

begin executing on it. One of the most important issues in this last election was the illegal immigration crisis. And that is the topic of the first vote that we are holding in the Senate under Republican majority.

For the last 4 years, the Biden administration's open border policies have wreaked havoc in both border communities and those far from the border. One of those communities is Athens, GA, where 22-year-old nursing student Laken Riley was murdered by an illegal immigrant while out for a morning jog last year. Laken's murderer not only entered the country illegally, he was arrested twice—twice—in the United States and never deported.

This week, the Senate is going to vote on Senator BRITT's bipartisan Laken Riley Act, which would ensure that illegal immigrants are deported when they are arrested, as Laken's killer was, for crimes like theft and burglary.

While this bill sounds like a commonsense measure—and it is—Senate Democrats uniformly opposed it last year despite the bill receiving bipartisan support in the House of Representatives. We will see what they do when the new Senate majority brings it up for a vote.

We are also going to be taking a vote to support our ally Israel, something my friends across the aisle seem to struggle with from time to time. After the International Criminal Court issued arrest warrants for Israel's Prime Minister and Foreign Defense Minister in November, I called on the Democratic leader to bring up an ICC sanctions bill that had already passed the House—again, with bipartisan support. The ICC's rogue actions only enable the terrorists who seek to wipe Israel off the map, and they cannot be allowed to stand unchecked.

In November, I promised that if Leader SCHUMER wouldn't bring the ICC sanctions bill to the floor, Republicans would. And we will soon fulfill that promise and have a vote to support our ally Israel.

Senators can also expect to vote on another commonsense measure this month. As thousands of pro-life Americans come to Washington for the 52nd annual March for Life, we will take up the Born-Alive Abortion Survivors Protection Act. This straightforward bill simply states that a baby born alive after an attempted abortion is entitled to the same protection and medical care any other newborn baby is entitled to.

This vote will ask Democrats to answer whether a living baby born after attempted abortion should be provided with medical care or be left to die. It shouldn't be a hard question.

The Senate will also be working to get President Trump's team in place. Beginning next week, Senate committees will hold hearings on the President's nominees. We will work to ensure each nominee has a fair process without unnecessary delays or obstruction,

and we will confirm those nominees swiftly so the Trump-Vance administration can hit the ground running.

Finally, Republicans in Congress are hard at work preparing to address some key priorities through the budget reconciliation process.

We have a lot to do there.

To begin with, the border security policies we expect President Trump to implement will need to be fully funded to maximize their effectiveness. Increasing the number of Immigration and Customs Enforcement officers and Border Patrol officers, increasing detention space and providing barriers and technology are just some of the resources needed to secure the border.

Border security is one key part of providing for our national security. Investing in our military is another. And we are working on investing in improvements to military readiness that will help restore American strength so that we can deter our adversaries and keep the peace.

We are also going to invest in American energy dominance. Energy security plays a key role in our national security, and Republicans plan to use budget reconciliation to help advance American energy production.

Another priority is extending the tax relief Republicans delivered during the first Trump administration. These pro-growth policies put more money in Americans' pockets and helped deliver a strong economy before the pandemic. We need to extend them to protect our economy and the American people from a \$4 trillion tax hike next year.

This is just the start. We have a lot of work to do. But the American people have chosen the right team to get it done.

LEGISLATIVE SESSION

LAKEN RILEY ACT—Motion To Proceed

Mr. THUNE. I move to proceed to Calendar No. 1, S. 5.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will report the motion.

The legislative clerk read as follows:

Motion to proceed to Calendar No. 1, S. 5, a bill to require the Secretary of Homeland Security to take into custody aliens who have been charged in the United States with theft, and for other purposes.

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 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. 1, S. 5, a bill to require the Secretary of Homeland Security

to take into custody aliens who have been charged in the United States with theft, and for other purposes.

John Thune, Katie Britt, Markwayne Mullin, Bernie Moreno, Eric Schmitt, Jim Banks, John Curtis, Pete Ricketts, Cynthia M. Lummis, Rick Scott of Florida, John Cornyn, Mike Rounds, Tom Cotton, Shelley Moore Capito, Roger Marshall, Dave McCormick, Tommy Tuberville.

Mr. THUNE. I ask unanimous consent that the mandatory quorum call be waived.

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

MEASURE PLACED ON THE CALENDAR—S. 9

Mr. THUNE. Mr. President, I understand there is a bill at the desk that is due for a second reading.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The leader is correct.

The clerk will read the bill by title for the second time.

The senior assistant executive clerk read as follows:

A bill (S. 9) to provide that for purposes of determining compliance with title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 in athletics, sex shall be recognized based solely on a person's reproductive biology and genetics at birth.

Mr. THUNE. Mr. President, in order to place the bill on the calendar under provisions rule XIV, I would object to further proceeding.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Objection having been heard, the bill will be placed on the calendar.

Mr. THUNE. I yield the floor.

LAKEN RILEY ACT—Motion To Proceed

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Democratic leader is recognized.

119TH CONGRESS

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, today, President-elect Donald Trump comes to the Capitol to meet with Senate Republicans. We expect they will talk about their first order of business when they assume full control of government.

And what is the Republicans' first order of business going to be?

Will it be helping working people as Donald Trump promised on the campaign trail? Will it be increasing paychecks or strengthening workers' rights or making healthcare more affordable? Will it be investing in more American manufacturing jobs, like Democrats did 3 years ago?

No, no—and, again, no. Donald Trump and Republicans promised to fight for working Americans, but their actions already tell a different story.

Before even entering office, Donald Trump is working with Republicans to give very wealthy people and megacorporations another round of trillion-dollar tax cuts. At the same time that Americans are struggling with inadequate childcare and not

enough healthcare and the inability to buy a home, these Republicans are talking about helping the megacorporations and wealthy people get tax cuts.

Many of them are saying: Let's cut Social Security. Let's cut Medicare. Let's cut healthcare. Let's cut the ability of a first-time homeowner to buy a home, to pay for it.

So instead of working in a bipartisan way to put the needs of working Americans first, Republicans are getting ready to use the reconciliation process to reward the richest Americans and give more tax breaks to America's biggest corporations.

It is obscene enough that Republicans want to make tax cuts for the ultrarich their first agenda item, but it gets worse when you remember they already cut taxes for those same people just a few years ago, and we all saw what a disaster it was.

The last time Donald Trump and Republicans cut taxes for the rich, they claimed it would trickle down to the working people, to the middle class. It most certainly did not. Republicans promised that the average household would see \$4,000 extra per year, but, in fact, real median wages grew less than half of a half of a percent—less than half of a half of a percent—in the 2 years following these tax cuts. Executive pay and bonuses, meanwhile, soared to record highs. Stock buybacks, which only reward shareholders, hit a record in 2018.

After the Trump tax cuts went into effect, the highest income earners in America paid less, effectively, in taxes than the working class for the first time ever. Imagine that. The highest income earners paid less, effectively, in taxes than the working class for the first time ever after the first Trump tax cut, and Republicans want to repeat that performance?

According to one study by economists at the University of California, the richest 400 families paid a lower tax rate than the bottom half of U.S. households in 2018. The richest 400 families paid a lower rate than the bottom half of U.S. households in 2018—paid a lesser amount, I believe.

There is nothing—nothing—pro-worker about cutting taxes for the wealthiest people in America, but that is precisely what Republicans are preparing to do as one of their first orders of business. They are not debating whether they should do it, just what is the best way to do it—one bill; two bills; choose your poison.

We already see a clear difference between the way Republicans are preparing to govern and how Democrats governed when we had the majority. We put bipartisanship first. We never made party-line votes the only part of our main agenda, as Republicans seem prepared to do.

Let's not forget—in the first year of the Democrats' majority, one of our signature bills was a bipartisan effort to rebuild America's roads, bridges,

and highways, to put people to work, and fix our infrastructure. That is putting workers first.

In 2022, Democrats led a bipartisan effort to bring manufacturing back to our shores, to make America the world leader in microchip production once again, to plant the seeds for good-paying tech jobs at America's heartland. That is putting workers first.

In 2023, we even led a bipartisan effort to fix our immigration system with the strongest—the strongest—border security bill in over a decade. That was a bipartisan bill. We were hours away from voting on the bill here in the Senate before Donald Trump killed it for no other reason than a cynical political game.

So it is troubling that so far, we have seen little indication from the Republican majority that they are interested in continuing the bipartisan streak of the last 4 years or that they are really interested in helping the working people of America in any way. Instead, Republicans seem ready to use their majority to go back to the same old GOP playbook: tax cuts for the ultrarich, trickle-down fantasies, and turning their backs on working Americans whom they promised to fight for.

NOMINATIONS

Mr. President, now on nominations, every time a new administration begins, one of the most important things the Senate does is carefully evaluate, consider, and vote on the President's Cabinet nominees. Strong nominees only come from a strong vetting process here in the Senate.

I have been very clear where Democrats stand. We need thorough background investigations, we need hearings where both sides can prepare to ask strong questions, and we need a vote here on the floor. In other words, we expect regular order. It is deeply troubling, then, to see our Republican colleagues already beginning to shun regular order.

Yesterday, the chairman of the Committee on Energy and Natural Resources noticed a hearing for Governor Doug Burgum to serve as the next Secretary of the Interior without minority consent, as has long been the standard practice. Senate Democrats on the committee expressed reasonable objections to proceeding to this hearing because the committee had not yet received basic information on Governor Burgum's background.

What are Republicans trying to hide by rushing this and other nominees through committee? It is very reasonable to wait a little, get additional background information so both sides can be ready for the hearing. Why the rush? Are Republicans trying to hide the fact that maybe some of Donald Trump's nominees are not qualified for the positions they seek? Are Republicans trying to cover for nominees who will turn their backs on working Americans and use Agencies like the Department of the Interior to help giant polluters and Big Business?

The American people should know if Cabinet nominees will push policies that kill good-paying clean energy jobs created under President Biden. These are good-paying jobs that support communities in red States and blue States. Repealing these jobs would be profoundly anti-worker and might cause many to lose their jobs.

Americans deserve to know what kind of people are going to serve in President Trump's Cabinet. They need assurances that these nominees will fight for them, will cut costs, and hold the big corporations accountable.

When Republicans try to rush nominees through the process, the American people have to wonder what are Republicans trying to hide.

GULF OF MEXICO

Mr. President, now finally, I want to make a brief comment about the President-elect's press conference yesterday.

Donald Trump throws out a lot of strange and rather random ideas on a regular basis. He did it yesterday when suggesting we rename the Gulf of Mexico the "Gulf of America."

Well, let me say this: I would agree working with Donald Trump on renaming the Gulf of Mexico only if he first agrees to work with us on an actual plan to lower costs for Americans. That is what the American people want us to focus on first, not on renaming bodies of water.

Our priorities—our Democratic priorities—are so much more closely aligned with the concerns of the American people than Donald Trump's seem to be.

The incoming President knows he has a tall task ahead of him. He spent years on the campaign trail making outlandish promises he won't be able to keep. In fact, he is getting ready to do the opposite of what he promised by cutting taxes for the very, very wealthy.

Donald Trump is in over his head, so he is doing what he always does in times like this: distract America with crazy ideas.

Renaming the Gulf of Mexico may be a zany new idea, but it isn't going to help people save money at the grocery store; it is not going to make trips to the pharmacy more affordable; it is not going to help anyone find a good-paying job. Donald Trump says these things because it will get him attention and make him sound like a tough guy.

If Donald Trump wants to rename an ocean to sound more patriotic, I would say we will help him on one condition and only on one condition: Let's come up with a real plan first—not a concept of a plan—to lower prices for Americans. Let's do that first. Then Donald Trump can have his fun.

I yield the floor.

THE PRESIDING OFFICER. The majority whip.

BIDEN ADMINISTRATION

Mr. BARRASSO. Mr. President, 2 months ago, the American people gave Republicans a clear mandate. It is a

mandate to get America back on track. Senate Republicans won 53 seats. In the House of Representatives, Republicans are in the majority. And President Trump won a historic victory. He won all seven of the battleground States, and he won the popular vote. The victory was decisive. Starting this week, Republicans are going to begin to deliver on the mandate.

