cancel a chunk of student loan debt for nearly 4 million borrowers. It would fund public media. It would restore cuts to humanitarian aid and USAID. And to put it in even more perspective, that $40 billion that Donald Trump is sending off to Argentina, it could fund childcare for military families for almost 20 years.

It would fund the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau to stop big banks and giant corporations from scamming people for almost 50 years.

And it could pay for 100 Qatari jets, meaning one for every Governor of all 50 States and a backup plane for each and every one of them.

So there you have it. Remember Trump's promise to lower costs for Americans on day one?

PRAYER

Pursuant to the order of February 29, 1960, the hour of 12 noon having arrived, the Senate having been in continuous session since yesterday, the Senate will suspend for a prayer by the Senate Chaplin.

The Chaplain, Dr. Barry C. Black, offered the following prayer:

Let us pray.

Eternal God, who alone spreads out the Heavens and rules the raging of the sea. We cry out to You, refusing to believe that the problem of this government shutdown is too difficult for You to solve.

Lord, You have been our help in ages past. You are our hope for years to come.

Today, give our Senators a faith that will not shrink, though pressed by many a foe; that will not tremble on the brink of any Earthly woe.

We promise to give You all the glory for the great things You have done and will do.

We pray in Your mighty Name. Amen.

TRUMP ADMINISTRATION

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. RICKETTS). The Senator from Massachusetts.

Ms. WARREN. Thank you very much.

I just want to go back to this point as I tee up the question for Senator MERKLEY here, and that is, Donald Trump right now is sending $40 billion to Argentina, and I just want to go through the list again about what could we do with that $40 billion if we kept it right here in the United States.

Forty billion dollars would stop health insurance premiums from doubling. Forty billion dollars would restore food assistance for families that will be hurt by Donald Trump's cuts. Forty billion dollars would cancel a chunk of student loan debt for nearly 4 million borrowers. Forty billion dollars would fund public media.

Mr. MERKLEY. Mr. President, retaining the floor, I yield to the question that is being posed by my colleague from Massachusetts.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Massachusetts has the floor.

Ms. WARREN. I yield the floor.

Mr. MERKLEY. I yield for a question to be posed by my colleague from Massachusetts.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Oregon is recognized.

Mr. MERKLEY. Thank you very much, Mr. President. I see that my colleague from Massachusetts is here and has gotten half of her question out.

If you would like to continue the question, I would invite you to give me a question.

Ms. WARREN. OK. I am almost there.

Am I recognized to do that, Mr. President?

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Oregon has the floor and has yielded to you for a question.

Ms. WARREN. As I was saying, I was talking about what this $40 billion that Donald Trump is sending to Argentina could be used here at home, and that is to stop the doubling of health insurance premiums, to restore food assistance for families that the Trump administration is cutting, to cancel student loan debt, to fund public media, and to restore humanitarian aid and USAID.

To put it in a different perspective, that same $40 billion could fund childcare for military families for nearly 20 years; it could fund the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau to stop big banks and giant corporations from scamming people, for almost 50 years; and it could pay for 100 Qatari jets—one for every Governor in the United States, plus a spare jet for them.

So there you have it.

Remember Donald Trump's promise to lower costs for Americans on day one? Well, instead, Donald Trump is bailing out his ''favorite President'' and bailing out rich Wall Street investors who invested in Argentina debt.

The American people are begging us to do something about the skyrocketing cost of living. They are crying out for help. But Donald Trump can't hear them over the sound of the bulldozers that are demolishing a chunk of the White House to build his brandnew ballroom, a $250 million ballroom—a monument to Donald Trump himself, paid for by big corporations that are trying to suck up to the administration for special favors.

The American people told Donald Trump to cut the cost of living. Instead, he is cutting off part of the White House for his new billionaires' ballroom.

Families are missing car payments, but Donald Trump is too busy building his ballroom to notice.

The price of coffee is up nearly 30 percent, but at least Donald Trump will have a fancy, new ballroom in the White House. The price of coffee is up nearly 30 percent, but at least Donald Trump will have a fancy, new ballroom where the White House is supposed to be.

Farmers are going bankrupt, but Trump is too worried about the construction of his ballroom to help.

The cost of baby strollers—or, as Donald Trump calls them, the things you carry babies around in—those are going up, but Trump is too busy building his fancy ballroom to notice.

So my friend JEFF MERKLEY is exactly right. We are not in normal times. All of us need to stand up, speak out, and push back.

My question for you, Senator MERKLEY, is, How is the fight to lower costs for families all around this country linked to the fight against Donald Trump's authoritarianism?

Mr. MERKLEY. I thank so much my colleague from Massachusetts for the question of how the price of goods around the country is linked to Trump's authoritarian undertakings. It kind of boils down to this—and a colleague came to the floor and used this term a little while ago, a colleague from New Hampshire. She said: In an authoritarian structure, the authoritarian believes that the people are accountable to the authoritarian, and in a democracy, the leader believes that the leader is accountable to the people. That is the difference.

So if you are in a situation where you have an authoritarian for the President, first thing they do is try to erode the checks and balances of the constitution to concentrate more and more power in the Executive. Of course, we see that in all kinds of ways we have been discussing.

Then they proceed to try to change the rules for elections so they can rig the next elections.

Then they start to attack any form of dissent—suppress freedom of assembly, freedom of press, freedom of speech and due process. We see that.

Then they say: Now we want to free the military. But in all of that is this sense that the people are simply pawns for the authoritarian President.

Then, in that setting, it becomes just fine to do a bill that savages healthcare for the people to fund tax breaks for billionaires. It becomes just fine to do a bill that savages child nutrition to do tax breaks for billionaires. It becomes just fine to run up debt over the next 30 years $30 trillion to fund tax breaks for billionaires.

That is the way the authoritarian personality is connected to the policies that emerge from bills that authoritarian champions. They are not bills by and for the people; they are bills by and for the powerful.

I see that my colleague from Connecticut has come to the floor, and I would be happy to yield if you have a question.

Mr. BLUMENTHAL. I am very grateful for the opportunity to ask a question and for the Senator from Oregon yielding to me.

Mr. MERKLEY. I will yield, absolutely.

Mr. BLUMENTHAL. First of all, I want to thank him for his leadership,

his fortitude, and his determination exhibited so eloquently over these last 24 hours. He is really providing a model for all of us in standing up and speaking out.

Let me say that after listening to the eloquent words of my colleague from Massachusetts, that the destruction Donald Trump is doing to the White House is emblematic of the wrecking ball he is taking to our democracy.

Put aside the waste of money that could be used to improve our education system, to solve food insecurity, to guarantee the election integrity of this Nation, the damage that he is doing to this iconic symbol of America is so costly to our image and esteem around the world.

The White House is a symbol of America, and he is destroying a part of it. What he intends to build as a replacement to the East Wing is a gargantuan insult to America, and it is unfortunately emblematic of a lot of the other destruction he is doing in so many other areas as we watch the norms and laws that protect our great experiment in democracy erode under his destructive action.

In some ways, it is a little bit like the frog in the pot. The water begins to heat without our noticing it. The acts seem benign when taken individually, but cumulatively, they will boil and destroy our democracy.

The President has turned the Oval Office into an auction house. He has put a ''for sale'' sign on the White House lawn. Influence and power are the way to a quick profit, whether it is crypto or pardons or many of the other perks of office. He is using it for his own personal ends and weaponizing the Department of Justice against his personal opponents, his political adversaries—a violation of basic norms of the Department of Justice and of our democracy.

He is prosecuting political enemies in courts that he has filled with MAGA zealots and has a Department of Justice that is run by his personal lawyers. He is punishing constituents of Democrats by canceling billions in Federal programs and firing dedicated public servants during a government shutdown when he simply fails to find them worthy.

Last week, he announced that the administration is sending $20 billion in bailout money to Argentina and perhaps another $20 billion in private funding. What he is doing in tariffs has been eclipsed by all the other stuff, but it hits Americans in their pocketbooks. Groceries are skyrocketing in price. Americans are finding it more difficult to put food on the table. Farmers are being crushed by these tariffs as well.

Healthcare. The tax credits that make healthcare insurance affordable to millions of Americans will end at the conclusion of this year because he has failed to provide leadership in extending them, and that is why the government has been shut down by Republicans—because they have refused to agree to extend those healthcare tax credits.

But maybe most alarmingly—most alarmingly—as is visible in the streets of Oregon, California, Chicago, Los Angeles, is the deployment of our military, our National Guard.

The Senator from Oregon has spoken so powerfully and eloquently to bring a critical lens to this desecration of democracy and the impact on our military itself, because they are being used for a purpose that goes against the fundamental purpose of our military in this country.

The Founding Fathers were deeply worried about the use of a standing army, potentially, within the homeland, and many were opposed to a standing army because of that concern.

So we have laws—Posse Comitatus—that forbid the use of the military against American citizens on American soil. The health of our Republic depends on the proper use of our military against foreign adversaries and threats from abroad.

But the President of the United States, in effect, has decided that he will use our National Guard as a police force, supplanting local and State police. And the damage is done not only to institutions—which should be supported and we should be providing more resources to local and State Police, more training and equipment to them so they can do the job of keeping order and maintaining our democracy—but, also, to the military itself, which is demoralized and potentially degraded by the misuse of these resources that are designed to support them in countering adversaries abroad, and, of course, to the faith and trust of Americans in the military, as they see it misused.

So I want to ask my colleague from Oregon about perhaps his personal experience as he watches this deployment of the National Guard in his State. How are the people of Oregon reacting to the misuse of our National Guard? Is there faith and trust in the military affected by the President's deployment of the National Guard in a circumstance that a Federal judge has found is unnecessary because whatever protests have happened in the past weeks and months have been peaceful and without the necessity for this kind of military intervention?

Mr. MERKLEY. I really appreciate the question from my colleague. It is quite an interesting moment right now because unless there is a decision that has been made while I have been speaking—and that is certainly possible due to the amount of time—there has not yet been a decision by the district judge to dissolve the second temporary restraining order. So the National Guard has not been federalized and able to deploy.

But it was going to depend on what happened at midnight last night, in which the district judge had said: I want to see if the circuit court decides to do an en banc panel. That is a fancy way of saying, instead of 3 judges evaluating the situation, a panel of 12 judges—the chief judge and other judges from the Ninth Circuit, selected randomly—would examine the decision. If that was going to happen, my impression was she was going to hold off.

The other thing that was unfolding was that the Seventh Circuit, putting Illinois—and Chicago has been really affected by this. The Seventh Circuit made a decision in support of the district court there, but that looked like it was going to the Supreme Court. And they may do a shadow docket decision very soon, at any moment, which could also affect what happens. So my guess is soon.

If none of those happens, my guess is that soon, in fact, the second temporary restraining order will have been dissolved, and that will give the ability for the National Guard to be in their mission.

I think there has been a lot of effort put into saying: These are our Oregonians. These are our soldiers, our folks. We have gone and supported them as they have gone on missions to Iraq and missions to Afghanistan and missions elsewhere in the world. We go and we welcome them home, and we think that they will have a very deep understanding that whatever they are instructed to do, they will not deliberately do provocative things.

The thing that would really sour the situation—I am putting up a little picture here that I know you can't see, but it is a picture of one of the Federal agents, not the Oregon National Guard, walking up and spraying a protester straight in the face. She had gotten out of the way as she was requested. She was sharing her opinion in a vocal manner but not in the way of anything—she had moved as requested. When people see that and other things where agents start assaulting peaceful protesters, that is where things get dicey.

So far, the Portlanders have said this is what Trump wants. He has almost instructed people, these other Federal agents, to come and provoke a riot. In fact, they even staged a fake riot last week, which was an extraordinary thing that should trouble every American.

He asked the protesters to back up several hundred yards, and they did that without conflict. So there was no tussle. There was no breaking the line. There was no throwing of things. They backed up. But behind the line of the Federal agents—probably Federal Protective Service—were videographers. The goal was to tape a fake riot. After they had been backed up, on command, the Federal Protective Service threw down the flash-bangs, which sound like gunfire. They threw down tear gas with big pluming smoke that was very irritating, and they fired pepper balls at the crowd. Well, the net result of that is the protesters scattered while being videographed so they would look—so

that Trump's team could say: Look, there was a riot.

I just can't believe that our government would stage a fake riot like that. It was carefully preserved and recorded by Oregon Public Broadcasting. So I am confident in saying what happened.

I don't think anything like that will ever happen with the Oregon National Guard. I think they will be extraordinarily careful to execute their mission in a professional fashion and to provide a little bit of encouragement to protesters: Get out of the way of the car—or do things like that.

That is my belief of our Oregon National Guard.

There is also the Oregon National Guard from California. The President said he is going to send some from Texas. That could still be possible. I just hope all are well-trained, and that it is a redline that you never attack a peaceful protester.

So far, the Portland protesters decided to engage in joy and whimsy. They have just frustrated the hell of the Trump team because they want riots. No, there is the ''pastries and pajamas'' team, and there is the Puppy Dogs for Peace team, a wedding taking place, a Unipiper doing the bagpipes on his unicycle, and there are folks putting down candles on the ground and flowers in the air and just basically doing the cha-cha slide. I have no idea how to do that, but maybe I will learn down the road here.

But this type of joy and whimsy has been a terrific way to respond to Trump trying to provoke violence and failing to do so. I think the Oregon National Guard will be extremely professional.

Mr. BLUMENTHAL. If my colleague would yield for one more quick question.

Mr. MERKLEY. Yes, I yield for a question.

Mr. BLUMENTHAL. I think he is absolutely right to call attention to the extraordinary professionalism of the National Guard, which, hopefully, will avoid the provoked violence that President Trump, unfortunately, would welcome, apparently, here. But we know that the President has said that if the courts deny him the opportunity to deploy the National Guard, he will consider using the military under the Insurrection Act.

Yesterday, I came to the floor in support of reforms that I have proposed to the Insurrection Act that would reduce the unbridled and unchecked powers that he has right now. The Insurrection Act makes modifications to the Posse Comitatus law in ways that potentially provide him with unbridled authority.

My reform bill would require accountability. It would enable use of the military in the event of a claimed rebellion or insurrection for a limited amount of time, require the President then to come to Congress and make the case, and Congress to approve a set of reforms that would protect the American people against misuse of the military in the event that he could not deploy the National Guard in this way.

I want to ask my friend from Oregon—and I believe I know the answer because he has supported reforms in the past—whether these kinds of reforms to the Insurrection Act are important and necessary to protect the American people and the military itself against the kinds of misuse of powers that could occur.

Mr. MERKLEY. The reforms that my colleague speaks of are incredibly important because we have a standard under title 10. Under title 10, which is the federalization of the National Guard, the standard is there has to be a rebellion and there has to be an invasion.

A rebellion: a sizable group, well-organized, well-armed, seeking to overthrow the government.

An invasion: a significant military force coming across to attack us.

They are well-understood terms. Even with that title 10, I am very nervous because even though the law does not say to give deference to the President in title 10, two of the judges said you should give deference to the President, which I find absurd because what it means is these standards that were crafted in legislation here—I am sure broadly and intensely debated—and said no, it has to be a rebellion or it has to be on the verge of a rebellion and the understanding of what that would look like—and to say it is a rebellion just because the President says there is one and there is nothing, like that type of deference, that is throwing open the gates to say an authoritarian President can roll out the military under title 10. That is scary as hell.

The Insurrection Act, in ways, is even scarier because it does have an explicit deference to the executive. So while it has a standard, it says that, interpreting that standard, there should be deference. I have read a number of analyses that say there is no way that the Supreme Court is not going to essentially say that the President interprets what is happening, given the language that exists there. That was written with the belief that we would always have a capable, responsible defender of the Constitution in the Oval Office and we don't. So reforming that act and closing that loophole absolutely is incredibly important to save our Republic.

Mr. BLUMENTHAL. I thank the Senator from Oregon.

I yield the floor to my other colleague from Oregon.

Mr. MERKLEY. I note that my colleague from Oregon, following proper protocol here, has arrived on the floor. I would be happy to answer a question, should you have one.

(Mr. SHEEHY assumed the Chair.)

Mr. WYDEN. I thank my colleague very much.

I just want to make sure, from a parliamentary standpoint, would the Senator from Oregon yield for my question?

Mr. MERKLEY. I would be happy to yield for a question.

Mr. WYDEN. Mr. President and colleagues, I want to start by commending my partner from Oregon, who has now been on the floor for close to 18 hours. What he is doing is ringing the alarm bells about authoritarianism in America. It is an important public service.

Let me begin by saying, the Wyden family certainly knows a thing or two about watching a democracy slide towards authoritarian rule. I wrote in my book about how the courageous women in my family, in the face of the Nazi takeover of the German republic, recognized the very real threat of the growing authoritarianism in Germany. They pushed the rest of the family to recognize what was happening to their democracy when some of the men didn't want to face reality. Because of the vigilance of women, I am standing here today in the Senate.

Now, further, on this point, as my colleague knows, during the protests in Portland this past weekend, Federal agents dragged a 4-foot-6 blind man named Quinn across a driveway and detained him for over an hour. Apparently, they thought he didn't move out of their way fast enough. It is hard to imagine—it has been reported in publications, in the Oregonian and the like—how anyone could see Quinn as a threat.

As he put it: I think they wanted to make a point, so they picked the weakest person they could find and made a big show about it.

What Donald Trump and the Vice President are offering us is, indeed, an authoritarian playbook: Attack the weakest in order to intimidate the rest of us. That is why it is the obligation of all Americans to pay attention to all of the discussions on this topic and to speak out and not yield. The American abolitionists told me that eternal vigilance is the price of liberty to keep the powerful from stealing from the many for the few.

Senator MERKLEY, I am interested in what you think Americans should do to secure the benefits of liberty for themselves and their families and future generations and what do you want Americans to take from your speech today?

Mr. MERKLEY. Thank you so much to my colleague from Oregon for this question.

It is very powerful to think about how fast the menace grew through the Jewish community in Germany and how, if one did not recognize that threat—and if I understood it right, the women in the family were the ones who said: We have got to get out of here—

Mr. WYDEN. That is correct.

Mr. MERKLEY.—to save their futures and, therefore, your future.

Why? Why do we have to have a world where the powerful engage in these assaults based on race or religion or ethnicity?

I sometimes hear Rodney King in my head—''Why can't we just all get

along?''—after he had been badly, badly beaten.

The fact is, it seems like we have a long ways to go to erase prejudice from our hearts, and when people gain positions of power who carry that prejudice in their hearts, it often becomes open hatred and amplifies the ability of others to more openly discriminate or engage in provocative acts. So, anyway, I hope the generations to come will find a better path.

But in your question on securing liberty, this most important message—and I will have my team put it back up—is the alarm bells are now. The authoritarian actions are not down the street. They are not around the corner. They are not something to worry about 2 months from now. They are here right now.

All the basic characteristics of authoritarian control are present at this moment in the United States of America: stealing the power of the purse so that the President makes decisions of what programs are funded; taking and ignoring due process, which is our guarantee of freedom from an authoritarian state; attacking the issue of liberty for the press to be able to write what they want and not be compelled through using licenses or mergers as a way to coerce them to put up what the government wants; the President telling the universities that they need to shape their education the way the President wants and support his political agenda—are you kidding me?—and so forth. And then weaponizing the Department of Justice to go after an enemies list.

So it is here now. That is the main thing. And what do Americans do to secure liberty?—what you did on Saturday, what you did on Saturday, with 7 million people taking to the streets. It was the largest demonstration in the history of this country, saying: No Kings in the United States of America. Our Presidents are not Kings. Our laws are not suggestions, and our Constitution is not optional.

That outcry, both inside a Chamber like this but, very importantly, in the streets, is the outcry that tells the rest of the country: This is not OK. This is not acceptable. This is breaking the law. This is shredding the Constitution. This is attacking our freedoms, and we the people will reclaim our Constitution, our separation of powers, and our freedom.

That is why the action of demonstration and the action of speaking out are so important at this moment. It needs to work toward the next election where people of any party, if they believe in our Constitution, campaign and win on the basis that they are going to secure for the next generation—our generation and the next generation—the freedoms and the characteristics of our Constitution and make sure this doesn't happen again.

Mr. WYDEN. Senator MERKLEY, you have said it very well.

It seems to me America is the last bastion of liberty in the world. There is nowhere to flee to, no mighty republic that stands if American democracy fails.

I want to commend my partner from Oregon for taking this exceptionally important stand. This is a message, particularly for all of America, and it is high time it be made on the Senate floor, and I commend my colleague.

Mr. MERKLEY. Thank you so much to my colleague from Oregon.

And I so appreciate so many folks coming down to echo and amplify that we have to ring the alarm bells now so the American people will be very clear as to what is going on.

I see my colleague from Rhode Island, and I would be happy to yield to him for a question.

Mr. REED. Will the Senator yield for a question? I think he will.

Mr. MERKLEY. I will, indeed, yield for a question.

Mr. REED. Thank you very much.

First, let me say that you are demonstrating incredible courage and conscience today and last evening as you stand here and point out the grave situation this country faces. You have clearly indicated—and I believe you are right—that the direction of this administration is toward authoritarian rule. Step by step, unfortunately, we seem to get closer.

One of the great ironies of the administration is that President Trump loves to sort of fake people out, if you will, while he is doing something he doesn't like or we wouldn't like. For example, for 56 times, he has talked about the deep state, the deep state, while at the same time it appears he might be building such a deep state.

For example, the Washington Post reported that the former chief data officer for the Social Security Administration has said that Elon Musk and his DOGE gang copied a mainframe database containing the personal information of hundreds of millions of Americans, including names, birth dates, addresses, and more. In fact, if you step back, DOGE has pilfered information from every Federal Agency, and we are in a situation where I believe Trump is prepared to weaponize that information against the American people in so many different ways.

So I would just ask: Did you hear my distress that Trump could use this information to attack his opponent? Could he use this information to disrupt the elections in '26 as a path to further authoritarian influence in the United States?

Mr. MERKLEY. I say to my colleague from Rhode Island that, when an authoritarian President starts collecting data in this fashion, they probably have a plan for it, and that plan is not going to be one to enhance liberty for the American people.

One of the things that I am deeply concerned about—and I am not sure if this is the same database you are referring to—is a collection of voter registration databases—is that the same? Yes—from across the country.

Mr. REED. If the Senator would yield?

Mr. MERKLEY. Yes, I will yield for a question.

Mr. REED. DOGE, it has been my observation, has pilfered information from every major Federal organization, and the Social Security Administration's former employees have indicated they have taken the most critical files that have detailed information on every American.

I think you are right. There are only two things you can really do with this kind of data. You sell it or you weaponize it or you do both. The concern I think we both share is weaponization.

In addition, I believe that the administration has sought from secretaries of state throughout the United States information about their voting rolls, which is specifically directed perhaps at electoral interference.

I yield the floor.

