and provide. Treasury replied that it would fully cooperate with the committee and that it will work alongside other relevant Federal Agencies to deliver on the request as thoroughly as possible.

The subpoenas, depositions, and SAR requests made between the two House committees are part of a very robust investigatory process, one which deals with massive amounts of information and patterns of activity collected over a 20-year period.

The Finance Committee has one of the broadest committee jurisdictions in the Senate, but it is the Banking Committee, not the Finance Committee, which has specific subject matter jurisdiction over bank suspicious activity reports and a more particular expertise with reading and handling of those documents.

At this stage, while the House committees are pursuing the same exact information from the same Agencies and the Agencies have agreed, by law passed in the House and Senate, to release those materials, it would not be helpful for either the Senate Finance or the Senate Banking Committee to confound the process by attempting to duplicate or compete with their work

while adding more stress to the Department struggling to keep up with the pace of congressional demands.

Mr. President, for these reasons I object to my colleague's request.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The objection is heard.

The Senator from Oregon.

Mr. WYDEN. Mr. President, I am going to be very brief.

First of all, as my colleague knows, we are talking about a different set of files. I am concerned about the Treasury Department. What my colleague is talking about is essentially the Justice Department.

And what is needed here is more investigations rather than less, and nobody has the expertise that we have on the Senate Finance Committee. The Treasury Secretary knows that, and that is why his strategy is just to slow-walk this. He is just hoping this disappears.

Well, I have said it at home, and I have said it again at a townhall meeting: I want everybody to know that we are not going anywhere on this. We are going to stay at it until all the information comes out. We are going to have a bank reform proposal.

My colleague is on the Banking Committee. I look forward to him seeing my bank reform proposal because these Wall Street banks behaved abominably.

They saw what was going on. I happen to think one of the reasons they did it is because they liked the fact that Epstein was giving them referrals.

So my colleague and I agree on a number of issues. Pharmaceutical benefit managers would be one. But we couldn't disagree more on this. And until the slow-walking ends, the investigation that I have launched and has taken place over 4 years and has blown the whistle on a lot of important steps, it is a beginning. We will stay at it until we have got real reform.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Idaho.

Mr. CRAPO. Mr. President, just to make one quick clarification, I am not just talking about the Justice Department. The Treasury Department has agreed to release the exact files that have been demanded and has said that they will provide them as thoroughly and as quickly as possible to the House Oversight Committee.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Oregon.

Mr. WYDEN. Mr. President, we will make this really brief.

I have made a number of requests specifically for the information that my colleague has now described as something that is going to come out.

I will believe it when I see it.

What I do know is the Treasury Department has stonewalled us every single day through the Trump administration.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Iowa.

SMALL BUSINESS INNOVATION
AND ECONOMIC SECURITY ACT

Ms. ERNST. Mr. President, I rise today as the Senate puts small business first in America's innovation program and gives them the certainty they need to build and grow.

For too long, our Nation's seed fund programs, SBIR and STTR, have been allowed to prioritize a few large companies over truly small businesses. Until now, these programs received blank checks to squander tax dollars meant to advance innovation in our national interest and have not protected taxpayer-funded technologies from foreign influence.

When confronted with this unacceptable status quo, I knew Congress could work together to find a solution for our truly small businesses. After working across the aisle and with our small businesses, we now have the necessary reforms to strengthen America's seed fund while unleashing small businesses to deliver for taxpayers and our warfighters.

Together, our bipartisan, bicameral legislation will ensure awardees safeguard tech against Chinese espionage, hold recipients accountable to actually producing cutting-edge technologies and capabilities—no more blank checks—require for the first time an annual limit on applications to prioritize truly small businesses over large companies who know how to game the system, establish the first of its kind strategic breakthrough awards, and, finally, provide taxpayers with transparency into who receives these awards.

These changes were necessary, and we are taking the time to absolutely get it right. And, tonight, I am proud the Senate is unanimously passing these long-overdue updates for innovators.

And at this time I would like to yield the floor to my ranking member on the Small Business Committee Senator MARKEY.

Mr. MARKEY. Thank you, Madam Chair.

Mr. President, I am so happy to come to the floor today to reopen the Small Business Innovation Research and Small Business Technology Transfer Programs. These programs deliver more than \$4 billion to thousands of innovative small businesses across our country every single year.

But for nearly 5 months, these programs have been shuttered. That never should have happened.