You just heard the minority leader in the Senate talk about what Republicans are going to do to help the American people. I want to talk about that because I want to contrast it to what the outgoing President is doing right now in his final days in office.

The Democrat President who is leaving is trying to put in place leftwing, dangerous policies—policies that have been rejected by the American voters and policies that are going to make it more expensive for American voters to live their lives. These policies will make America less safe, less prosperous, and more vulnerable. These aren't policies the American people voted for.

It seems that the lameduck President is working overtime to undermine the American values and the demands and the wishes of the American people. The outgoing President has actually had his administration sign contracts with government unions so government workers have the right to stay home from work, maybe pretending that they are working, while still getting paid for a job that they are supposed to be doing.

To make matters worse, this past Monday, Joe Biden banned American energy production on 625 million acres of Federal waters. The Democrat leader says: Well, we need to do things to lower prices for the American people. That is not going to do it. That is going to make it more expensive for the American people when they use energy to heat their home and to drive their vehicles.

Joe Biden and the Democrats are using an obscure law to sabotage American energy independence and American energy production. In the process of doing this, all in the name of the environment and climate, they are going to make it much harder for the American people to make ends meet at the end of the month.

In my home State of Wyoming, the Biden administration issued a midnight rule that limits agriculture production and oil and gas leasing in Wyoming on public lands. He did this over the objections of the people of Wyoming. This is one more insult from this outgoing administration to the families and the workers in my home State.

So it is not surprising that Joe Biden continues to do more damage as he shuffles out the door. Under his administration, punishing regulations have replaced common sense. His war on American energy independence has hurt us strategically and has caused prices to go up dramatically. On the whole, he has been the most anti-

American energy President in the history of this country.

Sadly, there are plenty more examples of malicious sabotage by this lameduck President. In December, what did we learn? We learned that the Biden administration was selling off materials purchased to build the wall at our southern border. It sold the materials for pennies on the dollar. Bidding began at \$5. This is vindictive and an illegal violation of U.S. law.

Joe Biden and Democrats let more than 10 million illegal immigrants cross our border illegally into our country. Among them, we know, were over 300 individuals on the Terror Watchlist.

So this morning, when the Democrat leader says "What are the Republicans doing? What are you starting out doing?" Well, this week, we are going to be voting on the Laken Riley bill. She was a young woman—an innocent young woman—murdered by an illegal immigrant who came across into this country illegally. She was murdered. It is a bill that has been sponsored and cosponsored by every Republican in the Senate, and now I am happy to report that there are several Democrats who have also signed on to that legislation.

We are now talking about something that should have been done in a bipartisan way earlier, but we have an opportunity this week to get a bill passed in the Senate that is absolutely bipartisan and would make a huge difference in trying to protect American citizens from illegal immigrants who are in this country. We are talking about a group of at least 10 million, some of whom are members of criminal cartels, drug dealers, people on the Terrorist Watchlist. Yet, by Joe Biden's actions of selling off materials that taxpayers have paid for—pennies on the dollar—he is now making it harder and more expensive for President Trump to do the job at the border that he was elected to do and for which Joe Biden and his party were rejected at the ballot box.

This week, we also see that Joe Biden is rushing to release terrorists from American custody. One week after the New Orleans terrorist attack, this President has set free 11 terrorists from Guantanamo Bay—terrorists connected to the 9/11 attacks on America.

The Wall Street Journal reported yesterday that Joe Biden wants to give back a dangerous terrorist and close friend of Osama bin Laden.

Here at home, we are seeing another type of Joe Biden jailbreak. Last month, the President pardoned 39 convicts and commuted the sentences of nearly 1,500 more—more commutations in a single day than the last three Presidents combined. These people are hardened criminals. They include murderers, child abusers, fraudsters, con artists, and corrupt public officials.

This ugly action was a disregard for the victims, for their families, and for the facts, and a slap in the face of every law-abiding citizen. This abuse of

power undermines our justice system and the power of the Presidency.

This week, Joe Biden continued his march of shame by giving America's highest civilian honor to George Soros. Soros is a pro-crime activist. He is a supporter—an active supporter—of defunding the police. George Soros spent \$50 million to elect soft-on-crime prosecutors, including the partisan New York City district attorney Alvin Bragg. Biden rewarded Soros for funding the lawyers who launched the legal attacks against his political opponent, President Trump.

In his final days in office now, Joe Biden is making America less safe, less prosperous, and more vulnerable. This is the opposite of what the American people voted for in November.

There was a column in the opinion page of yesterday's Washington Post Magazine. This is a reflection, an opinion of individuals on what legacy there is going to be for Joe Biden. Presidents are concerned about their legacy. This is by Matt Bai, called "Biden's legacy: A bridge to nowhere." And pulled out on the big line is: Joe Biden "will be chiefly remembered . . . as a man who didn't know when to leave"—"a man who didn't know when to leave." Joe Biden's shelf life has expired. It is time for him to go.

In our first days in office, Republicans have started to get America back on track. Working with President Trump, we will put our focus on what the American people care about: stopping the chaos at the border, taking the handcuffs off of American energy production, and putting the safety and the security and the future of all Americans first.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Democratic whip.

REMEMBERING JIMMY CARTER

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, for many Presidents, their legacy is written and sealed by their actions in office—their post-Presidency activities nothing but fodder for the tabloids and a footnote in history books—but not for Jimmy Carter.

I remember the last days of the Carter Presidency. After 444 painful days of sustained and frustrating efforts to release American hostages being held in Tehran, we witnessed their welcome, but cynically timed, release on the last day of our Nation's peaceful transfer of power from President Carter to President Reagan.

President Carter's main goal had been to make sure that every hostage returned home alive. On that score, he succeeded.

Leaving office at 56 years of age and passing away at the end of last month at 100, President Jimmy Carter had the longest post-Presidency in our Nation's history, and he certainly made it count. The same faith, empathy, and desire to help others that motivated him to run for office compelled him to continue improving the world after he left office. Not content with a rocking-

chair retirement, President Carter devoted himself to human rights, conflict resolution, election monitoring, healthcare, affordable housing, and so much more.

He was a humble man in a world of politics where humility is often the first casualty. But there is no doubt that in corners of the globe near and far, Jimmy Carter left his mark. A public servant can ask for no greater legacy.

As our 39th President lies in state in the U.S. Capitol, just a few steps away from this Chamber, before he is laid to final rest, it is a time for paying respects and reflecting. President Carter's legacy tasks each one of us with looking inward and asking: How can I use my place in life to do more good for more people?

Today, I send my thoughts to all those who knew, loved, or were inspired by President Carter. Our Nation and world are better off because of his service. May he rest in peace.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

119TH CONGRESS

Mr. CORNYN. Mr. President, with the new session of the Senate and a new majority in the House and the Senate—actually, the House had the majority but the Senate has a new majority—and President Trump in the White House, one of the first things that Members of the Senate had to do is to choose which committees to serve on.

I have been proud to serve on the Senate Judiciary, Finance, and Intelligence Committee in previous Congresses. This Congress, I will be joining the Budget Committee for the 119th Congress. I was particularly interested in joining the Budget Committee because one of the biggest challenges we have is to get our budget under control. With approaching \$36 trillion in debt, we are paying more interest on the national debt than we are on defense. At a time when President Trump asked NATO to up their investment in their own defense to up to 5 percent of GDP, we stand about 2.7 percent of GDP here at home.

Clearly, we need to rightsize our spending and our debt and reprioritize what it is we are trying to do here. National security, I believe, is the preeminent responsibility of the U.S. Congress.

We will have the opportunity to pass a budget with reconciliation instructions. I am not sure how much the American people care about the process. We care about the process because we have to deal with it. But the first thing we do have to do is pass a budget.

That is something we haven't done since 2017. I remember in 2017, right after President Trump was sworn or even before he was sworn into office, we passed a budget resolution from which we got the ability to then pass the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act, one of the most significant tax reform bills in 25 years.

But we got that budget passed before President Trump even took office because, as a resolution between the House and the Senate, it doesn't require a Presidential signature. It is already January 8. We have 12 days until President Trump puts his hand on the Bible and is sworn into his second term of office, and we don't have any time to waste.

The reason why a budget is so important is for a variety of reasons. But one reason is because it allows us to pass budgetary legislation using the majority threshold, which would allow Republicans alone—hopefully, Democrats will join us, but with 53 Republicans and everybody on the same page, hopefully, we will be able to pass legislation addressing our budgetary challenges.

We do have unique rules here in the Senate. One is called the Byrd rule, which tries to make sure we don't use the reconciliation process and the budgetary process to pass substantive legislation as opposed to budgetary legislation. That is something we are going to have to work out with the House because I know the House has different rules. They don't have any constraint on the types of things that they can do using reconciliation like the Senate does. But that is the reason why it is so important for the House and the Senate to get on the same page.

There is some discussion here on Capitol Hill about whether we want to pass one budget or two budgets or more—actually, even one budget with multiple reconciliation bills. Frankly, I don't think the process is as important as it is to get the job done. We need to save the American people a multitrillion-dollar tax increase which will occur unless we can renew the expiring provisions of the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act.

As I indicated earlier, we need to deal with our rising debt and our funding for our national security purposes. The goal, of course, for national security funding is to establish deterrence and to deter—whether it is Iran that has aspirations for nuclear weapons that has created so much havoc and misery in the Middle East; whether it is North Korea that is testing hypersonic missiles along with nuclear weapons; or whether it is Russia, which has aspirations to restore the former Soviet Union or Russian Empire currently by the means of taking Ukraine back. Then, there is China, which—as the Presiding Officer knows with all of his experience in Asia—is a huge challenge for the United States.

President Xi has stated he wants the People's Liberation Army to be prepared by 2027 to take Taiwan by what-

ever means necessary. We are not ready, and we have to be ready to maintain and reestablish deterrence so that does not happen; so that President Xi wakes up day after day and he says to himself, "Not today." And tomorrow he wakes up and says, "Not today."

That is what deterrence is about.

And we, again, need to deal with our budgetary challenges because we are not spending the amount of money we need to spend on defense and deterrence, nor are we spending the money we do spend in, I believe, the wisest and most appropriate manner given the current circumstances.

So whether we pursue a single reconciliation bill or multiple bills, we can't lose sight of the goal, and that is to pass President Trump's agenda for the American people. That is what the November 5 election was all about. And we are in lockstep with President Trump, I believe—the majority in the House and the Senate—to accomplish that goal. But we can't do it unless we work closely together, which is why we need to be on the same page.

We need to quickly arrive at that agreement so we can act swiftly to implement the solutions that will help improve the day-to-day lives of our constituents, the people we represent—in my case, 31 million people in the State of Texas. President Biden's policies have been a disaster for my State and for the American people. Texans have been suffering under open borders and high prices for the last 4 years. Those who run businesses are facing burdensome regulations from the out-of-control regulatory regime.

On top of this, as I mentioned, if Republicans fail to act swiftly to extend the expiring tax cuts, 62 percent of taxpayers will experience a tax increase—62 percent. We can't let that happen. It would be insult to injury on top of a 40-year-high inflation for the American people to have to experience a tax cut increase if we are unsuccessful.

So while we have important conversations and healthy debates over what budget reconciliation ends up looking like, we need to keep our eye on the prize in order to deliver on these critical priorities for the American people.

Now, in addition to border security, abundant American energy, regulatory reform, permitting reform, and avoiding this multitrillion-dollar tax increase, there is one more thing that I would like my colleagues to remember as we deliberate the contents of this package.

I believe we have a once-in-a-generation opportunity to deal with some of the biggest challenges that face America, and we can't squander that opportunity. We have to address not only our discretionary spending, which is about 28 percent of what the Federal Government spends each year, but also our mandatory spending programs outside of Social Security and Medicare. We are not going to touch Social Security or Medicare absent some bipartisan agreement.

But there is still about \$700 billion of mandatory spending that the Federal Government spends each year that is, essentially, on autopilot. We can address these mandatory spending programs by implementing commonsense reforms to programs like SNAP—otherwise known as food stamps—that have grown unchecked for years. By simply reducing payment errors for the SNAP payments, for example, we could save an estimated \$100 billion.

By implementing a real work requirement for means-tested programs like Congress did back during the Clinton Presidency, we could save an incredible amount of money for the American people and help ease inflation so that the Federal Reserve can bring down interest rates. Or we could repeal the controversial 2021 Thrifty Food Plan that would save as much as \$300 billion.