Mr. MERKLEY. I appreciate that clarification of the question.

It is absolutely concerning. You can imagine the many ways in which it can be weaponized. Any hostile agent from outside the United States can use that data in all kinds of ways. What happens if, suddenly, your Social Security benefits aren't there or the files regarding your disability benefits or your age and birth records? Who all knows what can disappear or be modified? Banking records are possibly included if you had banking transactions to pay your taxes. It could be incredible amounts of stuff.

We have had fairly protective practices of these databases, which is why, when DOGE went in with laptops, there was a lot of resistance. Some people who provided that resistance got moved aside physically to enable DOGE to access.

Then there is this other database effort, which is the voting registration database effort and the idea of collecting that. They have been pushing the secretaries of state. Many States have said no, and they are going to court; they are resisting. Well, thank goodness they are because a national registration voter database can be used just like a State can purge names from it, which several States have done, saying: Oh, these names look the same. Maybe it is like you have two Jack Ryans or, more commonly, it is done to Hispanic names, where they say: Hey, there is the same name in Georgia as there is in Mississippi, so we will purge this name.

I mean, it is hostile purging, and people don't know that they are no longer registered until they go to the polls to vote, and then it is often too late. So I am very, very concerned.

I want our States to maintain their own independent voting registration databases because that would be a phenomenal way to manipulate the next election.

I used to—and I say ''used to.'' Months ago, in February, people in my

townhalls would say: Aren't you worried about an effort to postpone the next election or declare an emergency?

And I would say: No. I just can't imagine that taking place.

Now, I can imagine that taking place because we have seen emergency measures abused. We have seen the President assume powers he does not have. For example, tariff power is not delegated to the President. It has always been done by law here in this Chamber and down the Hall.

So when the President is that authoritarian—taking powers the law doesn't grant, arguing it in court, and the court giving him more power; and his consolidating information on voting, I am very, very worried about that.

I want to encourage the secretaries of state in every State, whether you are in a blue State or a red State, to hold onto your data, protect it, back it up, double secure it, and tell the Feds to keep their hands off.

Mr. REED. Well, I concur.

If I may raise one additional question?

Mr. MERKLEY. Yes, I will yield for a question.

Mr. REED. You have seen firsthand what is happening in Portland. It is outrageous. The situation has been completely distorted by the President to suggest that there is major civil upheaval. That is not the case at all from the reports I have heard.

His also suggesting that military personnel can enforce the laws of the United States violates the Posse Comitatus Act, which has been a barrier to police powers by the military since the 1870s.

I assume, like myself, you are particularly disturbed that he is, again, not only weaponizing data, but he is weaponizing our military forces to go in and carry out civil wars.

Your comments?

Mr. MERKLEY. Yes. In regard to your question, I am extremely worried about the Trump administration's effort to pave the path with the courts and with the discipline of the military and have them in the practice of being deployed to, if you will, in theory, quell unrest.

But the law on title 10 is very clear. You need to have a rebellion, or you need to have an invasion, and it is very clear you don't have either of those. Even then, two judges on the three-judge panel on this court said: Well, let's kind of give a little more flexible definition of ''rebellion,'' and by the way, maybe you can give more deference to the President's evaluation. After all, they run the building.

Once you say the President can simply declare there is a rebellion, then the standard set in law means nothing. You are just throwing open the doors to an authoritarian President who is deploying troops against the American people.

We have already seen, with the provocative actions of assaults on peaceful protesters, how dangerous that is. And, then, of course, the Insurrection Act, as an exception to Posse Comitatus, is extremely scary because it explicitly has in the law a certain interpretation by the President, or deference to interpretation by the President. The core assumption was that a person in that position would always be a person who had high regard for the Constitution and for the boundaries and for the liberties and for the freedom and would defend it with their whole heart, mind, and soul. But that is not a person we have in the Oval Office today.

So I do support efforts that a number of folks—and I believe you might be well involved in—are striving to plug some of those loopholes so that that power does not get deployed.

Mr. REED. Thank you very much, Senator.

Mr. MERKLEY. Thank you.

I note that we have a Senator from Wisconsin. I would be happy to yield for a question, if she had one.

Ms. BALDWIN. Will the Senator yield for a question?

Mr. MERKLEY. I will happily yield. Thank you.

Ms. BALDWIN. Thank you.

Senator MERKLEY, you and I are both members of the Senate Appropriations Committee.

I have a question for you about how critical a functioning Congress and a functioning appropriations process is to our separation of powers, our checks and balances, and, therefore, to our very democracy.

The Federal Government is currently shut down because Republicans who control the House, the Senate, and the White House are hell-bent on raising healthcare costs for the American people. In fact, 22 million Americans are about to see their health insurance costs potentially double, triple, or more. And the only way for us to get out of this mess is for Democrats and Republicans to sit down together and negotiate a solution.

So far, Republicans refuse to come to the table. The House has been out of session for over a month—out of town—and President Trump is leaving the country, again, at the end of this week.

The longer this Trump shutdown continues, it appears more likely that our Republican colleagues will totally give up Congress's power, which, of course, is the power of the people in the government-funding process.

In fact, this morning, reporters are circulating the Capitol, speculating that Congress will give up on passing fiscal year 2026 appropriations bills and instead attempt to pass a full-year continuing resolution. This would be a failure on the part of the House and the Senate majority, controlled by Republicans. And, really, it would be a failure on the part of President Donald Trump. It would be a failure that undermines one of Congress's core democratic functions: setting priorities through the power of the purse.

So my question for you, as you hold the floor to shine a light on the ways in which this President continues to undermine our democracy and disregard the Constitution: How is Donald Trump undermining Congress through his attacks on the bipartisan appropriations process? And when he does that and the majority—the Republicans in Congress—allow this to happen, how do the American people lose?

Mr. MERKLEY. I so appreciate the question from my colleague from Wisconsin.

Part of the discussion earlier was you can detect a difference between a democracy and an authoritarian government in the following fashion: Are the decisions about which programs are funded, how they will operate, and how they are funded decided by the Congress or by the President? That is the power of the purse, and it is so clearly laid out by our Founders that you put it in Congress's hands because if you put it in the President's hands, you have a strongman—1 person, not 100 people in this Chamber bringing their diverse life experiences, their knowledge, their particular interests, and saying these things are important to our various parts of the country. You just have one man from New York deciding what is important, one man who hangs out with a group of billionaires deciding what is important.

So an incredibly essential distinction between a democracy and an authoritarian government is the decisions about the programs, their design, and their funding are made by Congress.

What we have seen is that the President and his head of Office of Management and Budget, Russell Vought, are attempting to take that power out of the hands of Congress and have the President decide which programs are funded and how much.

Every time you hear the President say: I canceled these grants because they are out of sync with the priorities of the President, that is an authoritarian statement because it is not the President's prerogative to decide how to spend that money; it is the power of the people, through their elected representatives in the House and Senate.

Then, in addition, Mr. Vought has coordinated a series of strategies to essentially cancel programs by slow-walking the disbursal of funds; by freezing the funds; by impounding the funds; by delaying until the end of the year and then submitting a request to legislatively have the funds undone but then the clock runs out on the year, and poof, the funds disappear. He has a fancy name for it: a pocket rescission. But think of it more like the carriage in ''Cinderella'' that hits midnight, and poof, the carriage is gone, and you only have a pumpkin. In this case, we only have a lump of coal when we hit the end of the year.

Then there is a requirement under the law for the President to lay out an expenditure schedule so that we can see whether or not funds are being delayed, or frozen, impounded, and so forth, and that schedule has disappeared. That website has been shut

down. So the President is hiding, and contrary to the law, what is required so that we can protect the prerogatives of our Constitution.

These are the ways the President is directly attacking the power of the purse and trying to turn this—this is one of the ways. He is doing a whole series of other things, in attacks on freedom, on weaponization of the Department of Justice to go after enemies, sending the military into the streets. But this is a key one in terms of the checks and balances of our Constitution. He is trying to take the power of the purse and has made substantial progress in doing so.

Ms. BALDWIN. Thank you.

Mr. MERKLEY. I see my colleague from Hawaii has arrived, and should she have a question—

Ms. HIRONO. Yes. Would my colleague yield for a question?

Mr. MERKLEY. I would be happy to yield.

Ms. HIRONO. First of all, I commend you for holding the floor to raise issues of such concern to the American people.

I want to focus my question on the corruption of the Trump regime. This corruption is rampant and unending, from making untold sums off meme coins to the latest outrage, demanding that the Department of Justice pay him more than $200 million. That is taxpayers' money that he wants to get his hands on. We have a President putting his financial interests before the best interests of the American people.

This is the classic Trump playbook: using the power of his office to make a profit at the expense of the American people and as a distraction from the chaos and cruelty that he is sowing every single day. It is classic authoritarianism, using the tools of government to enrich himself, reward his friends, and punish his enemies.

So I am asking my colleague: What kind of threat does this blatant corruption pose to our democracy, our institutions, and on the American people?

Mr. MERKLEY. If the Senator from Hawaii will repeat the last sentence of her question, I would appreciate it.

Ms. HIRONO. Certainly.

So the rampant corruption of this regime, what kind of threat does this blatant corruption pose to our democracy, our institutions, and the American people?

Mr. MERKLEY. Thank you so much for the question.

When I hear that word ''corruption''—and I admit, I am starting to feel a little dazed after these many hours on the floor—my head goes, first, to the financial corruption of the President, but there are always other forms of corruption he has engaged in, in terms of corrupting the basic balance of the separation of powers and the checks and balances. But let me speak, first, to the financial corruption.

One thing that we have seen is that he is using the Presidency to enrich himself and his companies and his family.

The most blatant example of this is when he said: I have this product that I want people to buy. I am going to hold a competition, and the people who buy the most of this product, a crypto coin, would be invited to a very special dinner at my golf club, where I will be present, and you will have access to me.

So he sold access to the Presidency to the people who bought the most of his crypto coins. In that case, it was a meme coin, and that means, basically, the coin is a collectible. It basically has no value.

But then he engaged in another form of crypto corruption, and that involved saying: We are going to have a stablecoin. And a stablecoin means you give me a dollar, and I give you a crypto token that you can use in international transactions.

Then there was a transaction involving—I believe; I hope I still have this right—the United Arab Emirates. They basically bought several billion dollars of these coins. What happens then is that the President can hold those dollars until the coins are redeemed and benefit from the interest earned on those several billion dollars.

Meanwhile, there was a desire by the foreign government to get access to highly capable AI chips. The answer was, no, we are not doing that. But then after they bought all these coins and enriched the President of the United States, well, then the President said: Let's give them the coins; let's give them these advanced chips.

So, certainly, the smoke, and I would say even the flame, of selling access and favors out of the Presidency is now to the tune of having made billions of dollars in the roughly 9 months that he has been in office.

I would be happy to yield for another question if you were talking about a different type of corruption.

I yield—I don't yield yet because I have to do this protocol right.

I see my colleague from New Hampshire is on the floor, and I would welcome a question, if you have one.

Mrs. SHAHEEN. Will the Senator yield for a question?

Mr. MERKLEY. Yes, I will yield for a question.

Mrs. SHAHEEN. I am normally your seatmate, but I thought it might be easier if we talked this way.

Mr. MERKLEY. Absolutely.

Mrs. SHAHEEN. So I am down here in a different place than I usually am to ask a question.

But I want you to know how much I and all of your colleagues appreciate your standing up for democracy because we are in a pivotal moment, as you said, not just in this country but globally.

I know that you care about not just what is happening domestically in the United States, but you also care about what is happening in the world because you and I serve on the Foreign Relations Committee together.

I just came from a meeting with NATO Secretary General Mark Rutte, who shared that Europeans are now spending more on defense than the United States for the first time since President Eisenhower. And they are working together to strengthen sanctions against Putin and his bloodthirsty gangs who are wreaking havoc on Ukraine and Europe.

I have some good news that I wanted to share with you from the Foreign Relations Committee this morning, since you weren't able to be with us, and it applies to what is happening in Ukraine and Europe—because this morning, in the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, the committee considered three bipartisan bills to address Russia's continued, expanding aggression—for the first time in this Congress.

So the first time since the beginning of the year, we have actually taken action in the Foreign Relations Committee, action that you supported with your proxy votes—and I appreciate that—to take action against Russia's aggression in Ukraine.

One bill will designate Russia as a state sponsor of terrorism because of what they have done to kidnap Ukrainian children. One will stop Chinese entities from supporting Russia's brutal war machine against Ukraine. And the final one will authorize a continued quarterly transfer of Russia's foreign assets that have been seized in the United States to support Ukraine.

So I think—all of these bills passed. They were bipartisan. They passed unanimously out of the committee. And I think it is a critical time in history for this Congress to be taking a stand on Ukraine.

So, Senator MERKLEY, given this important moment in history, what more can we do in the Senate to support our allies and to protect the Ukrainians from further bloodshed from Vladimir Putin?

Mr. MERKLEY. I so much appreciate the good report and question from my colleague from New Hampshire and appreciate her leadership on the Foreign Relations Committee as the top Democrat, working hard to partner across the aisle for the common cause of international security.

Every time I think about Ukraine, I think about how fiercely, including in the Orange Revolution, in which they did so much to say: No, we will not be taken over by Russia; we will not be put under the thumb of Russia by one of our Presidents. They have said: We see the system to our north where there is no freedom, where people are not in charge of their own destiny because they are ruled by a dictator, and we reject that and will fight with our lives—and so many have, in fact, perished on the battlefield—to defend our freedom.

That inspires me every time I think about it.

At the moments in which President Trump has been less supportive of

Ukraine and more supportive of Russia, I have tried to send him magical vibes—no—understand the difference between standing with a nation fighting for freedom and snuggling up with a dictator. We are a light to the world when we fight for democracy and support democracy.

So I am really pleased to hear about these three bills passing, and I hope that other factors can be worked up in the international community that will help slow down the Russian war machine. They are an incredibly large country, and they have built huge factories to produce cruise missiles, and so, nightly, Ukraine is hammered with hundreds now. So it just means more resolve by the United States, more resolve by Europe.

I am surprised to hear that the Europeans collectively are spending more on defense than the United States. If that had been a trivia question, I would have failed. But there it is, and that certainly has been partly to recognize the threat from Russia.

If Russia is willing to slice off a piece of Georgia, as they were in 2008, I believe; if they are willing to throw thousands of soldiers into a fight with Ukraine really with no consideration—I mean, it is just like fodder to the war machine. And then we are seeing that they are overflying some of the other European countries. And these are incredibly provocative.

So I think all of that goes toward hopefully forging a unity of purpose between Europe and the United States.

Something you may not know—one of the skeletons in my closet is I spent a rotation working at NATO in Brussels when we were trying to develop a treaty for intermediate-range missiles because of the nuclear threats, to stabilize the threats, in the middle of the 1980s. The United States and Europe worked so closely together. That is the type of partnership—it is the type of partnership that has taken some hits in the last few years. We want to restore that vision of that careful, detailed, determined coordination so that we advance the best strategies. And, of course, battlefield strategies are also changing dramatically as we go—being able to adjust to this changing world.

So that is my hope, that building on the work the committee did today—and hopefully those bills will be here on the floor, and hopefully they will be on the President's desk—that we can continue to strive to a peaceful conclusion with security for Ukraine and not allow the war machine of Russia to overwhelm it.

Mrs. SHAHEEN. Thank you.

Mr. MERKLEY. Mr. President, for the first time in several hours, I don't have a colleague who is asking me a question, and so I am going to return to the conversation that I was holding forth on regarding the Department of Justice.

I have here this page called ''Justice Connection, Urgent Message from Recent DOJ Alumni Decrying Attacks on Justice Department.'' I believe I asked unanimous consent to have this put in the RECORD, but if I did not, I am asking it now.

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

Mr. MERKLEY. Thank you very much, Mr. President.

Here is how that reads:

We are 292 former career employees who proudly served our country at the Department of Justice. From prosecutors, special agents, and intelligence analysts to immigration judges, grant managers, civil rights attorneys and more, we all carried out our duties faithfully, regardless of who occupied the White House. Until we no longer could.

Each of us left the Department, either voluntarily or involuntarily, because of actions taken by this administration.

Our fidelity to the Constitution and our dedication to our country did not end when our jobs did. Now that we've left the Department, we believe it's our duty to sound the alarm about this administration's degradation of DOJ's vital work, and its assault on the public servants who do it.

It is incumbent on all of us to fight for the Justice Department before it's too late.

DOJ's mission is to ''to uphold the rule of law, to keep our country safe, and to protect civil rights.'' It's failing on all three fronts:

The Justice Department cannot uphold the rule of law when it carries out the President's retribution campaign and protects his allies; violates court orders and evades due process requirements; directs attorneys to violate their ethical responsibilities; and fires its employees without notice or cause in violation of civil service laws.

It also cannot keep our country safe when it ousts FBI employees, prosecutors, national security experts, and ATF officials; shutters offices that prevent community violence and dismantle drug trafficking operations; purges the attorneys who enforce laws that protect the environment; and shifts highly trained special agents away from counterintelligence and counterterrorism.

And it cannot protect civil rights when it drives out 75% of attorneys from the Civil Rights Division and refuses to enforce the nation's civil rights laws as Congress intended, using them instead as a cudgel against marginalized groups.

The administration is taking a sledgehammer to other longstanding work the Department has done to protect communities and the rule of law, too. Its plans to eliminate the Tax Division, which saves the country billions of dollars by pursuing tax evaders, will leave us poorer. Gutting the Public Integrity Section and FBI public corruption squads has paved the way for government graft. Cancelling hundreds of millions of dollars in grants has left at-risk communities less protected and crime victims less supported. The list could go on.

As for its treatment of its employees, the current leadership's behavior has been appalling. This administration's lies about the ''deep state'' and exaggerations about government inefficiency have eroded the respect our country once held for public servants. And demonizing, firing, demoting, involuntarily transferring, and directing employees to violate their ethical duties has already caused an exodus of over 5,000 of us—draining the Department of priceless institutional knowledge and expertise, and impairing its historical success in recruiting top talent. We may feel the effects of this for generations.

The Justice Department's backbone has always been its career workforce, and those who were part of it are best positioned to explain why the current leaders' actions are catastrophic for the nation.

We call on these leaders to reverse course—to remember the oath we all took to uphold the Constitution—and adhere to the legal guardrails and institutional norms on which our justice system relies.

We call on our fellow alumni to join us in sounding the alarm, and in mobilizing to support our colleagues still there. They deserve respect and gratitude, neither of which they're getting from this administration.

We call on Congress to exercise its oversight responsibilities far more vigorously. Members in both chambers and on both sides of the aisle must provide a meaningful check on the abuses we're witnessing.

And we call on all Americans—whose safety, prosperity, and rights depend on a strong DOJ—to speak out against its destruction.

Our democracy is only as strong as the rule of law, and the rule of law can't survive without the principal institution that enforces it.

Well, that is a powerful letter from these 292 former career employees of the Department of Justice.

I was very struck about the phrase that says: ''We call on Congress to exercise its oversight responsibilities.''

That came up about an hour ago, in one of the conversations, that we could do so much more and we should try to be partnering with our Republican colleagues to provide that essential function of oversight. That is one of the checks and balances, and we should be deeply engaged in making it as effective as possible because here is quite a list of the things going wrong with the Department of Justice.

These things beg for hearings to be held, for issues to be understood, for the press to be able to report, for solutions to be able to be found, for lines that prevent unacceptable conduct to be clearly delineated.

But that can't happen unless Congress exercises its oversight ability.

OK. We have Chapter 8. So we are headed back to the book, and the book is this book, ''How Democracies Die.'' And with each chapter, I am trying to give some sense of the chapter but not every element of it. So I will read some of the pages, maybe scan through some others, and try to address a few of the issues that I will raise.

This particular chapter addresses President Trump's first year in his first administration, and it is titled: Trump's first year: an authoritarian report card. So remember this was just his first year in office. We are now in his fifth year in office, headed toward his sixth year in office, and we have seen such an acceleration. So the items identified in the first year, well, we may well see that they become more serious over time.

Donald Trump's first year in office followed a familiar script. Like Alberto Fujimori, Hugo Chavez, and Recep Tayyip Erdogan, America's new president began his tenure by launching blistering rhetorical attacks on his opponents. He called the media the ''enemy of the American people,'' questioned judges' legitimacy, and threatened to cut federal funding to major cities. Predictably, these attacks triggered dismay, shock, and anger across the political spectrum.

Journalists found themselves at the front lines, exposing—but also provoking—the president's norm-breaking behavior. A study by the Shorenstein Center on Media, Politics, and Public Policy found that the major news outlets were ''unsparing'' in their coverage of the Trump administration's first hundred days. Of news reports with a clear tone, the study found, 80 percent were negative—much higher than under Clinton (60 percent), George W. Bush (57 percent), and Obama (41 percent).

Soon, Trump administration officials were feeling besieged. Not a single week went by in which press coverage wasn't at least 70 percent negative. And amid swirling rumors about the Trump campaign's ties to Russia, a high profile special counsel, Robert Mueller, was appointed to oversee investigations into the case. Just a few months into his presidency, President Trump faced talk of impeachment. But he retained the support of his base, and like other elected demagogues, he doubled down. He claimed his administration was beset by powerful establishment forces, telling graduates of the U.S. Coast Guard Academy that ''no politician in history, and I say this with great surety, has been treated worse or more unfairly.'' The question, then, was how Trump would respond. Would an outsider president who considered himself to be under unwarranted assault lash out, as happened in Peru and Turkey?

President Trump exhibited clear authoritarian instincts during his first year in office. In Chapter 4, we presented three strategies by which elected authoritarians seek to consolidate power: capturing the referees, sidelining the key players, and rewriting the rules to tilt the playing field against opponents. Trump attempted all three of these strategies.

President Trump demonstrated striking hostility toward the referees—law enforcement, intelligence, ethics agencies, and the courts. Soon after his inauguration, he sought to ensure that the heads of U.S. intelligence agencies, including the FBI, the CIA, and the National Security Agency, would be personally loyal to him, apparently in the hope of using these agencies as a shield against investigations into his campaign's Russia ties. During his first week in office, President Trump summoned FBI Director James Comey to a one-on-one dinner in the White House in which, according to Comey, the president asked for a pledge of loyalty. He later reportedly pressured Comey to drop investigations into his recently departed national security director, Michael Flynn, pressed Director of National Intelligence Daniel Coats and CIA Director Mike Pompeo to intervene in Comey's investigation, and personally appealed to Coats and NSA head Michael Rogers to release statements denying the existence of any collusion with Russia (both refused).

President Trump also tried to punish or purge agencies that acted with independence. Most prominently, he dismissed Comey after it became clear that Comey could not be pressured into protecting the administration and was expanding its Russia investigation. Only once in the FBI's eighty-two-year history had a president fired the bureau's director before his ten-year term was up—and in that case, the move was in response to clear ethical violations and enjoyed bipartisan support.

