

voice in Congress. Preserving the filibuster is crucial to preserving the Senate's checks and balances role in our system of government.

I expect that Democrats will continue to display a renewed enthusiasm for the filibuster during this Congress. And while I may strongly disagree with their choice of when to use it, I will continue to defend their right to do so. Keeping the Senate the Senate and ensuring it continues to fill the role envisioned for it by the Founders is more important than temporary political gain. I hope that when the day comes that Democrats retake the Senate, their time in the minority will have reminded them of the crucial role the filibuster plays and that they will carry their newfound enthusiasm for the filibuster with them when they again find themselves in our shoes.

NOMINATION OF SEAN DUFFY

Mr. THUNE. Mr. President, I will be filing cloture on former Congressman SEAN DUFFY's nomination to be Secretary of Transportation here shortly.

Yesterday, the Commerce Committee favorably reported Congressman DUFFY's nomination in a 28-to-0 vote—in other words, unanimously—and I hope we will be able to move this nominee quickly, as we did with Secretary Rubio, who was also unanimously reported out of committee.

Congressman DUFFY is highly qualified for this position. He served five terms in the U.S. House of Representatives. As the cochair of the Great Lakes Task Force, he played a role in advancing a number of transportation and infrastructure projects. At his hearing last week, he demonstrated his knowledge of the issues that will be his responsibility in this role. Our colleague Senator BALDWIN said that he is "the right person for this job."

There is no reason to delay this uncontroversial and qualified nominee. If Democrats want to spend their nights and weekends taking votes on uncontroversial nominees, we can do it that way, but one way or the other, these nominees will be confirmed.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

EXECUTIVE CALENDAR

Mr. THUNE. Mr. President, I move to proceed to executive session to consider Calendar No. 6.

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 legislative clerk read the nomination of SEAN DUFFY, of Wisconsin, to be Secretary of Transportation.

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 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 nomination of Executive Calendar No. 6, Sean Duffy, of Wisconsin, to be Secretary of Transportation.

John Thune, Shelley Moore Capito, Jon Husted, Tom Cotton, Mike Rounds, Jim Justice, Mike Crapo, Ted Budd, James Lankford, Dan Sullivan, Todd Young, Cynthia M. Lummis, Katie Britt, John R. Curtis, Rick Scott of Florida, Thom Tillis, Ron Johnson.

LEGISLATIVE SESSION

Mr. THUNE. Mr. President, I move to proceed to legislative session.

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

ILLEGITIMATE COURT COUNTER-ACTION ACT—Motion To Proceed

Mr. THUNE. Mr. President, I move to proceed to Calendar No. 3, H.R. 23.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will report the motion.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

Motion to Proceed to Calendar No. 3, H.R. 23, a bill to impose sanctions with respect to the International Criminal Court engaged in any effort to investigate, arrest, detain, or prosecute any protected person of the United States and its allies.

CLOTURE MOTION

Mr. THUNE. I send a cloture motion to the desk for the motion to proceed.

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

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. 3, H.R. 23, a bill to impose sanctions with respect to the International Criminal Court engaged in any effort to investigate, arrest, detain, or prosecute any protected person of the United States and its allies.

John Thune, Tom Cotton, Tim Scott of South Carolina, Pete Ricketts, Shelley Moore Capito, Deb Fischer, Markwayne Mullin, Rick Scott of Florida, Tim Sheehy, Cindy Hyde-Smith, John Boozman, Marsha Blackburn, Mike Rounds, James Lankford, Ted Budd, John R. Curtis, Tommy Tuberville.

Mr. THUNE. I yield the floor.

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Democratic leader is recognized.

CABINET NOMINATIONS

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, today, the Senate will hold votes on two piv-

otal Cabinet nominees. First, we will vote to advance the nomination of John Ratcliffe to serve as CIA Director. I will respectfully vote no, not because of our political difference, which, of course, exists, but because I am deeply worried that Mr. Ratcliffe will be unable to stand up to people like Donald Trump and Tulsi Gabbard, who are known to falsify intelligence.

As CIA Director, Mr. Ratcliffe will have to make decisions based on intelligence and fact. There may be no Agency more important than the CIA that has to be fact based. Sometimes, these facts will lead to inconvenient conclusions for his superiors and the President. It is in those cases where truth—not fiction, not ideology—must prevail, and I have my doubts that Mr. Ratcliffe will be able to hold firm.