We are talking about real money.

But it is not just programs that got take-ups during the pandemic. Let's take a look, for example, at the IRS. By rescinding the remaining unspent Inflation Reduction Act funds that were directed to the IRS during the Democrats' massive spending spree, we could save an additional \$40 billion.

Now, think about that for a minute. We could save taxpayers \$40 billion just by sending less money to the Agency when it comes to process their tax payments. That seems like a no-brainer if I ever heard of one. This money has not been spent.

If there are other demands in the future that Congress needs to address, then we are prepared to act on those. But to simply leave \$40 billion unspent and act as if there is nothing we can do about it at a time of sky-high inflation and reckless spending, I think would be irresponsible on our part.

Here is another idea. By repealing Davis-Bacon, a law that requires Federal construction projects that are carried out that applies to them that requires payment of a prevailing wage—which isn't necessarily a market wage at the location you are talking about—the Department of Transportation alone could save \$400 million.

Turning to our Federal workforce. Our Federal workforce does, by and large, great work. They do important work on behalf of the American people. But by reforming the pension system for Federal employees to bring the benefit calculation in line with the private sector standard, the government could save \$5 billion over the next decade. We could reform the structure of the Federal employee health benefit program and save an additional \$18 billion.

These are just a few examples of what I would call low-hanging fruit of the opportunities for us to save taxpayer money and to begin to reverse the reckless spending policies of the last 4 years. These are just some examples of the longer list that could save taxpayers as much as \$1 trillion over the next 10-year period.

And, of course, I think we ought to put it all on the table—the money we

spend through discretionary spending, the money we spend through mandatory programs, the money that is spent through the tax code. The child tax credit and the earned income tax credit alone represent \$200 billion in spending. And this is using the tax code to basically create or supplement our welfare system because it is a refundable tax credit, which means people get a check—get cold, hard cash—using the tax code.

We need to restore the Tax Code to its original purpose and not hijack it for purposes of expanding the welfare state. We can have healthy debates about what the priorities should be. I think the child tax credit is very important, and we can talk about the appropriate levels of all of these various programs, including those included in the Tax Code. But we have to start somewhere, and we have to start soon.

Little things do add up. Over the past 4 years, families back home in Texas have had to reevaluate their budgets. So why shouldn't the Federal Government have to make the hard choices that folks back home are making on a daily and weekly basis? They have had to tighten their belts as a result of high inflation and the highest interest rates that we have had in a long time, which have eaten away at their monthly incomes. They have figured it out, and we can figure it out here, too, for the American people and for the Federal Government.

I think it is only fair that the U.S. Congress, which holds the purse strings for the U.S. Government as a whole, should have to do the same thing that families all across Texas, all across Tennessee, and all across the country are having to do on a regular basis. It doesn't seem fair to me to have the folks back home have to make these tough choices while the Congress has been spending away under Democratic majority control and with President Biden in the White House.

This is another reason I am excited about the great work the Republicans are going to do on the DOGE Caucus, the Department of Government Efficiency, alongside our friend Elon Musk and his partner in crime Vivek Ramaswamy. I say that tongue in cheek, Mr. President. But they have volunteered their efforts and raised the visibility and profile of some of the massive inefficiency in Federal spending in a way that, I think, will be able to galvanize the attention of the American people and enable us to get the political courage to do what we need to do to cut out waste, fraud, and abuse.

This Republican-led Congress can make an impact in reducing our spending, and I know we are all excited about the opportunities to do so. We are chomping at the bit. We just need to all get on the same page so we can get down to work. So I would urge all of my colleagues to remember budget reconciliation not only allows us to allocate resources to places like the southern border, which have been

flatout ignored by the Biden administration, but it is also a tool to reduce spending—inefficient, wasteful spending—and to right-size our priorities.

You know, budgets are all about priorities. We have things we must have; we have things we would like to have; and we have things we want but that we can't afford. Those are decisions families have to make on a regular basis and so do small businesses all across the country. Why not the Federal Government? There is no good reason the Federal Government shouldn't have to operate under the same rules.

While we can notch some big wins in the coming weeks, we need to eat our spinach too. You know, we have been kicking a lot of these issues down the road until now, when we have run out of road. So it is up to us, the elected Representatives of the American people. This is our responsibility. It is not always going to be fun. It is not necessarily always going to be popular, but I believe that, if we explain to the American people the necessity of doing what I have been talking about here, they will understand it, and they will respect it and accept it. After all, this is something I propose that we do—that we have to do—because of what the American people told us that they want, which is a change in direction for the country, in their vote of November 5 of this last year.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Virginia.

BIRTHRIGHT CITIZENSHIP

Mr. KAINE. Mr. President, I spoke on the Senate floor on December 11 about birthright citizenship—the guarantee contained in the 14th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution that all persons born in the United States and subject to the jurisdiction thereof are deemed citizens.

I reviewed the legal history of this provision, the legal guarantee designed to erase the horrible legacy of slavery that had been embodied in the Dred Scott v. Sandford decision. It was a desire to correct that decision that led to the inclusion of this definition of citizenship in the 14th Amendment.

I also rebutted, during that speech, too, common misconceptions: first, that children born in the United States to parents from other countries are not subject to the jurisdiction of the United States—that has been ruled false by the Supreme Court since the late 1890s—and, second, a claim often made by the President-elect that the United States is unique in the world in guaranteeing birthright citizenship to all who are born within this country. Indeed, as I will discuss in a few minutes, the United States did, in fact, lead the way in guaranteeing birthright citizenship in the 1860s, but in doing so, it has led to a global movement that many other countries have decided to embrace.

I believe the constitutional basis for birthright citizenship is clear, and those challenging the notion are mounting an argument with no legal

basis. But, today, I want to move beyond the legal history and talk about the good that birthright citizenship brings to our Nation.

Children born in America to immigrant parents from all corners of the world and from all social conditions have been an enormous benefit to our country and, indeed, to my Commonwealth of Virginia. More than 47 million people living in the United States were born in another country, and another 16 million American children were born here to immigrant parents. Currently, more than 25 percent of all American children live in a household where at least one of their parents is an immigrant.

How has immigration affected American society? Let's use one example—crime. The statistics are compelling and longstanding that immigration does not increase crime. Instead, the evidence is strong that crime has decreased as immigration has increased. In 1980, immigrants made up 6.2 percent of the American population—45 years ago. By 2022, the percentage had more than doubled, with immigrants now making up nearly 14 percent of the American population.

What happened to crime during that period as the percentage of immigrants in the United States doubled? During this time, the crime rate in this country—as measured by crimes committed per 100,000 people—had fallen by 60 percent. So, again, as the portion of our population that is immigrant has more than doubled, the crime rate in our country has fallen by more than 60 percent.

A recent study conducted by scholars at Northwestern University pulled crime data from the United States going back 150 years, and during that 150-year period, they were able to reach a uniform conclusion that immigrants during this 150-year period have always been incarcerated at lower rates than native-born Americans.

Another recent study commissioned by the National Institute of Justice, within the DOJ, looked at all crimes committed in Texas from 2012 to 2018 and found that undocumented immigrants—the earlier statistics I have been giving are about immigrants generally, but this study in Texas found that undocumented immigrants are arrested at less than half of the rate of native-born U.S. citizens for violent crimes and drug crimes and at less than a quarter of the rate of native-born citizens for property crimes.

Immigration is a plus for the American economy. Immigrant households generated more than \$236 billion in income in 2022 and paid nearly \$66 billion in local, State, and Federal taxes. The Congressional Budget Office estimates that immigration flows to the United States that are projected would likely increase the American gross domestic product by nearly \$9 trillion between now and 2034.

And I know, because of the background of the President, this next sta-

tistic will not surprise you: More than 45 percent of Fortune 500 companies in America were started by immigrants or by the children of immigrants. This is not just a relic of the past; it sticks to today. In 2023, 17 percent of new businesses that were started in America during that year were started by immigrants, and another 17 percent were started by the children of immigrants. Fully, 34 percent of new businesses in 2023 were started by immigrants or by the children of immigrants.

So it is clear to me—the great-grandson of seven Irish immigrants and a Scottish immigrant whose dad was Scottish and mother was Irish—that, throughout our history, immigrants have tremendously benefited this Nation, and that is not something that is suddenly turning from a positive to a negative.

In Virginia, for example, when I was born, in 1958, about 1 out of 100 Virginians had been born in another country. Today, it is more like 1 out of 8, and that has coincided during my lifetime with Virginia moving from bottom quarter per capita income among American States to top quarter, and that movement has been significantly advanced by talented people from around the world deciding that they wanted to make Virginia their home.

Enough of the statistics. How about some stories? Children of immigrants have made powerful contributions to the very essence of America.

Where would American fashion be without people like Ralph Lauren, who just got a Presidential medal—born Ralph Lifshitz, in the Bronx, to parents who had emigrated from Poland?

Where would American politics be without people like KAMALA HARRIS, born in California to parents who had emigrated from Jamaica and India; or MARCO RUBIO, born in Florida to parents who had emigrated from Cuba; or Nikki Haley, born in South Carolina to parents who had emigrated from the Punjab region of India; or General and former Secretary of State Colin Powell, born in New York to parents who had emigrated from Jamaica?

Where would American sports be without people like figure skater Michelle Kwan, born in California to parents who had emigrated from Hong Kong; or baseball legend Alex Rodriguez, born in Manhattan to parents who had emigrated from the Dominican Republic?

Where would American acting be without people like Renee Zellweger, born in Texas to parents who had emigrated from Switzerland and Norway; or Bruce Lee, born in California to parents who had emigrated from Hong Kong and Shanghai?

Where would American business be without people like ketchup magnate Henry Heinz, born in Pittsburgh to parents who had emigrated from Germany; or outdoor gear entrepreneur Eddie Bauer, born in Washington State to parents who had emigrated from Russia; or cosmetics titan Estee Lauder,

born in Queens to parents who had emigrated from Hungary and Slovakia; or entertainment executive David Geffen, born in Brooklyn to parents who had emigrated from Mandatory Palestine?

Where would American music be without people like Frank Sinatra, born in New York to Italian immigrants; or George Gershwin, the child of Russian immigrants?

All of these Americans were born here to immigrant parents, some of whose immigration status was unclear at the time of their births and some of whose parents were clearly undocumented. And that is the point of birthright citizenship. When America is at its best, the status of our parents doesn't limit our ability to contribute to our community, and that is part of the genius of our Nation.

I believe birthright citizenship—put into our Constitution in the 1860s to rectify the sin of slavery and the egregious Dred Scott decision—has really been a blessing to our country, and it has actually inspired a global movement, especially among nations in the Americas, to guarantee citizenship to all born within their borders.

There are slightly more than three dozen nations in the world that guarantee birthright citizenship, predominantly in the Americas. And why did it catch hold in the Americas? We called ourselves the New World. That was a phrase we often kind of used for the United States and the Americas to contrast it with an old world—mostly nations in Europe—that tended to lock you in a social status based on who your parents were. That was a reality that was pretty common when the English arrived in Jamestown in 1607 or at Plymouth Rock in 1619.

As Europeans and others were coming to the United States before we declared our independence in 1776, it was fairly common for people to be locked into the status to which they were born, and that is why so many of our ancestors wanted to come to the United States—because they would not be locked into a social status based upon their parents' social status or have to look into a future where their own kids and grandkids and great-grandkids would be locked into a status. So the United States, in the 14th Amendment, decided to embrace a definitively new-world concept that, if you are born in this country, you are a U.S. citizen. It doesn't matter who your parents are, and you have the same opportunities and responsibilities as anyone born in this country. It is part of the genius of this country.

I could tell thousands of stories like the ones that I have shared. I plan to speak more on this topic in the months to come because I am going to vigorously defend the constitutional principle of American birthright citizenship against any who would try to dilute it or tear it down.

With that, I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Tennessee.

LEGISLATIVE ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Mrs. BLACKBURN. Mr. President, last week I joined one-third of this Chamber in taking the oath of office so that we could start a new term of Congress and celebrate what it means to be able to say: This is our new start. We have got 2 years. Let's see what we are going to do with this Congress.

