

**Opening Statement of Senator Richard J. Durbin**  
**Spotlight Hearing on**  
**“Restoring Accountability: Exposing Trump’s Attacks on the Rule of Law”**  
**April 7, 2025**

Thank you very much, Congressman Raskin. It’s an honor to be here. All across America this last weekend, thousands of people—many whom never participated in a political event—came out to demonstrate their concern about the current state of the American government and what is happening with this administration. There were a thousand in Springfield, Illinois. Some fifty thousand in Chicago, Illinois. And that story is repeated over and over again. We are at a unique moment in our history.

Presidents have constitutional issues—virtually all do—but few have a constitutional crisis, which we are facing now in this country. I want to thank Congressman Raskin for coming here today, along with his colleagues from the House, and thank my colleagues from the Senate. But I want to particularly thank Senator Schiff. He’s in a unique position – bridging the experience you had in the House of Representatives with this administration, and now your responsibility here in the United States Senate. I think this may be unique in American history, but it’s certainly warranted, and I thank you for your leadership, Senator, in bringing us together.

When you take a look at what we face today, it is truly a constitutional crisis. How did it start? Well, it certainly started with questioning a legitimate election and the outcome. The “Stop the Steal” movement was an indication of pure effort to stop the Constitution from working its way. But the courts rejected President Trump’s efforts to turn the results of the election. And now we see what he does in his second term.

First, President Trump has gutted and weaponized the Department of Justice and our federal law enforcement agencies. The Justice Department is supposed to enforce our laws and protect our citizens. But President Trump appointed his personal attorneys to fill numerous senior positions at DOJ, including Attorney General and Deputy Attorney General. As many of us predicted, the new DOJ leadership has treated the Justice Department like the President’s personal law firm. From dismissing corruption charges against the Mayor of New York in exchange for supporting the President’s policies to restoring gun rights to domestic abusers who supported the President to threatening universities that don’t toe the MAGA line, the Justice Department has abandoned its commitment to the rule of law to advance the personal and political interests of Donald Trump alone.

We need to fight back against this weaponized Justice Department. That’s why I led the Judiciary Democrats in filing a bar complaint against Trump DOJ official Emil Bove for his role in corrupt bargaining with Mayor Adams. That’s why I’ve led the Senate Judiciary Democrats in demanding an explanation from Attorney General Bondi for the firing of the Pardon Attorney and the restoration, for God’s sakes, of Mel Gibson’s gun rights.

This brings me to the second way in which President Trump has threatened the rule of law: targeting law firms, simply because they dared to employ attorneys who were involved in litigation or representations that the President didn’t care for. We have long recognized the

importance of parties before a court having representation by attorneys of their choosing—even in unpopular and politically charged cases.

This goes back to the founding of the Republic. John Adams—our second President and one of the nation’s Founding Fathers—famously represented nine British soldiers accused of perpetrating the Boston Massacre. The right to counsel is so fundamental that it’s enshrined in the Sixth Amendment. But instead of protecting and defending the Constitution as he swore to do, President Trump has used his position to settle political scores and target law firms he deems insufficiently loyal. Over the past two months, he’s issued executive orders that attempted to suspend security clearances, limit access to government buildings, and prohibit government contracts for certain firms. If those orders sound lawless, it’s because they are—and multiple federal courts have appropriately blocked large portions of those executive orders.

The Republicans on the floor and in the Committee complain and moan and groan about all of the judicial cases that have been ruling against him—and many have. The fact of the matter is that this President has issued over a hundred executive orders—many of which fly directly in the face of clear constitutional law.

The President’s actions pose an existential threat to the targeted law firms. Some have capitulated. For other firms, even the threat of future executive orders was enough to lead them to preemptively cut deals with the Trump administration. That, of course, is the point. The President wants to intimidate law firms so they’ll think twice before taking on a client whose rights have been violated by the administration. That should alarm everyone.

This is the kind of thing we expect from tin-pot dictatorships in other parts of the world. But these kinds of attacks on lawyers and the rule of law are unprecedented in the United States of America. They are not normal, and we cannot allow them to continue.

I look forward to hearing from the witnesses and thank you for your courage coming forward today. It’s important that we hear this story that each of you has lived. And I want to close by saying to all those who gathered across America, and who communicate through social media, asking what Congress is doing to try to stop these excesses and these violations of the Constitution: remember what happens on this day. Because on this day, I think we are making history at the right moment. Thank you, Senator.