

Mr./Madame President, I've come to the Senate floor today to discuss how our government is funded.

The Constitution puts Congress in charge of setting up programs and funding them. There are some programs – for instance, Medicare and Social Security, that are funded at a certain level every year, unless Congress passes a law to change it. For everything else, Congress has to pass a new funding law every single year.

The list is long:

- medical research,
- fighter planes,
- weather satellites,
- salaries for park rangers,
- food inspection programs to make sure your chicken doesn't make you sick.

The money that we spend is detailed every year in a set of twelve bills that Congress votes on called “appropriations bills.”

The Senate voted on the first one of those twelve bills last week – the one that deals with funding for veterans' programs and military bases. I care deeply about improving the lives of our servicemembers and veterans. All three of my brothers are proud veterans, and they served their country with honor. I'm the ranking member of the Senate Armed Services Committee's Personnel subcommittee.

I voted no on that funding bill because even if this bill becomes law, I don't believe Donald Trump has any intention of following that law. I'm not willing to be a helpmate on another one of Donald Trump's scams.

Why do I think Trump won't follow the law? Consider his administration's track record over the past six months on Congressional spending laws.

First, Trump tried to freeze billions of dollars that American families and businesses count on — money that Congress set aside to support everything from food assistance programs to scientific research. Multiple federal judges blocked the illegal power grab, saying it blatantly violated the Constitution. Now, even Republicans are begging the administration to hand out the investments that Congress already passed and, by law, their communities were promised.

Second, Republicans in Congress are bowing down to Donald Trump and ratifying some of his worst efforts. They are using an obscure piece of federal law to zero out federal funding after it

was approved by both Republicans and Democrats in Congress. This process is called a “rescission,” and it only requires 50 Republican votes to do Donald Trump’s bidding.

And if that wasn’t bad enough, Trump is already plotting to use a shady loophole to defund even more programs — demanding cuts so late in the year that Congress doesn’t have enough time to do anything about it. The Director of Donald Trump’s Office of Budget and Management, Russ Vought [VOTE], has already said that loophole is quote-unquote “on the table.”

Let’s be clear about what’s happening here. Step One: Congress negotiates a compromise that both Republicans and Democrats support and it’s signed into law. Step Two: Trump tells Republicans what parts of that deal he wants to cancel. Step Three: Republicans in the Senate bend the knee and follow Trump’s orders to cancel the money. But wait there’s more — apparently, Step Four is Republicans turn around and, with a straight face, ask Democrats to negotiate more deals for next year’s funding, starting the whole rinse-and-repeat process again, beginning with the bill to fund veterans services.

Are you kidding me? Do we really look that gullible?

Why should Democrats come to the table in good faith and throw our support behind a quote-unquote bipartisan bill, only for Republicans to turn around after the deal is done and, somewhere down the line, delete any of the parts Trump doesn’t like? That’s like Republicans saying: “Let’s cut a deal to sell you a car today,” and then a month from now, they come back and steal the wheels.

Of course, Trump may not ask his Republican buddies to rescind spending. Maybe instead on his own he’ll just illegally refuse to spend it, the way he’s done with \$425 billion already this year.

Our founders didn’t give the President the power to decide spending. A king can decide anything he wants, but not a president. Donald Trump wants to be able to wake up and decide to cancel funding for public education, transportation projects, medical research, food inspectors, anything, just because Donald Trump feels like it — and he wants the Republicans in Congress to roll over and let it happen. No checks and balances. Just Trump playing king and ending programs that would help Americans.

Trump is getting a lot of help from his team. Russ Vought [VOTE], the head of OMB, has said that the problem in Congress is too much bipartisanship. Too much. In other words, the Trump administration is saying loud and clear that Donald Trump can make all the decisions. They don’t need — or want — Democrats.

At the very same time, the Republicans need Democratic votes for these funding bills because the Senate rules currently require 60 votes for them to pass and there are only 53 Republicans in the Senate. If Democrats don't provide votes, the Republicans want to blame us for shutting down the government when this year's funding runs out at the end of September.

On the other hand, if Senate Republicans want Democratic votes for these funding bills, they should ask us what it will take to win our support. Not just what programs we want to fund or at what levels, when those promises aren't worth the paper they're printed on. No, Democrats should tell Republicans that if they want our votes, they will have to guarantee that any deal we strike actually means something.

I get it: Democrats and Republicans have different priorities. Here in the Senate, Republicans have voted to end health care for 17 million Americans and drive up health insurance costs for millions more. Republicans have voted to give billionaires huge tax cuts. Democrats are willing to make a deal, but our deal is about bringing down costs for families, including the cost of health care, groceries, and housing. If Republicans want to make a deal, let's make a deal — but only if the Republicans include an agreement that they won't take it back a few weeks later.

Congress is a co-equal branch of government. We swore an oath to the Constitution, not to a king. I'm asking my Republican colleagues to grow a spine and stand up for Americans instead of bowing down to their pretend-king. And I'm asking my Democratic colleagues to join me in using the power we have to fight back.

Mr./Madame President, I yield the floor.