While taking that oath to support and to defend the Constitution and to defend our freedoms, I really felt and thought about what an honor it is to represent the people of the great State of Tennessee.

Over the last 6 years, I have fought vigorously to bring the voice of the people of Tennessee to this Chamber to make certain that their thoughts and their wishes and their values were brought forward and that we made the effort to defend faith, family, freedom, hope, and opportunity, not only for Tennesseans but for all Americans.

I will tell you, we were able to get so much done over the last 6 years. Much of it was done by working with colleagues across the aisle, by taking these great ideas from Tennessee, bringing them here, and saying: How do we distill this so that it becomes a policy that is going to positively impact and make better the lives of Tennesseans and all Americans?

In Tennessee, we have a lot of veterans, and there are two provisions that I was able to shepherd through and get signed into law. One is the VA Veteran Caregivers Act. And, of course, as our veterans have returned from wars, as caregivers from their families have stepped up to assist them, there were some—basically, some gaps that needed to be filled in. We did that.

We also passed legislation, Strengthening VA Cybersecurity Act. I was so pleased that that got signed into law to make certain that the identities and the healthcare information, the benefit information of our veterans, is going to be protected. In Tennessee, we have a big military presence. Fort Campbell primarily sits in Tennessee. We have the Naval station over in Millington, right outside of Memphis. We have Oak Ridge National Lab. The Air Force has the Arnold Engineering Development in Tullahoma.

And I was successful in pushing forward to end President Biden's COVID mandate—COVID vaccine mandate—on our military communities.

In addition to achieving that, every year, Mr. President, you and I have worked tirelessly together to make certain that our military assets—our National Guard, our Active Duty—were well covered in the NDAA.

There has also been a foreign policy issue, a couple of them, that I have paid attention to. One is strengthening our ties with Israel and standing with our allies like Taiwan and assisting them as we stand up to what I call the "axis of evil"—Russia, China, Iran, and North Korea.

One of the bipartisan measures that I brought forward after China took con-

trol of Hong Kong was to make certain that we supported internet freedom and that we blocked the export of crowd-control equipment to China and China-controlled Hong Kong and barred the FAA from buying drones from the U.S. adversaries. These provisions became law, and they strengthened our national security.

We also fought to end the modern-day slavery of human trafficking, especially with my bipartisan REPORT Act and the Project Safe Childhood Act. Both of those were signed into law last year; and standing up for women with the Speak Out Act—Senator GILLIBRAND and I worked diligently on that—and the Women's Suffrage Centennial Commemorative Coin Act. And also, Senator BALDWIN and I just got across the finish line the Women's Suffrage National Monument Location Act. I will tell you, so many people were absolutely shocked to find out that there has never been a monument in this city that recognized women's suffrage.

We have also worked to confirm judges to the Federal bench, including Justice Amy Coney Barrett. Of course, we all know that that led to the overturning of the Roe decision and the Chevron decision—two decisions that will impact our Nation.

We worked with the first Trump administration to protect life and to bar Federal funds from going to Planned Parenthood.

And, Mr. President, you and I have put endless hours into making certain that we secured relief for communities in Tennessee and across the southeast that have been adversely impacted by Hurricane Helene. There is so much more that we have done.

But we have turned the page now, and we are looking at how do we use these 2 years, this 119th Congress that is in front of us.

We know that the American people have spoken. At the very top of their list is securing that southern border—getting that border under control, ending illegal entry into this country. The American people know, you cannot have—you will never have—national security without a secure border.

Every law enforcement officer I talk with in Tennessee says we can't get our arms around gangs, drug trafficking, sex trafficking, and crime in our communities until that southern border is secured. So legislation that I am working diligently on to get passed is my CLEAR Act, which many of our colleagues in this Chamber have heard me talk about for years. Basically, this codifies the 287(g) Program. It would ensure that our State and local law enforcement officials can apprehend and detain criminal illegal aliens and make certain that ICE deports them and that ICE reimburses that local law enforcement agency.

With all the harm that has been caused by sanctuary cities, this legislation would end Federal funds going into those entities. It should be a top priority of this Congress.

We also need to lower costs and make life more affordable. We all know about the economy, taxes, inflation, affordability—another of the top issues for the American people. And they want us to hold this government accountable for what they have done to push inflation forward.

It means that we need to make permanent the 2017 Trump tax cuts. That created the strongest economy in decades, and it truly spurred new investment in Tennessee and across the country.

It also means slashing this out-of-control spending and making certain that we rein in this lawless bureaucracy that makes life worse for so many Tennesseans and Americans.

President Trump is tackling this problem. He is doing it with the Department of Government Efficiency, or DOGE, which will be led by Elon Musk and Vivek Ramaswamy.

With my DOGE Acts, Congress can play a crucial role in ensuring their reforms last beyond the Trump administration.

You know, the American people want us to change how the Federal Government does business, get the spending under control, and get rid of the bloat that is in the Federal Government.

I think we should concentrate on this to the point that we "DOGE" every single Federal Agency and turn "DOGE" into a verb, a term of action.

Another goal at the top of the agenda—and this is a goal that Senator BLUMENTHAL and I share. We have now worked 4 years on holding Big Tech accountable with the Kids Online Safety Act and ensuring that parents have the tools they need to protect their children in the virtual space.

This is just a sample of all the work that is in front of us. But the list of things we can do to empower American workers and taxpayers and businesses and families and farmers goes on and on.

I am looking forward to a new administration as we aggressively tackle these issues: expanding access to quality healthcare, especially for our vets and especially in rural America; defending female athletes in women sports from the radical left's agenda and celebrating the accomplishment of female athletes. We should pass my American Girls in Sports Day on October 10 of each and every year and celebrate our female athletes; we should end the surge of violent crime in cities across this country; and when it comes to supporting Tennessee's creative community with the American Music Tourism Act, the No FAKES Act, which is AI protections, and the HTS Act for our recording artists. Each and every one of these have a place on our agenda for the 119th Congress.

Before we can do any of this, we need to make certain that we confirm each of President Trump's nominees, make certain that he has his team in place, and that his Cabinet is in place so that they can carry out the mandate that

was sent by the American people, which is: No more business as usual; secure the border; make certain that we get the cost of living down, we get inflation down; expand and extend those tax cuts; and be certain that, once again, our allies know they are an ally and our enemies fear us on the global stage.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. SCHMITT). Without objection, it is so ordered.

The Senator from Oklahoma.

DEPARTMENT OF GOVERNMENT EFFICIENCY

Mr. LANKFORD. Mr. President, I don't even know how many times I have come to the floor of this Senate to be able to talk about government efficiency. It is not a shock for me to be able to come back here again today and to say: Let's talk about this. I don't know a single one of the great 4 million Oklahomans that if I went to their house today, knocked on their door, and said: Is the Federal Government the most efficient body in the country, that they would say yes.

This should not be a partisan issue that government should be more efficient. Every single dollar that is spent was taken from an American in tax dollars or was borrowed so that their children would have to pay for it. This should be a straightforward issue.

Every single year I put out a "Federal Fumble Report," and I will put one out in a month or so. And when we release that report, everyone nods their heads and says: Yes, those are areas of inefficiency. And year after year, I highlight things like Federal tax dollars that were spent paying for a drag show in Ecuador.

If the nice folks in Ecuador want to have drag shows, why are my folks in Oklahoma being forced to pay for them?

I highlighted things like we did a research study in Ghana to be able to determine whether helmets made people on bikes in Ghana safer. By the way, I could go ahead and tell you that today without spending any Federal tax dollars. Yes, they will make it safer, but why were the folks in Oklahoma being forced pay for the study in Ghana to be able to study head injuries on folks on bikes and whether they should wear a helmet.

The folks in Oklahoma paid for a study that came out as a book that was analyzing humans and chimpanzees in Sierra Leone and the effects of climate change on them. Again, I am sure there are nice folks in Sierra Leone that are very interested in that. Why are my folks in Oklahoma being forced to pay for that?

I could go one after another after another on things that we have studied

over the years, but let me tell you what happens. When we highlight these things and a little sunshine hits them, suddenly people start backing up, and Agencies stop funding some of these things that everyone nodded their head and said: Where did that crazy thing come from?

So because of the reports that we put out, we are not paying for helmet studies in Ghana anymore. We are not paying for drag shows in Ecuador anymore. We are no longer paying for the study on the Russian wine industry that Americans used to pay for. We are no longer funding the 3D puppets that we once paid for. We have been able to put sunshine on those things, and those things have stopped.

The challenge is, how do we actually set this into a process so that we are not having to play Whac-A-Mole all the time to be able to take down one after another after another.

The people of my State, they don't want to pay for those things. They want to pay for border security and they want to pay for good schools and they want to have good roads. They want to have lower gas prices. Those are the things that they want.

So how do we actually get to that? Well, I could outline right now \$170 billion in wasteful spending in the Federal Government just today, simple things that most Americans would agree on. We spend \$8 billion a year just for Federal buildings to lease them or to do maintenance for them—\$8 billion a year. Currently, most of those buildings, because we have so many Federal employees that are teleworking, most of those buildings are 25 percent full. We are spending \$8 billion a year on buildings that are mostly empty. Most businesses in America would say that is a waste of money. I am going to find a way to do that less, except the Federal Government doesn't do that. We just continue to be able to lease empty office space and maintain empty office space.

That should not be a partisan issue. That should be an issue everybody in this body looks at and says: There is something that we could do to be able to make this better. Let's be more efficient.

Starting with the new Trump administration, they have launched a new initiative that folks have made fun of, DOGE, the Department of Government Efficiency. And I am fascinated by the number of people that step out and they make fun of this initiative, to say: This Department of Government Efficiency—and then I ask them the simple question: Do you know a way the government could be more efficient? And people will say: Well, yeah, should we do that? Yes is the answer.

So the very simple statement is: If we find duplication in government, why don't we highlight it and then eliminate it? If we find areas where there are tax regulations that actually don't make sense that actually slow the economy down rather than actu-

ally encourage economic development in the country, why don't we fix that? If we find areas of permitting, where permitting actually prevents government growth rather than accelerates the growth of our economy, why don't we go after that?

Where there is waste in Agencies, where there are empty Federal buildings, where there are Federal projects that really should be done by the State or local government, why don't we make those changes?

That is what this whole concept is about—the Department of Government Efficiency—is to actually create a mechanism to say: Let's stop talking about it and highlighting it a little bit at a time. Let's actually work to be able to make this better in the days ahead.

I am very pleased that a whole group of colleagues are passionate about this as well. They are coming to the floor today to be able to highlight some of these areas of inefficiency and to say: Yes, absolutely. I see it as well.

Because while I do "Federal Fumbles" every single year, I continue to also say to all of my colleagues: We should not be the only office doing this, and thankfully we are not. There are multiple offices that their staff are also looking for areas of government efficiency. And for the first time in a long time, we have built enough momentum to say: Let's get these done. Let's not just show them so we embarrass Agencies not to do it next year; let's actually set a process in place.

So today I have invited multiple colleagues, including my colleague sitting at the dais today, to be able to find a moment in their very busy schedules to be able to come and highlight areas where the government can be more efficient, where we can be more effective at protecting taxpayer dollars, and where we can stop throwing American's dollars out the door for things that everyone would recognize as wasteful.

When we have almost \$2 trillion in debt, it is definitely the moment for us to say: Let's work on being even more efficient in the days ahead because we desperately need that.

So, with that, I yield the floor to my colleague from West Virginia who has been very outspoken in trying to be able to protect taxpayer dollars in West Virginia and for the Nation and to try to make ways to make this more effective in the days ahead.

I yield the floor.

Mrs. CAPITO. I want to thank the Senator from Oklahoma for his leadership on this. We are just getting started here. So I am very excited, as I know all of us are, to embark on a serious mission of not just government waste but pulling in our government spending to make it make sense and more toward a balanced budget.

CALIFORNIA WILDFIRES

Mr. President, before I begin, I would like to say a few words about the tragedy unfolding on the west coast. I

know many of us have been looking at the television and watching the structure fires and heard from friends who have children there or are themselves there, and I think it is just unimaginable. So I just want to let them know in California that we are praying for them and their families, for their safety, and that hopefully this will all come under control sooner than later.