Most troubling about Mr. Ratcliffe were the answers I got from him about Tulsi Gabbard, President Trump's nominee to serve as Director of National Intelligence. If confirmed, Ms. Gabbard would oversee the CIA and our entire intelligence community, and I think she would be colossally disruptive for American security.

If there is anyone who hasn't been fact based as you have listened to her statements over the years, it is Tulsi Gabbard. She seems to make things up out of thin air. No one could be worse in a position of DNI than someone who doesn't believe in facts.

So I told Mr. Ratcliffe he should urge President Trump to drop her nomination. If he really cares about the CIA and its integrity, he couldn't report to somebody like Tulsi Gabbard in good conscience. She is simply too risky.

Ms. Gabbard has a whole history of spreading falsities, cheering America's adversaries, and, if confirmed, I am worried she will push false intelligence for political ends. Those are precisely the moments Mr. Ratcliffe will have to hold firm, reject what she says, and go to the President and speak truth to power.

His answers to my questions about that were unsatisfying. So I am voting no because it is such an important position.

Now, on the Hegseth vote, today the Senate will vote to advance one of the most unqualified, erratic nominees for a major position we have ever seen in America. No position in the Cabinet carries the weight, the responsibility of Secretary of Defense.

The Secretary of Defense is in charge of keeping us safe and keeping the men and women in our Armed Forces and the civilians safe. So you need someone who has a steady hand. You need someone who has had experience in this kind of stuff. You need someone who, when he shows up to a meeting, you are sure that he knows all the facts and is going to be able to conduct himself properly.

If there is any Cabinet that should be universally trusted and uncontroversial, it is the Secretary of Defense. Unfortunately, Mr. Hegseth is

neither. He is neither trusted nor free of controversy, and I will strongly vote no.

I want my colleagues to think about how absurd it is that this nominee has even made it to the floor. It is a shame that that has happened. We are being tasked to trust our Armed Forces to a man with a history of erratic behavior. One of the kindest words that might be used to describe Mr. Hegseth is "erratic," and that is a quality you don't want as head of DOD.

He has a history of excessive drinking, of alleged domestic abuse, and zero experience leading a large organization of any kind.

The new allegations that came out yesterday are even more troubling. And people say: Well, how do we know they are true? Well, first, the person who did it has no strike against her; but, second, it just corroborates in an even worse way of what we have known about Hegseth in the past. He has a clear problem of judgment, as you have seen by his statements. It is like saying your heart surgeon has twitchy hands, but I will let him do surgery on me. No one would do that.

How on Earth can America entrust our safety and security to a man who has allegedly shown up to work and other events inebriated? What if he shows up inebriated during a crisis? What is going to happen? This is dangerous.

If confirmed, he would be in charge of a workforce of over 3 million people, a budget of 850 billion. Where in his history does it show he is capable of doing that? And what if his erratic behavior spills over to his job at the Pentagon, a high-pressure job? And when people are having this behavior, usually high-pressure jobs make them more, not less, erratic.

What mystifies me so much about Mr. Hegseth's nomination is that there are so many other conservative defense leaders that President Trump could have nominated—people I wouldn't agree with, maybe, ideologically, on some of the issues that affect Secretary of Defense but people who would be capable of running the department. I know there are plenty of Republican Senators who would instantly make a better option than Mr. Hegseth.

Is Pete Hegseth really the best the Republicans have to offer? How low—how low—has this party come in making him the nominee? I don't believe he is the best. I don't believe he is close to the best. I would be voting, with complete conviction, no. Given his history confirming Mr. Hegseth is, simply put, a risky roll of the dice that Americans cannot afford, especially in such an important position.

Another of these pantheon of just awful nominees—not all of them are awful at all, but some are, too many are—is Russell Vought. With his nomination to be OMB Director, Donald Trump has made it official: Project 2025 is coming to the White House. The man who was the chief cook and bottle

washer for 2025, who pushed it, who endorsed it, is now in one of the most powerful and sensitive positions in the government, OMB, which has a say over all government programs.

Golden age? It is sure not going to be a golden age for the American people if Mr. Vought becomes the head of OMB. It is one of the most important Agencies in the government. They oversee every Federal Agency, every town, every locality. Every family is going to be affected. You want to get your drug prices lowered? Vought doesn't like that; look at 2025. You want to feed hungry kids? Vought doesn't like that; look at 2025. You want to preserve and expand \$35 insulin? Vought doesn't like that. You want to make the tax system fairer and not have tax cuts for the very wealthy but help the middle class with tax breaks? Vought doesn't like that. He wants it to go to the wealthy.

