

This morning I would like to take a moment to address something else the President did not address on Tuesday but that his administration is already quietly planning to do in the months ahead. I am referring to the administration's radical new proposal to codify the same kind of targeting of grassroots groups that an independent inspector general determined that the IRS engaged in in the run up to the 2012 election. I realize it just doesn't seem possible to a lot of people that the Obama administration would even think of touching an issue this radioactive after last year's scandal, but those who think that underestimate the extent to which this administration and its allies are willing to go to keep those who disagree with them from speaking out or participating in the political process. They underestimate the extent to which they are willing to go to hold onto power, and they forget how speech is usually stifled.

James Madison once wrote:

I believe there are more instances of the abridgement of freedom of the people by gradual and silent encroachments by those in power than by violent and sudden usurpations.

That was James Madison, and that is what is going on. The fact is that right now the Obama administration is getting ready to codify the same kind of intimidation and harassment of its political opponents that stunned the Nation last year, and hardly anybody is talking about it—certainly not the President on Tuesday night. It is time we start talking about it because what the administration is planning is nothing less than declaring a war, not just on its opponents but on free speech itself.

Here is their plan. The administration proposes to redefine political activity so broadly that grassroots groups all across the country that exist for the sole purpose of speaking out on issues of liberty or limited government or free enterprise or anything else that the administration doesn't want to hear about will be forced to literally shut down. Just by speaking out on these issues of broad public concern, they would be ruled out of bounds under new IRS rules—just in time, by the way, for the midterm elections.

If you think this kind of speech is precisely what the First Amendment was written to protect, you would be entirely right. This is exactly what the First Amendment was about. So this is a hugely important issue, and that is why groups all across the political spectrum and the folks who support them are increasingly concerned.

As usual, the folks who are pushing this new assault on speech tell us that it is some kind of good-government proposal that increases transparency, but the truth is that the only transparency here is the administration's thuggish attempt to shut down its critics. It is really incredible, when you think about it. Democrats think that 2014 is shaping up to be a tough year

for them politically. So instead of trying to persuade the public that they have the best answers to the problems we face, they try to shut everything else out of the political process. They try to shut them up, and they have no problem using the powers of the government itself to do it—less than a year after presiding over one of the biggest abuses of government power in the modern memory. The arrogance here is literally breathtaking.

But we have seen this kind of thing again and again from our liberal friends over the years. They just cannot accept a public that disagrees with their plans for the country. They just cannot seem to accept a society in which “we, the people,” establish the rules—not them. Whether it is the fairness doctrine or the DISCLOSE Act, they want those who disagree with them to sit down and shut up. Their view is you can fight for your ideals, you can speak out, but only if you agree with me. If you are on the other side, you don't have a right to speak out; not only that, but I am going to put you out of business. I am going to use the IRS—for goodness sake, the IRS—to identify anybody who disagrees with me and shut them up. I am doing it through regulation because I cannot pass it through legislation.

This is just one way the President plans to go around the people's elected representatives this year and every American needs to know about this abuse of power. Let me be clear. What the administration is proposing poses a grave threat to the ability of ordinary Americans to freely participate in the democratic process. Rather than reform the IRS and root out any hint of corruption or targeting of political opponents, they are now proposing to codify it. Fearful of losing the Senate, they have decided to double down. Instead of getting the IRS out of the business of policing speech, they want to make it the final arbiter of political speech.

Some may ask, why is the IRS, an agency whose purpose is to collect taxes, even involved in muzzling speech? How did that happen?

That is a very good question. It should not be. The administration needs to start explaining to the American people why it is engaging in this abuse of power, especially after last year. The administration may believe the smoke has cleared, but I do not believe the American people see it that way at all. I think that if the American people knew what the administration was really up to, they would react with the same kind of outrage they did last year about the targeting of conservatives by the IRS, and that is why the new IRS commissioner has a simple choice.

We have a new IRS commissioner over there. He has a simple choice. He can either restore the public's trust in an agency whose reputation was already in doubt or he can allow himself to be used as a political pawn by an ad-

ministration that now seems willing to do anything to keep those it disagrees with from fully exercising their constitutionally protected right to free speech.

After recent scandals the IRS should not be getting more involved in what people can and cannot say but less involved. Commissioner Koskinen must take a stand against this kind of thuggery and make it clear to a nervous public that his agency will not engage in any more government-sanctioned crackdowns on speech.