But I have seen this on the TV, and I would say it from this podium, that I urge all residents, if you are told to evacuate, don't waste any time. It sounds like quick and fast evacuations are smart and are being advised. So please be super careful as we move through this tragedy.

You know, Americans are resilient people, but the Californians and the Los Angelenos are being asked for a lot right now, so it is really tough.

DEPARTMENT OF GOVERNMENT EFFICIENCY

Mr. President, so today I am going to speak about an issue that weighs heavily on the American worker and taxpayer, and this is the waste, fraud, and abuse rampant in our Federal Government. When I say "heavy," I mean really heavy, really heavy, because billions of hard-earned taxpayer dollars are at stake here.

Under President Biden, wasteful government spending has just spiraled out of control, harming our hard-working Americans and their livelihood. Each misspent dollar represents a missed opportunity for our neighbors, our communities, our families.

But that is going to end with this incoming administration and, I think, the control of the House and the Senate. In the 119th Congress, Federal spending comes with a promissory note of accountability to the American people. No more spendthrift bureaucrats getting out of line. No more blank checks or wild excesses. The American people have had enough and rightfully so. They are ready for the government to work for them.

Republicans are proud to have the Department of Government Efficiency, better known as DOGE. I remember I probably heard DOGE, what, about a month ago? I am wondering, What is this? I know that Elon and Vivek are both very busy men. So I want to thank them especially for conceiving this idea and dedicating their time and energy and gathering other folks' help to eliminating government waste.

Like a one-two punch, Congress and the DOGE Commission will identify and address the most flagrant abuses of the Federal bureaucracy. DOGE will provide the ideas from these two men, and Congress will bring the constitutional oversight and legislative authority.

We plan to hit the ground running, really, on day one of the Trump administration, to take aim at the worst excesses left over.

When it comes to wasteful government spending in the jurisdiction of my committee, which is the Environment and Public Works Committee—I

am very thrilled, as of yesterday's meeting, to become the new chairman there—look no further than the groundwork we laid last year through the investigations of my committee. We worked on looking at the spending in the massive, bloated, ill-conceived Inflation Reduction Act. The so-called IRA, which was a bill passed with only Democrat votes, authorized billions of dollars in new handouts from EPA to the Democrat-aligned groups.

Recently, an EPA employee actually admitted that its current grant-making process—that means between now and January 20, when President Trump takes over—he equated it to being akin to "throwing gold bars off the Titanic." That should send chills to every American taxpayer—"throwing gold bars off the Titanic." We have reached unprecedented levels of waste, fraud, and abuse.

The American people rejected this kind of reckless governance in November through their voice at the ballot box. Bureaucrats are desperately—right now, as we speak—writing checks because come January 20, they know President Trump will take the checkbook away and ask for accountability.

My committee already issued a clear warning to the EPA in a letter in December. We demanded to know who is getting these gold bars that are being thrown off the Titanic and in what amounts. Most importantly, we want a clear paper trail so the bureaucrats at the EPA can't bury wasteful spending on the way out the door.

The committee has already uncovered handouts to groups that are anti-American, anti-Semitic, anti-Israel, anti-police, and anti-border security. That is it—not a dollar more. For example, of the \$3 billion of the IRA dedicated to the new environmental and climate justice block grant program through the IRA, the EPA announced over the last several months that it would give \$50 million to Climate Justice Alliance, \$50 million to the New York Immigration Coalition, and \$100 million to the NDN Collective. The Climate Justice Alliance promotes wildly anti-Semitic rhetoric. The New York Immigration Coalition advocates for radical open border policies. Most egregiously—remember, this is the one getting \$100 million—the NDN Collective goes as far as to call America an evil country.

Let me be clear. These groups should not and will not receive one dime of taxpayer dollars. The American people should be outraged, as I am—I think you can tell my voice is getting a little bit louder here—at the abuse of their tax dollars. These funds were meant to benefit them, not to prop up radical political groups or line the pockets of bureaucrats with questionable priorities. Taxpayer dollars should never go to organizations that hate America or our values. It is pretty simple when you put it like that.

To those who say that there is no alternative, that government is and al-

ways will be wasteful, I say look to the State of West Virginia. My home State consistently generates large budget surpluses, demonstrating that we can protect our values and our interests without recklessly spending the taxpayers' hard-earned dollars.

I think it is time to bring some good old West Virginia thrift to the bureaucracy in Washington, DC. Many of our States are operating under the same parameters. With the President, the House, the Senate, and the DOGE Commission all on the same page, working together, we are poised to do just that. If we are to spend taxpayers' dollars, I do not believe there is an article I role for unlimited government spending; it must be in the furtherance of the benefit of our Nation. The American taxpayers deserve a government that respects their hard-earned dollars.

The relationship between the government and its citizens has been frayed by years of neglect, waste, and distrust. Mending this relationship will not happen overnight. It is a long process. It is a process Republicans are prepared to take, to embrace, and undertake. We will end the reckless spending spree, we will put an end to bureaucratic waste, and we will aim to ensure that every dollar that leaves the Federal Treasury is used in service to the American people. This is our commitment to rebuild trust, to prioritize the needs of the people, and to ensure that the government serves them, not the other way around.

Thank you, my fellow Senator. I appreciate it, and I look forward to working with all of us here on this very important issue.

Mr. LANKFORD. I am especially grateful for all the work you have done.

Mr. President, I would like to introduce a fellow colleague, Senator JONI ERNST from Iowa. She is the founder of the DOGE Caucus and has been the one who has been very passionate about trying to find the waste in government. I ask that she be recognized to speak.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Iowa.

Ms. ERNST. Mr. President, thank you to my colleague from Oklahoma, Senator JAMES LANKFORD, for arranging today's event.

Mr. President, a winter storm shut down the Nation's Capital this week, but did anyone notice? Essential government employees showed up to do their jobs while the others enjoyed days off.

My telework report revealed that just 6 percent of workers report in-person full time, and these bureaucrats are doing anything but working. This is sadly just more business as usual. However, it is a fitting prelude to a much bigger storm that is headed this way that will sweep over this city and forever alter the way it operates. I am, of course, talking about the Department of Government Efficiency, or DOGE.

Headed up by Elon Musk and Vivek Ramaswamy, DOGE is putting Washington on notice. Henceforward, every cent being spent will now be scrutinized. All regulations must be justified and continually rejustified using data and outcomes, not just ideology. And the government works for the people, not the other way around.

To support these efforts, I am honored to be chairing the Senate DOGE Caucus and working to downsize the government, which is why my colleagues and I stand here today. For that, I again want to thank Senator LANKFORD, a founding member of the caucus, author of his "Federal Fumbles," and a true hero to taxpayers, for organizing today's discussion.

It is a rare occasion for this many Senators to assemble on the Senate floor to call for spending cuts. In fact, since my fellow Iowans sent me to the Senate 10 years ago to make the porkers squeal, it has been a very, very lonely fight.

In this era of political polarization, Democrats and Republicans still come together in agreement over one issue: living high off the hog. When faced with proposals to trim the fat from Washington's budget, Members of Congress from both parties act like Goldilocks—it is always too little or too big and never just right. But the real "make-believe" of this fairytale is that it is impossible to cut spending without causing pain.

Most Americans aren't even benefiting in any meaningful way from the hundreds of billions of dollars hidden in our Federal budget. In fact, Washington's out-of-control spending has been fanning the flames of inflation over the past 4 years, increasing everyday costs for families all across the country.

There is no time to wait for DOGE to get to work because even being a lame-duck isn't slowing down Biden's reckless spending. Biden's binge-buying bureaucrats are being ordered to work overtime, including weekends, to get billions of dollars out the door as quickly as possible before President-elect Trump takes office.

At the same time, the outgoing administration is cutting collective bargaining deals with government employee unions, giving bureaucrats the right to stay home from work until—get this—2029—conveniently after President Trump's term. If Federal employees don't want to come back to work, well, you know what, DOGE and I are happy to make that dream come true.

My New Year's resolution is to put Washington back to work and on a diet. This week, I am reintroducing my bills to drain the swamp by relocating Federal Agencies and bureaucrats outside Washington. I am also putting forward a plan with \$2 trillion in potential savings.

Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that this letter be printed in the RECORD.

UNITED STATES SENATE,

Washington, DC, November 25, 2024.

Mr. ELON MUSK and Mr. VIVEK RAMASWAMY
Co-Chairmen, Department of Government Efficiency.

DEAR MR. MUSK AND MR. RAMASWAMY: Thank you for stepping up to take on the challenge of saving taxpayers from Washington's out-of-control spending that put our nation \$36 trillion in debt. Your mission could not be more urgent, and there's no team better suited to lead the effort.

My fellow Iowans sent me to the Senate ten years ago to make the porkers squeal. It's been a very lonely fight. In this era of political polarization, Democrats and Republicans always come together in agreement over one issue: living high off the hog.

When faced with proposals to trim the fat from Washington's budget, members of Congress from both parties act like Goldilocks. It's too little or too big, always too hard, and never just right. But the real "make-believe" of this fairy tale is that it's impossible to reduce Washington's budget without causing pain. Most Americans aren't even benefitting in any meaningful way from hundreds of billions of dollars being wasted.

While you're seeking "super high-IQ small-government revolutionaries" for "unglamorous cost-cutting," all that's really needed is a little common sense. If you can't find waste in Washington, there can only be one reason: you didn't look.

With \$3 billion of interest being added to our national debt every day, the longer we delay tackling the problem, the further away the finish line gets.

To give you a head start, here are a trillion dollars' worth of ideas for trimming the fat and reducing red ink:

VACANT BUILDINGS

Maintaining and leasing government office buildings costs \$8 billion every year. Another \$7.7 billion is spent for the energy to keep them running. Yet, with the federal workforce still largely working from home, not a single headquarters of a major government agency or department in the nation's capital is even half full. Billions more are being spent buying brand new furnishings for the abandoned offices. The government also owns 7,697 vacant buildings and another 2,265 that are partially empty. An additional \$14 million is being spent leasing underutilized space and nearly \$1 million more for its maintenance. Consolidating office space reduces costs and auctioning off unneeded properties brings in revenues.

AUDIT THE IRS

Americans are paying the salaries and benefits for thousands of federal employees who aren't paying their own taxes. I audited the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) and found more than 5,800 employees and contractors of the tax collection agency owe almost \$50 million. As a result, many are now in payment plans, but 860 still haven't paid their overdue taxes. Tax evasion isn't just a problem at the IRS either. Government-wide, there are nearly 150,000 tax cheats owing \$1.5 billion in unpaid taxes.

BIDEN'S BILLION DOLLAR BOONDOGGLES

President Biden's so-called infrastructure program provided \$7.5 billion to build a nationwide network of electric vehicle (EV) charging stations and \$42 billion to expand broadband. Three years later, just 17 EV stations are completed and not a single person—not one—has been connected to the internet yet. It's time to pull the plug.

The Biden administration also paid hundreds of billions of COVID relief dollars to fraudsters. A U.S. attorney calls it "the biggest fraud in a generation." Some swindlers who uploaded pictures of Barbie dolls as

photo identification on the applications were even approved to receive money. But the Biden administration is being lax recollecting the cash and time is running out. The Special Inspector General for Pandemic Recovery investigating the grift expires in March, unless Congress extends its mission until every penny is returned.

GOLDEN STATE GRAVY TRAINS TAKING TAXPAYERS FOR A RIDE

Just three California gravity trains are on track to burn through billions of dollars:

The California High-Speed Train is costing about \$1.8 million a day to build and won't be completed for another decade. The current cost estimate to complete the project is \$128 billion—nearly \$100 billion more than the original price tag! President Trump previously canceled federal funding for the project, but President Biden restored the money.

The price tag of Nancy Pelosi's six-mile subway extension from San Francisco to Silicon Valley is \$9.3 billion, more than \$1.5 billion per mile.

The 1.3-mile extension of San Francisco's Caltrain rail service is one of the costliest transit projects in the world with a price tag of \$6.7 billion, or \$5.15 billion per mile.

Going a billion dollars over budget isn't a rounding error, it's a train wreck.