I asked him—he was in my office yesterday—I asked him: What part of 2025 would he disagree with? He couldn't point to a single one. In this panoply of awful proposals, he couldn't name a single one he didn't like.

He is also a proponent of impoundment of funds. It may be unconstitutional, but it could cause real damages as the cases would go through the courts when he sued for it. And that means he can pick what he doesn't like and just end it, even if Congress has lawfully voted for it in a bipartisan way.

So this man would be devastating to the families of America if he got into office. I hope my Republican colleagues will look at his record and vote against him. Nobody can claim to be pro-worker and then vote for Russell Vought.

EXECUTIVE ORDERS

Mr. President, on the EOs and the GOP agenda, the more people look at President Trump's Executive orders, the more obvious it becomes that no golden age is coming to America, unless, of course, you are very rich, well-connected, or own a drug or oil company. With the ferocity of a bulldozer, Donald Trump has spent his first few days in office dismantling decades of progress that help working people, help middle-class families, help people afford healthcare.

There are many Executive orders signed by the President that have flown under the radar but, nonetheless, also have proved devastating.

He has halted, for one, leasing for wind energy projects in the outer continental shelf, putting at risk billions of dollars of investments and killing good paying jobs in the United States, in my State of New York out on Long Island, particularly.

He thinks he can cut them off. Of course, we are going to fight that, and people will fight it in the courts. But President Trump yesterday was out there touting a new program, a new proposal, by some foreign investor to create more energy because we need it. But in his EOs he says: No clean energy, no offshore wind. Is that ridiculous?

It is robbing Peter to pay Paul. It is talking out of both sides of your mouth. It is one hand doing one thing, and another hand doing the opposite. It is devastating—devastating—and we are going to fight that proposal tooth and nail because it is so important to New York, to Long Island, to America.

He has repealed the Biden-era policies that make it easier for Americans to enroll in the ACA; 20 million Americans pay less for healthcare. That is in the Executive orders; get rid of it.

And in his first week in office, he has killed policies that provide a year of postpartum care for low-income moms in Medicaid. How is that the idea of a golden age?

Here in Congress, it is the same story with our congressional Republicans. They continue to dedicate the lion's share of their energy into fighting the best ways to pass their multitrillion-dollar tax cuts for the ultrarich.

But I want to leave my Republican colleagues, who are now talking about budget and debt ceiling and all of that, with a thought, food for thought. All this planning and agonizing about one bill or two bills is a side show. Eventually, it is going to be clear they can't pass anything without Democratic help. Republicans have spent their entire time talking among themselves about tax breaks and radical budget cuts when they should be spending more time with Democrats talking about bipartisan policies that do not prioritize the ultrawealthy. Thus far, at least, Republicans haven't even pretended to be bipartisan.

Instead of indulging their hard-right ideology of tax cuts for the ultrawealthy, Republicans should put the needs of ordinary Americans first. Make it a golden era indeed, but for the middle class and working people, not for the powerful and privileged. We look forward to them coming and working with us on these issues.

I yield the floor.

THE PRESIDING OFFICER. The majority whip.

Mr. BARRASSO. First, I ask unanimous consent that Senator DURBIN and I be allowed to speak for up to 15 minutes each prior to the scheduled roll-call vote.

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

UNANIMOUS CONSENT AGREEMENT—EXECUTIVE CALENDAR

Mr. BARRASSO. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent also that the mandatory quorum call in relation to the Ratcliffe nomination be waived.

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

CABINET NOMINATIONS

Mr. BARRASSO. Mr. President, today this Senate will confirm John Ratcliffe to be the Director of the Central Intelligence Agency. This is a win for our national security. Frankly, this should have been done 2 day ago, but Democrats unnecessarily delayed this important vote.

John Ratcliffe is undeniably qualified for the job. He is going to lead the

CIA without bias and with the safety of the American people being his top priority.

Once the Senate confirms John Ratcliffe, we will move to consider the nomination of Pete Hegseth to be Secretary of Defense. America needs a strong, intimidating, and lethal military. Our men and women in uniform, they want to serve in that kind of a military. They didn't join to be joining a safe space or a faculty lounge. They volunteered to serve in the U.S. Armed Forces, the greatest fighting force in human history.