You know, the President made what I think was a pretty revealing comment in a recent interview when he talked about his inability to break through with certain Republicans. Rather than concede that they may have a different world view or that they disagree with his approach to the issues of the day, the President blamed FOX News and Rush Limbaugh of somehow convincing folks that he is something he is not.

I think a far more likely explanation is that the President does stuff like this. I think a more likely explanation is that in the sixth year of his Presidency he would rather blow kisses to his liberal base than work with Republicans to create jobs and increase opportunity and prosperity for the millions of Americans who are really struggling out there. Rather than let people from one end of the political spectrum to the other duke it out through robust public debate, he wants to use the IRS to drive conservatives right off the playing field. That is a better explanation for why ordinary conservatives across the country are not buying the idea that you are some kind of pragmatic problem solver, instead of a liberal ideologue who seems more interested in shutting down your critics than working with us in facing the Nation's most urgent problems.

Just 3 months ago the President sought to unite the country around the argument that as Americans we never give up. What I am saying this morning is that even as he is saying that, he is also busy kicking the ladder out from under anybody who disagrees with him. That is just what this new IRS proposal does, and Republicans plan to fight it every step of the way.

Mr. President, I say to my friend the majority leader, who deferred to me this morning, that I have two more statements. I am sorry to detain him.

Mr. REID. No problem.

REMEMBERING STAFF SERGEANT RYAN D. AUSTIN

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, it is my sad duty to report to my colleagues on a young Kentuckian who has been lost while serving his country. SSgt Ryan D. Austin of the U.S. Air Force passed away on August 6, 2013, in Maidstone, in the United Kingdom. He had been stationed at Ramstein Air Base in Germany, and he was 25 years old.

For his service in uniform, Staff Sergeant Austin received several medals,

awards, and decorations, including the Air Force Achievement Medal, the Meritorious Unit Award, the Air Force Good Conduct Medal, the National Defense Service Medal, the Global War on Terrorism Expeditionary Medal, the Global War on Terrorism Service Medal, the Air Force Expeditionary Service Ribbon, the NCO Professional Military Education Graduate Ribbon, the Small Arms Expert Marksman Ribbon, the Air Force Training Ribbon, and the Cyberspace Support Badge.

Ryan enlisted in the Air Force in January of 2010. He was deployed to Germany with the 435th Air Ground Operations Wing, First Communications Maintenance Squadron.

Ryan's brother Nathan said:

Being with [the Air Force] was the best career move he ever made. The Air Force gave him the chance to go overseas, learn new cultures and serve his country just like our father did. It made him feel he gave something back to his country, as well as protect America.

Ryan was raised in Laurel County, the son of Karen Long and Doug Austin, who also served in uniform. He graduated from South Laurel High School in 2006. Friends remember that he enjoyed golf, cooking, working for charities, and traveling.

Nathan remembers:

When Ryan was around, he was fun to be with. We included each other in our hobbies like tennis, basketball and video games. We had our friends and we always had great times . . . it's really a heavy burden on my heart to know that I have lost a brother.

While in high school, Ryan worked as a teacher's aide for Joey Marcum, a science teacher. Joey remembers:

Ryan was such an awesome young man. He was honest, hardworking and dependable. You could depend on him for literally anything. He was just a really good guy.

Ryan leaves behind his wife Jessica. The two of them were married on December 6, 2009. At the time of Ryan's death, Jessica was pregnant with their first child. She had a boy, named Brayden Kaine Austin. Ryan "was really looking forward to being a father," his brother Nathan said.

Christa Koeller is a friend of Ryan and Jessica's who lived across the street from them when Ryan and Christa's husband were both stationed at Offutt Air Force Base near Omaha. She remembers the couple's joy at learning they would have a baby:

When he found out and Jessica found out that they both would be parents, they were so overjoyed to start that new segment of their lives. Ryan was a family man, devoted to his job, and he was very dedicated as an airman. . . . A baby son lost his father, and will never know him.

Ryan's funeral service in Corbin, KY, was officiated by Pastor Daniel Carmack of Hawk Creek Church. Firefighters, policemen, county health care workers, friends, family, and even those who did not know Ryan but wished to pay their respects literally lined the town streets as the funeral procession passed by. Ryan received full military honors from the Honor

Guard of Wright-Patterson Air Force Base.

