

Navy Vet Senator Fires Back at Musk's 'Traitor' Insult

Story by Sean Craig

Arizona Democrat Kelly tweeted Sunday on Musk's X platform that he had returned from a visit to the war-torn country, where he visited a military hospital and met with wounded soldiers. "What I saw proved to me we can't give up on the Ukrainian people," he said.

Musk replied: "You are a traitor."

Kelly, who flew combat missions during the Gulf War as a naval pilot before becoming a NASA astronaut, shot back: "If you don't understand that defending freedom is a basic tenet of what makes America great and keeps us safe, maybe you should leave it to those of us who do."

Kelly's wife, the former congresswoman Gabby Giffords who was almost killed in a 2011 mass shooting, stepped in to back him up. "My husband is an American hero," she tweeted.

Kelly expanded on his response during an appearance on MSNBC Monday in a withering address aimed at Musk that questioned the patriotism of the White House senior adviser, who Trump has tasked with leading the administration's efforts to purge thousands of federal workers.

"When I was 22 years old, as I was getting sworn in to the United States Navy, I swore an oath to our Constitution, to protect and defend the Constitution," he told Rachel Maddow. "I have lived that oath my entire life."

"The only oath I can think of that maybe Elon has sworn is an oath to his own checking account, to his pocketbook—an oath, maybe, to ruining the lives of veterans. I had veterans in my office last week who, after really good performance reports, found out that Elon Musk fired them for poor performance. He has ruined these people's lives."

Former Congresswoman Gabby Giffords and her husband, Sen. Mark Kelly. / PATRICK T. FALLON / AFP via Getty Images

Democrats estimate that the Musk-led firings of federal workers has impacted thousands of veterans, ABC News reported, and Sens. Tammy Duckworth (D-IL) and Andy Kim (D-NJ) plan to introduce a bill that would require their reinstatement.

Kelly added that he believes Musk's "slash-and-burn of the federal government" is being carried out to "create a little space so the big, giant tax cuts that they're going to give for millionaires and billionaires do not look as bad, does not add as much to the debt and deficit."

He suggested Musk will cut Medicaid, impacting children and seniors, before suggesting the billionaire resume his prior career: "I would prefer if Elon went back to his old job. You know, it's SpaceX and Tesla."

Meanwhile, a GOP lawmaker sided with Kelly, calling Musk's "traitor" remark wholly inappropriate.

"It's not decent, it's not right," House Rep. Don Bacon (R-NE) told CNN. "I don't agree with Senator Kelly on some things, but we don't call each other a traitor, and I think it reflects bad on the White House."

Kelly's exchange with Musk comes as relations between Washington and Kyiv are in disarray, following an Oval Office meeting where Trump and Vice President JD Vance berated Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky.

Trump's administration has also opened up communications with autocratic Russian President Vladimir Putin, who ordered a full-scale invasion of Ukraine more than three years ago. Trump claimed last week that the Kremlin "may be easier dealing with."

Following the heated Oval Office meeting, Trump suspended military aid to Ukraine and cut off some intelligence sharing with the country.

Kelly told reporters on Monday that he saw firsthand how Trump's actions had harmed Kyiv's defenses against Russian forces.

“If there’s stuff they don’t get, that they need, that changes their ability to defend against attacks,” he told media, according to a Reuters report. “And those attacks happened on Friday night, on Saturday, when I was there.”

Read more at [The Daily Beast](#).