Our Nation is counting on President Trump and our military to defend America and to restore peace through strength. The problem is our servicemembers are trapped in a broken system with misguided values.

Today, we face the most serious significant recruiting and morale crisis since the creation of the all-volunteer military. The military, in 2023, missed its recruiting goals by almost 40,000 people. The Pentagon says that they met their goals in 2024. You know how they did that? They conveniently lowered the goals from the 2023 number. Easy to make the mark when you lower the bar.

According to the Department of Defense, more than half of all young Americans say they have never ever thought of serving in our Nation's military.

In addition to the recruiting problem and the morale problem, we also, at the Pentagon today, have an accountability problem. The Department of Defense last month failed its seventh audit in a row. We need to change course at the Pentagon. We need to get the Pentagon back on track, and President Trump has selected Pete Hegseth to do just that.

As Pete said at his hearing last week:

We don't need more bureaucracy at the top. We need more warfighters empowered at the bottom.

As a decorated combat veteran, Pete brings a fresh set of eyes to the Pentagon. He is confident. He is knowledgeable, and he is courageous. He knows the cost of war, and he knows the price of weakness. He clearly loves our Nation. He loves this country. He is a champion for our servicemembers and their families, and he wants to continue serving the country.

That is why I believe Pete Hegseth is the right choice to lead our military.

At the Senate Armed Services Committee, Pete answered hard questions with clarity and with resolve. Pete was clear about our mission and his mission. It is, as he said, to make the Pentagon "laser-focused on lethality, meritocracy, warfighting, accountability and readiness."

Ultimately, the Senate Armed Services Committee voted in favor of Pete's nomination. Unfortunately, that wasn't enough for the Democrats. No, no, they decided to then run their desperate playbook of distract and delay so that they could try to search and destroy.

Senate Republicans are not going to be stopped by Democrats' political games. We are moving forward.

Perhaps no other Cabinet position is more important to the safety and security of our Nation than the Secretary of Defense. The American people deserve to have a Secretary of Defense in place and on the job.

Now, Mr. President, on a related matter, on confirmation here, our work in confirmation continues and it will continue later today. Senate Republicans are readying votes on more of President Trump's nominees, and it is a strong roster.

Kristi Noem is the nominee to be Secretary of Homeland Security. She will secure our borders.

Scott Bessent is the nominee to be Secretary of the Treasury. He will strengthen our economy and stop the Democrats' \$4 trillion tax increase.

Sean Duffy is the nominee to be Secretary of Transportation. He will build our Nation's crumbling infrastructure. The Commerce Committee was unanimous in support of his nomination.

In fact, all of these well-qualified nominees received bipartisan support in committees. The Senate has an obligation to confirm them quickly. To deny a President his Cabinet is wrong, especially when we are talking about the national security team. Any delay denies our Nation a Homeland Security Secretary when open borders endanger every community in America. It denies the country a Treasury Secretary at a time when painfully high prices are hurting families and hurting small businesses. It denies the country a Secretary of Transportation when our ports and our airlines need urgent attention.

The President deserves to have his team in place, and Senate Republicans will overcome the roadblocks, and we will confirm them. The choice for Democrats is simple: the easy way or the hard way.

Mr. President, we are going to get them confirmed.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Democratic whip.

NOMINATION OF PETER HEGSETH

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, the United States continues to face a host of serious challenges around the world that demand serious leaders. This is recognized by members of both political parties, where country rises above party politics. In fact, over the last three decades alone, every single Senate-confirmed Secretary of Defense, but one, has received broad bipartisan support.

I would like to take a moment to share my reservations about the nomination of Pete Hegseth to serve as our next Secretary of Defense. From the outset, he has failed to position himself as someone with a strategic plan to face the threats of our Nation, to equip our warfighters with the technologies of the future, or to support them and their families with the benefits they have earned and deserve.

Aside from serving in the National Guard for some years, Mr. Hegseth lacks the necessary qualifications to lead the Department of Defense.

Imagine the size of that responsibility: more than 3.5 million servicemembers and civilian employees, a budget of \$900 billion a year, and hundreds of thousands of platforms and assets.

