many of these community health centers have had their funding cut temporarily, and too many are still unable to access funding. Some have even had to close. That means many working people suddenly have no option for high-quality, affordable healthcare near them.

Is this DOGE's idea of cutting wasteful spending—taking among the most effective, efficient parts of the healthcare system that deliver healthcare to people who need help with lower costs and cutting it without asking a question? without examining what community health centers do? Meat-ax. Meat-ax. That is what they are doing.

Or let's look at programs like PEPFAR in the AID program. Again, they want to cut the whole AID. But what about PEPFAR? Do people at DOGE even realize what PEPFAR does? It helps combat things like AIDS. It has saved 25 million lives. Other programs stop things like Ebola in central Africa. If Ebola is left unchecked, it could, one day, spread to America—from Uganda to around the world today. There are flights from Kampala all over the world. So even if you oppose foreign aid on a policy ground, most people believe that PEPFAR and the programs fighting Ebola in central Africa are effective and cost-effective and make us more secure. God forbid Ebola would spread to the United States.

Do you want to see what government waste looks like? It doesn't look like those two programs. Thanks to DOGE, here is what government waste looks like that DOGE has created: Thanks to DOGE, half a billion dollars in food assistance through USAID is sitting in ports and ships and warehouses unable to move.

So the bottom line is simple: If you want to make cuts, you have sunlight, transparency, debate in Congress—not lawlessness; not breaking the law because you feel, well, that you know more than anybody else; not by implementing cuts and asking questions later. It is a formula for disaster when you do things like that. These policies will hurt children; they will hurt seniors; they will hurt veterans and so many other of our friends and neighbors.

RECONCILIATION

Mr. President, on reconciliation, today, Senate Republicans' scheme to pass tax cuts for the ultrarich takes the next important step. Later today, Chairman GRAHAM of the Budget Committee will hold a markup of the Republicans' first reconciliation bill.

Republicans claim that their bill will be fully paid for, but that means Republicans are laying the groundwork to gut things like nutrition assistance, funding for nursing homes, student debt support, and to kill clean energy jobs that employ Americans in red and blue States alike.

There has been so much focus on how Republicans are going to pass their signature bills—should it be one bill? Should it be two bills?—that at the end of the day, talking about process is a sideshow. This ''one bill, two bills, or a hundred bills'' is meaningless. What they are trying to do is give tax cuts to the very wealthy—further tax cuts to the very wealthy—who are doing just fine, and they are hurting average Americans by cutting programs—again meat-ax, slashing—across the board to do it.

They could carve up their bill. They could carve up one bill, two bills, five bills. As I said, it doesn't matter. They could carve it up in their agenda however they want, and they could change the order of policies they tackle first, but the endgame does not change. This is all about clearing the path to cutting taxes for billionaires and making the American people foot the bill.

The whole thing—the whole big enterprise—is aimed with one goal in mind: tax cuts for the wealthiest Americans—large tax cuts for the wealthiest Americans—who, as I said, are doing fine—not as fine as the average Americans, who just saw their inflation go up 3 percent.

Plain and simple: Again, what is their plan? To funnel more wealth to the ultrawealthy while slashing everything else to the bone: gutting Medicare and Medicaid; yanking school lunches from kids; blocking prescription drug reforms which make drugs cheaper for the average American; cutting funding for cancer research—one of the most popular things we do; cutting research for semiconductor manufacturing and letting China get ahead of us. No matter how they dress it up, no matter what spin they can put on it, the Republicans' agenda boils down to this: tax cuts for the wealthy and deep, deep painful cuts for everybody else.

NOMINATION OF TULSI GABBARD

Finally, Mr. President, on the nomination we are about to vote on in a little while, the Gabbard nomination, every single Democrat, I am proud to say, will oppose the nomination of Tulsi Gabbard because we simply cannot, in good conscience, trust our most classified secrets to someone who echoes Russian propaganda and falls for conspiracy theories.

So before my Republican colleagues cast their votes to confirm Ms. Gabbard, I hope they are going to think carefully one last time because America's safety—America's security—is at stake.

Is Ms. Gabbard really whom Republicans want leading intelligence Agencies? I will bet not.

Is she the best person we could find for the important position of Director of National Intelligence? Of all the people who know the intelligence world, I know some will be conservative like Donald Trump would want, but they wouldn't have the huge question marks about them that Ms. Gabbard has.

Do Republicans truly believe, I say to my colleagues, that someone who has so carelessly and repeatedly echoed Russian propaganda and sympathized with the likes of Putin and Assad is the right person for this job?

I ask my Republican colleagues to think about the safety of the American people and the concern of our allies—and the threats posed by Vladimir Putin—before casting this vote.

Objectively, I think most Senators would agree there are better choices to lead National Intelligence. Do you know what my guess is? If we had a secret ballot, Gabbard might get 10 votes and 40 against her from the other side. People know—that is why they raised so many questions—but Donald Trump and Elon Musk, evidently, threatened them, and they are changing their views.

The Director of National Intelligence must be strong against America's adversaries. This is an amazing one. How could we put someone in when you hear about this? After Assad used chemical weapons against his own people in 2017 and 2018, Tulsi Gabbard turned against U.S. intelligence—by the way, at that point, Donald Trump was President—and sided with fringe conspiracy theorists to cast doubt on these two specific incidents.

I want to be clear about how strange and troubling this episode was. On one side, you had the entire U.S. intelligence ecosystem, the intelligence system of the French Government, and the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons all saying the same thing: that Assad used chemical weapons against his own people in 2017 and 2018. The findings were not speculation. They were based on satellite imagery, witness accounts, medical experts—in other words, the kind of intelligence data that Ms. Gabbard would be responsible for evaluating if she—God forbid—gets this job.

On the other side were all these experts and all this evidence—fact-based—and you have Tulsi Gabbard relying on the judgment of an individual who had appeared on Russian-funded propaganda outlets, questioning those findings and shielding Assad for his inhumane conduct.

I have to say, I have never heard of a DNI nominee who was so ready and willing to question the findings of America's own intelligence operations and yet accept Russian disinformation so easily. And, of course, I am troubled by her long record of showing weakness against Russia when it came to Putin's invasion of Ukraine.

On the night Russia invaded Ukraine and launched the first full-scale invasion of a sovereign nation in Europe since World War II, what was Ms. Gabbard doing? She was on Twitter at 11:30 p.m., blaming NATO and the United States for starting the war in Ukraine when Putin invaded Ukraine. She said the war could have been avoided had NATO and the U.S. just accommodated Putin.

That is who we want as head of National Intelligence?

By the way, Russian state TV gleefully aired these comments shortly