The Comey firing was not President Trump's only assault on referees who refused to come to his personal defense. Trump had attempted to establish a personal relationship with Manhattan-based U.S. Attorney Preet Bharara, whose investigations into money laundering reportedly threatened to reach Trump's inner circle; when Bharara, a respected anticorruption figure, continued the investigation, the president removed him. After Attorney General Jeff Sessions recused himself from the Russia investigation and his deputy, Rod Rosenstein, appointed the respected former FBI Director Robert Mueller as special counsel to oversee the investigation, Trump publicly shamed Sessions, reportedly seeking his resignation. White House lawyers even launched an effort to dig up dirt on Mueller, seeking conflicts of interest that could be used to discredit or dismiss him. By late 2017, many of Trump's allies were openly calling on him to fire Mueller, and there was widespread concern that he would soon do so.

So in this section, we are hearing about all of the attacks on the referees during Trump's—and this is just a classic part of an authoritarian government—attack the referees. And, of course, we saw it in year five, this year. Immediately, Trump took out special investigators of the various Agencies and did so in order to make sure that there wasn't the type of oversight that would point out to the public or to Congress where things were going wrong.

Take out the referees—that is the authoritarian strategy being laid out here.

President Trump's efforts to derail independent investigations evoked the kind of assaults on the referees routinely seen in less democratic countries—for example, the dismissal of Venezuelan Prosecutor General Luisa Ortega, a chavista appointee who asserted her independence and began to investigate corruption and abuse in the Maduro government. Although Ortega's term did not expire until 2021 and she could be legally removed only by the legislature (which was in opposition hands), the government's dubiously elected Constituent Assembly sacked her in August 2017.

President Trump also attacked judges who ruled against him. After Judge James Robart of the Ninth Circuit of the U.S. Court of Appeals blocked the administration's initial travel ban, Trump spoke of ''the opinion of this so-called judge, which essentially takes law-enforcement away from our country.'' Two months later, when the same court temporarily blocked the withholding of federal funds from sanctuary cities, the White House denounced the judgment as an attack on the rule of law by an ''unelected judge.'' Trump himself responded by threatening to break up the Ninth Circuit.

The president took an indirect swipe at the judiciary in August 2017 when he pardoned the controversial former Arizona sheriff Joe Arpaio, who was convicted of violating a federal court order to stop racial profiling. Arpaio was a political ally and a hero to many of Trump's anti-immigrant supporters. As we noted earlier, the chief executive's constitutional power to pardon is without limit, but presidents have historically exercised it with great restraint, seeking advice from the Justice Department and never issuing pardons for self-protection or political gain. President Trump boldly violated these norms.

Not only did he not consult the Justice Department, but the pardon was clearly political—it was popular with his base. The move reinforced fears that the President would eventually pardon himself and his inner circle—something that was reportedly explored by his lawyers. Such a move would constitute an unprecedented attack on judicial independence. As constitutional scholar Martin Redish put it, ''If the president can immunize his agents in this manner, the courts will effectively lose any meaningful authority to protect constitutional rights against invasion by the executive branch.''

This discussion over pardoning himself and the risk it creates of misbehavior is an interesting prelude to the fact that, essentially, the Supreme Court pardoned Trump, saying that the President cannot commit a crime. If he can't commit a crime, then you can do whatever and you don't have to be pardoned because you haven't committed a crime. So the Supreme Court essentially gave him the same protection and created the same risk for an authoritarian state that Trump pardoning himself would have resulted in.

The administration responded by launching attacks on the OGE.

Office of Government Ethics.

House Oversight Chair Jason Chaffetz, a Trump ally, even hinted at an investigation of Shaub. In May, administration officials tried to force the OGE to halt investigations into the White House's appointment of ex-lobbyists. Alternately harassed and ignored by the White House, Shaub resigned, leaving behind what journalist Ryan Lizza called a ''broken'' OGE.

President Trump's behavior toward the courts, law enforcement and intelligence bodies, and other independent agencies was drawn from an authoritarian playbook. He openly spoke of using the Justice Department and the FBI to go after Democrats, including Hillary Clinton. And in late 2017, the Justice Department considered nominating a special counsel to investigate Clinton. Despite its purges and threats, however, the administration could not capture the referees. Trump did not replace Comey with a loyalist, largely because such a move was vetoed by key Senate Republicans. Likewise, Senate Republicans resisted Trump's efforts to replace Attorney General Sessions. But the president had other battles to wage.

I think this is an important moment to remember that back in 2017, colleagues across the aisle played a role of reason in pushing back on some of the unacceptable things that Trump was trying to do.

They protected Comey. As it said:

Trump did not replace Comey with a loyalist, largely because such a move was vetoed by key Senate Republicans. Likewise, Senate Republicans resisted Trump's efforts to replace Attorney General Sessions.

Early in the conversation, we were talking about the importance of one of the checks and balances of the Constitution, which is for the Senate and the House to hold hearings on what is going on.

When I read the two-page letter from the 283, I believe it was, 282 former career employees at the Department of Justice, they laid out a host of things that are going wrong. It is essentially an invitation: Please hold hearings because a lot of bad stuff is happening inside the Department of Justice.

So I encourage colleagues on both sides of the aisle who serve on the Judiciary Committee to take them up on that invitation, to bring these former members and others to share what is going on, because that is our responsibility under the Constitution, to provide that type of spotlight, insight, and

hopefully advice to help the administration, well, more effectively and legally pursue the enhancement of the American system of justice.

Of course, this whole litany of the way Trump attacked the referees was a prelude to the absolute assault on the referees that occurred during this year in such a systematic fashion, in such an expanded fashion.

The Trump administration also mounted efforts to sideline key players in the political system. President Trump's rhetorical attacks on critics in the media are an example. His repeated accusations that outlets such as the New York Times and CNN were dispensing ''fake news'' and conspiring against him look familiar to any student of authoritarianism. In a February 2017 tweet, he called the media the ''enemy of the American people,'' a term that, critics noted, mimicked one used by Stalin and Mao. Trump's rhetoric was often threatening. A few days after his ''enemy of the people'' tweet, Trump told the Conservative Political Action Committee:

I love the First Amendment; nobody loves it better than me. Nobody. . . . But as you saw throughout the entire campaign, and even now, the fake news doesn't tell the truth. . . . I say it doesn't represent the people. It never will represent the people, and we're going to do something about it.

Do what, exactly? The following month, President Trump returned to his campaign pledge to ''open up the libel laws,'' tweeting that the New York Times had ''disgraced the media world. Gotten me wrong for two solid years. Change libel laws?'' When asked by a reporter whether the administration was really considering such changes, White House Chief of Staff Reince Priebus said, ''I think that's something we've looked at.'' Ecuadorian President Rafael Correa used this approach. His multimillion-dollar defamation suits and jailing of journalists on charges of defamation had a powerfully chilling effect on the media. Although Trump dropped the libel issue, he continued his threats. In July, he retweeted an altered video clip made from old WWE footage of him tackling and then punching someone with a CNN logo superimposed on his face.

President Trump also considered using government regulatory agencies against unfriendly media companies. During the 2016 campaign, he had threatened Jeff Bezos, the owner of the Washington Post and Amazon, with antitrust action, tweeting: ''If I become president, oh do they have problems.'' He also threatened to block the pending merger of Time Warner (CNN's Parent company) and AT&T, and during the first months of his presidency, there were reports that White House advisors considered using the administration's antitrust authority as a source of leverage against CNN. And finally, in October 2017, Trump attacked NBC and other networks by threatening to ''challenge their license.''

This was written in 2018, but you see the strategies as they are reporting on January 2017 through January 2018. You see how the strategies were being explored that have been so fiercely pursued this year. You see that here he was threatening a merger, which is something he did with CBS. You see that here he was threatening libel law changes. And while he didn't do that, apparently, what he did in the most recent year was to do a lawsuit, a $10 billion lawsuit against the Wall Street Journal because he didn't like something that they said. He also attacked, of course, ''60 Minutes'' over how they edited an interview with Kamala Harris.

So the strategy of attacking the press in 2017 continues with Trump reentering office in 2025.

And finally, in October 2017, Trump attacked NBC and other networks by threatening to ''challenge their license.''

There was one area in which the Trump administration went beyond threats to try to use the machinery of government to punish critics. During his first week in office, President Trump signed an executive order authorizing federal agencies to withhold funding from ''sanctuary cities'' that refused to cooperate with the administration's crackdown on undocumented immigrants. ''If we have to,'' he declared in February 2017, ''we'll defund.'' The plan was reminiscent of the Chavez government's repeated moves to strip opposition-run city governments of their control over local hospitals, police forces, ports, and other infrastructure. Unlike the Venezuelan president, however, President Trump was blocked by the courts.

Although President Trump has waged a war of words against the media and other critics, those words have not (yet) led to action. No journalists have been arrested, and no media outlets have altered their coverage due to pressure from the government. Trump's efforts to tilt the playing field to his advantage have been more worrying. In May 2017, he called for changes in what he called ''archaic'' Senate rules, including the elimination of the filibuster, which would have strengthened the Republican majority at the expense of the Democratic minority. Senate Republicans did eliminate the filibuster for Supreme Court nominations, clearing the way for Neil Gorsuch's ascent to the Court, but they rejected the idea of doing away with it entirely.

Now, that topic is something I know a little bit about, having immersed myself in exploration of the ins and outs of the filibuster. And one may wonder why the Senate Republican majority did not proceed to eliminate the filibuster. Well, here is the reason why: Mostly, my Republican colleagues do their policy through tax bills. Tax bills can be done through reconciliation, and reconciliation is a simple majority mechanism. So, therefore, they largely don't need to dump the filibuster because they can do their policy by simple majority already.

You saw that this year with the so-called Big Beautiful Bill that we called the ''Big Ugly Betrayal,'' done solely on a party line, and if I recall right, all of us in the 53-to-47 Senate—I think we ended up with a 50–50 vote broken by the Vice President. So it passed by the narrowest of margins, but it was done entirely on simple majority by one party.

Meanwhile, Democrats tend to like policy ideas, and policy ideas require a supermajority. So if you are a Republican leader, you can pursue your objectives by simple majority through the tax bill, and then when you are the minority, you can block the Democrats' policy bills using the supermajority requirement.

So it is essentially: Heads, we win; tails, you lose. That is a pretty good arrangement. Who would want to mess with that?

Now, Trump didn't understand that. I am sure if he was asked, he couldn't explain it. But that is why it doesn't make sense for Republicans to get rid of the filibuster, because it is inherently advantageous for them, given the difference in how Democrats and Republicans pursue bills.

Perhaps the most antidemocratic initiative yet undertaken by the Trump administration is the creation of the Presidential Advisory Commission on Election Integrity, chaired by Vice President Mike Pence but run by Vice Chair Kris Kobach. To understand its potential impact, recall that the Civil Rights and Voting Rights Acts prompted a massive shift in party identification: The Democratic Party became the primary representative of minority and first- and second-generation immigrant voters, while GOP voters remained overwhelmingly white. Because the minority share of the electorate is growing, these changes favor the Democrats, a perception that was reinforced by Barack Obama's 2008 victory, in which minority turnout rates were unusually high.

Every now and then, we see the parties flip on a significant issue. That is always kind of an interesting question to explore how that happens.

So here is the Republican Party that was founded, antislavery—the Republican party that fought for civil rights bills against the Southern Democrats who resisted civil rights bills, including filibustering them to keep them from happening. So you would think that in that situation, once civil rights were actually conveyed by the Voting Rights Act, it might be the Republican Party that quickly absorbed the new voters, since the Republican Party had been the premiere champion for civil rights. But that is not the way it worked out.

The Democratic Party, with Johnson, took the lead in overturning the bans on voting participation by minority Americans. The Democratic Party, although being the party that had long oppressed and suppressed civil rights, became the party that pushed through the 1964 Civil Rights Act and the 1965 Voting Rights Act. And it is the Democratic Party, despite its long history of suppressing civil rights, that became the welcoming party for newly-enfranchised minority voters.

Another interesting flip, in my mind, is on international trade. When I came to the Senate, it was primarily Republicans who wanted the Trans-Pacific Partnership. In fact, it was very important trading strategy for very powerful companies. And it was mostly Democrats who opposed it—not purely, but that was certainly the weight.

But then Trump, when he ran for President the first time, he started advocating against the TPP and started advocating for bringing factories back to America, including using tariffs to make American factories more competitive. And so the Republican Party, after his election, became the party that was driving against the TPP, and it was more the Democrats who still had folks who were supporting it—anyway, another flip worthy of thinking about as, over time, special events take place that change the direction.

The first special event was the passage of the 1964 and 1965 bills, led by Democrats that converted the anti-civil rights party into the pro-civil rights party. And the flip on the Trans-Pacific Partnership being driven by Trump's effort as a Republican candidate to become an opponent of the TPP, rather than the traditional position of Republicans to be for it.

Perceiving a threat, some Republican leaders came up with a response that evoked memories of the Jim Crow South: make it harder for low-income minority citizens to vote. Because poor minority voters were overwhelmingly Democratic, measures that dampened turnout among such voters would . . . tilt the playing field in favor of Republicans. This would be done via strict voter identification laws—requiring, for example, that voters present a valid driver's license or other government-issued photo ID upon arrival at the polling station.

The push for voter ID laws was based on a false claim: that voter fraud is widespread in the [U.S.] All reputable studies have concluded that levels of such fraud in this country are low.

Mr. KELLY. Will the Senator yield for a question?

Mr. MERKLEY. I see the Senator from Arizona on the floor, and, yes, I would yield for a question.

Mr. KELLY. Senator MERKLEY, I appreciate everything you are doing to highlight the many ways that this President has been undermining the Constitution and the rule of law.

We have now experienced about 9½ months of this Presidency, and I am going to ask you a question about one thing in particular, and it is about the U.S. military and the leadership of the U.S. military.

But I want to kind of set the stage here a little bit. The United States has the most lethal military in the history of the world. The President presiding right now has experienced that as a U.S. Navy SEAL, I myself as a pilot flying off of an aircraft carrier in the first gulf war. No nation—at least today—matches the combat capability, the professionalism, the effectiveness of the U.S. Navy, Air Force, Army, Marine Corps, and now Space Force. And I will include the Coast Guard, too, because we like to count the Coast Guard, especially when they partnered with us on things that really mattered to the United States.

You know, one of those that I would like to discuss, where we should see more involvement from the Coast Guard, is what we are currently seeing in the Caribbean with regards to drug trafficking, which is a problem and presents a clear and present danger to the citizens of this country, and it is something we need to do more about.

I was on one of the cable shows last night, talking about this specific issue. So to date, there have been 6 or 7 strikes in the Caribbean that have killed 32 people, and, you know, some of those were trafficking drugs.

Those routes, by the way, Senator MERKLEY, are used generally to traffic cocaine and marijuana through the Caribbean, to Caribbean islands and on to Europe. They are not the routes that traffic fentanyl to the United States.

And over the last 6 weeks or so, we have conducted kinetic strikes against these boats without what I recognize as the legal authority to do so. It is not something I have seen in my experience in the U.S. Navy—I spent 25 years in the U.S. Navy—that I have seen during my career. I am now retired. But during my career, I never saw a President command the Department of Defense to do things that I felt were outside the boundaries of what we would consider illegal action against people.

We have traditionally done this with the U.S. Coast Guard, sometimes in conjunction with the U.S. Navy. We are in a partnership. They do what we would call law enforcement. And members of the Coast Guard come aboard Navy ships. We interdict drugs that are coming through the Caribbean or, more often, on the pacific side, on the western side of Mexico, up into California, and we interdict those drugs, and then we prosecute those individuals.

And, in my view, I think the administration has not made a case to the U.S. Congress and to the American people as to why this is a legal action.

A couple of weeks ago, when we were being briefed on this, I felt that they were pretty much tying themselves into a knot in trying to inform us on why this is allowed under the law.

Now, here is one of the things I really worry about. I worry about these young sailors or naval aviators or drone operators that are the trigger pullers, the guys who are dropping the small-diameter bombs from airplanes. It could be an F–18 or an F–35 or some other weapons system or folks that are operating an MQ–9 drone.

If you are the guy that is pulling the trigger in a combat operation, you typically expect that the people above you have done all the due diligence necessary to make sure that you are not going to be in some kind of legal jeopardy. And I really worry about that today.

There might be some young Navy lieutenant out there or Marine Corps captain or Air Force, for all I know, a MQ–9 operator, that might someday find out that they have done something that is not consistent with the law, and they are now in legal jeopardy. And that is a big problem.

I never saw that during my 25 years in the U.S. Navy. The two ships I sunk in the Persian Gulf, not for one second did I feel like I was getting some bad information from the battle group or from anybody above in the chain of command, whether it was General Schwarzkopf or Colin Powell or the President of the United States, George Herbert Walker Bush. It was not a concern of ours. It is a concern today.

And I can tell you, as I watch this from my vantage point on the Intelligence Committee and on the Armed Services Committee, there are members of our military that are now in some sort of potential future legal jeopardy. And it is because we have a President that I believe doesn't do his homework, doesn't follow norms, and possibly is making decisions that are not legal.

(Mr. BANKS assumed the Chair.)

We have seen the politicalization of the U.S. military over the last 9 months. That really disturbs me—the speech in Quantico where the Secretary of Defense dragged in hundreds of our senior leadership from all over the world, admirals and generals and senior enlisted staff who have very important jobs, who are working every single day to make sure that our Nation and our allies are safe and secure and have to make some really complicated decisions every day about the posture of force, how to equip them, make sure they are ready to fight—and the Secretary of Defense, for some reason, decides that he needed to give a TED talk about gym clothes and PT and other stuff that has no bearing on whether or not we are a capable military.

I don't know why he feels this way. But in my experience, from the time I first put on the uniform in 1986 to the time I took it off in 2011 and then beyond since I have been retired from the U.S. Navy, our effectiveness has never been diminished. Our innovation and our professionalism and our ability to train well is something that really makes us stand out.

I have experience with some of our allies, but I also have a little bit of experience with our adversaries. While I was at NASA flying the Space Shuttle over a decade—first flight in 2001 to my last in 2011—every one of my missions I had a lot of interactions with Russian cosmonauts. Most of these Russian cosmonauts—not all of them but most—were members of the Russian Air Force, pilots, some of them test pilots.

I flew with these guys. They weren't the best pilots in the world, I have to admit. I was shocked the first time I flew with a guy who I will not share his last name. His first name was Vladimir. But I was really shocked that this guy who was a MiG–25 pilot could not fly formation in an airplane, something so fundamental and basic to a military pilot, that they did not train enough to be capable enough to do something that was so fundamental to be an effective fighter pilot.

And then after—that was early in my NASA career. Later, as I started flying to space with these guys, I realized that Russians and the Russian military, in particular—because that is where my experience was with these military guys—they were motivated by different things. It explains a lot of what I see out of Russia today.

Now, as Americans, whether you are in the U.S. Navy, whether you are a naval aviator or in the Air Force, Army, Marine Corps, Space Force, even in U.S. industry and in organizations in the United States, and I don't think this is unique to us, but everybody doesn't share this value: Americans are

usually most motivated by mission success. We care about the mission first. We care about the mission before ourselves. We care about the mission more than anything. I think it is true for American companies, too, that they have a set of goals, and they have a plan and they are going to execute the plan.

It is not true of our Russian adversaries. It took me a while to learn this, but I found that they were motivated primarily by a couple of things: One was the appearance that they were in charge. That mattered to them more than anything else, that I look like I am in charge of whatever this operation is, not mission success. The second thing would be who could I blame? If things go wrong, where to place the blame. And the third thing, which was really interesting, was what can I steal from my employer. That, to me, was three principles I saw in my Russian cosmonaut colleagues.

They talked about the stealing. I wasn't sure they were actually stealing anything from the Russian space agency or not, but they talked about it as something that is fundamental to their system and their economy.

I bring this up because I often feel that we are unique as a service, as a fighting force in the world. Our allies—some of them are really, really good. But there is nothing that I found in my experience in my career—I am 61 years old—that is as professional as U.S. servicemembers and as motivated by mission and doing the right thing and making moral and ethical choices. And that is all at risk.

In Senator MERKLEY's State, in Portland, they are sending armed uniformed soldiers to do what we traditionally feel is police work—intimidating the population, using tear gas against U.S. citizens for no reason. By the way, National Guard and Active-Duty servicemembers are not trained for this mission.

In my 25 years in the Navy, I never once did anything that you would consider to be close to police work. I would know. I am the son of two cops, so I would get a sense for what that was. It never happened. And unless you are a military policeman, it doesn't happen for infantrymen, for special ops or submariners, and certainly not for Active-Duty infantry.

So at this time in our history, I am really worried about legal jeopardy that our young servicemembers have been put in. But I am also worried about, does this fundamentally change the nature of the U.S. military, which has been, in my view, a force for good around the world, where we come to the defense of our allies and we do it in a way that garners a tremendous amount of respect, I think, even from our adversaries. I think that is all at risk.

So I wanted to ask Senator MERKLEY: You have been here 16 years now in the U.S. Senate. You have tremendous experience at this. My understanding is, you have a very close relationship with the people you represent in Oregon. How worried are you about the changes that could happen to the U.S. military?

And also, I am interested in what are you hearing from your constituents about this. They have been the focus and have been highlighted by this administration, not just this year but in Donald Trump's first Presidency as well.

I yield back to the Senator from Oregon.

Mr. MERKLEY. Thank you so much to my colleague from Arizona for your question.

I so appreciate the decades of experience and knowledge you bring in regard to the services. I have only a small chapter in my life of 2 years working for Secretary Weinberger as a Presidential fellow. But I didn't wear a uniform. I was a civilian working on a host of different programs for 4 months or so. They were great assignments. I learned an awful lot.

But everything you are talking about comes from your deep connection, involvement in the uniformed services, and such a wealth of knowledge just listening to you. I so appreciate that you bring that to bear.

In terms of my concern about the military, I felt, from my much more limited world, mostly the Pentagon, that folks have worked incredibly hard not to be partisan. Certainly, the Secretary of Defense brought a set of missions that tied into President Reagan's administration and his goals. But people didn't overtly talk about pardons or press in terms of the sort of derisive commentary we have now and heard on cable television on both sides.

When I think about these last few years, I am concerned that the military has been substantially politicalized. I may be wrong about that because I don't have that view from inside. But I think about how the President gave the speech to the 800 generals, and he basically said: If you don't like what I am saying, you can leave the room. If you leave, I will strip you of your rank and your career will end.

To me, that was: I want you to be loyal to me, not the Constitution. I want you to be loyal to me, the President of the United States, which is, I felt, very inappropriate and out of sync with the military I saw, ready to work in partnership with administrations of either side.