He has, over the years and even during his confirmation hearing, disparaged women serving in the military and questioned their right to adequate healthcare. He advocated for pardons for war criminals and questioned the rules of engagement that are designed to protect civilians from harm. And he exhibited a stunning lack of basic knowledge on the threats our country faces.

This is to say nothing of the numerous, troubling personal allegations against him relating to the use of alcohol, personal misconduct, financial mismanagement, and more—all of which raises questions about his fitness and vulnerability to serve in this high position.

This is an unusual situation. I would say the Armed Services Committee and the Department of Defense are two of the most bipartisan efforts I have seen in my time in Washington. It is customary to have both political parties in lockstep together working for the defense of this Nation, as they should.

But for some reason, Mr. Hegseth has decided that he would break with tradition and not meet with the Democratic members of the Armed Services Committee, aside from the ranking member, JACK REED of the State of Rhode Island. That is unfortunate. The bipartisanship should be honored, even if it is difficult and challenging. Unfortunately, Mr. Hegseth did not agree with that position.

It is for these reasons that every Democrat on the Senate Armed Services Committee voted against advancing his nomination, and I will oppose him on the floor.

(The remarks of Mr. DURBIN pertaining to the introduction of S. 229 are printed in today's RECORD under "Statements on Introduced Bills and Joint Resolutions.")

Mr. DURBIN. I yield the floor.

CLOTURE MOTION

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

The 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 nomination of Executive Calendar No. 1, John Ratcliffe, of Texas, to be Director of the Central Intelligence Agency.

John Thune, Steve Daines, John Kennedy, Jim Justice, James E. Risch, Mike Crapo, Tim Sheehy, Deb Fischer, Tommy Tuberville, Rick Scott of Florida, Pete Ricketts, Katie Britt, Ted

Budd, Roger F. Wicker, Mike Rounds, Roger Marshall, Eric Schmitt.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. By unanimous consent, the mandatory quorum call has been waived.

The question is, Is it the sense of the Senate that debate on the nomination of John Ratcliffe, of Texas, to be Director of the Central Intelligence Agency, shall be brought to a close?

The yeas and nays are mandatory under the rule.

The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk called the roll.

Mr. BARRASSO: The following Senator is necessarily absent: the Senator from Tennessee (Mr. HAGERTY).

Further, if present and voting: the Senator from Tennessee (Mr. HAGERTY) would have voted "yea."

Mr. DURBIN: I announce that the Senator from Pennsylvania (Mr. FETTERMAN) is necessarily absent.

The yeas and nays resulted—yeas 72, nays 26, as follows:

[Rollcall Vote No. 12 Leg.]

YEAS—72

Alsobrooks	Gillibrand	Moran
Banks	Graham	Moreno
Barrasso	Grassley	Mullin
Bennet	Hassan	Murkowski
Blackburn	Hawley	Paul
Booker	Hickenlooper	Peters
Boozman	Hoeven	Ricketts
Britt	Husted	Risch
Budd	Hyde-Smith	Rosen
Capito	Johnson	Rounds
Cassidy	Justice	Schmitt
Collins	Kaine	Scott (FL)
Coons	Kelly	Scott (SC)
Cornyn	Kennedy	Shaheen
Cotton	Kim	Sheehy
Cramer	King	Slotkin
Crapo	Klobuchar	Sullivan
Cruz	Lankford	Thune
Curtis	Lee	Tillis
Daines	Lummis	Tuberville
Durbin	Marshall	Warner
Ernst	McConnell	Whitehouse
Fischer	McCormick	Wicker
Gallego	Moody	Young

NAYS—26

Baldwin	Markey	Schiff
Blumenthal	Merkley	Schumer
Blunt Rochester	Murphy	Smith
Cantwell	Murray	Van Hollen
Cortez Masto	Ossoff	Warnock
Duckworth	Padilla	Warren
Heinrich	Reed	Welch
Hirono	Sanders	Wyden
Lujan	Schatz	

NOT VOTING—2

Fetterman Hagerty

The PRESIDING OFFICER. On this vote, the yeas are 72, the nays are 26.

The motion is agreed to.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

EXECUTIVE CALENDAR

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will report the nomination.

The legislative clerk read the nomination of John Ratcliffe, of Texas, to be Director of the Central Intelligence Agency.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Missouri.