In September, I came to the Senate floor seeking unanimous consent to pass H.R. 5100, a bipartisan bill sponsored by the chairs and ranking members of the Small Business Committee and House Science and Technology Committee to temporarily extend these programs while negotiations continued. Unfortunately, my motion was blocked and the programs abruptly shut down.

As a result, the smallest SBIR and STTR companies were hurt. Important

research and development was stalled, and jobs were lost.

While I am glad to have come to an agreement, I am disappointed at the suffering that was caused by the longest shutdown in the program's history.

But we did ultimately come to an agreement. That is what we bring to the floor here today.

More than 40 years ago, Congress created the SBIR Program to serve four purposes: one, stimulate economic innovation; two, use America's small businesses to meet Federal research and development needs; three, to foster and encourage participation by minority and disadvantaged individuals in innovation; and, four, to increase private sector commercialization from Federal research and development.

Ten years later, Congress created the STTR Program to promote collaborations between small businesses and research institutions.

And since the creation of the SBIR and STTR Programs, 33,000 American small businesses have won more than \$77 billion in awards.

In my own home State of Massachusetts, more than \$9 billion in SBIR and STTR funding has been won by more than 2,600 small businesses in Massachusetts. It has been the engine of growth out on our tech belt.

The SBIR, STTR Programs have been overwhelmingly successful in supporting innovative small businesses and their technologies. This is just great news here. Data shows that 60 percent of all awardees in the past 5 years are first-time winners. The SBIR Program has returned anywhere from \$22 to \$33 for every \$1 spent by the program that is pushed into our economy. And through SBIR and STTR funding, small businesses have created cutting-edge lifesaving medical breakthroughs. In fact—this is an unbelievable number—one out of every eight FDA-approved drugs is linked to the SBIR and STTR Programs.

SBIR funding ultimately led to the creation of a drug to treat COVID-19 infections, a medication that treats HIV infections, new treatments for Alzheimer's disease, a continuous glucose monitoring device for type 1 diabetics, and even the world's smallest heart pump—SBIR, STTR.

These programs have also led to the creation of technologies we take for granted, such as GPS, wireless communications systems, and even self-automated vacuum cleaners.

Simply put, the benefits of the SBIR and STTR Programs touch our lives far more than most people realize. It has unleashed a cornucopia of innovation that now is a part of every American family's lives, and we must keep this program funded and going.

The American people deserve to have access to the most innovative technologies. Our brave men and women who defend our freedom deserve to be equipped with the best available technology to keep themselves and all of us at home safe as Senator ERNST said.

Our families and our friends who are battling illnesses deserve access to the most effective breakthrough treatments that innovation can offer.

For the Federal Government to continue investing in the most innovative technologies, SBIR and STTR funding must continue to be based purely on the strength of an idea, the best ideas our country has. That is the spirit of Darwinian paranoia-inducing competition, which is the heart of our system in our country.

So now, after 5 months of the programs' lapse, I am proud that the chair and I have negotiated a bipartisan agreement that does not automatically eliminate any small business from the program. Unlike previous proposals that would have automatically kicked out more than 50 successful small businesses across 20 States and severely curtailed hundreds of small businesses, this reauthorization would allow small businesses to continue innovating and creating groundbreaking technology for our country.

In an attempt to preserve quality proposals, this legislation requires each Agency with an SBIR and STTR Program to place a ceiling on the number of proposals that any small business can submit. The ceiling must be placed in one of three categories: one, a proposal limit per fiscal year; two, a proposal limit per solicitation; or, three, a proposal limit per topic.

This language provides Agencies the flexibility to administer these programs in a manner that best promotes innovation.

I recently met with Agency officials across the administration, including at the Pentagon, to ensure this language would not hinder the development of cutting-edge technologies to protect our country. I received assurances from the Pentagon—the largest awarding SBIR and STTR Agency—that the provision would be implemented on a per-topic basis and no company would be unfairly targeted. That means any small business can take their best shot at solving any problem the government—the NIH, the Defense Department—poses, and Agencies can secure the most innovative solutions.

I will continue to hold this administration accountable and fight to maintain the merit-based nature of these programs.

This reauthorization also includes several new improvements for the SBIR and STTR communities.

The bill retains the bipartisan 2022 foreign due diligence program, which requires Agencies to create a process to communicate with small businesses if they have been flagged for a foreign risk, and explicitly ends the blacklisting of companies. This transparency measure allows small businesses the opportunity to address any foreign risk they pose, likely unknown to them.

Two, the bill expands direct to phase II authority to the Department of Energy and the National Aeronautics and Space Administration. This will fast-