Pastor Carmack said:

Ryan Austin was not only a soldier, but a leader that has left an indelible mark on this generation.

The Pastor continued:

Ryan will long be remembered as . . . a devoted husband, loving son, leader to his generation, and always a friend. Although he was only 25, he have proved the statement true that "life is not measured in quantity, but in quality," and he lived his life to the full with integrity and honor.

Pastor Carmack, who was Ryan's youth pastor and watched this young man grow up, remembers that "Ryan was a kid that always served others." I think it is clear that as an adult, a husband, a father, and an airman, Ryan's commitment to serving others only grew stronger.

We in the Senate are thinking today of Ryan Austin's loved ones, including his wife Jessica; his son Brayden; his father Doug; his brothers Nathan Austin and Dylon Wall; his sister Rachel Austin; and many other beloved family members and friends. Ryan was laid to rest next to his mother Karen Long.

I would like Ryan's family to know that the Senate honors Sergeant Ryan D. Austin's life of service. We are saddened by this very tragic loss, and we are grateful for his supreme sacrifice, which reminds us all of the meaning of valor.

GREENVILLE, KENTUCKY, FIRE

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, I wish to speak briefly on a tragedy that happened this morning in Kentucky.

News reports are still developing, but we do know that a large house fire occurred in Greenville, in Muhlenberg County, in western Kentucky. Fire officials reports say multiple lives were lost in the fire, including children. There are two survivors who have been flown to Vanderbilt University Medical Center for treatment.

Personnel from three fire departments—Greenville Fire, Graham Volunteer Fire, and Beechmont Volunteer Fire—responded to the blaze. I thank these brave firefighters, as well as the emergency medical technicians, police officers, and other responders who heroically leapt in to save lives.

Elaine and I are hopeful for a speedy recovery for the two victims who are still alive, and we extend our prayers and condolences to the families of the souls lost in this destructive fire. I will pay close attention to this story as events further develop. The entire Commonwealth stands behind Muhlenberg County right now, and we will do whatever we can to help recover from this horrific loss.

RECOGNITION OF THE MAJORITY LEADER

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The majority leader is recognized.

STAFF-PREPARED MATERIALS

Mr. REID. Mr. President, I am sure not many people care, but the reason I didn't go first today is that those of us who serve in office depend on other people to prepare materials for us so we can make a reasonably good presentation. Well, I came here today and looked at my stuff—it was yesterday's. So I figured I would be better off waiting until I got the right one—which reminds me of something I heard as a very young Lieutenant Governor. This story may be true; it didn't happen to me, but I have always remembered it. It has always made me aware of the great work my staff does.

A man is used to his staff preparing his remarks, flowery remarks, and always so very, very well. He has a long speech he has to deliver. He gets to page 5, and it says, "OK, you SOB, you are on your own" and the rest is blank. I remembered that today, and figured I had better wait until my office had the right speech.

IMPROVING THE PROVISION OF MEDICAL SERVICES AND BENEFITS TO VETERANS—MOTION TO PROCEED

Mr. REID. Mr. President, I now move to proceed to Calendar No. 297, S. 1950.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The clerk will report the motion. The legislative clerk read as follows:

Motion to proceed to Calendar No. 297, S. 1950, a bill to improve the provision of medical services and benefits to veterans, and for other purposes.

SCHEDULE

Mr. REID. Mr. President, following my remarks the time until 11:15 a.m. will be equally divided and controlled dealing with flood insurance. At 11:15 a.m. there will be up to four rollcall votes in relation to amendments to that bill.

ORDER OF PROCEDURE

Mr. REID. Mr. President, following those votes the recess which was originally scheduled until 2 p.m.—and that will still be the case, except I ask unanimous consent that on the passage of S. 1926, as amended, the votes start at 1:50 p.m., with all other provisions of the previous order remaining in effect.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. REID. Additionally, we expect to receive momentarily the conference report to accompany the farm bill today, and we will work on getting an agreement to move forward on this today.

RETIREMENT OF JOEL BREITNER

Mr. REID. Mr. President, here in the Senate we work closely with so many people, but no one do we work more closely with than the court reporters. They are right here in our face every time we talk, taking down a verbatim transcript of what we say, and they work extremely hard.

We went through a period of time when we were working through all