

press, in my view, is probably not that interested in this number because in places like Washington, everything seemed to be going great. But it wasn't going great.

Think about this: If Washington or L.A. or New York or San Francisco are growing at 3 or 4 percent growth and yet the country is at about 1.5 or 2 percent, then there are probably huge parts of America that are actually shrinking, not growing at all.

These charts talk about economic growth, GDP. It can sound a little bit wonky. Really, GDP is a marker for the health of our economy. It is an indicator of American progress. It is a proxy for the American dream and optimism in the future.

As this chart shows, we have had a sick economy over the last 10 years, a lost decade of economic growth. The press hasn't written much about it, and when they have, they have typically bought the line of the previous administration saying: Hey, look, we know that the traditional levels of economic growth are close to 4 percent. Look at Clinton, look at Reagan—4½, 5, 6. We know that is the case. We know 3 percent is OK. But we haven't hit that in the last 10 years, so what is wrong? Well, the press started buying the line from the last administration: That is the "new normal." We can't hit 3 percent anymore. We certainly can't hit 4 percent anymore. So 1½, 2 percent is America hitting on all cylinders. I believe that is a surrender. I believe dumbing down our expectations for economic growth is a retreat from the American dream.

As you know, the American people aren't buying this. They are not buying the dumbing down. They are not saying: Oh yeah, we can live with this 1½ percent growth. Sure. No problem. They are wise, and they aren't buying the dumbing down.

We all saw the book recently released by former Senator and Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, and her book is entitled "What Happened." What happened? This is what happened: Our citizens saw the American dream slipping away after a lost decade of economic growth, and they weren't ready to surrender to the new normal.

What do we need to focus on in the Senate? We have to start moving beyond this. We have to. We need policies that are going to focus on reigniting growth—the growth that Democrats and Republicans have supported for decades. What is that? I think there is a lot of agreement—infrastructure, less burdensome regulations, energy. America has enormous supplies of energy that we can take advantage of. Yet the issue we are starting to debate now in the Senate is tax reform.

As we debate this and work in a bipartisan way—I have heard a lot of my colleagues say that we do need to undertake tax reform. We need to keep asking ourselves, on all these policies, what they will do to reignite growth, to reignite the American dream, to

allow hard-working American families to keep more of their paychecks, and to return to the optimism that comes with a robust economy, not just along the coast of America but throughout the entire country, to get back to that optimism and growth. That is what I am going to be doing as we undertake this debate on tax reform.

The Trump administration is off to an OK start. The first quarter—again, kind of a hangover from the Obama years—1.2 percent growth. That is not good at all. The last quarter, second quarter, was 3.1. It hit above 3 percent, which is what the President says his policies are meant to do. As long as they are focused on that, I certainly am going to be somebody who wants to support those kinds of pro-growth policies, and I think it is imperative, whether it is tax reform, infrastructure, regulatory reform, or energy, that we all come together in this body and make sure we work together so the next decade of growth in America does not look like this last one and gets us over 3 percent, gets us back to traditional levels of growth. I don't think there is anything more important we can do in the Senate than getting back to those important levels of growth for our country and our citizens.

TRIBUTE TO TYLER ROBERTS AND MICHAEL SOUKUP

Mr. President, I wish to say a few words about some of my staff who have done a great job serving Alaskans and who are leaving my office soon. I am going to miss them a lot. One is here now, and he will probably be embarrassed that I am talking about him on the Senate floor—Tyler Roberts.

Tyler has been a legislative assistant of mine, handling healthcare, budget, tax. He is leaving to join the private sector. He has been with me from the beginning, 2½ years ago. I can tell you this: He has worked long hours serving the people of our great State and has set a tone in the office of hard work, diligent work, good-natured, and we are going to miss Tyler very much.

I wish to also recognize Michael Soukup. Michael is our digital director and press secretary. From educating Alaskans on what we are doing in DC to designing poster boards like this, creating awesome graphics and videos, Michael has been an invaluable member of my team as well. He is an artist. Like all good artists, his work has a distinctive look and style. If you see one of my photo montages on Facebook and you think it is well-done, which we do, you can thank Michael. We call them Soukup specials.

Tyler has also worked tirelessly for me and Alaska, his home State. I know that he will bring the same amount of creativity, ingenuity, and integrity to all he does as he moves into the next phase of his career.

Thank you to all my staff.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

DISASTER TAX RELIEF AND AIRPORT AND AIRWAY EXTENSION ACT OF 2017

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, as in legislative session, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate proceed to the immediate consideration of H.R. 3823.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will report the bill by title.

The legislative clerk read as follows:

A bill (H.R. 3823) to amend title 49, United States Code, to extend authorizations for the airport improvement program, to amend the Internal Revenue Code of 1986 to extend the funding and expenditure authority of the Airport and Airway Trust Fund, to provide disaster tax relief, and for other purposes.