CHRISTMAS IN SEPTEMBER

In Washington, Christmas comes in September when binge buying bureaucrats go hog wild fulfilling their own wish lists. That's because the federal government's authority to spend money left over at the end of a fiscal year expires at midnight on September 30. In the rush to use it before they lose it, \$53 billion was recently spent in a single week! The September spending sprees of the past included impulse purchases on \$4.6 million of lobster tail and crab and \$2.1 million for games and toys, including nearly \$12,000 for a foosball table. For the sake of taxpayers, DOGE needs to be the Grinch.

WELFARE FOR POLITICIANS

The Presidential Election Campaign Fund provides welfare checks for politicians with presidential aspirations. It hasn't supported a winning candidate in two decades. This year the program paid out more than \$1 million to Mike Pence's campaign and \$380,000 to Green Party candidate Jill Stein. More than \$16.6 million is currently available for funding the future aspirations of fringe candidates destined for failure.

BAD PENNIES

The government is losing money making money, paying more than three cents to produce a penny and more than 11 cents for a nickel. That makes no cents when simply changing the composition of the coins could save more than \$50 million a year.

TRILLION DOLLAR SECRET SLUSH FUNDS

This past year, Biden's bureaucrats claimed the Department of Veterans Affairs and the Small Business Administration ran out of money needed to assist veterans and pay for emergency disaster recovery efforts. Yet, Washington always finds money when it comes to paying for pet projects, and some accounts are flush with cash. There's still billions of dollars of unspent COVID relief dollars, for example. Most of us feel lucky when we find a \$20 bill in our pocket or some change in the couch. Well, Washington ended the last fiscal year with trillions of dollars left unspent, \$1.6 trillion of which isn't even obligated for any specific purpose yet. With trillions of dollars stashed away in secret slush funds, why is Washington borrowing any more money?

BOGUS BONUSES

Federal employees and government contractors are being rewarded with financial

bonuses for poor performance resulting in delays and cost overruns.

The Pentagon is paying millions of dollars in unearned bonuses, including \$10.6 million to a contractor that created "a life and safety concern" for airmen by failing to provide the necessary parts for jets.

The VA mispent \$10.8 million on bonuses for the department's senior execs from the *PACT Act*, passed to care for veterans exposed to toxic substances. As a result of the VA's mismanagement, the program went bankrupt, forcing Congress to pass an emergency bailout bill.

NASA is paying out-of-this-world bonuses totaling more than \$500 million to the contractors of the next manned moon mission, which is billions of dollars over budget and years behind schedule as a result of poor performance. Houston, we have a problem. Taxpayers were promised the moon but are instead getting stuck with a "moondoggle."

SILLY SCIENCE

Remember when America could actually land a man on the moon? Most Americans weren't even born when the last astronaut stepped foot on the moon. Today, we're spending billions on science and NASA can't even return our astronauts trapped on the International Space Station to Earth. American science is unmatched. We transformed the world with the creation of the internet, and SpaceX is aiming beyond the moon. The question is what are we learning from the billions of taxpayer dollars Washington is spending on research and development?

The National Science Foundation is discovering the answers to questions like:

How fast can a shrimp run on a treadmill? (66 feet per minute)

Where does it hurt the most to be stung by a bee? (in the nostril)

What were viewers' facial reactions to the Trump/Clinton presidential debate? (men looked angry and women appeared sad, especially when Clinton spoke)

Which tastes better, water from a bottle or out of the toilet? (both were rated about the same)

Does recycling make men seem less manly? (yes)

How long does it take for a panda to poop? (about 12 seconds)

What word are Republican members of Congress more likely to tweet than Democrats? (freedom)

Can elephants solve puzzles? (yes)

Not to be outdone, the National Institutes of Health spent tax dollars researching:

To live a longer, healthier life, what political party should you join? (Republican)

Are pampered cats less likely to poop outside the litterbox? (yes)

Is pizza as addictive as drugs? (yes)

Do pigeons gamble? (you bet)

Does this sour cream and onion flavored potato chip look like Elvis? (yes, but judge for yourself)

These might be fun to ask contestants on a game show, but the real question is: why are taxpayers supporting any of these studies?

UNEMPLOYMENT FOR MILLIONAIRES

Nearly 15,000 millionaires collect \$213.3 million in unemployment payments in a single year. An old regulation left over from the Great Society-era requires the benefits be made available when someone loses a job, even if the recipient is still making a million dollars or more in other income. Most of the hardworking Americans picking up the costs aren't bringing home anywhere near that amount, even if they're working two jobs. The million-dollar question is: why is Washington forcing middle class Americans to finance the lifestyles of jobless millionaires?

GOVERNMENT SWAG

Federal agencies collectively spend \$1.5 billion every year on public relations and prop-

aganda. This includes koozies, key chains, coloring books, snugglies, and costumed mascots. Let's bag the swag.

EVERY CLOUD HAS A SILVER LINING

Consolidating agencies' cloud computing software licenses could save \$750 million every year.

CHINA'S MAD SCIENTISTS

The entire world knows Dr. Fauci funded risky research on coronaviruses in China's Wuhan Institute of Virology with taxpayer dollars. My investigations discovered millions more sent to other institutions and labs in the communist country for secretive risky research.

UNITED NATIONS OVERPAYMENTS

The United Nations (U.N.) charges the U.S. higher membership dues than any other country and then Washington voluntarily contributes \$15 billion in additional contributions. U.N. staff helped plan and execute Hamas' terrorist attack on Israel in which American citizens were murdered and taken hostage. And a 2024 U.N. migrant plan promotes cash handouts for migrants to cover travel expenses and includes a map with a red line leading right to the U.S. border. Our tax dollars to the U.N. are subsidizing threats to our own national security!

DEFENCELESS SPENDING

It's time to declare war on waste at Department of Defense (DoD). The Pentagon has never passed an audit and is unable to fully account for its budget. By its own estimates, DoD wastes \$125 billion on bloated bureaucracy and inefficiency. DoD could save \$527 million just by streamlining the duplication and unnecessary overlap within its storage and distribution centers. DoD overpayments are legendary and the department is still overpaying nearly \$1 million for spare parts. This includes a nearly 8,000 percent mark-up for a soap dispenser than the shelf price and \$1,220 for a coffee cup.

REMOVE INELIGIBLE RECIPIENTS OF FEDERAL EMPLOYEES HEALTH BENEFITS

The Federal Employees Health Benefits program is spending almost \$1 billion a year paying the bills of individuals who aren't even eligible for the coverage. Over 12 years, the program covered more than \$100,000 in claims for just two ineligible enrollees.

PAID TO DO NOTHING

While millions of Americans are working two or more jobs to make ends meet, some federal employees aren't working at all. Dozens of Department of Energy employees with nothing to do spend the workday napping or playing chess, dominoes, and cards. Hundreds of other federal employees spend years with no work assignments while on paid administrative leave, costing more than \$31 million in salary payments a year. Congress passed a law to fix this problem years ago, but it's still not enacted. Put them to work or send them home for good!

STOP GIVING AWAY THE FARM

Your call for budget cutting crusaders asks for individuals willing to work 80+ hours a week. Those type of hours aren't unusual for our nation's farmers and ranchers. No one works harder and every single American depends on the fruits of their labors. So nothing bugs me more than when the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) gives away farm aid to pay for pet projects, like subsidizing cricket farms or teaching pigs to play video games, that do nothing to support agriculture.

SNAP BACK INACCURATE SNAP PAYMENTS

Nearly \$1 billion of ineligible Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits are being paid *every month*,

according to USDA's own estimates. Tens of thousands of recipients enrolled in the program do not even qualify for the assistance and double dippers are getting second helpings from multiple states. Fixing these bureaucratic blunders would save more than \$10 billion a year.

REDUCING DUPLICATION AND IMPROVING PERFORMANCE

More than \$200 billion in financial benefits could be achieved by implementing the thousands of outstanding recommendations made by Congress' nonpartisan watchdog agency, the Government Accountability Office. We may not agree with every suggestion, but GAO always puts taxpayers' best interest first.

REQUIRE COMMONSENSE PROJECT MANAGEMENT PRINCIPLES

For every \$1 billion Washington spends, \$102 million is wasted as projects go over budget, are delayed, or fail to meet projected goals. Implementing the most basic management systems—like establishing scopes and goals—could have saved taxpayers \$688.5 billion from the \$6.75 trillion the federal government spent this past year.

This is by no means an exhaustive list, and I will be providing many more recommendations soon. My team and I are ready to help you make some prime cuts.

Sincerely,

JONI K. ERNST,
United States Senator.

Ms. ERNST. Mr. President, my proposal includes selling off thousands of vacant and underutilized buildings; auditing the IRS to fire the thousands of employees who owe tens of millions of dollars in unpaid taxes; pulling the plug on Biden's billion-dollar boondoggles for gravy trains that never leave the station and electric vehicle stations that aren't charging up anything but debt; bagging the swag and propaganda promoting government programs and Agencies at a cost of \$1.5 billion a year; and changing the composition of coins so we stop losing money making money. In fact, there is no better example of the cost of government inefficiency. Washington spends 3 cents to produce a penny and 11 cents to produce a nickel. That makes no sense. A penny here, a nickel there—eventually, these examples all add up to millions, billions, and eventually, trillions.

The bottom line is that if you can't find waste in Washington, there can only be one reason: You didn't look.

Well, folks, I spent the last decade looking while just about everyone else seems to have been looking the other way—until now. While this is a personal issue for me, it should not be a partisan issue. After all, every American benefits from a more efficient government, and everyone loses when tax dollars are wasted.

I have worked across the aisle on a number of issues to make Washington more transparent and accountable, so I would invite anyone in this body and everyone who may be watching at home who has ideas to join this conversation and our movement because DOGE is inevitable.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. MULLIN). The Senator from Nebraska.

Mr. RICKETTS. Mr. President, I rise today to compliment my esteemed colleague from Iowa, who is the founding member of the DOGE Caucus, as well as Elon Musk and Vivek Ramaswamy for their effort to be able to create the Department of Government Efficiency.

This is something that is near and dear to my heart because as Governor of Nebraska, this is what we did. We focused on how we could drive efficiency through our State operations.

Now, if you want to think about the big argument between Republicans and Democrats on a really macro scale—what it is—it comes down to what should government properly do. What should be the size and scope of government? Well, there are actually things we agree that government should do between Republicans and Democrats; and for those things, we should do them really, really well. All too often, government fails because it is not properly managed, because we don't do a good job; and when we don't do a good job, we end up wasting taxpayers' dollars.

As the Governor of Nebraska, this is one of the things I focused on to be able to do a better job on—take my private sector experiences, in coming from the business world, and applying them to the running of State government. We showed that the things you do in the private sector will work in running the public sector as well.

In the State of Nebraska, we implemented Lean Six Sigma. Lean Six Sigma is a process improvement methodology. There are a number of them out there, and this is the one we chose. What it does is you break down an operation; you count what the steps are and what the steps, you know, should be; you get the frontline people engaged—the people actually doing the work involved in looking at those steps; and see if you can cut the waste in the number of steps and everything else so that you can make the process more efficient. That is how you can do a better job of actually providing services while reducing costs at the same time.

That is the thing. Every time you get to government, they say: Oh, we want to cut expenses, blah, blah, blah. Oh, you are going to cut services.

No. No. No.

In the private sector, you can't go to your customers and say: Well, I am going to reduce your prices, but I am going to also reduce your service, because your customers will go somewhere else. It doesn't work that way. So the private sector figures out how to do a better job of providing services while reducing their expenses. We can do the same thing in government. In the private sector, you have competition that is going to drive inefficient businesses out. In the government sector, it is going to require people like Elon, Vivek, and the Senators here in this room to be able to drive that through our government Agencies to get that efficiency.

I want to talk a little bit about what we did, because it was very effective. I mentioned that you measure the steps. You count how many steps there are, and see where the overlaps are. One area we did it was in air construction permits. We had 190 steps that it took to issue that permit. We cut that down to 22 steps. By doing that—sorry. It was 110 steps that we cut down to 22. By doing that, we cut it down from 190 days to be able to issue that permit to 65 days. Now, we can't change any of the environmental regulations. That was just a better job of issuing those permits. And, when you free up your teammates' time because they are not wasting time on all those extra steps, they can do more work—they are more productive—and can focus on things that are going to be more important—for example, more difficult permits.

