

Opening Statement of Ranking Member Jeff Merkley
Senate Budget Committee Hearing: “The President's Fiscal Year 2027 Budget Proposal”
April 16, 2026

Sen. Merkley’s remarks, as prepared for delivery, follow:

Thank you, Chairman Graham, for convening this hearing.

And thank you, Director Vought, for being here today to discuss the President’s Budget for Fiscal Year 2027.

Your budget opens with a message from you, in which you write, quote: *“A historic paradigm shift in the budget process is occurring.”*

I agree with you – and that paradigm shift is extraordinarily dangerous for our country.

The Constitution is clear: it is Congress’ responsibility to debate and decide taxation, spending, and whether to go to war. Then it’s the Executive’s responsibility to carry out Congress’ decisions.

But since you returned as OMB Director, the Trump administration has repeatedly violated the Constitution’s separation of powers.

Usurping Congress’ power to tax through the President’s tariffs, which the Supreme Court has ruled unconstitutional. Usurping Congress’ power of the purse, which the Supreme Court has ruled twice belongs to Congress, but, despite that, the Government Accountability Office found that you illegally impounded funds on seven separate occasions last year.

You have used so-called “pocket rescissions”, to ‘run out the clock’ on the fiscal year. You have fired thousands of federal workers – who you’ve then scrambled to rehire because DOGE had no clue what it was doing. You have dismantled federal agencies, including the entirety of the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), which public health experts calculate has led to the deaths of at least 780,000 people globally, two-thirds of whom are children.

You’ve also dismantled most of the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau (CFPB), which had saved working families over \$21 billion since 2011, and many more consumers will save many times that amount because it banned predatory practices.

I understand that you are still the Acting Director of CFPB, so, the buck stops on your desk for those decisions.

Now, the Trump Administration is trying to usurp Congress’ power to declare war.

The President’s reckless war with Iran has made America less safe by strengthening the regime hardliners while weakening the reformers. Enriching and emboldening Russia by easing oil sanctions costing the U.S. billions of dollars every day and raising prices for American families.

In addition, this war has tragically claimed the lives of 13 American servicemembers.

These are just a few examples of the massive, dangerous changes underway by the Trump Administration.

The Administration's dangerous changes continue in the President's Budget for Fiscal Year 2027.

Immediately upon opening this budget, I was struck by what was missing.

No plan to bring down gas prices.

No plan to bring down grocery prices.

No plan to save Social Security, which will start running out of money in just six years, requiring a 28 percent cut to seniors' benefits according to the most recent estimates from the Congressional Budget Office.

No funding for aid to farmers hurt by Trump's tariffs.

No additional funding to deal with unexpected disasters, like wildfires, floods, or hurricanes.

No meaningful revenue proposals.

And no credible plan to reduce the debt, which is now over 100 percent of GDP.

In addition, as a former Congressional Budget Office analyst, I went looking for the deficit projections, but you didn't bother to put them in, yet again ignoring the law – 31 U.S. Code § 1105 – which requires the President's Budget to include at least 5 years of deficit and debt projections – but yours does not.

So, you are breaking both the spirit and letter of the law.

What your budget does include are projections that the President's tariffs will raise an eye-popping \$1.6 trillion in revenue more than CBO estimates.

And CBO's estimates were made before the Supreme Court ruled Trump's tariffs unconstitutional.

So, your revenue projections should have been even lower than CBO's, not higher. Making your estimates here simply fictional.

Your budget also includes a massive 42 percent – or \$445 billion – increase in defense spending, bringing the total Pentagon budget to \$1.5 trillion.

This is on top of the \$150 billion in additional reconciliation funds provided by last year's Big Ugly Betrayal Law.

But it doesn't include the billions of dollars a day we're spending in Iran, none of which has been budgeted for.

Yet it does include a 10 percent cut to domestic programs American for families. And those cuts will continue to compound, so, in just ten years – by 2036 – your budget proposes merely \$550 billion in non-defense spending – a 45 percent cut compared to CBO's baseline projection.

This is not serious budgeting.

This is paying for more guns and bombs by slashing investments for families: housing, health care, education, roads and bridges, medical research, and environmental protection.

This is just the latest example of Families Lose, Billionaires Win.

Candidate Trump ran promising to keep us out of foreign wars and invest in families here at home, saying on September 5, 2024, quote: *"We're going to make this into an incredible country that can afford to take care of its people. ... We're going to take care of our country first."*

But this budget increases funding for foreign wars while slashing investments for families, and on April 1, the president said, quote: *"It's not possible for us to take care of day care, Medicare, Medicaid... we have to take care of one thing: military protection."*

This budget is a betrayal of every working family.

And it's an extraordinarily dangerous change in the way Congress and the Executive branch budget for our country.

At my town halls across Oregon, I've been telling folks that the countries who will win the 21st Century will be the countries who invest in education and infrastructure. Not the countries who drive themselves deep into debt trying to control the farthest reaches of the world.

Robbing our domestic investments to pay for endless wars is a path to economic ruin that will open the door for China and other countries to dominate the future.

Congress needs to reject this irresponsible budget and reassert our Constitutional powers so we can invest in working families.

I look forward to today's discussion.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

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