There being no objection, the Senate proceeded to consider the bill.

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Cassidy amendment at the desk be agreed to and the bill, as amended, be considered read a third time.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

The amendment (No. 1108) was agreed to, as follows:

(Purpose: To strike the provisions relating to development of a private flood insurance market)

Strike title IV.

The amendment was ordered to be engrossed and the bill to be read a third time.

The bill was read the third time.

Mr. McCONNELL. I know of no further debate on the bill.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. If there is no further debate, the bill having been read the third time, the question is, Shall the bill pass?

The bill (H.R. 3823), as amended, was passed.

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the motion to reconsider be considered made and laid upon the table.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. McCONNELL. I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. BLUMENTHAL. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

EXECUTIVE CALENDAR—Continued

PUERTO RICO AND U.S. VIRGIN ISLANDS RECOVERY EFFORT

Mr. BLUMENTHAL. Mr. President, I am here for the third time in as many days to talk about this Nation's response to a humanitarian crisis affecting millions of Americans—the people

of Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands. It is similar to the situation in Florida, in the gulf coast, and, some years ago, in Connecticut and in other parts of this country when they faced a natural disaster that was almost as devastating as an attack would be by a foreign power. Analogous but different, this category 4 Hurricane Maria caused consequences as devastating and destructive as any that man could do. It is a natural disaster, not manmade, but it is turning into a manmade disaster.

So far, the response from our government has been underwhelming. In fact, it has been inadequate and anemic. It has been shamefully slow and under-sized and should be vastly upgraded and increased.

Just moments ago, I learned that Lieutenant General Buchanan has been appointed to head the military efforts in Puerto Rico. That appointment followed a call just an hour or so ago with all of the representatives, including FEMA, the Department of Defense, other Federal agencies, and the Red Cross, during which I urged our U.S. military to be mobilized, much as we would be in responding to a natural disaster in Connecticut or Texas or Florida or other places in this country on the mainland where we have seen the same kind of storm.

The 3.4 million people in Puerto Rico are almost exactly the same number as the population of Connecticut. I hope, and I believe, the response would be better in Connecticut if we were to face the same kind of natural disaster. Yet the manmade disaster is the failure to move food, fuel, medicine, water, other necessities, and communications equipment from the ports and the airports into the interior of the country, even into the major cities, where currently apparently a lack of drivers and passable roads make it all the more difficult. Whether the supplies of food and fuel and medicine and water are adequate on the island or need to be increased on an emergency basis and whether there are sufficient shipments and airlifts going into the island, the simple fact is that Puerto Rico faces a disaster—manmade after natural.

I commend the loyal and dedicated people of FEMA and all of the National Guard, including the National Guard of Connecticut, who have performed with such heroism and dedication in the face of the most difficult circumstances imaginable, but their efforts need to be matched by many others. There are 4,500 American military personnel now in Puerto Rico. Rather than 5,000, there should be 50,000 of our National Guard, not to occupy the island, not to enforce martial law but to make sure the logistics—the transportation, the means of delivery of the lifeblood of that island in food and fuel and medicine and water and other basic necessities—are sufficient to move those basic supplies to the places they are needed. The troops who are there now are performing heroic, Herculean work, and so are many volunteers, along with FEMA

officials, the Coast Guard, and others, but they need more help.

Nearly a week after this storm, Maria, more than 90 percent of the island's residents are without power, 42 percent have no water, the vast majority of the country's 69 hospitals cannot function, and only 10 percent of the cell towers are working. If those conditions existed in Connecticut, I would be on the floor 24 hours a day. Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands have no one here, and they have no elected Representatives in the House of Representatives. They are voiceless or at least voteless in this body. We need to stand for them, speak out, and fight for them. That is why I am here for the third day in a row.

We need a plan and a strategy, which has been lacking from this administration. In that phone call earlier today with FEMA officials and the Department of Defense, I asked about a plan. They are working on it. The military, U.S. Northern Command, is working on a plan. They could not tell me when it will be ready or what it will say or what the total number of troops or other logistical supplies will be nor could they commit that there would be a waiver under FEMA regulations of the C through G conditions, which apply to permanent recovery.

The only decision that has been made is A to B, which provides for debris and other emergency responses over the next 180 days, and that is part of what the island needs—a longer term plan as well as an immediate one to make sure there is a road to recovery, that there is a path that will provide hope. Not only is the well-being and health of this island threatened but so is hope, which is so important for progress to be made.

The people of Puerto Rico have been met with, at best, ambivalence and ambiguity by the President of the United States. Earlier this week, he seemed more inclined to blame the island itself and the size of the ocean than in advocating for help. I hope we can come together on a bipartisan basis. With the kind of situation that is there now—the danger of epidemic as well as immediate health threats before disease takes hold—we must act before people die. We must come to the aid of Puerto Rico. They need medical care. They need access to food and safe drinking water, and, yes, they need greater security.