FIRST AMENDMENT

Mr. HAWLEY. Mr. President, there is no right that is more sacred to Ameri-

cans than the First Amendment right to liberty of conscience, to liberty of worship, to liberty of free expression. These rights are more than words that are written on a piece of parchment; these rights are solemn commitments that Americans make to one another, commitments that undergird our society; that establish its moral foundation and basis; that testify to the world that we are a society built on liberty, we are a society built on conscience, we are a society built on the right of individuals to follow the call of God on their lives, to respond to that call as they feel led and as they see fit within, of course, the bounds of the law.

These rights—this foundational right to the liberty of conscience, the freedom of religious worship, the freedom to follow and respond to God—this is what establishes us most fundamentally as a free nation. This is what gives us our moral character as a nation, and it is what has defined us as a nation—the largest Christian Nation in the world—since our founding.

But I have to say, no administration in the history of this country has assaulted these rights more deliberately, more fervently, more grotesquely than the Biden administration. For 4 long years, this administration carried out one persecution after another against people of faith. It started during the COVID era with their shutdowns and lockdowns, when they targeted religious communities—evangelicals and Catholics and Orthodox Jews. It continued with their use of statutes to go after Christians and other religious believers who objected to abortion.

Mr. President, I want to draw attention today—I want to draw the attention of this body today, to draw the attention of the American people today—to the plight of just a few Americans, 20 or more Americans who are imprisoned even now because of the persecution of the Biden administration, because of their choice to violate that solemn pledge that Americans make to one another, because of their choice to target the First Amendment rights of law-abiding, freedom-loving, peaceful Americans.

I am talking about people like Mark Houck, Mark Houck from Pennsylvania—here he is with his family at mass—a man of faith, a man of family, a man of work and commitment and responsibility, whose crime—whose crime—according to the last administration, was to take one of his young sons to an abortion clinic and there to stand peacefully, to pray, to sing, to engage with those who wanted to talk about the alternatives to abortion.

What did Mark Houck do when a pro-abortionist came and shoved his young son? Mark Houck defended his son. For this, the Biden administration sent a SWAT team—an FBI SWAT team—to his door in the early morning hours. Why? Well, just to terrorize him, to terrorize these children, to send a message to religious believers and pro-lifers all over this country: Don't you

dare exercise your First Amendment rights. Don't you dare speak up in favor of life. Don't you dare take a stand.

They took his case all the way to trial, where, I am glad to report, he was swiftly acquitted, completely exonerated.

But other Americans have not been so fortunate. I think of Bevelyn Williams. Bevelyn is 33 years old. She is from Tennessee originally. She has a remarkable life story. She started a ministry that specializes in care for the homeless and for those who are living rough on America's streets. This follows from her own incredible personal transformation.

She dropped out of high school when she was just 15 years old. She had two abortions herself and was later arrested for money laundering. Then she met Jesus Christ, became a Christian, changed her life, decided to dedicate her life to the service of others, to dedicate her life to those like the homeless, who have nowhere to turn, to those on the streets who have nowhere to go, and, yes, to those mothers who, like she did at a young age, struggled with an unexpected pregnancy, those mothers who felt, as she did at a young age, that there was no hope.

So Bevelyn founded ministries that would reach out to these young women, that would serve these young women. And what did the Biden administration do to her because she had the temerity to exercise her First Amendment rights, because she went to an abortion clinic and there sang and prayed and worshipped, because she there told women who were coming into the clinic that there really were alternatives, that life didn't have to be this way? Because she told her own personal story, she was prosecuted—prosecuted—by a Federal court and sentenced to 41 months in prison. And what was her supposed crime? She leaned on a doorway in a manner that hurt the hand of a staff member. Let me say that again. She leaned on a doorway in a manner that hurt the hand of a staff member. For this, this amazing African-American woman was sentenced to 41 months in prison—41 months.

I think of Lauren Handy. She is 31 years old. She is from Alexandria, VA. Lauren was one of two individuals who, in 2022, discovered a box of 115 fetal remains here in Washington, DC, 115 pieces of remains of aborted babies, a number of them late-term abortions—not permitted to happen under Federal law—babies who had come to term and had been killed and whose remains had then been put into boxes and then discarded like so much common trash. They came to be known as the DC Five. Lauren helped discover them.

Lauren also dedicated her life, at even her young age, to serving mothers in need, to helping those who had no hope. And what was she given in return?

In August of 2023, she was prosecuted under the so-called FACE Act. She was