We used this in a variety of ways, and we showed lots of improvement. For example, in our economic assistance line in August of 2014, it was taking about 23 minutes to answer that phone call. We set a goal of setting 5 minutes or less to answer those phone calls for those people who were calling in seeking our assistance. We hit that goal all the way up until the pandemic.

It was taking us 40 days to issue SNAP applications—food stamps. Again, if you are one of those families in need and it is taking 40 days to process that application, what is that saying about how we think about it? We set a goal of getting applications done in 10 days. We hit that all the way up until we hit the pandemic. Then, even when we got out of compliance—when we started going above 10 days—we knew we were above it, and we took the steps to start getting that number back down again.

We were able to do it in a variety of other ways; like, for example, with the Department of Motor Vehicles, getting you your driver's license. In our Centers of Excellence, we were able to get that from 22 minutes down to 8 minutes in getting people in and out the door.

With our Green Sheets, which is what we used in our Department of Transportation to be able to make sure that our contractors were doing the right things with regard to the environment or antiquities or whatever—making sure they were following all the rules—we were able to cut that from 16 days down to 3 days so that those contractors could get into the field faster and get our projects moving faster.

Here is another one: We would issue reimbursement checks to families with children who have special needs. Often, these special needs children will have to have specialized care. Families will have to travel to that hospital to go get that. They would get reimbursed for those expenses, but it was taking us 13 to 15 days to reimburse those expenses. Well, what is wrong with that? That is over a 2-week pay period. Those families had to float those costs from one paycheck to the next paycheck.

You know and I know that a lot of families live paycheck to paycheck, so that put a financial burden on those families with kids with special needs. We were able to cut that time down to 2 days to be able to make sure we could get those expense checks back to those families in need so that they wouldn't have to float that and experience that financial hardship from one payment to the next.

Well, what did we have to do to do that? We had to get everybody on board—our entire team. At the end of the day, in the State of Nebraska, we trained over 30,000 of our teammates in the Lean Six Sigma process. There were wipeouts kind of in the introductory one. Over 6,200 of our mid-level managers in the yellow belts, the next level up. We trained 248 executive green belts. Those are the upper level executives—again, more training. Then we trained nine black belts. Those are the folks who oversee the whole program.

By implementing all of that, we were able to save over 900,000 hours of our teammates' time. We did over 1,000 different projects. We saved \$115 million in hard savings. Because of those processes, for example, we were able to reduce the square footage that we were occupying as the State of Nebraska by 60,000. It was 60,000 square feet we took off our rolls; we reduced our employment by 3½ percent; and we were able to control spending.

Before I became Governor, our budget was growing at 6½ percent a year. I would say that was not sustainable. We were able to, on average, while I was Governor, keep that growth of our budget to 2.8 percent a year—just 2.8 percent a year on average. I might just contrast that to what we are doing here in the Federal Government right now. In 2019, we spent \$4.4 trillion. In 2024, that was closer to \$6.8 trillion, \$6.9 trillion. That is, roughly, a 55-percent increase in just 5 years. Folks, that is not sustainable.

That is why what this Department of Government Efficiency, the DOGE, and what this incoming administration are going to do is so important. We have got to be able to get our spending under control. It is a risk to our country. We have got to get this under control, and we can do it. We can do a better job of providing services and keeping our expenses down just like the private sector does by leveraging tools like Lean Six Sigma, just like the private sector does.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Kansas.

Mr. MARSHALL. Mr. President, as you know, most every January, hard-working families across this country gather together at their kitchen tables, and they work on a budget. Then, once a month, they try to balance their checkbooks, making a budget, balancing the checkbooks. Congress seems to be incapable of doing either of these. That is why, today, this country faces a national debt of over \$36 trillion—\$36

trillion. I believe that debt is the greatest threat we have to our long-term national security and to the future of America in so many ways.

First, we need to look at how we got here. How did we get to \$36 trillion in national debt? I think many of us feel it has been driven by Federal waste, by fraud, and gross mismanagement.

Now, last year's Federal deficit—I want you to think about this. We are talking about the deficit now. We have a national debt of \$36 trillion. We have a deficit each year. So in this last fiscal year, the Federal Government took in \$5 trillion, but we spent \$7 trillion. Let me say it again. We took in \$5 trillion, but we managed to spend \$7 trillion. That is pretty simple math for a deficit of some \$2 trillion.

This last year, we eclipsed a new benchmark. The Federal Government spent more on interest payments—on interest alone—on the debt than it did on funding the national defense or Medicare. Let me say it again. We spent more on making an interest payment than we did on national defense or Medicare. No matter what your priorities are—whether it is schools, roads, and bridges, or maybe you think we need more military—when we are spending \$1 trillion a year as a nation on interest, lots of things are going to go unaccomplished.

The American people have clearly spoken as 77 million people elected Donald J. Trump to be the President and, with them, his priorities in that we deal with the bureaucratic inefficiencies, the overregulation, and a government that prioritizes beltway politics over the heartland, all without any transparency or accountability.

So what am I talking about?

The Pentagon can't account for \$824 billion. Improper Federal payments in 2023 were \$236 billion. The pandemic relief lost to fraud and abuse was \$200 billion. Right there together, just those three items alone, add up to \$1.2 trillion of waste, fraud, and mismanagement.

We take a peek again at 2023 and the Biden-Harris administration's open border policies. Think about the costs of taking on these 10 million—maybe more—illegal immigrants. It is at least \$150 billion.

Our Department of Education spent over \$1 billion in promoting DEI initiatives in schools. Let me say it again—\$1 billion in promoting the DEI initiatives in schools, but our kids can't read and write and do math.

Meanwhile, the U.S. Government adds \$6 billion of debt daily. So we are at \$6 billion. By the time you wake up in the morning, go to bed, and wake up the next day, we have added another \$6 billion of debt. The total debt now, as I said earlier, is over \$36 trillion. Again, we are making an interest payment of \$1 trillion each year.

So this is where DOGE comes in. What can DOGE do here? I am proud to be one of the founding members. I appreciate Senator ERNST's leadership on

this. I am committed to addressing this crisis and to reforming the Federal Government to operate with the efficiency and accountability that Americans deserve.

To address this spending crisis, we need a plan, and we need accountability. We have some simple reforms that we can make on day one that slash the spending and disrupt the unaccounted-for blank check spending that we are seeing out of this Federal Government. So here are just a few examples, and I have been sharing these with people who are coming into this new administration.

If this were a business, the first thing I would do when I would have seen that we had spent \$2 trillion more than we had taken in—the first thing I would do is I would freeze Federal employees. I would not hire any more Federal employees.

Next, I would require all Federal employees to return to their offices to work. You know, maybe only 1 out of 10, maybe 2 out of 10 Federal employees in DC are actually back in the office working.

Next, I would decentralize the Federal Government. There are many functions of the Federal Government that could be better and less costly if we would move them out of this environment.

Next, I would implement term limits for political appointees as well as long-term employees.

I think there are opportunities for Agency consolidations. We can modernize the IT system. We are spending 80 percent of \$100 billion annually on an outdated IT system here in the Federal Government. The opportunities that we would save financially with regulatory reform are infinite. We could roll back energy mandates, EPA limits, methane emission rules. We could expand Federal land leasing for oil and gas production.

Next, I would talk about cutting subsidy waste—getting rid of some of the tax credits. For instance, taxpayer-funded electric vehicle subsidies could be done away with. Why in the world are we giving tax credits to foreign entities? So we have foreign countries, foreign entities that are benefiting from some of these tax credits as well.

Our grant oversight is just pitiful in the spending of money. With the NGO research grants, we don't know who is spending it and where it is going. Then we are funding billions of dollars on gain-of-function research and teaching China how to develop weapons against Americans. The biodefense program for the NIAID is spending over \$2 billion annually, again, to help communist China develop bioweapons against Americans. We need more research accountability.

There are opportunities for education reform. Then, with the taxation and IRS reform, we could rescind the \$80 billion for IRS funding under the IRA act as well. Certainly, simplifying tax laws would be a great opportunity as well.

Those are just a few. That is just a handful of the ideas that we have passed on to DOGE and to President Trump's team, and we look forward to working with them. I think it is enough said. Enough is enough. It is time for Federal Agencies and unelected bureaucrats to remember that we the people sign their checks and that DOGE is absolutely committed to restoring accountability and putting the Federal Government back on the path to serving the American people. These solutions will give beltway bureaucrats fits—it will give them heartburn—but these reforms will finally put the Federal Government on notice and on a path to start working like a business.

I will close with this. DOGE can help us identify and prioritize waste. So DOGE is going to help us identify and prioritize the waste, the fraud, and the mismanagement, but it is up to Congress to put their gloves on, roll up their sleeves, and get the work done.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Missouri.

Mr. SCHMITT. Mr. President, I rise to speak about the grave threat that the administrative state poses to our country and what we can do to stop it.

I want to thank the Senator from Oklahoma for sort of leading the effort here today to talk about this and to air this out on the Senate floor. Quite frankly, one of my big surprises, I think, in my first 2 years here in the U.S. Senate, is how little we actually talk about this and how little time we have spent addressing this.

So many of the conversations that happen inside the beltway here are so detached from the conversations that I have back home in Missouri. Quite frankly, the people whom I talk to who work hard every day can't believe the waste that happens here. They can't believe we spend millions of dollars on drag shows and DEI trainings in countries halfway around the world. If they knew more about it, my guess is it would be an even bigger topic of conversation; there would be more outrage. I think that is part of what the table setting is going to be over the next 6 months or so here, which is to identify these things, talk about them, highlight them, and do something about it.

Last year, when I gave my inaugural speech on the Senate floor, I talked about how the administrative state was one of the biggest threats to our Republic. Nameless, faceless bureaucrats who are accountable to nobody, promulgate rules and regulations that deeply impact everyday Americans every day.

The EPA can promulgate a rule that devastates farmers. A farm that has been in a family for generations can be under water just like that, and they don't even know whom to talk to about it.

Ranchers are impacted.

None of these folks are ultimately ever held accountable. You don't know

their name. Their title is ambiguous, and they are in an Agency you have never heard of.

The Loper Bright case that the Supreme Court just recently heard dealt a significant blow to the power of the administrative state. It involved NOAA, which was attempting to force fishermen in that case to pay out of their own pocket for Federal observers on their own boats. There are many, many more examples than just this particular case, but this one made it to the Supreme Court. They had an impactful decision. Real Americans—real Americans—have been impacted by this bloated bureaucratic mess that has developed over the decades.

While the administrative state is still a great threat to our country, the good news is that President Trump will soon occupy the White House. DOGE will soon get to work, and we can finally have some real momentum to dismantle the administrative state once and for all, returning the power back to the people.

You see, the difference is, when the Senator from Oklahoma gets elected or I get elected, the folks get a say. They can send us back or they can send us home. If you want to ban gas stoves, we should have to vote on that. My guess is, it would receive very few votes. But if you have got a bureaucrat that is not even in an office anymore—because only 6 percent of them are actually in the office—making these kinds of decisions, you lose every sense of accountability, and our representative form of government is ultimately undermined.

To ensure that President Trump and DOGE hit the ground running, yesterday, I introduced two bills that are a critical one-two punch in dismantling the administrative state.

The first bill is called the ERASER Act, which prohibits any Agency from issuing a rule unless the same Agency has repealed at least three rules. Additionally, the bill prohibits an Agency from issuing a major rule unless the Agency has repealed three or more rules and the cost of the new major rule is less than or equal to the cost of the rule that is being repealed.

This would make Agencies think twice before promulgating new regulations, and because Agencies are addicted to the power that comes from regulating Americans, it could have the added benefit of stripping many regulations from the books altogether and freeing Americans from the bonds of overregulation.

The second bill is called the Separation of Powers Restoration Act, which builds on the Supreme Court's ruling in the Loper Bright case and the tearing down of the Chevron deference that we have lived with for decades. This bill would enact a stricter standard of review. No longer can Agencies expect the courts to just side with their interpretation of the statute, like they could when the Chevron deference was in place.

This bill would institute a *de novo* standard of review. Under a *de novo*

standard of review, courts will weigh the merits of the arguments without deference—without deference standards—to either side, placing American citizens and businesses, either caught on the wrong side of regulatory enforcement action or challenging the validity in the first place, on equal footing in a court with that Agency. This is a critical effort, which will strip power away from the unelected bureaucrats and put the power back in the hands of Americans.