But I don't know if we see, for example, the speeches at the military academy. I recall some story about folks cheering and clapping for what was a partisan set of political points being made. I don't know. I am going to leave it to your analysis because you have a much better sense of that.

But when it comes to the effort to create a pathway to use the military against civilians inside the United States of America, that is of grave concern to my constituents; to look at the current dynamic now in which President Trump said Portland is a war zone, it is war-ravaged, it is in complete chaos—while he was saying that, there might have been two or three protesters outside the ICE building conducting themselves peacefully; there have been weeks with no arrests—that is a real invention.

When our Governor talked to President Trump, she pointed that out, and I gather he was like, ''Well, I have seen the tapes.'' I don't know what tapes he was watching, maybe 2020 tapes when we did have actual conflict in the city. But here you have Portlanders, who have been so restrained. Even when they have suffered being hit by pepper balls, tear gas, they have not engaged in the scuffles with police, and they have been protesting with joy and whimsy.

I mean, it is a strange feeling to see people bringing their pets down and having ''Keep Your Paws Off Portland'' signs or folks handing out pastries in pajamas or otherwise proceeding to celebrate their joy as a way of saying to President Trump: There is no riot here. Don't use anything that you have said as a foundation for deploying troops to our city.

In fact, a district judge simply said that the President's description of the city is untethered to the facts.

There is a huge concern that the President is striving to get the courts to make decisions that will open the doors and say there will be deference to the President so he can deploy, under title 10, the National Guard, the federalized National Guard, against peaceful protesters or that the President will proceed to using the Insurrection Act, which does inherently give more support, deference, to the President.

So there is a lot of concern, to my colleague from Arizona, about what is going to unfold.

Meanwhile, I am delighted to see my colleague from New Mexico on the floor, and I would welcome a question if he has one.

Mr. LUJÁN. Will the Senator yield for a question?

Mr. MERKLEY. Yes, I will yield for a question.

Mr. LUJÁN. First, I want to begin by thanking our friend, and I say ''our friend'' because he is more than my friend, Senator MERKLEY. We are friends from across our Nation's Capital and across America—some who are here, listening to you themselves, and others who, I am sure, are tuning in. Whether it is on social media or on C–SPAN or on one of the news outlets that is carrying the conversation that you are having on behalf of the American people, I want to say thank you. Thank you for your courage, for your conviction, and for your tireless leadership in speaking up today on behalf of all that is going on across America and around the world but especially what is impacting your constituents.

If I am not mistaken, Senator MERKLEY, it has been nearly 20 hours that you have been on the floor now, speaking to the American people.

Now, I like you. I am proud to be a U.S. Senator. I know, the way you speak about Oregon, I am always battling with you on whether it is New Mexico or it is Oregon. Which is more beautiful? I still believe it is New Mexico, but that is not my question today, Senator MERKLEY.

I am so proud to represent the people from New Mexico, and every day I am reminded that the work that we do here doesn't just impact our homes. The work that we do here touches every corner of the United States of America.

For the last 3 weeks of this Republican shutdown—and the reason I say that is that the American people know that the House of Representatives has a majority of Republicans; that the Speaker of the House is a Republican; that the majority in the U.S. Senate is controlled by Republicans; that the majority leader is a Republican; and that the President of the United States is a Republican.

Now, as I visit with constituents from across New Mexico—and last night, Senator MERKLEY, I had a townhall, a telephone townhall. We had thousands and thousands of New Mexicans who were on this call. They all told me that they were worried about what would happen if their health insurance premiums doubled, even tripled. Every news article I read this morning and those that I saw on television or on social media today had similar stories from constituents about concerns about maybe losing their healthcare.

Now, Senator, you know, as well as so many people across New Mexico and a few across America, that 3 years ago I survived a stroke. When someone has a heart attack or a stroke or some other chronic episode like that, you learn that time is not on your side. You are not thinking about how expensive those hospital bills may be. All you are hoping is that you can get to see a medical professional who might be able to save your life. By the grace of God, by the love of my family, Senator MERKLEY, I am here. I am alive today. I healed, and it is quite miraculous, but a big part of that was because I was fortunate enough to have health insurance. I was fortunate to get to a facility quickly enough. On the way there, a local paramedic and an EMT from Santa Fe County Fire Department helped to prepare me before I got to the emergency room. They helped to save my life.

Well, right now, across the country it is not just the concern of health insurance premiums doubling or tripling so that millions of people could lose coverage; under this thing called the Big Beautiful Bill, my Republican colleagues here said: Well, we are going to have the largest cut in Medicaid funding since the program has been created.

In addition to that, how about my Republican colleagues saying: Well, let's also go after food programs, and the largest cut to food programs across America were included in that bill.

The reason I bring up Medicaid is that, in New Mexico, we had a Republican Governor who actually embraced Medicaid expansion. So New Mexico was one of the States that had the most uninsured people per capita and became one of the most insured. Because of that expansion, people were able to get care and help.

As for those rural health clinics that also provide care to so many of our Medicaid beneficiaries in New Mexico, all of a sudden, when Federal Medicaid dollars go away, they might close.

So I am going to go back to my stroke.

Time is not on our side. If someone has to travel hours to try to get into a medical facility because the rural health clinics have closed that might be able to stabilize them in the way that that EMT and that paramedic did for me at the local fire department, they might not heal or, worse, they may not live.

Now I am going to get back to one of the conversations we are having right now: How can we work as Democrats and Republicans and work with the President to ensure that health insurance premiums will not double or triple for the American people?

One of my constituents told me, Senator MERKLEY, that it is almost like they are reaching into our pockets and just stealing money. What I mean by that is, in New Mexico, if these tax credits go away, it is going to cost people about $7,000 a year—7,000 bucks—for hard-working, middle-class families. That is taking from their pockets.

In addition to that, when they go to the grocery store—well, let me even back up a little. Remember when the President said, when he was running as a candidate, that, on day one, he would lower prices for the American people just like ''that''? Well, at the grocery store, things are getting more expensive. Everything seems to be getting more expensive. Well, that is taking money out of the pockets of the American people—our constituents—who are hard-working families just trying to get by, who are trying to leave better lives for their kids than they had for their own if they are blessed to have children.

Many are worried about how they will even put food on the table now that the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program is delayed or even this program called WIC. You know, there are acronyms all over our Nation's Capital. WIC is the program for Women, Infants, and Children.

How are we going to make decisions across the country to make sure that we are going to provide food for the most vulnerable in the richest Nation in the world? Everyone seems to be worried about that except for President Donald Trump.

The reason I say that, Senator, is, this week, all President Donald Trump seems to care about is breaking ground on this $250 million ballroom.

Some constituents have reached out to my office and have asked: Well, what does that mean?

I have told them: Well, the President allowed a bulldozer to go and knock down part of the White House so he could build a $250 million room to throw some parties in. That is essentially what is happening.

I mean, heck, in New Mexico, Senator, if someone is going to do some remodeling of their home, they have to go pull local permits and get permission and follow the rules and all the rest—not this guy. At a time when people are about to have their health insurance premiums double or triple and when food programs are getting taken away, this President says that his priority is to build a $250 million party room. That is a lot of money. That is more money than most people will see in their lives. I mean, heck, $1 million is one of those numbers.

In addition to that, President Trump decided to throw a picnic yesterday for some of my Senate Republican colleagues who wanted to be there. I was told that he gave away thousands of dollars of his own personal Trump swag. What is that—hats? signed bags? pens? I don't know what else was in there—watches? maybe a pair of his shoes? Instead of working to end this shutdown that they started, they decided to have a picnic.

It is my understanding that President Trump may even be leaving the country this weekend. He is leaving for a week as opposed to bringing people together?

I am reminded, Senator MERKLEY, that President Trump said not too long ago in an interview: If there is a shutdown, it is up to the President to bring people together to prevent the shutdown.

I think, in that same interview, the President said something along the lines of, if there is a shutdown, it is a bad mark on the President. It sounds to me like the President should be bringing people together.

Last night, one of my constituents from Albuquerque, NM, shared with me that she had been furloughed as a Federal employee. She told me she didn't know how she was going to pay this month's bills without a paycheck. She felt that President Trump was doing nothing to end the shutdown, and she didn't know how she could continue handling all the stress of not being paid. That is something else that we are not talking about here—all of the stress and mental health challenges that families are going through.

One of my constituents in Las Vegas, NM, has four children, a mortgage to pay, and his family lives paycheck to paycheck. He said, with all the stress and hurt that is being caused by the Republican shutdown, he doesn't know if people will be able to afford their healthcare if it is taken away.

This week, people across America are watching Donald Trump tear down the east side of the White House to make room for that $250 million ballroom.

There is a story that I just saw coming in, Senator MERKLEY, about President Trump and that it looks like he is trying to shake down the Department of Justice to get 230 million bucks for himself. And here is the kicker: The person who would actually have to sign off on giving President Trump $230 million in taxpayer money from the Department of Justice is a guy named Todd Blanche. Anyone who knows who this person is knows that Todd Blanche was Donald Trump's personal defense attorney. He didn't do so well because he got convicted, but he is the guy who would have to sign off.

So I will sum it up this way, Senator MERKLEY—and I have a question for you, sir. My colleague from Hawaii said it perfectly yesterday. Here is the quote:

There is enough money to bail out Argentina with $40 billion.

By the way, for people who don't know what that means, to all the cattle ranchers in America, President Donald Trump said he is going to bail out Argentina and buy $40 billion of their beef. What is that going to do to American cattle producers?

Now back to the quote:

There is enough money to bail out Argentina with $40 billion.

''There is enough money to buy Kristi Noem,'' who is the Secretary of Homeland Security, ''a $173 million [personal] jet,'' just to fly a little more comfortably.

There is enough money to renovate that ballroom for 250 million bucks, but there isn't enough money for you, the American people. It seems to me the priorities are clear.

So will the Senator yield for a question?

Mr. MERKLEY. Yes, I am yielding for your question.

Mr. LUJÁN. Senator MERKLEY, how are Americans supposed to trust an administration that seems to be so focused on giving things to themselves when Americans are worried they won't be able to afford basic necessities like food and health insurance?

I yield to the Senator.

Mr. MERKLEY. Thank you so much for your question.

You have laid out so many points here about kind of the mismanagement of America's funds, and we could add a few more to them: the craziness of spending more money than it costs to buy a Presidential jet—to rehab a jet that was given to the President so that he could actually send it on to his personal library after he leaves office. It is profoundly disturbing, and I appreciate the way you framed it.

There is enough money for luxury glitz—for a megaballroom. I can't even imagine how anything could cost that much to build. Maybe there will be an eighth-inch of gold on every surface or something—I don't know—but that doesn't serve the American people. It doesn't make one single person in America have better healthcare or a better education or a decent home in a decent community or a better job. It doesn't give you quality of opportunity. It doesn't tackle any of the environmental issues.

It is simply a gross display by the President, who has constructed his entire administration on the basis of a theory to govern, which is ''families lose, and billionaires win.''

Families lose their healthcare so there can be massive tax breaks for billionaires.

They lose their Medicaid on top of their ACA healthcare in order to fund massive tax breaks for billionaires.

They lose their nutrition assistance to fund tax breaks for billionaires.

Then, over the next 30 years, their bill runs up $30 trillion in additional debt to fund these tax breaks for billionaires. Maybe I should say ''trillionaires'' now. You think about how that debt, that additional $30 trillion in debt, how much that would compromise the ability to have future programs for healthcare and housing and education.

Folks in my State—probably the same thing with folks in your State—last Wednesday—the information come out a week ago so people could look on the exchange and see what their policies are going to cost. We don't have a new, comprehensive analysis. The preanalysis, the projection, was that the average cost would go up not 5 percent or 10 percent or 15 percent but about 68 percent. That is because the premium goes up, the tax credits come down, and costs become massively more expensive—now maybe a lot more because the average across the country is that premium payments would go up 114 percent—more than double.

How do you explain to anyone that you slashed their healthcare affordability to fund a giveaway of $20 to $40 billion to Argentina or to fund that new ballroom? I mean, that is insane. I mean, that is, well, just like the rich rubbing our nose in it, for ordinary Americans: You won't be able to afford healthcare, but, wow, we got that new jet, that jet you talked about, for Noem—I hadn't heard about that one. We got the new ballroom. We got the tax breaks for the richest people.

This government by and for the billionaires ties into the authoritarian perspective, because if you are a regular leader of a democracy, you feel you are accountable to the people, and you would never ever pursue a bill that defunds healthcare for ordinary families to put more dollars in the pockets of the already richest Americans. But if you are an authoritarian—and the entire time I have been on the floor has been to ring the alarm bells. Ring the alarm bells. Authoritarianism is here now. I am told that each time I say this, lots of bells are posted online. So just for my team's fun, ring the alarm bells. I want that to be heard all across America, that we are way off track. This is the wrong way to go.

In a democracy, you want to have the foundation for families to thrive because you are accountable to the people, and the people that run the operation. But in an authoritarian government, boy, that is not the case at all. Instead, it is like the leaders feel like the people are accountable to them. So if they have to do without, well, too bad. As the phrase goes, let them eat cake. If they don't have bread, oh, let them eat cake.

So there we are. And our responsibility is to say to the American people that the way to stop this authoritarian takeover is to have very significant, robust demonstrations across America, like we had on Saturday. The citizens have to make a big deal. Protest outside our offices. Write to us. Phone us. Give us a hard time. Tell us we should be doing more. It is that feedback that really caused me to say I need to try to do more to ring the alarm bells about where we are headed and, thus, to be up here all night and now through the morning and into the afternoon.

I am getting a little unsteady on my feet, but if we collectively, through this dialogue, are bringing attention to people in saying: Yes, 7 million people were out there in the streets—next time, we need 10 million. Do your local demonstration with those who went. Hear about what they did, and spread the word that this is not normal, this destruction of our rights; this weaponization of the judiciary to go after political enemies; the effort to open the doors so that the President can deploy, with the court's approval, the military into our cities when there is no rebellion, no insurrection, and no invasion. So that is our responsibility—to call it out and to carry on the fight.

I believe the American people are starting to understand just how much their freedoms are being crushed, and that is why we need to be in partnership, to steer this country back and save our Republic.

Mrs. MURRAY. Will the Senator from Oregon yield for a question?

Mr. MERKLEY. I see the Senator from Washington State is on the floor, and I would be very happy to yield for a question.

Mrs. MURRAY. I thank the Senator from Oregon.

First, let me just commend you for what you are doing here throughout the night, throughout today, calling attention to a really critical issue in this country.

So many people have come up to me, you know, because we go back and forth to the west coast all the time—how many people walk up to us and say: What can I do about this? And each one of us has to say: Here is what I can do.

I want to thank you for doing what you are doing today because you are going above and beyond to point out to people that, as your chart says, authoritarianism is here, and it is here now. We can ignore it, or we can speak out.

You have spent all night long and all day standing on your feet at, I am sure,

great personal sacrifice to fight for everyone in this country and to sound the alarms, as you have been talking about. So I just personally want to thank you.

I want to reiterate something that you have said for all of these hours and, actually, many times to me over the past few months—the fact that Trump is using his place in government to control every aspect of our lives, whether it is what our schools are teaching or not teaching; it is whether or not he is prosecuting his enemies, which he is doing; it is cutting off projects and funding to punish the political opposition.

You and I both know—we represent blue States, but we have a lot of red counties and cities and neighborhoods. Even within all of our blue districts—you can't just randomly say ''I am hurting blue'' without hurting the red because these are all Americans. But he is using his power to do that.

We are seeing him, as you know well in your home State, deploying troops to intimidate Democrats. I listened to you late last night talk about what is happening in Portland. The misuse of this kind of power should be frightening to every single American. We need to stand up, and we need to call it out, which is what you are doing today. Even dictating what late night TV hosts are doing is part of this whole picture that you have been describing.

But I came to the floor today as your partner on the Appropriations Committee. We serve on that together. We all know in this body how important that committee is because we decide where the funding is going to go in the country.

I have been out on this floor, I have been at home, and I have been everywhere talking about the power of the purse, which sounds kind of like this quaint little phrase, but it is really important. For anybody who has a family, you know that the person who writes the checks in the checkbook decides where the money is going to go. Well, that power of the checkbook—that power of the purse, as it is called—lands on this side of the White House and the Congress. We have the power of the purse. Why is that? Because we represent our constituents from across the country—I, from Washington State; you, from Oregon. People from Illinois and Alabama and Florida all come here to be a voice for their constituents on where their tax dollars are going to go.

Within this country, the power of the purse means we have the ability to decide where the money is going to go because we represent our constituents. That is what they call on us to do.

I am seeing Trump do an all-out assault on Congress's power of the purse, so I wanted to come here today and ask you your thoughts on how this President is undermining the power of the purse and how it plays into your ringing the bells about authoritarianism.

Ringing the alarm bells for the authoritarian takeover.

The power of the purse is one of those fundamental ways that, in fact, the President is concentrating his power.

The difference between a democracy is that—in a democracy, the legislature says: Here are the programs, here is how we want to run them, and here is how we are going to fund them. It brings together the collective wisdom of a large group that comes from every portion of the Nation, like we do here—100 Senators from 50 States. We not only bring our geographic differences; we bring our life differences and our life skills. All of that helps us form a pretty complex set of decisions about the programs that need more support because of the challenges we are facing as a nation at that moment and those that can do with less support. That is our responsibility. But all those voices together are just so central to that.

In an authoritarian nation, all of that responsibility—design the program, fund the program, choose whether the program will live or die—is all transferred to the executive. So we are thinking, authoritarianism is over here, and the power of the purse is with the executive; democracy is over here, and the power of the purse is with legislature.

Russell Vought, the current head of OMB, is a well-trained, clever man, and he is saying: Well, let's see how we can actually take the power of the purse. You passed a bill for fiscal year 2025, and now we are in—we are no longer in fiscal, but let's say we were. Well, maybe I can just slow-walk the funds for the programs I don't want to fund. That way, the decision is transferred to the Executive. Maybe I can freeze them. Maybe I can impound them, basically permanently take them off the table, see if I can get away with that. Maybe I can send over a request to have Congress formally undo the programs they have funded.

They did send one of those over, and it was voted on. It needed a majority vote in both Chambers. But the problem with that is you have a bipartisan vision to serve the entire—these desks to me are now representing the geography of the United States—to serve the entire breadth and depth of our Nation, with all of our differences. Then, on a partisan basis, meaning half the room, they decide what programs to cut. That means a deal was done in the beginning between Democrats and Republicans, and then it was undone. The programs that were cut were the programs, by and large, the Democrats had advocated for. How do you do the next deal in that situation?

Then we have Mr. Vought saying: What I will do is pretend I am going to spend it, but then in the last 45 days, I will send a notification that I would like Congress to undo it. But there is a waiting period, so therefore I know what I have done is set it up so that before those 45 days are up, the end of the fiscal year comes, and that bucket that goes to that program goes poof into thin air.

That is the fancy term that is used, ''pocket rescission.''

So here we are saying to our Republican colleagues: If you negotiated in good faith to serve the interests and concerns that all hundred Senators bring here, than a bill forged in that bipartisan manner can only be done in a bipartisan manner.

We do rescissions in a bipartisan manner. We do undo funding. We take 1-year, 2-year, 3-year funding that turned out not to be needed or better spent elsewhere, and we pull it back, and we put it into a different program. But we do that readjustment in the same bipartisan way we did the initial program.

We are saying to our colleagues across the aisle, if the power of the purse means something—and it does: the difference between an authoritarian government and a democracy—then work with us to defend our Constitution, defend that what we have done together cannot be undone by the Executive.

So far, we have not received a ''Yes, we will defend the Constitution.'' What I hear is mainly ''Yeah, President Trump would never go for that.'' When you hear that, you know you are trapped in authoritarianism because the vision of our Nation is that we the Congress will forge these programs and decide how to fund them, how much. And when it is like ''Can't do that because Trump would be upset,'' well, that just confirms that we are in authoritarianism now. And it is not just the power of the purse, of course; it is an attack on due process; it is an attack on free press; it is an attack on freedom of speech; it is the weaponization of the Department of Justice; it is the ignoring the laws that apply to the Executive completely, like firing all of the IGs and getting rid of all of the referees.

In the book that I really spent the night trying to use as a framework in order to say, hey, experts have studied how democracies die—they don't die with people with guns anymore; they die with people who get elected, and then they follow the authoritarian playbook on how to basically undo the checks and balances and amplify the power.

And another piece of that, that we should be very concerned about in the Northwest right now—more in Portland, but who knows what happens in Seattle—is trying to carve a path in which Trump has court rescissions that say he can put troops into the street whenever he wants. And that is a massively dangerous amplification of authoritarian power, and that is why what we do this year makes such a difference.

And we have to protest and say this is not normal. We have to ring the alarm bells. We have to praise the 7 million people who got out there and said: No Kings in the United States. And that is such a beautiful, short way of saying: No authoritarianism; we

want our Republic back, and we are going to fight to make that happen.

Mrs. MURRAY. And we want our voices to be heard. That is what you are doing, and I thank the Senator from Oregon for all he has been doing for so long, for so many years, but especially for the last 20-plus hours that you have been on the floor—

Mr. MERKLEY. Too many.

Mrs. MURRAY.—too many hours on the floor, reminding us all of why this is so critical.

Mr. MERKLEY. I note that my colleague from Delaware is on the floor.

Ms. BLUNT ROCHESTER. Yes, I am.

Mr. MERKLEY. I would welcome a question if you have one.

Ms. BLUNT ROCHESTER. Will the Senator from Oregon yield for a question?

Mr. MERKLEY. I will yield for a question.

Ms. BLUNT ROCHESTER. First let me say thank you, Senator MERKLEY, for your tenacity, your energy, your compassion, and your love for this country. I mean, really, that is what this is about. That is why you have been standing on this floor for over 20 hours, and I want to say thank you on behalf of the American people.

And I want to say, Mr. President, we are now 21 days into this Republican shutdown and well over 200 days into the Trump administration.

Costs for housing are up, food prices are up, energy costs have gone up, and we are about to see our healthcare costs skyrocket for millions of Americans—all while the President pushes this country to the literal brink of a constitutional crisis.

So let's recap. The Department of Defense is trying to censor the press. This administration is offering deals to universities to teach Trump priorities, taking away independence and academic freedom. They tried to push dissenters off airwaves.

But this is America. And Senator MERKLEY—you and I know—here, the people have the power, and the power of the people matters. Here, the voices of our communities hold weight, and that is why I stand with you as you ring the alarms.

The people are standing up, they are speaking out, and they are saying: Enough is enough.

What does that look like? It looks like journalists, from MSNBC to FOX News, handing in their DOD press badges, choosing to stand up for their First Amendment rights rather than bowing to the whims of the Secretary of Defense. It means universities are refusing to play ball, declining the offer. It means Americans use the power of their purses to say you will not silence someone like Jimmy Kimmel and he was reinstated.

But it doesn't stop there. It is an unprecedented move by Federal judges appointed by Democrats and Republicans alike that are speaking out on an impending judicial crisis over the Supreme Court's emergency orders.

State governments are joining compacts to protect access to public health for citizens as this administration rips away access to vaccines. Airports across America are refusing to play this administration's propaganda videos. And perhaps most importantly, millions of Americans from across our country have made their voices known and heard.

Seven million Americans did what I think was truly a part of the American spirit by using their voices in a peaceful way, assembling, doing it in a way that was both joyful but also patriotic—and demanding that we in Congress also stand up.

So we are standing up for our communities. And thank you again, Senator MERKLEY, for doing so. And we are fighting for families across America who are about to see their healthcare coverage go up or maybe even be eliminated.

In this moment, we don't need a King. The people need a President for all of the people—not a $20 billion bailout for Argentina, not a new White House gold ballroom when people can't even afford to pay their rent or to buy a home on their own—and not a Justice Department bailout—all while November 1 is fast approaching and tens of millions of Americans face this healthcare crisis: rising cost or a total elimination of their healthcare or medical debt. Costs are already high—and now this. It is time to do the right thing and to take a stand.

And with the President poised to leave town, we ask that he stay and pull together the partners—the House, which has been out of session. And I came from the House. I don't think I ever saw anything like this where they literally have been missing in action for weeks. As a matter of fact, for our August break, they left in July. This is unprecedented, and we need them back at the table. They need to do the work.

And so my question to you, Senator MERKLEY: In light of what the President wants to spend money on and what the American people need, does the President have his priorities straight? Are his priorities right on behalf of the American people?

Mr. MERKLEY. Well, thank you so much to my colleague from Delaware.

That question rather answers itself after listening to all the points you were making, which were right on.

How can it possibly be the right priorities if you are spending your money on tax breaks for billionaires while cutting the tax credits that enable families to buy insurance at an affordable price? How can it possibly be the right thing to do that you are cutting child nutrition while you are spending a huge amount on a ballroom—undoubtedly a Trumpian gold-style ballroom. How much was it: 200 million or 300 million? Some crazy, crazy sum. I can't even imagine how you could spend that much on a room.

And you mentioned this $20 billion bailout—20 billion with a ''b'' bailout—for Argentina. Now, that one came out of nowhere. I don't remember a bill on the floor here saying that we are passing a spending bill that has in it a 20—and the President said maybe as much as a $40 billion bailout.

Is there some authority I don't know about, maybe? I don't know. The books are complicated. But I doubt it because what this President is doing as an authoritarian is just saying: I am going to do what the hell I want. I am in charge. The bank account of America is mine. Hell, I am going to build a glitzy ballroom, and I am going to try to refurbish a jet for Air Force One that will only be workable for a few months, if that, before I send it off to my Presidential library—a huge waste of our money.

And this bailout for Argentina—you know, earlier I was talking to a colleague from Washington State who said a lot of soybeans are shipped through Washington State but they are normally bought by China. Well, China isn't buying a single bean this year because of the tension and the argument between our two nations over tariffs. One moment, the President put a 50-percent tariff on China; and the next moment, they are saying they are not going to send out any strategic minerals, critical minerals. Next: Well, I will put a 100-percent tariff on you.

I mean, nobody makes an investment in the United States of America, a factory here, when we are in tariff chaos. There is nothing about this that does anything except throw people up and down, and everyone gets hurt. They don't know if the tariffs are going to affect what they sell. They don't know if they are going to be able to affect the inputs of the things they manufacture. They don't know what they should plant if they are farmers.

And where are all these beans—unsold soybeans—going to go this year? Where are they going to be stored? Are they going to be wasted? Are they going to be plowed back into the ground for fertilizer? I don't know.

But I do know this chaos is terrible for America. And the small business world came and talked to me yesterday, the representatives—maybe you had them in your office as well—and they said: Main Street is Pain Street. And I did hear that—I am going to note that Senator MARKEY may have been the first person I heard that from. But I thought that was a way to describe it.

And they certainly said: Yes, there are two components of that pain. One is the loss of the credits to buy healthcare—because small businesses don't have big plans with big insurers. They provide some help, and folks go and buy on the exchange. And they said, second of all, the tariffs.

So Main Street is Pain Street. That is not a good future for America. And families with no health insurance, that is a terrible look for America. And by ''look,'' I don't mean the atmospherics of it; I mean that is the wrong mission in a republic.

And the connection I have been drawing between Trump's authoritarian personality and tendencies is that an authoritarian feels that people are accountable to him so he can do any damn thing he wants and control anything without advice or controls or checks from anyone. And he has hated it every time checks were applied in the past. He is going after some of those folks now who applied those checks in the past.

And the leader of a democracy says: I am accountable to the people. The people need healthcare, housing, education, good-paying jobs, investment in infrastructure, quality of opportunity, and let's take on some of those environmental problems. That is what a leader of a democracy does.

So here we have this authoritarian President crushing our freedoms, trying to steal the power of the purse from Congress to concentrate it in the Executive, proceeding to spend money wherever he wants.

That $20 billion, I would love to see—I am not being coy. I would rather have all of the Senators right here and say: Let's pass a bill right now and say ''hell no.'' You know, a lot of that $20 billion is going to the debt that has been built up in Argentina, and friends of President Trump have reportedly bought that debt at a huge discount. I didn't see how much of a discount. But what that means: If you buy a dollar of debt and you buy it at, say—let's make the math easy—25 cents, then you get a 400-percent return if the money goes to Argentina and they pay off the debt at face value.

That is not about making America first; that is about making Scott Bessent and his friends—at least I have seen Scott Bessent's name in some of those articles—and his friends, who are connected to buying up Argentine debt. I am not sure if Scott himself bought it or not. But, the point is, make some billionaires richer. It is another make a few friends of the President and friends of his Cabinet members richer—that $20 billion—or possibly $40 billion, the President said.

Think about that—20 billion. That is $50 for every single American tossed in a pot to hand out to a strongman in Argentina. Forty billion—$100 a person, handed out to a strongman. Every one of us, take $100 out of our pocket.

Ms. BLUNT ROCHESTER. Will the Senator yield for one more question?

Mr. MERKLEY. I will yield for another question. Thank you.

Ms. BLUNT ROCHESTER. As you talked about the small businesses, Senator, I was reminded that, as we look at who is actually purchasing this healthcare in the marketplace—a lot of people don't even know they are on ACA and receiving the tax credit—that half of them are small businesses.

I come from Delaware. We are urban, suburban, rural, and coastal. And so we also know that a quarter of farmers and ranchers are getting their healthcare this way. And then we think about the fact that this issue is disproportionally affecting red States, not just blue States.

All Americans are going to be hurt. This is why your ringing the alarm is so important. And I would ask a very simple question: Is there a connection between the healthcare crisis that we are in and an authoritarian regime?

Mr. MERKLEY. Well, there is, absolutely, such a powerful connection because the authoritarian doesn't care about the fundamental programs for the people because they don't feel they are accountable to the people.

So just as our authoritarian President is weaponizing the judiciary to go after his opponents, he is using the power of the government over licenses and mergers in order to try to control what broadcasting does to attack freedom of speech, trying to control what our universities teach by threatening the collapse—threatening and taking away the research grants and telling them they can't have foreign students that are essential to their revenue streams.

All of those authoritarian pieces—the stealing of the purse—but then there is this piece, the philosophy, and the philosophy is: The people owe me, the authoritarian; not I am accountable to them.

So, therefore, it is totally legit to go for legislation that slashes the programs that are fundamental to families to make the rich richer. And I want to go back to that picture that I had up earlier of the billionaires standing behind President Trump at the inauguration. And at that point, maybe we didn't know for sure that he had campaigned on helping families. But we didn't see champions of families behind him. We saw the billionaires behind him.

That is exactly what has happened. The philosophy is: Families lose and billionaires win. And our effort, as those in a democracy, is that we are fighting for the vision that families thrive, and the rich and powerful pay a fair share.

Mr. SCHUMER. Would my colleague yield for another question?

Mr. MERKLEY. I would yield for a question. Yes.

Mr. SCHUMER. I thank my colleague from Delaware. Before I ask my question, I just want to thank the great Senator from Oregon for his strength, his fortitude, his integrity, and just shining a spotlight on this erosion of democracy under Trump in so many different ways.

I have been to the floor earlier, and we talked about it. But now I would like to ask a question about one of the most serious threats that our American people face, which is the healthcare crisis, a dramatic—a horrible—crisis that is going to leave millions without any health insurance at all, that is going to raise premiums to people from $500 to $1,000 a month—not a year—that will close rural hospitals, that will kick people out of nursing homes, where they will have nowhere to go.

And I remind my colleagues that this President, instead of negotiating a way out that addresses the crisis with Leader JEFFRIES and me, is going away for 6 days. It is outrageous for him to leave on a foreign trip while the American people are suffering and we get closer and closer and closer to the time, starting November 1, when people are going to have to make that awful decision: Do I leave my family with no healthcare at all because I can't afford it?

It is a horrible, horrible decision. And yet, this President—Leader JEFFRIES and I asked the President to meet with us before he left. He refused. The reporting is that JOHNSON and THUNE and he were on the phone and agreed they wouldn't even talk to us. And, instead, he is going away while people are suffering. He ought not to do that.

And what is he spending his time on instead? Eroding our democracy, doing these faux ads, screwing up, forcing networks and TV stations and media to bow to his whim, using the Justice Department as an attack dog against his enemies, arresting people, as my good friend from Oregon has pointed out repeatedly, on the streets arresting people, whoever the hell they are. They have no identification, and the people are arrested without even being told why they are being arrested and who knows what the heck is going on. He is spending all his time on eroding democracy, taking away our rights.

The people expect him not to go on a foreign trip—this President who fancies himself a King—but, instead, to do the people's business and help us, sit down with us, negotiate a way out of this healthcare crisis.

We all know—I think, and I would ask my colleague, he knows, I believe—that before Donald Trump leaves the country, he should at the very least sit down and negotiate in a serious way and address the healthcare crisis that affects the American people.

Shouldn't we be working to lower people's premiums, to keep rural hospitals open, to prevent people from being kicked out of nursing homes, to ensure that research that saves lives continues? Shouldn't the President listen to the cares of the American people and their desperate need on healthcare rather than taking a foreign trip?

JEFFRIES and I asked him yesterday—we demanded, really—that he sit down and talk to us and negotiate, not just talk to us but negotiate a serious approach to avoid all the devastating things that will occur. And he said 4 hours later, after conferring with THUNE and JOHNSON, no, he wouldn't.

Well, that is a disgrace. So I would ask my colleague—I would ask him: Shouldn't the President be spending time addressing the healthcare crisis rather than spending all this time eroding our democracy? If he negotiated a fair treatment of people with

their healthcare, he would be doing some good. And when he erodes our democracy, he is doing something evil.

So his priorities are wacky and misplaced and awful and so detrimental to what the American people want.

So my question to my colleague is this—and one more thing, doesn't my colleague—and there are a bunch of questions here—agree that Trump is the focal point of this healthcare crisis, that JOHNSON is paralyzed because of the divisions in his caucus, that THUNE just goes along, that the President—this Trump, this President Trump—is the person who could get the Republicans to pass a decent proposal, a fair proposal, a proposal that helps the American people out of this crisis, and the President is the focal point because he can get JEFFRIES and THUNE to act, and there is probably no one else?

And yet, he is flying away, ignoring this issue facing the American people after he has eroded our democracy as the Senator from Oregon has pointed out? He is flying away and abandoning the American people.

Isn't it correct—does my friend from Oregon agree—that the President's priorities are so detrimental to the American people, are really perverse in that he seems to enjoy eroding democracy and doesn't even give a damn when the American people are suffering?

So I would ask my colleague to answer that series of questions.

Mr. MERKLEY. My colleague from New York, the minority leader, is absolutely right. The Trump priorities are absolutely perverse. Well, here we are in a structure of the Senate, and what is the Senate about? Coming together and saying here is where I want to go; where do you want to go? How can we make those two things work together to make America better?

We can't always find the answer, but I will tell you one thing is damn sure: You can't find the answer if you can't sit down and have the conversation. And here with are with the House on vacation for over a month. I guess they are getting paid.

And here we are in the Senate without an agreement to just sit down and talk to each other about the framework because it appears that the key, as you have suggested, the lynchpin is they will not sit down and offer ideas and work out a deal without Trump in the room or Trump guiding the outcomes.

So he is the factor.

So as he jets off—and in Oregon, last week, people, a week ago Wednesday, they saw what their prices are going to be. The premiums are higher; the credits lower. They have got to fill in the gap in between. And are they going to be able to afford insurance? Are they going to be able to make that decision by January 1? They are stressed about this.

I had small businesses in yesterday, representatives from Oregon, and the vision there is ''Main Street is in Pain Street'' because of the tariffs and because of the fact that many of them—a large share of them—buy their insurance on the exchange.

And this man who runs a small company—it is a lighting-for-events company—and I think he said he had four employees. I talked to three of them, and three of them said: We are not buying insurance.

Mr. SCHUMER. Right.

Mr. MERKLEY. We can't afford it. We looked at the new prices. We can't afford it. We are going to go without insurance. We all know the huge calamity.

Well, when the Speaker of the House that I saw on the boob tube—on the television—says there is nothing to talk about, I think immediately: There are 20 million reasons to talk about. Those 20 million are the 20 million Americans seeing these huge increases. Many of them will not be able to buy insurance at all.

Let's add to that, since the bill, also, is just 15 months out now from slashing in a devastating fashion our Medicaid Program, which in combination with the effects on the Affordable Care exchange will put 15 million people out of healthcare, 235,000 in my home State of Oregon—and 70 percent of the kids in my rural areas are part of the Oregon Health Plan and are on Medicaid. I can just not even conceive of the carnage that will be done to the quality of life without healthcare available to so many people.

Isn't that a hell of a number of reasons to sit down and brainstorm together? You can't get to a common purpose if you can't even talk to each other. You are here. Your office is open. You are available to talk. You are inviting them to talk. They are saying no. That is a travesty in our Republic.

Mr. SCHUMER. So to renew my question succinctly: Does my friend from Oregon believe, as I believe, that before the President jets away on this foreign trip, shouldn't he sit down with Leader Jeffries and me, as we wanted him very much to do—demanded he do—and negotiate a solution that addresses this horrible crisis, which my colleague from Oregon has addressed in so many ways, whether it is ACA premiums or Medicaid or nursing homes or community health centers or scientific research? All of those need to be addressed, and this President is flying away. Isn't that appalling?

Mr. MERKLEY. That is horrific that he is flying away. He absolutely should be sitting down right now and holding a conversation with you about how we solve this problem for millions of Americans.

Mr. SCHUMER. Let me thank my friend from Oregon for his amazing, strong, persistent efforts.

I yield back to the Senator from Oregon.

Mr. MERKLEY. I see my colleague from Vermont on the floor. I will take a question if he has one.

Mr. SANDERS. Will my colleague yield for a question?

Mr. MERKLEY. I will yield for a question.

Mr. SANDERS. Let me thank Senator MERKLEY for today pointing a finger at one of the great crises our country—one of the greatest crises our country has faced, I think, since the Civil War; and that is that, every day, we have a President who is moving this country into an authoritarian form of society.

You know, as a nation, what we have always expected in our democracy is that if you disagree with me, we debate the issue. You don't think I am a good Senator? Run against me. You think I am wrong on an issue? Write a letter to the editor. Do a podcast. Be critical of me in any way you want.

But what very few people in America believe is that we should give more and more power to a megalomaniac who sits in the White House, who disrespects every day the Constitution of the United States and the rule of law.

And what saddens me very much is when we think back on the history of this country, going back to the extraordinarily brave men and women who put their lives on the line and sometimes died during the Revolutionary War. Tens of thousands of Americans took on the greatest military power on Earth, led by the King of England, in order to say: We are tired of your rule. We want to rule ourselves.

And then, in 1789, these brilliant people came up with the Constitution, and the essence of that Constitution—having learned their lesson from the King of England, who had absolute power—is what they said: We are going to create a Constitution that will never give absolute power to any one person or one entity.

So they created an executive branch, the President, the legislative branch, Congress—House and the Senate—and a judiciary whose function is to provide checks and balances on each other. It is a rather extraordinary document—1789.

Since then, we have had so many millions of men and women putting their lives on the line and sometimes dying in order to defend that Constitution, to understand that what freedom is about is the right to disagree, that we do not have to live under the control of one person.

In an unprecedented way—and I know my colleague from Oregon has been talking about this—every day, there is another attack on basic American freedoms.

The First Amendment—not the Second, not the Third; the First Amendment to the Constitution—is freedom of the press. And that was not an accident. They understood that in order to maintain a free society, you have to have the right of people to express their point of view, to write what they wanted to, to rally people around their point of view.

Yet we have in an unprecedented way a President who has sued one major media after another—ABC, CBS, Meta;

defunded PBS; defunded the NPR. This is a President who does not want to be criticized.

Well, guess what, Mr. President. In a democracy, you will be criticized, I will be criticized, and the Senator from Oregon will be criticized. That is what a democracy is about. And if you don't like criticism, get out of the White House, get out of politics.

We are not going to sit back and allow one media after another to be intimidated, frightened. And if they stand up alone and run a story critical of the President of the United States, oh my God, they may be sued.

You have an FCC chairman, I think, I say to my friend, who, during the Jimmy Kimmel episode, was threatening to rescind licenses of networks if the White House did not like some of the content that was coming out. That is not the America we love, not the America we are prepared to defend.

But it is not just the media. You have a President who is suing law firms. And what was the crime of these law firms? What did they do that was so terrible? Well, they had clients who went to court against the President. Gee, the last thing I heard, that is what happens in a country, you know? People go to court. And we don't then try to blackmail and intimidate law firms by saying: We are going to sue you. You better not have clients who are going to attack me.

We have a President now who is going to war against universities, trying to break freedom of speech, freedom of dissent on college campuses. You stand up. You protest.

Hey, we are going to take away money from you. We don't like the content of your courses. We don't like your teachers, the faculty, the president of the university. Your views on gossip? Sorry, you are not going to get Federal funding.

We have a President who is usurping the powers of the U.S. Congress. Every fourth grader understands Congress has the power of the purse. The President, if he likes it, signs the bill, but when you sign that appropriations bill, that money goes out. You don't have the right to say: Oh, California, New York, Vermont, you voted against me. You ain't going to get the money that was appropriated.

That is not what this country is about, and it is not what the Constitution is about.

A few minutes ago, Senator BLUNT ROCHESTER asked I thought a pretty profound question, and that is, what is the relationship between authoritarianism and the healthcare crisis that we are in right now?

As the Senator from Oregon has mentioned, when Trump was inaugurated, sitting right behind him were the three wealthiest people in the world.

Remember that, the Senator from Oregon?

It was Mr. Musk, Mr. Bezos, and Mr. Zuckerberg. And right behind them were some 14 or 15 other billionaires.

There is Mr. Zuckerberg, Mr. Bezos, Mr. Musk, and a couple other billionaires there as well.

I was at the inauguration, kind of up front, and as I listened and I saw what was going on and heard Trump's speech, I was thinking about Abraham Lincoln in Gettysburg, one of the pivotal battles of the Civil War to end the abomination of slavery. Lincoln gets up a few days, I think, after that terrible war, blood still on the ground, and he says to the American people a few days after that battle:

These brave soldiers—in so many words—did not die in vain because they died in order to maintain a government of the people, by the people, and for the people—not as Trump would have us: a government of the billionaire class, by the billionaire class, and for the billionaire class.

Senator BLUNT ROCHESTER asked the question, what is the connection between authoritarianism and healthcare? I will tell you what the connection is. Right now, under the Trump administration, the billionaire class has never ever had it so good. These guys sitting right behind Trump at his inauguration are now a combined hundreds of billions of dollars richer. They donated to Trump's campaign. They have given him gifts since. They are doing phenomenally well, while, at the same time, 60 percent of our people—working-class people, low-income people—are struggling to put food on the table, pay for childcare, send their kids to college, pay for the basic necessities of life, pay for housing, et cetera. The billionaire class, under Trump, never ever had it so good, and then we have a working class in America struggling to survive.

In particular, let us never forget—and I know the Senator from Oregon has mentioned it many times—that the reason Trump and his Republican friends made $1 trillion in cuts to Medicaid to throw 15 million people off the healthcare they currently have—and studies, by the way, suggest that when you throw 15 million low-income and working-class people off of their healthcare, some 50,000 people a year will die unnecessarily.

So why did Trump and his friends do that? Well, the answer is obvious. In that same terrible bill, they gave $1 trillion in tax breaks to the 1 percent, to the people sitting right behind the President when he was inaugurated.

Does anybody in America really believe that it makes sense to give $1 trillion in tax breaks to the richest people in America and at the same time throw 15 million working-class people off of their healthcare?

As the Senator from Oregon indicated, right now in Vermont and all over this country, people are receiving notices from their insurance companies. In my State, a few days ago—the southern part of the State—it wasn't a doubling of their premiums; it was a quadrupling of their premiums.

So at a time when we are already paying the highest prices in the world for healthcare by far, people are going to look at these bills and think it is insane. And, again, in Vermont, we are seeing now families are going to be paying 45, 50 percent.

I say to my friend from Oregon, 50 percent of their income on healthcare—how do you survive when you are spending 50 percent of your income on healthcare? What do you have left for food or for anything else?

What the connection is between authoritarianism and oligarchy is that these billionaires not only don't want to pay their fair share of taxes, they want tax breaks. Not only do they want to, with impunity, be able to break unions and throw workers out on the street, but they want in many ways what existed in the 1700s, what our forefathers fought against: They want the divine right to rule.

The King of England thought that they had a God-given, divine right to rule. These guys think that as multibillionaires, they have the right to do anything—no accountability. They are bringing forth hundreds of billions of dollars right now, investing in AI and robotics, which will, if we don't deal with it, have a devastating impact on the working class of this country. They are going to have more factories in America. But do you know what? Ain't going to be human beings working in those factories.

Elon Musk—I don't agree with Musk on anything. But just the other day, Musk made it clear—he said: Hey, AI and robotics are going to do away with jobs. There are not going to be any jobs. They don't need jobs in America.

Well, that is great if you are worth a couple hundred billion dollars. But if you don't have a job and you are a working-class person, how do you feed your family? how do you afford healthcare?

Do you think anybody at the White House will stay up nights worrying about you when you lose your job? I don't think so.

So we are in an unprecedented and difficult moment in American history. And I want to thank the 7 million people just this Saturday, all over this country, who came out and said loudly and clearly: No more Kings. And we are going to keep that movement going. And I don't care if you are a conservative, a progressive, a socialist, a Democrat, whatever you may be, we understand that what makes our country great is, in fact, freedom, the right to dissent, the right to argue, and I don't care what your politics are, that is what we have to maintain.