I look forward to working hand in hand with the Trump administration, Elon Musk, Vivek Ramaswamy, and my colleagues in the DOGE Caucus to finally reform and dismantle the administrative state, shrink the size of the Federal Government, reinstitute fiscal sanity here in Washington, and stop these Agencies from burdening American citizens with onerous regulatory schemes.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Oklahoma.

Mr. LANKFORD. Mr. President, as this body knows well, for the past hour, we have had multiple colleagues who have come to this floor to be able to talk about how do we make the government more efficient. They have been talking about, out loud, what they are working in their offices on, what their staff are working on, and what we plan to be able to implement. This is a public conversation, but there is a lot of private, behind-the-scenes work because the focus is not just what we talk about. It is what we actually get done.

There are a lot of areas of government efficiency that need to get done. This is a target-rich environment. Literally, you can pull out of this building and look in any direction you want to any number of Agencies and get started there.

But the focus that we need to have as a body is not what we do to talk about government waste but what are we going to do to get it done.

We are looking forward to President Trump's inauguration in a week and a half. We are looking forward to beginning to implement both on the executive branch and through legislative action real changes that can actually get our government toward more efficiency.

Now, I have to warn everybody: It is going to take a while because there is a lot to get done. But the good news is, we are not just talking about it; we are actually going to get something started.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mrs. BLACKBURN). The Senator for Kansas.

REMEMBERING OLEN MITCHELL

Mr. MORAN. Madam President, this afternoon I rise here on the Senate floor to recognize a fellow Kansan, to honor the life of a soldier, a servant, a great man, Olen Mitchell.

While Olen was born in Oklahoma, Kansas is the place he called home, and we are honored to call him our own.

Growing up in Western Kansas teaches you a lot about discipline, service, and hard work, and I know that Olen's time in Elkhart and Hutchinson, KS, taught him valuable lessons. The values he learned in Western Kansas provided him with a love of country and taught him to love his neighbors as himself. His character was further defined alongside thousands of other young men like him who fought in World War II.

Olen received a Purple Heart after being shot 2 weeks before D-Day in 1944 during his service in Italy. Even after being injured, he continued his service to his country in the military police. After his service, Olen received a Bronze Star, the Combat Infantryman Badge, and several other medals and service ribbons.

In June of last year, I had the opportunity to call Olen on the 80th anniversary of D-Day while he was visiting Normandy and seeing the beaches of France. It was my honor to thank him for his service during World War II and let him know how much of a privilege it was to know him and his story.

The "greatest generation" has left a permanent impact on the world, and that is why the loss of another World War II veteran is cause for mourning in this Nation and around the globe. We remember not only their grit, sacrifice, and bravery but also their kindness, their dedication, and their humility, which has changed communities across America, and changing those communities changed America.

Olen embodied the compassion, kindness, and courage we all remember, and he changed the Hutchinson community for the better. I know every time I was in Hutchinson, I had the opportunity to be with him. It was just a great experience for me, but you could also tell that those around us admired and respected him. He was a pillar in the community and so often involved in everything good.

Occasionally, he would drive me in the Fourth of July parades, and you could tell how the community responded not to the U.S. Senator going down Main Street but about how good it was for them to see their friend Olen.

He was a loving husband who was married for 68 years until his wife passed away. Olen was also an uncle, a great-uncle, and a great-great uncle. Three generations of family and loved ones had an exemplary role model as an inspirational figure who showed them kindness, love, and devotion.

A few times a year, veterans visit Washington, DC, on Honor Flights, and Olen visited our Capital in 2014—10 years ago. Meeting veterans during these visits brought me, certainly, great joy, and I am always moved by the veterans who see for themselves the memorial built to honor their comrades and themselves.

My own father was able to see the World War II Memorial. Before he saw it, I called him to tell him about it. So I am at the World War II Memorial

with my flip phone. I call my dad at home in Kansas to tell him I love him, I respect him, and I thank him for his service. I told this story before. My dad then calls me back and says: GERALD, you left me a voicemail, but I didn't understand it. Would you repeat it?

Olen is no longer in a position in which I can tell him what I told my dad, nor is my dad. So on behalf of all of us and communicated to Olen and all of his comrades, we today again say: We love you. We respect you. We thank you for your service.

After Olen's passing, the Kansas Honor Flight Foundation shared in their post that "Heaven needed a hero just in time for Christmas." Olen is a hero to his country, to his family, to his loved ones, and to his community. His story will not be and should not be forgotten, and the State of Kansas, our country, and the world are forever grateful for his life of service and dedication.

Olen, thank you for your life of service. Thank you for your friendship. Thank you for being such a great member of a great family.

I yield the floor.

MORNING BUSINESS

ARMS SALES NOTIFICATIONS

Mr. RISCH. Madam President, section 36(b) of the Arms Export Control Act requires that Congress receive prior notification of certain proposed arms sales as defined by that statute. Upon such notification, the Congress has 30 calendar days during which the sale may be reviewed. The provision stipulates that, in the Senate, the notification of proposed sales shall be sent to the chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee.

In keeping with the committee's intention to see that relevant information is still available to the full Senate, I ask unanimous consent to have printed in the RECORD the notifications that have been received. If the cover letter references a classified annex, then such an annex is available to all Senators in the office of the Foreign Relations Committee, room SD-423.

There being no objection, the material was ordered to be printed in the RECORD, as follows:

DEFENSE SECURITY
COOPERATION AGENCY,
Washington, DC.

Hon. BENJAMIN L. CARDIN,
Chairman, Committee on Foreign Relations,
U.S. Senate, Washington, DC.

DEAR MR. CHAIRMAN: Pursuant to the reporting requirements of Section 36(b)(1) of the Arms Export Control Act, as amended, we are forwarding herewith Transmittal No. 24-108, concerning the Army's proposed Letter(s) of Offer and Acceptance to the Government of Greece for defense articles and services estimated to cost \$130 million. We will issue a news release to notify the public of this proposed sale upon delivery of this letter to your office.

Sincerely,

MICHAEL F. MILLER,
Director.

Enclosures.

TRANSMITTAL NO. 24-108

Notice of Proposed Issuance of Letter of Offer Pursuant to Section 36(b)(1) of the Arms Export Control Act, as amended

(i) Prospective Purchaser: Government of Greece.

(ii) Total Estimated Value:
Major Defense Equipment* \$0.
Other \$130 million.
Total \$130 million.

Funding Source: Foreign Military Financing and National Funds.

(iii) Description and Quantity or Quantities of Articles or Services under Consideration for Purchase: Foreign Military Sales (FMS) case GR-B-IAO was below congressional notification threshold at \$99.99 million (\$0 in MDE) and included M117 wheeled Armored Security Vehicles (ASV) (through the Excess Defense Article program); MK19 Modification (MOD) 4 Up-Gunned Weapon Systems (UGWS); Concurrent Spare Parts (CSP) packages; spare barrels; U.S. Government and contractor vehicle spare parts; vehicle Special Tools and Test Equipment (STTE); vehicle Basic Issue Items (BII); Simplified Nonstandard Acquisition Program (SNAP) spare parts; U.S. Government case management and technical assistance; facility-required equipment; New Equipment Training (NET); Field Service Representative support; Joint Visual Inspection with U.S. Army Tank-Automotive and Armaments Command (TACOM) technical assistance; Packaging, Crating, and Handling with follow-on transportation; and other related elements of logistics and program support.

The Government of Greece has requested that the case be amended to include Aerosonde Uncrewed Aircraft Systems (UAS) with Lycoming heavy-fuel engines; Global Positioning System (GPS) with Selective Availability Anti-Spoofing Module (SAASM) or M-Code; TASE400 Electro Optical (EO)/Medium Wave Infrared (MWIR)/Long-Range Spotter-High Definition (LRS-HD) payloads; avionics; video and telemetry datalink subsystems and secondary payload bays; Ground Control Stations; ground data terminals; launch and recovery trailers; ground support equipment; "fly as you drive" M117 ASV interface kits and integration; initial spares package; initial spares replenishment; new equipment training; program management support; contractor logistics support and Field Service Representative support; technical data and publications; quality assurance services; U.S. Government and contractor engineering, technical, and logistics support services; and other related elements of logistics and program support. This amendment will cause the case to exceed the notification threshold, and thus notification of the entire program is required. The above notification requirements are combined as follows:

Major Defense Equipment (MDE): None.

Non-Major Defense Equipment: The following non-MDE items will be included: M117 wheeled Armored Security Vehicles (ASV) (through the Excess Defense Article program); MK19 Modification (MOD) 4 Up-Gunned Weapon Systems (UGWS); Concurrent Spare Parts (CSP) packages; spare barrels; U.S. Government and contractor vehicle spare parts; vehicle Special Tools and Test Equipment (STTE); vehicle Basic Issue Items (BII); Simplified Nonstandard Acquisition Program (SNAP) spare parts; U.S. Government case management and technical assistance; facility-required equipment; New Equipment Training (NET); Field Service Representative support; Joint Visual Inspection with U.S. Army Tank-Automotive and Armaments Command (TACOM) technical assistance; Packaging, Crating, and Handling with follow-on transportation; and other related elements of logistics and program support. The estimated total cost is \$130 million.

ding with follow-on transportation; and other related elements of logistics and program support; Aerosonde Uncrewed Aircraft Systems (UAS) with Lycoming heavy-fuel engines; Global Positioning System (GPS) with Selective Availability Anti-Spoofing Module (SAASM) or M-Code; TASE400 Long-Range Spotters; avionics; video and telemetry datalink subsystems; Ground Control Stations; ground data terminals; launch and recovery trailers; ground support equipment; "fly as you drive" M117 ASV interface kits and integration; initial spares package; initial spares replenishment; new equipment training; program management support; contractor logistics support and Field Service Representative support; technical data and publications; quality assurance services; U.S. Government and contractor engineering, technical, and logistics support services; and other related elements of logistics and program support.

(iv) Military Department: Army (GR-B-IAO).

(v) Prior Related Cases, if any: None.

(vi) Sales Commission, Fee, etc., Paid, Offered, or Agreed to be Paid: None known.

(vii) Sensitivity of Technology Contained in the Defense Article or Defense Services Proposed to be Sold: See Attached Annex.

(viii) Date Report Delivered to Congress: December 20, 2024.

*As defined in Section 47(6) of the Arms Export Control Act.

POLICY JUSTIFICATION

Greece—Aerosonde Uncrewed Aircraft Systems and Armored Security Vehicles

The Government of Greece has requested to buy Aerosonde Uncrewed Aircraft Systems (UAS) with Lycoming heavy-fuel engines; Global Positioning System (GPS) with Selective Availability Anti-Spoofing Module (SAASM) or M-Code; TASE400 Long-Range Spotters; avionics; video and telemetry datalink subsystems; Ground Control Stations; ground data terminals; launch and recovery trailers; ground support equipment; "fly as you drive" M117 ASV interface kits and integration; initial spares package; initial spares replenishment; new equipment training; program management support; contractor logistics support and Field Service Representative support; technical data and publications; quality assurance services; U.S. Government and contractor engineering, technical, and logistics support services; and other related elements of logistics and program support, that will be added to a previously implemented case whose value was under the congressional notification threshold.

The original Foreign Military Sales (FMS) case, valued at \$99.99 million (\$0 in MDE), included M117 wheeled Armored Security Vehicles (ASV) (through the Excess Defense Article program); MK19 Modification (MOD) 4 Up-Gunned Weapon Systems (UGWS); Concurrent Spare Parts (CSP) packages; spare barrels; U.S. Government and contractor vehicle spare parts; vehicle Special Tools and Test Equipment (STTE); vehicle Basic Issue Items (BII); Simplified Nonstandard Acquisition Program (SNAP) spare parts; U.S. Government case management and technical assistance; facility-required equipment; New Equipment Training (NET); Field Service Representative support; Joint Visual Inspection with U.S. Army Tank-Automotive and Armaments Command (TACOM) technical assistance; Packaging, Crating, and Handling with follow-on transportation; and other related elements of logistics and program support. The estimated total cost is \$130 million.

This proposed sale will support the foreign policy and national security of the United States by improving the security of a NATO