I want to conclude simply by expressing a very great deal of disappointment in my Republican colleagues, with few exceptions. The vast majority of Republicans in the Senate and the House are not authoritarians. They believe in the Constitution. They believe in the rule of law. But they, at this moment, at least, with very few exceptions, simply do not have the courage to stand up to this authoritarian President.

How many times have the Senator from Oregon and I heard that our Republican friends believe in small government, in federalism, in the right of the local government. They don't want that big, bad Federal Government overruling the needs of cities and towns in the States. And now you have a President of the United States sending Federal troops into Portland, OR, and Chicago, IL, usurping the rights of Congress, threatening to impeach judges who rule against them.

So this is a very difficult, unprecedented moment in our history, but I have every confidence that when the American people stand together and they do not let Trump and his friends divide us up by the color of our skin or where we were born or our sexual orientation; when we stand together, defend the Constitution, and defend American democracy, we will prevail, and we will defeat authoritarianism, and we will defeat oligarchy.

I would simply ask my friend from Oregon a profound question: Do you agree with me?

Mr. MERKLEY. Thank you to my colleague from Vermont. I appreciate your points, and I do share them, yes. You expressed them thoroughly and compassionately. And thank you for your advocacy.

I see that my colleague from Virginia is on the floor. Would my colleague from Virginia consider asking a question?

Mr. KAINE. Mr. President, will the Senator from Oregon yield for a question?

Mr. MERKLEY. I will yield for a question, yes.

Mr. KAINE. Mr. President, I am going to ask two questions. I am going to tell a story about something that happened recently in Virginia and ask my colleague from Oregon what he thinks about it, and then I am going to hand my colleague from Oregon a picture and ask my colleague what he thinks about it.

To begin with the story—and the story deals with a topic that may not seem that sexy or something but that I think is pretty important: U.S. attorneys and the rule of law. Virginia has two U.S. attorneys, Western District of Virginia and the Eastern District of Virginia.

And those two U.S. attorneys who were put in office by President Trump have both recently been forced out of office—forced out of office because they wouldn't engage in political persecution of Donald Trump's enemies.

Let me describe the situation to my colleague from Oregon. When the Trump administration began, the two U.S. attorneys who had been recommended by President Biden and voted on, confirmed by the Senate, both stepped down, as is the norm.

The Trump administration then elevated in the Eastern District of Virginia an individual by the name of Erik Siebert. First, the Department of Justice appointed him for 120 days, and then that was followed by an appointment by the judges of the court. But his initial appointment into the role was by the Trump administration.

Mr. Siebert began his career as a DC police officer and then served for 15 years as a prosecutor in one of the most important positions in the U.S. Attorney's Offices nationally.

Senator WARNER and I interviewed candidates, and we recommended Erik Siebert to the Trump administration. So they had put him in as the interim, and then he had been confirmed as the acting. We recommended him to the Trump administration. The Trump administration nominated him, and the Judiciary Committee—in an overwhelmingly bipartisan vote—reported him to the floor of the Senate.

But before the Senate could act on that bipartisan vote by the Judiciary Committee, Erik Siebert was forced out of office, and he was forced out of office because he refused to prosecute, to indict, former FBI Director Jim Comey and New York attorney general Letitia James. He said there was no evidence to support an indictment in the case, and so this individual who had been put in office by the Trump administration was forced out.

In the Western District of Virginia—which covers more of Virginia's land mass but a smaller portion of the Virginia population—Senator MERKLEY, we had a process like you do in Oregon, and Senator WARNER and I recommended two candidates to the White House, and one was a gentleman named Todd Gilbert. Todd Gilbert was a Republican member of our House of Delegates from Shenandoah County, VA, who was the leader of our Republican caucus in our House of Delegates, a strong supporter of President Trump, and he had even been speaker of the house when the Republicans held the majority of the Virginia General Assembly. A very solid individual, very much with Republican bone fides, and supporting President Trump.

But he applied to be the U.S. attorney. He had been a local prosecutor but also a local defense attorney. President Trump installed him as the interim and nominated him for the position.

Before the Senate Judiciary Committee could take him up, the Trump Department of Justice pressured Todd Gilbert to fire the chief deputy who had been the deputy in that office leading criminal prosecutions during multiple Presidential terms. Todd Gilbert refused to do it, and Todd Gilbert was forced to resign as a result.

Subsequent reporting by the New York Times laid out the facts that we believe to be true; that the Trump administration wanted to push out the assistant because the assistant was unwilling to issue indictments that were political in nature against Trump's political enemies and, for that reason, they pressured Todd Gilbert to fire his assistant.

Todd Gilbert, who had given up his position in the Virginia General Assembly to take this position, within a month, walked out of the U.S. Attorney's Office rather than succumb to a politically motivated firing of a longtime, dedicated prosecutor.

In two instances, the chief Federal law enforcement officials in Virginia, installed in their positions by the Trump administration, were forced to leave because they wouldn't agree to bend the knee and genuflect to a politically motivated persecution campaign.

And so my question to my colleague is, You are talking about creeping authoritarianism. What does it say when the Executive makes moves on law enforcement officials, Republican law enforcement officials, because they won't bend the knee and politically persecute people against whom there is no actionable claim?

Mr. MERKLEY. Thank you so much, my colleague for Virginia, for laying out this story, which is then quite presented because of its extraordinary nature, to have U.S. attorneys basically fired in short order because they stood up for the principle of the rule of law, rather than agree to be part of a political persecution or prosecution team.

And I must say they are candidates to go up on my wall of heroes. And I so respect—now here, as you said with Todd, he wasn't coming from the blue side of the aisle. And he wasn't just a newbie to the house. He was the leader of the house Republicans. When they were in charge, he was the speaker.

Now, I was the speaker as well. I have a little affection for the speakers, but I know how difficult it can be to run a chamber. So you have to be deeply, deeply connected to your colleagues and your caucus as you manage that process.

So this individual, just by that resume, clearly, was coming with a set of values deeply rooted in the Republican Party. The value he didn't have was to screw over innocent people. And thank goodness we still have people willing to stand up for justice not, if you will, injustice.

Because that is what we are seeing. We see it in the form of the enemies list that the President is going after, but we also see it—and more hidden normally—the firing of individuals, the tossing of individuals who aren't willing to take a loyalty test. Their loyalty is to the Constitution, not to the President.

So I think it says a tremendous amount about how far we are into the authoritarian state. This is kind of standard operating procedure for an authoritarian. You mentioned kind of creeping authoritarianism. I would say we are on full-stream authoritarianism because so much is happening in terms of the firing of employees who are failing the loyalty test; the decimating of programs at the whim of the President, rather than by the laws being passed here; ignoring laws that apply to the Executive, like the fact that you can't fire inspectors general unless it is for cause and 30 days.

The attack on due process and free speech and free press, the weaponization, in general, of the Justice Department—which is kind of a facet of it—and then the effort to get court decisions that enable the President to deploy the military in the streets, when there is no insurrection, no rebellion, and no invasion.

And this last piece, I think, is extraordinarily dangerous, not yet an issue that has come to your home in Virginia, but it has come to Southern California and to DC and to Portland, OR, and to Chicago, IL. And there will be others because the whole intent is to have the court decisions resolved that provide the precedent for deploying troops when and how the President wants, according to his definition of what a rebellion is or an insurrection is, as opposed to the realities. So there are no checks on that use of military.

These are all so many things happening all at once. Remember, we are simply 9 months into this administration. Wow. I mean, it is breathtaking. You had to have—the team had to have a careful plan, ready to roll, things that were going to be done every day. And that is why they had Project 2025. That is why they have Russ Vought at the head of OMB, being the engineer of that Trumpian trainer.

And we are in big trouble, so we are ringing the alarm bells. You are ringing the alarm bells. The people—they are 7 million strong on the weekend—were ringing the alarm bells in the biggest demonstration in U.S. history in a single day, but that is so important right now if we are going to save our Republic.

And thank you for being a core part of the rescue team.

I yield for a possible additional question.

Mr. KAINE. Mr. President, might the Senator from Oregon yield for another question?

Mr. MERKLEY. Yes, I will yield for another question.

Mr. KAINE. Thank you. And I will tell a quick story. In fact, I am going to hand you this picture now because my question is going to be for you to describe it. But I will tell a quick story on the authoritarianism front, and this is a very Virginia story, and then I am going to ask my colleague to describe the picture that I just handed him.

So Virginia is an unusual State. Fifty States have mottos; all States have mottos. Almost all States have mottos that are positive: ''Excelsior,'' ''Onward to the Stars Through Adversity.'' My favorite—because it is so random—positive motto is Michigan's. It is Latin, but the translation is: If you seek a pleasant peninsula, look about you.

How random. I wasn't looking for a peninsula, but I would rather it be pleasant than unpleasant.

Virginia's is the only motto that is not positive. The Virginia motto was designed by the framers of the Virginia Constitution, who were meeting in Williamsburg when the Framers of the American Constitution—not the Framers. The Declaration of Independence was being drafted and voted on in Philadelphia.

The Declaration voted on in Philadelphia, July 4, 1776. July 5, 1776, in Williamsburg, the Virginia ''B team'' that weren't in Philadelphia, they did four really cool things: They passed the first Virginia Constitution. They enacted the first Virginia bill of rights, which became a model for the national Bill of Rights. They elected Patrick Henry the first Governor.

But the fourth thing they did was they had a four-member committee appointed that spent 4 days in the library of William and Mary to design a state seal. And the State seal, which I am wearing. I wear this all the time. It is an unusual one. It is a woman amazon, representing virtue, standing atop a deposed Monarch whose crown has fallen off.

And the State motto, the only one that isn't a positive, the Virginia motto is a warning. It is a rebuke. It is Latin: ''Sic Semper Tyrannis''; thus be it always to tyrants.

And the framers picked the future verb tense. They didn't say: Down with tyrants. We don't like tyrants. We have defeated tyrants. They used the future verb tense because they believed that tyranny wasn't a form of government; it was a fact of human of nature. It was a fact of human nature that would not go away, and we would always need virtue to be able to defeat tyranny.

And so as you are talking about authoritarianism and where we are, I am just reminded of the fact that Virginians predicted in 1776 that the Nation would need to always be on guard against tyranny.

And in the formation of the Constitution—and my colleague has done a great job of looking at provisions of the Constitution—we invested a lot of power in the hands of an Executive, but then we put checks—Congress, the courts, a free press. You shouldn't go to war without a vote of Congress. The appropriations power was for Congress, not the President. We put all these checks in place to stop the reality of tyranny.

And as we round the corner into 250 years of American democracy, we are a nation looking in the mirror and asking ourselves the question of whether we still believe in democracy over tyranny. Do we still believe it?

In 1776, 30 percent of Americans were for monarchy. When we tell the story of the Revolution, it wasn't that 100 percent of Americans believed in democracy. Thirty percent were for tyranny and monarchy. It was what they knew or they had a financial tie or a family tie to England or maybe they were worried that democracy would be too messy. It wasn't a foregone conclusion that democracy would be the choice.

Every generation has to answer the question for itself: Do we still prefer democracy over tyranny?

And as we face the 250th anniversary of the Nation's birth, we are confronted with that.

I have handed my colleague a photo. I had hoped to have it on a poster, but the photo was taken today, and I didn't have time to turn it into a poster. But I want to ask my colleague from Oregon to describe what it is you see in that photograph.

Mr. MERKLEY. Well, thank you for the question. I thought when you were going to hand me this I was going to have a Rorschach test or something of that nature. But I knew within seconds what this was, as soon as I realized it was machinery and not parts of a bridge. But this is the demolition at the White House to prepare for some $300 million ballroom. At least that is what I am nominating as my answer, and I would yield to you a question if you would like to follow up.

Mr. KAINE. I would love to ask a followup question, if the Senator would allow.

Mr. MERKLEY. I will indeed allow a question.

Mr. KAINE. You know what a metaphor is. A metaphor is something that not only stands for itself but it stands for something else.

As you look at that picture of the White House being demolished today, at the very time as you were standing on this floor talking about authoritarianism hurting the institutions that were put in place 250 years ago, what is your feeling about the true significance of this demolition project going on at the other end of Pennsylvania Avenue?

Mr. MERKLEY. You are asking such a cerebral and philosophical question here as I am in the 20-whatever hour of the day.

But here we have evidence of the President tearing down a symbol of our Republic and building a symbol that is really a symbol about authoritarian power, about a government that serves the rich.

Just the fact that we are spending money on a $300 million ballroom—which I can't even imagine how it cost that much—when at the same time, the President will not come as requested by the minority leader in the House and minority leader in the Senate and sit down and work on it. I am sure they are willing to go to him, sit down, and work on the fact that we are facing 20 million people who are going to have their healthcare costs doubled. But instead of addressing that, the President is tearing down part of the symbol of our Republic, a President, and building a symbol of a King.

I yield the floor.

I thank my colleague from Oregon for this important conversation and for your stamina and patriotism.

Mr. MERKLEY. My stamina is getting a little shaky. I see my colleague from California standing behind me. I will get out of the way. I ask if you would care to ask a question.

Mr. SCHIFF. Yes. Would the Senator yield for a question?

Mr. MERKLEY. I will yield for a question.

Mr. SCHIFF. I thank the Senator for yielding and for your extraordinary speech and all that you have elucidated today and for your powerful advocacy on behalf of our democracy.

I think there are any number of signs of when a democracy is in trouble, when a country is descending into a kind of dictatorship. Books have been written about this subject. No one account, I think, can comprise all of the elements of the deterioration of democracy, but there are certain telltale signs that I think we are seeing all too clearly.

And my question goes to some of the things that we are witnessing that I think are hallmarks of the decline of a democracy and that ought to be sounding a three-alarm fire for the American people. Let me begin with a few of them.

First is the misuse of the military at home and abroad. When a President begins to use a military for unpurposeful purposes, when a President deploys American forces in violation of the law to American cities, when a President assembles top leadership—flag officers, generals, admirals—and tells them that our cities are to be military training grounds, that there is an enemy within, it is as sure as anything a sign of a democracy in trouble, of a democracy in decline.

When troops are repelling in Black Hawk helicopters, not in Somalia but in Chicago, it is the most visible sign of a democracy in trouble. This is, as we all know, in violation of the law which prohibits the use of our military for domestic law enforcement purposes.

Likewise, the misuse of the military abroad, without the authorization of Congress, is another sign of the deterioration of our democracy.

When a President arrogates to himself the power to blow up ships in the Caribbean or now in the Pacific without any authority, in violation of law and Constitution, it is another sign of the President arrogating the military power to himself—to the person of himself, not to the Constitution, not to his core responsibilities, but to himself.

No. 2, among the dozen or so most virulent signs of the decline of our democracy, at the risk of an authoritarian regime taking hold of this country, are the attacks on our universities. We see this in Hungary and elsewhere. When rulers start to attack the independence, the academic freedom of our universities, it is a sure sign of a democracy in trouble. When a President tries to dictate by withholding Federal funds—the lifeblood of research universities—and withholds those funds unless an academic institution agrees to adopt his cultural agenda or fire certain faculty or allow it to have some kind of a monitor, some kind of a Big Brother overseeing what takes place in our universities, it is a sign of a democracy in decline.

No. 3, when an administration, when a ruler goes after the right of representation by attacking lawyers, law firms, legal professionals and says: Thou shall not represent this cause which is deeply unpopular to me, you shall not take on this client who is antagonistic to me, you shall not hire this lawyer who is a personal enemy of mine—that is antithetical to the history of our democracy and all democracies.

John Adams, prior to becoming President, took on one of the most unpopular cases in American history, representing British soldiers who had participated in the Boston Massacre. Why did he do that? Why take on such an unpopular cause? Because he understood the importance to a democracy of the right of representation.

No. 4 of the signs that our democracy is in deep, deep trouble is the abuse of the Justice Department to go after the President's enemies and to protect his friends. It is in actions like, in the State of Virginia, the firing of a U.S. attorney who believes that a prosecution is not warranted, notwithstanding the personal injunction of the President that ''thou must prosecute these people.'' That prosecutor was fired and another was brought in to implement the President's will to go after his enemies.

But it is also, likewise, a sign of the loss of democracy when the powers of the Justice Department can be used to protect the President's friends, when a Justice Department can be told: You shall not look further into the $50,000 in bribe money taken from a top White House official; close down that investigation. You shall look no further into the corruption of the mayor of New York; close down that investigation because that mayor is useful to the administration politically. That is as sure a sign as anything that we no longer have an independent Justice Department but one in the thrall of the White House.

No. 5, suppression of free speech. Suppression of free speech, something not just in any amendment but in our First Amendment. When an administration uses its power to force ABC to pay him personally or to force CBS to pay him personally for the right to continue its broadcast license or for the opportunity of its parent to have a merger, these are overt efforts to censor the press.

When it uses its regulatory power and threats to try to take off the air a comedian or two comedians, it is a sure sign of the loss of press freedom.

And, equally, we see in other requests of regimes an effort to concentrate power, to concentrate the media itself in the hands of friendly oligarchs or to create a kind of state-run media, which we are deeply at risk of and see in the development of TikTok, and the course of power of the government to decide who the future owners of TikTok will be, to make sure they are of the same political persuasion as the President; or we see reflected in the oligarch control of Twitter or now X; or we see in organizations that are buying up stations like Sinclair and using its vast power for the purpose of censorship.

Next, in a declining democracy, in a budding autocracy, we see the demonization of vulnerable communities. And what could be more visible in America today than the demonization of immigrant communities by this administration or the demonization of the other, the false portrait that people who come to this country are all murderers and rapists and drug smugglers? The demonization of some of the most vulnerable people in America are also in the LGBTQ community and the trans community. We see this time and time again in history in countries becoming dictatorships, that they build their power on the backs of people they dehumanize.

You are seeing at home another powerful sign of a budding authoritarianism—a growing authoritarianism—and that is the use of propaganda, the use of taxpayer money for propaganda. You see banners with the President's glowering face now on public buildings in violation of law. You see Kristi Noem doing Hollywood-looking produced ads that are played at airports, falsely blaming Democrats for the shutdown—political propaganda paid for by you, the taxpayer; or highly-produced immigration videos featuring Kristi Noem thanking the President—more political propaganda.

Another sign of the decline of our democracy, of the growth of our authoritarian regime, is the corrupt use of government power for self-enrichment. This we saw from the very first days of this administration: the meme coin dinners in which the premises of the White House are used but private donors are encouraged to buy the President's meme coin, a cut of which the President gets; using the power of the prestige of that office—sometimes even the venue of that office—to enrich himself; the receipt of aircraft, a $400 million aircraft from Qatar, a nation that has a keen interest in U.S. policy; the President acquiring a plane in plain violation of the emolument clause; soliciting private donors for ballrooms; real estate deals in the Gulf; the rampant conflicts of interest with crypto money coming in from the Gulf to the First Family; the use of government power and position for corruption and self-enrichment.

Another powerful sign of a democracy in decline is the usurpation of Congress's power of the purse, the illegal withholding of funding, the impoundment of funding, the illegal rescission of funding, the illegal termination of grants, and, I would say beyond that, the mass firing of Federal employees—the lawless firing of Federal employees—the use of Congress's power to appropriate money, one of the most important powers—arguably, the most important power we have—now taken by the administration and without a fight in this body, certainly not

a bipartisan fight. That is surely a sign that we are losing our democracy.

The undermining of elections and voting is another key ingredient in dictators around the world. Cementing their position and power is the undermining of the foundational right to vote. We see it in its various forms now. We see it in this push to engage in gerrymandering around the country. But we see it in closing down polling stations in urban areas. We see it in efforts to suppress the vote of certain communities. We see it in the purging of voter rolls. We see it in affirmative efforts to discourage people from voting. We see it in the demonization of election workers, the interference with election boards.

Finally, although the list is much longer, I would end with this: the attack on truth itself, the attack on facts, the attack on science, the purging of people from our scientific agencies, the rabid falsehood, the firehose of falsehood coming out of the White House and our Agencies, daily—provable, palpable falsehood, eroding the very idea of truth and fact.

If you can persuade people that nothing is true, then what are we to use to decide who should govern?

If there is no shared experience, then how do we decide what the policies should be?

How do we avoid just falling back on political tribes or, worse, political violence, if there is no truth? if there is no fact? if there is no accountability?

So I thank Senator MERKLEY for shedding light on the risk—the risk to our precious democracy and the risk to this incredible inheritance from our Founders.

Part and parcel of saving our Republic and part and parcel of saving the country is to understand the dangers so that we can confront them. Future generations are going to ask what we did in this hour when our democracy was most vulnerable. Our parents and their parents went off to world wars to protect our democracy. Our task is far easier, on the one hand, but no less important on the other.

So I ask you: Are you seeing these same signs I am seeing of the danger to our democracy, of the degradation of our democracy, and what do you feel we can do to save this inheritance?

(Mr. SCHMITT assumed the Chair.)

Mr. MERKLEY. Well, I so appreciate the question from my colleague from California.

I must say this is a pretty comprehensive list you put forward, and I was checking them off in the order of issues that I have been raising over the many hours through the night last night, but I think the one that I didn't have that I actually agree with very much is your final point of the firehose of falsehoods, because we are just adrift in a sea of misinformation and disinformation. Then added into that toxic brew is a whole lot of just basic propaganda in a place it doesn't belong.

When you go out to the Portland airport, you will not hear the tape that Noem wants played. She wanted it played in airports all around the country, and a group of airports, led first by Portland, OR, said: No. It is breaking the law. It is breaking the Hatch Act; it is breaking the Anti-Lobbying Act; and it is breaking some other act on the list.

In a situation where the administration does not care what the law says, the philosophy is this: We are the unitary executive. We are in charge, and we can do whatever the hell we want—a ''take us to court if you don't like it'' attitude. Then we see the deliberate crushing of rights, and we see the deliberate grabbing of the power of the purse from Congress.

The difference between an authoritarian government—and there are many differences, but one way to describe the difference between an authoritarian government and a democracy is, in a democracy, the representatives of the people decide what the programs are, how they will be funded, and how they will be run. In an authoritarian government, all of those powers—''What are the programs? How much money will we put into them? How will they be run?''—transition to the executive, the all-powerful executive.

So every time we hear Trump or his Cabinet members saying, ''I am canceling that grant'' or ''I am defunding that program because it doesn't act consistent with the priorities of this administration,'' that is an authoritarian statement, and we are deep into this authoritarian crisis.

The poster behind me says:

Ring the alarm bells.

I thank you for helping to ring these alarm bells in a very cogent and extensive way.

I thank the 7 million people who went out and protested on Saturday for ringing the alarm bells because what we know is that, if we do not confront tyranny in its first year and if we do not find a way to have a strong rebuttal in the next election, then it becomes entrenched, and it is our responsibility—our oath to the Constitution—to not let that happen.

Thank you.

I notice we have a colleague from Vermont on the floor, if the colleague might be interested in asking a question.

Mr. WELCH. Will the Senator yield for a question?

Mr. MERKLEY. I would yield for a question.

Mr. WELCH. How are you managing to do this? You have been up all night and your staff too. It is really, really quite extraordinary.

Mr. MERKLEY. Well, thank you for that question. I am on the verge of falling over.

Mr. WELCH: And the staff.

Mr. MERKLEY: But I have got an hour more before we are going to wrap up this effort.

I am so pleased that so many have been able to come from the caucus and help ring the alarm bells, because this is the most perilous moment for our Republic since the Civil War, and never did I expect it to be in my time. I thought, yes, we argue over housing policy, and how can we best have a decent home in a decent community? Yes, we argue over education policy, and how can there be a pathway for every child to have a full and productive life? All of these are foundations.

Mr. WELCH. Will the Senator yield for another question? I will ask another one.

Mr. MERKLEY. Oh, another question. I would yield for another question. Yes, I would.

Mr. WELCH. All right.

Mr. MERKLEY. Make it a long one.

Mr. WELCH. I will make it a longish one, but I want to join my colleagues in expressing our gratitude for this incredible physical effort that reflects not just your intellectual engagement but your compassion and the care you have for Oregonians, whom you have been serving so well for so long. It has really been, just for me, a wonderful opportunity to be a new Member of the Senate, along with Senator SCHIFF, who I know feels the same way to be working with somebody like the Senator from Oregon, who is just honest and true and totally grounded in his commitment to the people whom he serves and the Constitution that all of us serve. It is just a gratifying experience for us to be your colleagues.

You know, one thing that I wanted to talk about was tariffs and who has the authority to impose tariffs and what the implications are, because what I am seeing is that our farm economy is really being devastated by tariffs.

Let's talk about Midwest farmers. They are proud folks, like the dairy farmers in Vermont, and they used to have markets. The thing they loved to have is purchasing power that they earned by tilling the land and having family farm operations that would be passed on from generation to generation. They really didn't want a lot of government involvement or interference. They wanted to be able to grow their crops. And what I am seeing is that the Trump administration's embrace of tariffs has resulted in the total collapse of the markets that used to be available to our Midwest farmers, including the China market.

You know, last year, our farmers sold about 30, 40 percent of their soybean crops to China. They haven't sold a bushel, OK? They haven't sold a bushel. There is now talk, by Trump, of taking revenue from the tariffs to pay farmers a subsidy. I get it—the farmers need it—but wouldn't it make more sense to let farmers sell the crops that they grow rather than have a tariff that prohibits them from selling to markets they have had?

Then the second thing I noticed—and I really am interested in this because rural America is the heart of America, you know, with the wonderful community values folks have—family values—

hard work, service. We have got a billionaire who is the Secretary of the Treasury. In my understanding—I don't know how. I guess, if you are a billionaire, you own lots of things in lots of different places, but he, apparently, owns lots of farmland in the West. But his major, new initiative is to take $40 billion of our money to bail out the Argentine peso.

So maybe you can explain to me how that is going to help our Midwest farmers—a stronger, bailed-out peso from Secretary Bessent—and how the Bessent policy on tariffs is going to give any kind of lifeline to those family farms that have been so much a part of our heritage, who do so much for the well-being of our country, and whose prosperity is so essential to the well-being of our whole country.

Farmers like to feed people. They like to work hard. They don't want a bailout, and they don't want a handout. We have got the tariff policies that are wrecking the markets, and then we have got a bailout that is going to Argentina that is going to further erode the ability of our farmers to sell their product because, oh, by the way, the Argentinian farmers are now going into the markets we are helping them create that have been opened up as a result of denying access to those markets for our Midwest farmers.

So perhaps you could explain to me how this makes sense.

Mr. MERKLEY. Well, I appreciate the question from my colleague from Vermont.

I must say soybeans have come up several times today, as has Argentina, and this is so troubling.

Now, I will tell you, when I met with my Farm Bureau, everyone has a little bit of queasiness even if tariffs haven't touched them yet, but the tariffs are changing all the time. So how might it suddenly affect the market if another tariff change is inputted and so forth?

Everyone in the agricultural world is terrified that, if they lose their market, even temporarily, those relationships deteriorate. When new relationships are forged, it is hard to get people back. If you have let people down once, then what happens next?

So this is the situation—this double deal, I guess I will call it, with Argentina—with our, well, having a trade war with China. So China doesn't buy a single thing. You said not a single bushel, and I have heard, yep, nothing, nada.

Senator MURRAY of Washington was down here, saying: We have got all of these beans that normally travel through Washington State before they get exported. Where the hell are they going to be stored?

I don't know, but what I do know is that a lot of folks may not have a place to store them. I look forward to learning more about what is going to happen to this massive crop that there is no customer for because China went to Argentina.

Then you mentioned a second part of the Argentina deal to which the President says: Do you know what? I want to bail out this far-right government down there because they are in trouble—and we don't want to let a far-right government be in trouble—with $20 billion and maybe $40 billion.

Think of how much money that is. That is $100 for every single person in the United States of America. You know, if I went door-to-door in Oregon and personally asked everybody, ''Would you like to give $100 to Argentina?'' do you know how many takers I would have?

Mr. WELCH. I think I know the answer.

Mr. MERKLEY. I think I would get zero takers.

By the way, where is the legislation that gives the President the power to give $20 billion or $40 billion to Argentina?

I haven't looked it up yet. I am going to look it up, but I think it is exactly a feature of an authoritarian government that he wants to self-help a fellow authoritarian government but with a twist. The twist is that, apparently, a group of well-placed colleagues—maybe friends of the Treasury Secretary, I believe, that I may have read, but I won't say that definitively—bought up some of the debt in Argentina. They bought it at a discount. That is my understanding.

Again, I have not double-checked this. So I am saying it with some caution.

But what happens when you do that, and then there is a bailout, and you get face value?

Let's say you pay 25 cents on the dollar. When you get face value after a bailout and you make a 400-percent return, well, that is great for the richest of whoever they are in America whom Trump wants to help out.

Mr. WELCH. Will the Senator yield again?

Mr. MERKLEY. I will yield, but it has to be in the form of a question. I will yield for a question.

Mr. WELCH. So here is my question:

Is this really a bailout for the financiers on Wall Street who bought this debt at 20 cents on the dollar but may get paid $1 on the dollar or is this just flat-out enrichment? They didn't lose. They are winning as other people suffer. So is this really a bailout or just a flat-out ''Hey, fellas. Here is $40 billion. I love you, Donald Trump''?

Mr. MERKLEY. Well, thank you for that question.

I must say it reminds me of a townhall because, every now and then, I realize I am way over my head in what I actually know to be the facts. So I am going to stop before I dig a bigger hole because I have not personally researched it or read up on it.

I have heard a variety of comments, almost in passing, from colleagues who were so disturbed about this arrangement, disturbed about what is going to happen to soybeans, disturbed that China is buying them from Argentina, disturbed that we are sending a bailout to Argentina, and disturbed that they have heard that a lot of that money may come back to some very rich people in the United States of America. But I do not know the details, and I am going to leave it as a bit of a conjecture, and when we talk soon, I will have the answers.

Mr. WELCH. Well, I appreciate that.

I yield to the Senator.

Mr. MERKLEY. Thank you.

I notice my colleague from Illinois has returned to the floor. If he would like to, I would be happy to entertain a question, should he have one.

Mr. DURBIN. First, I thank my colleague from Oregon for his endurance and determination in hanging in there.

He is bringing up a critical issue and subject for America at a critical moment, but I would like to return to an issue we discussed this morning when I was visiting, and that is the issue of the militarization of our Federal Government and its impact on States like yours of Oregon and mine of Illinois.

What I am finding as I read the newspaper accounts is that the ICE operation from the Department of Homeland Security in Illinois continues to intimidate people who live in the city, in their neighborhoods, and all around, and bring fear to parts of the city of Chicago. Little Village and Pilsen are the ones most well known.

Mr. MERKLEY. I am going to interrupt you for just a moment because the protocol team is not sure whether you asked me if I would yield for a question.

Mr. DURBIN. It is a legitimate point.

Will you yield for a question—

Mr. MERKLEY. I will yield for a question. Thank you.

Mr. DURBIN.—for the Chair?

The point I am trying to make is there are areas of the city of Chicago and I am sure in your State of Oregon where the intimidation factor has reached a point where people are worried about literally going to church, going to work, taking their kids to school. It is a genuine problem.

Just last week, an individual took his child to daycare, left the motor running in his car and took the little toddler into daycare. He came out the door and was arrested and detained and removed from that scene, specifically, while the motor was still running in his car. That is the kind of thing that is happening. It isn't as if they are targeting criminals; they are going after people who look like they are Hispanic. There are many who live in our city, and I am glad to have them. They are wonderful people.

I would like to ask, in your State, what kind of intimidation, if any, is taking place through this military operation of the President?

Mr. MERKLEY. I thank the Senator of Illinois for the question.

As you are telling this story, I was thinking about a story from Oregon in which a woman who has been there for a long time—she has legal status in the United States. Her mother visits from

Honduras, and her sister lives in Canada.

There is a park on the border between Washington State and Canada where people can go into the park and meet. They have to leave by the same entry they came in.

They have done this before, and so her mother gets to be with her, and then with her sister, the three of them and four children—7-year-old triplets and a 9-year-old, I believe. And the children are U.S. citizens. So they do what they have done before: They go up to meet the Canadian sister in this park. While they are hugging, she gets arrested. Arrested why? For smuggling her sister into the United States. But they are in this park that is set up for that purpose.

She is still being held. The children were released, and they are with a family friend. And the grandmother was released, the mother's mother, but the mother, Jackie—mother of the four American children—is still being held. We keep protesting, writing, calling, and she is still being held.

The case against her was dropped. Why? Because you can't arrest somebody for hugging in a park set up for that purpose. This is my understanding of the case.

But think about how that story says everyone is at risk all the time. Everyone is at risk. So there is fear and trepidation.

Individuals who have other documentation are afraid that they may make a move that may lead to some extended family member or someone else who has documentation being arrested, just like this woman had documentation. So it is a regime of fear.

The argument Trump made was that when someone is here and undocumented and they do a violent act, they are going to be deported. I don't think many Americans would argue with that. But we should also recognize that our immigrants commit violent acts at a lower rate than native-born Americans. Portraying immigrants with this false story of being criminals, rapists, murderers, and so forth, is simply, well, to quote a district judge on a different topic, ''untethered to the facts.''

We are in a deeply disturbing period where more children are being separated, and communities are being terrorized.

I think how you have brought forward time and time again that we needed to resolve the status for Dreamers in a more solid way, put bills forth, and we fell short how many times? Six times? I am not sure.

Mr. DURBIN. Or more.

Mr. MERKLEY. Or more. And this body can't even come together and address children brought here through no fault of their own, who know no other country, who speak no other language, who grew up here and are productive citizens. Many of them, when we first started—the first I was aware of it so long ago—they might have been little kids. Now they may be out of high school, out of college, fully employed in the community, and still we haven't resolved their status so they can kind of feel like fully productive members of our community.

Mr. DURBIN. If the Senator would yield?

Mr. MERKLEY. I would yield for a question.

Mr. DURBIN. Over the course of my service in the Senate, one of the things that I was proudest of and am still proud of was the formation of the so-called Gang of 8—four Republicans and four Democrats who sat down to write a comprehensive immigration reform bill. Senator McCain led the effort on the Republican side, and Senator SCHUMER joined me with others on the Democratic side. We produced a measure that had the support of business and labor and Democrats and Republicans.

We brought it to the floor of the U.S. Senate and passed it with over 60 votes. It was a glorious day and a great celebration. What was it all about? It was all about the 11 million undocumented people in the United States coming forward and registering with this government who they are, where they live, and they pay a fine for coming to this country without documentation. They then don't automatically become citizens, but they are allowed to work. They wouldn't be deported, and they can live a normal life, paying their taxes and doing what people who are in this country do normally.

It was an attempt to try to regularize the information, to account for the 11 million, and to say that was going to be an accounting, which would give us some stability in this country on the issue of immigration. The fact is, it would have done just that.

Unfortunately, it was never taken up by the Republican leadership in the House of Representatives. We passed it here in the Senate. It included the Dream Act, and it was a step forward.

I contrast it today with what we are faced with: full-scale battles and war over immigration in cities across this country. It is unnecessary. There are ways to resolve this fairly, humanely, and in an American fashion. I hope the Senator from Oregon agrees with me.

It is time for us to sit down and do this. Hiring more ICE agents is not going to resolve the issue of immigration. Having a law that is enforceable, rational, humane, and American in its nature is the best way, as far as I am concerned.

I ask the Senator for his reaction.

Mr. MERKLEY. Thank you, Senator. I not only agree, but I so admire what you accomplished. It is so frustrating. Why can't we accomplish that again?

I know one of our Members worked hard with my colleague across the aisle to do a bill that may have been a slimmer version, and President Trump—then-Candidate Trump—said don't take that immigration bill forward last year because he wanted to keep this as an election issue.

If people want to keep chaos rather than to solve problems, how are we to address a better path forward for our Nation, a more productive path?

So I hope what you accomplished can be reinvented. I am not sure that I have any confidence that it is possible. It may be harder now than it was then, but let's try. And you have my full backing in that effort.

Mr. DURBIN. I would like to just make one last comment, if I can—

Mr. MERKLEY. And I will yield for a question.

Mr. DURBIN.—in the nature of a question.

Just a few feet away from where we are in the Chamber is my Capitol office, and on my credenza behind my desk is my mother's naturalization certificate for all to see. I am a proud immigrant.

She came to this country at the age of 2. Her mother did not speak English but brought three children on a boat from Germany to Baltimore and ultimately to Illinois, where I grew up and my mother spent her life. It was an indication of the American dream, as far as I am concerned. Her son not only got a government job but was elected to the Senate, so good things happen.

But I think it is a story of immigration—a story that is repeated over and over again by families that come into this country, determined to succeed. It makes us a better nation and always has.

Has the Senator run into that in the State of Oregon?

Mr. MERKLEY. I must say, Senator, I don't think there is an individual we have in the Senate who is not the descendent of immigrants. So shouldn't we all be able to identify with our family stories and bring those to bear to solve this challenge and actually restore a framework?

Just let me take one piece of this. The process for being able to have an asylum hearing has a backlog of about 6 years. That is a piece that we can find a rational way to address. The Dreamers—we can find a rational path to bring the Dreamers fully into our society, as you have laid out in the past. We can proceed to, I think, find a deal on border security, what we pay. But there are many pieces that will never get solved unless people are sitting down, like you did with your Gang of 8, bringing people together, and saying: Let's iron this out. So that is my hope and prayer.

Mr. DURBIN. In the nature of a question, I ask the Senator from Oregon, is he aware of the fact that we have approximately 700 immigration judges facing that backlog you just described, and the Trump administration has dismissed 100 of them? So instead of adding more judges so we can expedite the hearings and resolve them, the opposite has been the case. Was the Senator aware of that?

Mr. MERKLEY. I was not aware of that, no, and that is insanity.

Mr. DURBIN. It certainly is.

I would also ask the Senator, when it comes to—

Mr. MERKLEY. I yield in the nature of a question.

Mr. DURBIN. In the nature of a question, when it comes to the issue of due process, the question is whether or not we can, in this country, offer due process to the people who are asking for their fate to be resolved. That has been part of our Constitution applying not only to citizens but those who are in our country petitioning to become citizens.

Does the Senator agree with me that due process is a critical part of our democracy?

Mr. MERKLEY. Absolutely.

Mr. DURBIN. We face this reality now with children. I just described it earlier. The question I would ask you is this—

Mr. MERKLEY. I yield for the question.

Mr. DURBIN.—does the Senator believe that these unaccompanied children need to have humane treatment at all times?

You told the story earlier of going down to the border and watching what happened under previous administrations. Would the Senator recount that story at this point?

Mr. MERKLEY. Yes. I think you asked me to recount the story. The story involved the fact that I read a speech by Attorney General Sessions. Attorney General Sessions was delivering this speech at I think it was called Freedom Park in Southern California, on the border. As I read the speech, I said out loud to people around me: It sounds like he is planning to separate children deliberately from their parents in order to have that trauma be a deterrent for people coming.

I said: There is no way any American administration—not blue, not red—would ever deliberately harm children as a political policy strategy.

A member of my team said: There is one way to find out. Go down to the border.

I checked, and I had that weekend free, so I went down to the border. I go into this warehouse, and in this warehouse, there are all these basically what we would call in Oregon cyclone fence cages, wired cages.

I stopped in front of one of them, and it had a group of boys, lined up from the smallest to the tallest. The smallest was just knee high to the grasshopper, as we would say, just a little tyke, maybe 4 years old.

I see these kids looking out across the warehouse because in other cages inside that warehouse were groups of women or men. My impression was they were looking to see, where did my mother go? where did my father go? where is my sister?

I said to the Customs and Border Protection agent: Were these children separated from their parents?

He said: Yes.

I said: Where do you do that?

He said: We bring the family in through that door—the door was maybe 25 feet away—and we say: Children, come with me. Parents go with that person. And, boom, they are separated, and they stayed separated.

What happened as that unfolded is the administration—this is under Trump 1—said they were keeping careful records of the children to be able to have a reunion with their parents, but they were not.

So we ended up with extraordinary efforts, including tons of volunteer lawyers and researchers, trying to get children back unified with their parents. A few hundred, I believe, were never reconnected to their parents. They could never be found. Whether they returned to a small village in a faraway country, I don't know, but it was profoundly disturbing.

I went outside, and the press had a little huddle. They said: What do you see? I said: Children being separated from their parents.

Of course, the story immediately blew up. And then I went up the road. I heard that there were hundreds of boys being held in a former Walmart. And my team member is like: Well, we asked, but we didn't get permission to get in.

I said: Well, let's go knock on the door.

And so we go up. And he is doing a live feed—what is that called—on one of those social media—live Facebook feeds. I go up and I knock, and I say, yes, who I am, and we were in the area, and we heard there were a lot of operations here. Can you give us a tour? Can you have the executive director come out?

And they got back to me. And by the way, I was—since I was doing a live feed, I said: Call me on my phone number. My phone number went out to the entire world at that moment. And so I enjoyed having hundreds or thousands of people, seemed like, called for weeks about this.

But they didn't come out. What they did is they called the police to have me arrested. And the police declined to arrest me but did escort me and my staff member off campus. They did not want there to be a tour.

And I had been told there might be—I think it was—1,000 boys, and there were some almost 1,500 boys in this. And because of the publicity of that live feed, the next week, the administration had to open it up to the press. And the week after that, I went back and took some legislators and saw it.

But this vision of deliberately harming children in order to deter immigration, that is a horrific thing. And it did stop. The outcry was massive. It did stop, thank God. But all these other now circumstances are—people are being hurt in all kinds of ways right now.

Mr. DURBIN. Would the Senator yield for another question? It would be my last question.

Mr. MERKLEY. Yes, I will yield for another question.

Mr. DURBIN. Is the Senator aware of the fact that 2 weeks ago ICE offered to children under the age of 18—and they were children—an option of a $2,400 reward if they would leave the country and go back to the country of their birth? Children were being asked to sign a contract to give up any claim to citizenship in the United States, and the $2,400 was available to an adult that they would identify in their country who would meet their airplane.

With all of the trafficking that has been going on, it was a ridiculous idea to take children and ask them to make that decision and to give them a financial reward if they went along.

Was the Senator aware of that?

Mr. MERKLEY. I had heard a reference to some kind of a payment program being tested, but I didn't know the details.

Mr. DURBIN. That was the detail.

I am going to yield the floor and thank the Senator.

Mr. MERKLEY. Thank you very much, to my colleague from Illinois. Thank you for being a champion.

And I noticed that we have a Senator from Washington State? No, we do not.

We do have a Senator from Oregon who has arrived. Would the Senator from Oregon like to ask a question?

Mr. WYDEN. I know you have to ask permission. I just want to say that today has been an extraordinary day for Oregon and for the country. We look forward to continuing this discussion. And would the Senator yield?

Mr. MERKLEY. Yes. Thank you for the protocol. Thank you for asking me. And, yes, I would yield for a question.

Mr. WYDEN. Would the Senator be willing to continue this discussion in the days ahead? Because I think this has been extraordinary. It has begun to lay out the implications of what this is really all about in terms of authoritarianism. It is important for our State. It is an important debate for the country.

Would the Senator be willing to carry out further kind of discussions? And it might not necessarily be here on the floor of the Senate, but elsewhere as well?

Mr. MERKLEY. I thank my colleague. As long as that discussion is not taking place in the hours that I might be sleeping tonight, absolutely.

And I do feel like this is so fundamental to our Nation. That is why everyone who has come down to the floor, everyone here who has asked questions today and made solid insights as they prepared their question, we are collectively ringing the alarm bells. We are ringing the alarm bells because authoritarianism is not down the road or around the corner or next month or next year; it is here right now.

And it has been so astounding to hear all of the mentions that have been highlighted by individual Senators about how this tyranny is taking shape. And in every possible way around the world where authoritarians have developed a strategy, they are all

being done here. It is like, all of them: Rig the next election. Yes. And then proceed to pressure the newspapers. Yes. And pressure the broadcasters on what they can put out. Yes. And weaponize the Justice Department. They are doing it.

And the list goes on and on.

And for us in Oregon, certainly, the one that is on everyone's mind is striving to have a pathway to legally send in the military when there is no rebellion, no insurrection, and no invasion. And that one terrifies me.

The administration is hell-bent on getting a judicial thumbs-up, a green light, to be able to move troops where they want in this country when none of those things are happening.

Mr. WYDEN. My colleague has richly earned a few hours of sleep tonight, but I am going to make sure that here in the Senate and across the country, people understand that this is the beginning of further discussion, not the end.

I want to thank my colleague for taking this time today to play out what this is really all about in terms of this issue.

Mr. MERKLEY. I am checking to see if any more colleagues would like to ask a question.

Would the Senator from Michigan like to ask a question?

Mr. PETERS. I would, thank you. Thank you, Senator MERKLEY, for yielding to me.

I do have a question for you. Certainly, I appreciate all that you have been saying over all of these hours. You are right; we are in a real crisis here in this country.

Mr. MERKLEY. Before you go any further, can you just say these magical words: Would you yield for a question? And I will say that I will yield for a question.

Mr. PETERS. Would you yield for a question?

Mr. MERKLEY. I will yield for a question, yes.

Mr. PETERS. Thank you. I appreciate that. And again, thank you for bringing this to the attention of the American people in such an eloquent way.

First, I would just like to ask my colleague about how President Trump is pursuing a dangerous and authoritarian practice of basically picking winners and losers in government. Clearly, he is acting just like a King. As we have seen, he has picked winners and losers by illegally refusing to spend money that Congress has directed. He is picking winners and losers by withholding Federal grant funding for programs like disaster relief and medical research unless people basically bend a knee to his draconian demands.

He is picking winners and losers by firing nonpartisan experts in programs that he doesn't like, and he is replacing them with people whose only qualifications are that they are loyal to the President—the only qualification he cares about.

And in a classic authoritarian playbook, he is covering all this up by removing independent watchdogs that conduct oversight of Executive functions. One of the most egregious examples of this power grab is the ongoing effort to illegally withhold funding that Congress has authorized and appropriated, with bipartisan support, for critical services. He is withholding it. President Trump froze funding that helped Michigan communities build new radio towers, prepare for natural disasters, and construct safe and modern infrastructure.

And when the President breaks the law to give a windfall to some States and some communities but not others, he is picking winners and losers.

We have also seen how President Trump has picked winners and losers among the employees who work on critical government programs and protect our national security.

President Trump has fired tens of thousands of nonpartisan Federal employees, all because they carry out a function that the President simply doesn't like.

And just this week—just this week—President Trump's Department of the Interior fired hundreds of workers who protect the health and safety of the Great Lakes, an economic and ecological gem for Michigan and all the States that surround those lakes.

At every turn, President Trump has instituted policies that increase his power and sway so that he can more easily pick winners and losers among the Federal workforce. He has made it so that the only qualification for being a Federal worker is someone who voted for him, whether or not you actually do the job. In fact, he is taking us back to the spoils system of the 1800s. And it is not only politicizing our nonpartisan, expert civil service; it is jeopardizing our government's ability to deliver crucial services to the American people.

And like authoritarians in the past, President Trump doesn't want you to know about his illegal actions, so he is covering them up by undermining independent oversight at every single turn.

And when it comes to picking winners and losers, we know that President Trump always chooses himself as the winner. He blatantly uses the Office of the President to promote the sale of his own meme coins. He accepts large investments and gifts from foreign governments without regard for national security concerns or Federal ethics laws.

Meanwhile, his family and friends peddle influence and make deals to enrich themselves and the President. And what do all these efforts to enrich himself add up to? It is no surprise that his net worth has risen by $3 billion in the past year.

So I would like to ask my colleague from the great State of Oregon a question about these decisions to basically unlawfully pick winners and losers. What do you believe that means for the future of our country?

Mr. MERKLEY. I so appreciate the point that my colleague from Michigan has been making. And if we think about the fundamental difference between a democracy and an authoritarian government, one way of describing that difference is that in a democracy, elected representatives of the people, like folks who are gathered here right now, work together, bringing their diverse life experiences, their knowledge of their individual States, and together find a strategy that will address their collective challenges so that each and every part of the country is represented and things are addressed that are important to every part.

That design of the programs and how they will operate and how they will fund happen in a democracy, in a Chamber like this.

In an authoritarian President—an authoritarian system—it is all happening on the Executive side. The Executive is saying: Here are the programs that are going to be funded; here are my priorities and what I will do. Here are the grants I will cancel and the ones that I will redirect. Here is the way we will run these programs.

And that is exactly what the Trump administration is trying to do. They are trying to move the responsibility we have under the Constitution to design programs, decide how much they should be funded, resolve questions about how they will operate, and move that responsibility over to the Executive.

And the head of the Office of Management and Budget, he was very upfront about it. He said: I believe in a unitary Executive, where all power rests with the President. And that means the President can cancel programs at will.

And I was shocked when I heard him say this. This is before we had the hearing in the Budget Committee, probably about the same time you were holding a hearing on Russell Vought.

And I said: You know, that has already been adjudicated by the Supreme Court. There was an effort in 1996 to do a line-item veto and allocate to the President the ability to say ''these programs go forward, these programs fail,'' and the Supreme Court said: Hell no; you can't do that. The Constitution assigns the responsibility to the legislature to decide what gets funded, and the Executive has to implement that plan.

And when the question of impoundments came up at an earlier date, where in a different strategy Nixon said: Hey, I think I will just not forward the funding; I will impound it so certain programs won't be funded—again, that had gone to the Supreme Court.

And again the Supreme Court said no. But Mr. Vought sat in my office, and he said: Well, I believe we will get this issue through the Supreme Court and the Supreme Court will back the unitary Executive, strengthen the Executive powers of this country.

I just shook my head. I am like, that can't possibly happen. But what happened just a short time ago? A piece of this went to the Court and in their shadow docket. The question was, Could the administration slow-walk funding to the last 45 days of the fiscal year and then bring over a request for us to undo that funding—it is called a rescission—and then, because it was a 40-day, 5-day grace period, pause, the fiscal year expires and the funding authorization goes proof, and suddenly the President has killed the program. And the Court, in their preliminary response, said: Yeah, we think you can do that.

So Russell Vought certainly seems to have a better grip on where the Supreme Court is.

But I just feel like we have to do everything we can, therefore, legislatively to stop that. Our spending bills need to say that if we have a bipartisan spending bill, that decision to undo that program can only be done by a bipartisan bill in the future, which is the way we do rescissions now.

We have money that is left over from a program or this program, and we say that money can be brought back in, that it is not needed, but we do it in a bipartisan manner, not in a manner that gives the power of the purse to the President of the United States.

This is a collective effort that all of our Republican and Democratic colleagues should be involved in. I mean, collectively, we need to be defending our role in the Constitution. And this is central to the separation between authoritarian power and a democracy.

I have been on the Senate floor to ring the alarm bells for a long time—since somewhere around 6:25 yesterday—and I want to thank the people who have been here with me the whole time, people who made this happen.

My Team Merkley staff, and I see a few of them—quite a few of them are here. I appreciate the support.

I thank the Capitol Police who had to stay through the night and the Democratic and Republican floor staff who had to stay and go forward without being, if you will, the center of attention. They had to make sure everything went right, and they did.

The Senate pages who have come and gone through the night—but I think it is cool that you were here. Every now and then, when I was a little lonely, I would look over, and I would see some heads peeking around the corner over on this side and this side. That was great.

The page program is extraordinary, and I hope all of you will think about how you find a path in life to build a better world. There is no better mission for a soul on this planet than to find a way to build a better world—a million ways to do it.

The Senate Doorkeepers, thank you. I so appreciate you all.

Senate Parliamentarians, oh my goodness. I don't know what kind of flowers I can possibly bring, but I will be in your debt for a long time. Thank you.

The Presiding Officers. So many of my colleagues from across the aisle had to come. And I know how hard it is to sit in that chair. I did my 100 hours in that chair, plus quite a few. And I know it is awfully hard to be there and not even be able to respond when maybe someone disagrees profoundly. Yet you are here making it possible that I could carry this conversation, ringing the alarm bells about authoritarianism. It couldn't have been done if you all hadn't come and held the floor, so thank you.

All of you colleagues who came to give a little dissertation and ask a question and sometimes a longer dissertation, thank you. Thank you. I appreciate that so much.

We are in the most perilous moment, the biggest threat to our Republic since the Civil War. President Trump is shredding our Constitution. Our Nation has spent 250 years striving toward a vision of equal justice. Of course, we had our Declaration of Independence. It took a few years to get our Constitution that we now have in place—1787. But we have been striving toward this vision in which everyone is empowered in this country.

I always think about how the foundation of the law is carved into the facade above the Supreme Court pillars, and it says ''Equal Justice Under Law.''

You know, the very first political act I took was when I was a junior in high school and I read an article in the evening paper—back when there was often a business paper in the morning and a labor paper in the evening—in the Oregon Journal. The article said that Vice President Agnew had been convicted of bribery, convicted of taking $100,000, the article said, and he had been given a fine of $10,000.

I was like, what? For the rich and powerful, they get to keep 90 percent of their proceeds? So I fired off a letter to the Oregon Journal and said: This is not right in a nation that values equal justice under law. And they printed it. They are long out of business. I would like to get a copy of that. Long out of business.

But the vision Trump is putting forward is unequal injustice. It is a huge assault on the foundation for our Nation. What we have is a nation in which the Founders—and many of you spoke so eloquently to this—a nation in which the Founders said: We do not want to have a King. We want to have government that flows up from the people, not down from a monarch.

So they put together their best ideas. They wrestled with it at the Constitutional Convention. They went through many versions of what the Senate would look like and even what our terms would look like—at one point, 12 years; at one point, lifetime. Right now, I wish it was a little less than 6 years myself.

But the challenge we have is that that vision of a separation of powers, of checks and balances, is being steadily destroyed by President Trump.

In the book that I was using as kind of a framework for discussing these issues, it says that most people even today think it is still that republics die with men wielding guns. It is essential that we understand that is not the way most republics die today. Most republics die because someone is elected who starts working systematically to reduce those checks and balances. Then perhaps they are aided by a rubberstamp Congress, and perhaps they are aided by a Supreme Court that vests more power in the Executive's key decisions, and, of course, it takes that aggressive authoritarian personality.

We have all three. We are fully in the authoritative moment right now. The President believes that he is the King of this country and that he can control everything, regardless of what the law says or what we send him. We have to collectively—and it should be a bipartisan effort—collectively say: Hell no.

We took an oath to the Constitution, to the division of government by and for the people, not government by and for the powerful. And we are going to keep fighting to restore that vision.

Today, so many of you highlighted so many pieces of what is going wrong in our country in terms of erosion—a President who wants to tell universities what they can teach and is holding research grants over their heads; a President who wants to tell law firms who they can give pro bono help to and has forced them to—various firms—chuck up a billion dollars to do pro bono work on the places and organizations that Trump wants them to spend it on; a President who is using every tool available to try to get court decisions that will allow him to use both the National Guard and the troops to be able to go where in the country he wants them domestically even if there is no insurrection, no rebellion, and no invasion; a President who is weaponizing the judiciary to go after person after person coming off his enemies list. Whoever it might be that is next—one of us may be next. One of our colleagues has certainly been publicized by Trump as being on Trump's enemies list. And this is just not to be allowed in government by and for the people.

There is the crushing of due process. And I appreciate the comments of my colleague from Illinois about due process and all of the challenges regarding immigration and due process. Let's find a way to finally pass an immigration bill after coming so close so many times.

Senator DURBIN, I know you are retiring, but let's get the immigration fix done before you leave us, with all of your expertise. The group of 8 that you put together before did incredibly fabulous work, and this is way past due, that we have that foundation of law with many pieces of improvements for justice.

We saw on day one of this administration Trump down there in the Rotunda with the billionaires standing behind him, and from that moment, it was apparent that is what his government was about—by and for the wealthy and the powerful.

If we had any doubts, then it was resolved when he put forward his version of the bill, which he called the Big Beautiful Bill and we often called—many of us—the ''Big Ugly Betrayal.''

Only an authoritarian President who believes that the people answer to him rather than him being accountable to the people would come up with a strategy of decimating the healthcare through the ACA to fund tax breaks for billionaires.

Only an authoritarian President would say: Let's demolish Medicaid and, between Medicaid and ACA, have 15 million people lose their healthcare—235,000 projected in my State.

Only an authoritarian would say ''Let's cut child nutrition to fund even more tax breaks for billionaires'' and then, of course, on top of all that, put forward a plan that runs up $30 trillion in additional debt over 30 years—probably the most fiscally irresponsible bill ever to pass through this Chamber. That $30 trillion of additional debt will so compromise our efforts to take on the foundations for ordinary families—for healthcare, for housing, for education, for good-paying jobs—the four foundations that give families a chance to stand on their feet and thrive.

So we all have taken an oath to the Constitution, so let's all work together in every possible way to ring the alarm bells because it is a fact that if we do not ring the alarm bells, well, the longer you are in an authoritarian state, it becomes more and more entrenched. So we have to fight it in every possible way.

I am so proud of the 7 million Americans who took to the street in every one of our States at those 2,700 different locations all across the country to say ''No Kings.'' They were ringing the alarm bells. They were saying that it is absolutely unacceptable to have an authoritarian government. And that is the largest demonstration in U.S. history.

For each of those 7 million, they have families, they have friends who knew that they were doing this, who are becoming educated about the challenge that we are facing right now.

We have to recognize that the next election is absolutely critical if we are going to save our Republic because the strategy of an authoritarian is to rig the elections, and the more time they have, the more entrenched it becomes.

Already, here is Trump trying to do a national voter registration file that can be more easily manipulated for the elections next year. Here is President Trump trying to do massive gerrymandering in a whole bunch of States in order to offset the balance between Democrats and Republicans that are representing the House of Representatives. Here is President Trump saying he will do everything possible to stop the use of vote-by-mail across the country because—we know why—because vote-by-mail has such integrity. It can't be manipulated on election day like precincts can.

In precincts, you can move your location. You can put them where there is no parking. You can understaff them. The machines can break down. You can send intimidators. You can proceed to put out fake information about your location. You can put out information that the election was last week when it is really this coming Tuesday.

You can't do that in vote by mail. And when we have the majority, we must pass the For the People Freedom to Vote bill and lock down the integrity of our elections, so we will not worry for a generation about the people having a fair voice in our government by and for the people.

I am proud to be colleagues with all of you in this effort. Thank you very much.

I yield the floor.

(Applause.)

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. MORENO). The Democratic leader.

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, let me express the profound gratitude of all of us for his amazing tour de force over these many hours.

JEFF MERKLEY has been the Paul Revere of 21st century America, literally, figuratively, riding from one corner of this country to the other, alerting people to the danger our democracy is in with the would-be King as President.

No one has done it better. No one has done it with more persistence. No one has done it with more passion. No one has done it with more effectiveness than JEFF MERKLEY, not only the Senate, but much more importantly, all of America owes you a tremendous, tremendous debt.

Thank you.

(Applause.)

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Republican whip.

Mr. BARRASSO. Mr. President, one of our colleagues just spent over 22 hours on this floor reading from a book, reciting poetry, one poem at least four times, and talking about renovations currently going on at the White House.

It was 22 hours of what I can only describe as rubbish. I come to the floor today to ask a simple question: What did Democrats actually accomplish?

The government is still closed. Capitol Police officers and Senate support staffers who were here for the entire 22 hours are still not getting paid, so let me read from the Record and into the RECORD an article published today in the Daily Caller written by Adam Pack.

The headline is this. It is entitled ''Democrat Forces Unpaid Capitol Police to Stay Up All Night So He Can Rail Against Republicans.''

Let me tell you the title again: ''Democrat Forces Unpaid Capitol Police to Stay Up All Night So He Can Rail Against Republicans.''

The article goes on:

Democrats are refusing to pay support staff and Capitol Police during the government shutdown, but still forced them to work overnight Wednesday so a lawmaker could rail against the Trump administration from an empty Senate chamber.

To repeat:

Democrats are refusing to pay support staff and Capitol Police during the government shutdown, but still forced them to work overnight Wednesday so a lawmaker could rail against the Trump administration from an empty Senate chamber.

The article goes on:

Democratic Oregon Sen. Jeffrey Merkley took to the Senate floor for—

As they wrote this—

a 14-hour long—

Now 22—

and counting screed against President Donald Trump beginning early Tuesday evening. His overnight talk-a-thon, which was still ongoing at the time of publication, forced floor aides and Capitol Police to work throughout the night despite staffers missing their first full paycheck due to the funding lapse on Monday—and Capitol Police poised not to receive their salary later this week.

Merkley blasted Trump's decision to deploy National Guard to Portland, Ore. over the objections of state and local officials during his marathon speech. He also denied that violence had occurred outside an Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) facility in Portland despite at least 195 rioters being arrested outside the building since June.

''Portlanders have responded in a very interesting way,'' Merkley said in the opening hour of his speech. ''They are demonstrating with joy and whimsy.''

The article goes on:

''They want to make it clear to the world that what Trump is saying about there being violent protests or a rebellion in Portland,'' Merkley continued. ''It's just not true.''

Democratic New Jersey Sen. Andy Kim also joined Merkley on the Senate floor in the 10 p.m. hour, praising the Oregon senator for shining a light on the Trump administration's alleged ''authoritarianism.''

''It's important that we don't underestimate the fragility of our democracy,'' Kim said.

Senate staffers missed their first full paychecks on Monday after Democrats consistently rejected a House-passed bipartisan spending bill to fund the government. A wide swath of federal employees will not receive their salary on Friday if Democrats do not supply the votes to end the shutdown.

The article goes on:

Merkley and Kim have voted with Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer on eleven separate occasions to keep the government shuttered during the 22-day long funding lapse.

Just three Democratic Senate Caucus members have thus far crossed party lines to fund the government, leaving the spending measure short of the necessary 60-vote threshold to move most legislation in the Senate.

Republicans blasted Merkley's overnight speech during the shutdown, arguing the move was unfair to floor aides and Capitol Police officers working unpaid because Democrats refuse to fund the government.

The article goes on:

''The Democrats are going to make Capitol Police and Capitol support staff—who they refuse to pay—work all night so they can give speeches patting themselves on the back for shutting down the government and hurting the American people,'' Senate Majority Whip John Barrasso wrote on X. ''How ridiculous is that?''

Senators, whose pay is protected by the U.S. Constitution, received their salaries on Monday.

The Senate is expected to vote on legislation this week sponsored by Republican Wisconsin Sen. Ron Johnson to pay military personnel and federal employees who are reporting to work during the shutdown.

Democrats are expected to filibuster the bill. Several members of their caucus have argued that every federal worker should be paid during the shutdown despite repeatedly voting against reopening the government.

The article continues:

Merkley's overnight remarks follow other Senate Democrats staging all-night speeches to protest the Trump administration this year.

In April—

The article concludes—

New Jersey Sen. Cory Booker delivered the longest Senate floor speech in history to attack the president and his policies.

The facts speak for themselves. Americans deserve better than Democrats' rubbish.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Montana.

GOVERNMENT FUNDING

Mr. DAINES. Mr. President, I am here to make some comments about my friend Bill Mercer, whom we are actually going to vote on here on the floor in a minute, but I wanted to set the record straight on something. I am tired of the lies being spread around.

There is a lie about what is happening here in Washington, and the lie is this: Republicans control the Presidency, the House, and the Senate, so it is on the Republicans for shutting it down. That is a lie. It takes 60 votes to get something done here in the U.S. Senate. We are looking for five Democrats to join us.

It is already bipartisan. Three Democrats have joined us. If five more join the Republicans, we have done this 11 times in voting for this clean CR, which Democrats have done repeatedly under Joe Biden's watch. If five Democrats join us, we will open the government back up. But just wanted to set that straight at home. Yes, Republicans have majority control of the Senate, but it takes 60 votes to get an outcome here in Washington. We have 53 Republicans, if five Democrats join us, we will get this done.

NOMINATION OF WILLIAM W. MERCER

Mr. DAINES. Mr. President, I rise today to speak in support of my friend Mr. Bill Mercer and his nomination to serve as the next judge for the U.S. District Court for the District of Montana.

President Trump made an excellent choice when he picked Bill. I was thrilled to see him quickly approved by the Senate Judiciary Committee, and now, today, the U.S. Senate will vote in the next hour or so on his final confirmation. And I urge my colleagues to join Senator SHEEHY and I in supporting his nomination.

Bill is a lifelong Montanan. He was born in Billings. We have known each other for a long time; in fact, we went to rival high schools, and we actually competed against each other in speech and debate. He was a Billings West Golden Bear, and I was a Bozeman Hawk. This is what makes America great. Two kids from Montana dreamed big, they worked hard, and now we have the opportunity to serve the State we love together.

Bill received his undergraduate degree from the University of Montana. He later went on to receive a master of public administration from Harvard and his law degree from George Mason University. Bill served his State and country in various roles over the past three decades. In Montana, he served as U.S. attorney for the District of Montana from 2001 to 2009. He represented Billings in the Montana House of Representatives for the past 7 years. Bill also worked at the U.S. Department of Justice where he served as Principal Associate Deputy Attorney General and Acting Associate Attorney General during the George W. Bush administration.

He has been actively engaged in his community, serving in five nonprofit boards of directors in Montana.

Bill has been a member of the Montana Bar for 32 years. He has appeared at State and Federal court in Montana and as lead counsel in numerous cases.

He has represented clients in appellate courts, which resulted in oral arguments in 15 cases in the Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit, the DC Circuit, and the Montana Supreme Court.

Bill has been recognized by his peers in the legal community for outstanding track records, being rated among the best lawyers in Montana for environmental and commercial litigation.

Throughout his extensive legal career and years of public service, Bill has represented Montana's interests very well. He is committed to the rule of law and the original interpretation of the Constitution.

He understands Montana's laws and issues. His experience as a widely respected and effective member of the Montana House has helped him understand the needs of our State, our families, and our communities.

I believe his time serving in Helena has given him an important perspective on the law and the importance of judicial impartiality. Federal judges play a critical role in our government. It is important that we pick servant leaders who are committed to our Founding ideals and to protecting the role of the judiciary.

These are lifetime appointments. He will have a lasting impact on both Montana and the Nation.

I have no hesitation when I say Bill is the top choice to serve as Montana's next Federal judge. I have seen his commitment to our State firsthand, and his time at the Department of Justice, as U.S. attorney, and as a State legislator prepared him well. There is not a better pick to serve the State of Montana.

I urge my colleagues to join me in voting favorably for Bill's confirmation.

I look forward to seeing the profound influence Bill will have in Montana and the Nation as he steps into this new role.

Thank you.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The majority leader.

ORDER OF PROCEDURE

Mr. THUNE. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that notwithstanding rule XXII, following the cloture vote on the motion to proceed to Calendar No. 168, H.R. 5371, the Senate vote on the motion to invoke cloture on the Lewis nomination; and if cloture is invoked on the Lewis nomination, all postcloture time be expired, and the Senate vote on the motion to invoke cloture on the Meredith nomination; further, if cloture is invoked on the Meredith nomination, all postcloture time be expired and the Senate vote on confirmation of the nominations at a time to be determined by the majority leader, in consultation with the Democratic leader, no earlier than Thursday, October 23; further, if confirmed, the motions to reconsider be considered made and laid upon the table and the President be immediately notified of the Senate's action; finally, that the mandatory quorum calls with respect to Calendar No. 168, H.R. 5371, as well as the Meredith and Lewis nominations be waived.

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

Mr. THUNE. Mr. President, I ask the Chair to execute the order of October 21, with respect to Calendar No. 168, H.R. 5371, and I further ask that following disposition of that vote, the Chair execute the previous order with respect to the Lewis, Meredith, and Mercer nominations in that order.

CLOTURE MOTION

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

The senior assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

CLOTURE MOTION

We, the undersigned Senators, in accordance with the provisions of rule XXII of the Standing Rules of the Senate, do hereby move to bring to a close debate on the motion to proceed to Calendar No. 168, H.R. 5371, a bill making continuing appropriations