The 78 mayors of Puerto Rico, along with the Governor, are doing also heroic and Herculean work, but a whole of government response is necessary from this body and from the Federal Government at a much higher magnitude. In the long term, we must have a martial plan—a strategy for rebuilding the island's roads, bridges, rail, airports, ports, and VA facility, much as we do in this country, except that, there, the need is so much more dire and immediate. Hospitals, transportation, electricity, power, communications, safety, housing all have been de-

stroyed, and the consequences will be deadly.

My hope is that Lieutenant General Buchanan will expedite that plan. So far, it has been lacking. It should be done today. It should be integrated with the FEMA approach, and I hope they will permit visits by Members of the Congress who, so far, have been prevented from going there.

The American people deserve to have elected Representatives there because Puerto Rico has none here. The extraordinary work done by the cable TV and reporters for the print media and others who are there have given us a picture—and often a picture is worth a thousand words—of the devastation that now continues from a manmade disaster that must be avoided before it takes lives and destroys hope.

Thank you.

I yield the floor.

THE PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from South Dakota.

MR. THUNE. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to be able to complete my remarks.

THE PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

MR. THUNE. Mr. President, I rise to voice my strong support for the nomination of Ajit Pai to a second 5-year term as Commissioner of the Federal Communications Commission.

Mr. Pai has served as a Commissioner of the FCC since 2012, when he was first confirmed by a voice vote in the Senate. Mr. Pai was designated by President Trump to be the 34th Chairman of the FCC in January of this year and was renominated to a second term to the FCC in March.

In July, the Senate Commerce, Science, and Transportation Committee, which I am privileged to chair, held a hearing on the nomination of Mr. Pai, and the committee reported out his nomination favorably on August 2.

Prior to becoming a Commissioner, Chairman Pai worked on telecommunications policy in both the public and private sectors, notably serving in the Senate as a staffer on the Judiciary Committee as well as in the general counsel's office at the FCC.

It is my belief that Mr. Pai's stellar career and communications policy, his integrity, and his tireless work ethic all serve him well as he continues to serve the FCC and guide the agency back to being a more collaborative and productive institution.

In just 9 months since becoming Chairman, Mr. Pai has made much needed reforms to improve transparency at the FCC and to improve the agency's processes. I am particularly heartened by Chairman Pai's efforts to treat his fellow Commissioners fairly by instituting the process of sharing documents with other Commissioners before discussing them publicly.

Additionally, under Chairman Pai's leadership, the public is now able to view the text of all agenda items in advance of Commission meetings. Also,

to better reflect the realities of today's competitive landscape, Chairman Pai has announced the creation of an Office of Economics and Data to provide cost-benefit analyses to better inform the FCC's work.

These measures are a significant step forward from the last Chairman's leadership style, which I frequently criticized as being hyperpartisan and warned would lead to counterproductive outcomes over the long term. That is why, a little over a year ago, I felt compelled to stand in this same spot and to strongly criticize the previous Chairman of the FCC for leading the Commission with unprecedented partisan zeal. At that time, I noted that the voting record for open meetings at the Commission showed a long history of consensus-building with the previous five permanent FCC Chairmen combining for only 14 party-line votes at open meetings during their tenures. However, this all changed under Chairman Wheeler as he pursued a highly partisan agenda, driven by ideological beliefs more than by a sober reading of the law. Chairman Wheeler forced 3-to-2 votes on a party-line basis a total of 31 times. To put it another way, in 3 years under Chairman Wheeler, the FCC saw over twice as many partisan votes than in the previous 20 years combined.

While partisan differences are sometimes inevitable, what were once very rare events have become standard operating procedure at the Commission. This extreme partisanship was used to do the following things: a complete upending of how the internet is regulated, creating years of uncertainty for everyone; stripping important consumer protection responsibilities from the Federal Trade Commission; a failed attempt to override States' rights on municipal broadband and a power grab that was overturned by the courts; increasing the size of the Universal Service Fund by billions of dollars by simultaneously undermining bipartisan efforts to improve the program's accountability; the unnecessary and possibly unlawful disclosure of trade secrets and a plan to have the FCC and its Media Bureau design and dictate the future of television ads.

I was not alone in noticing Chairman Wheeler's overreach. On several occasions other Federal agencies refused to support his actions. The Copyright Office strongly criticized a proposal for set-top boxes. The staff at the Federal Trade Commission called the FCC's privacy rules "not optimal," which is bureaucrat speak for really bad. The Obama administration's Department of Justice refused to defend the FCC's unlawful action on municipal broadband.

With respect to internet regulations, I am pleased that Chairman Pai has sought to hit the reset button on the 2015 title II order because, as I have previously said, the FCC should do what is necessary to rebalance the agency's regulatory posture under current law. I continue to believe, how-

ever, that the best way to provide long-term protections for the internet is for Congress to pass bipartisan legislation.

Two and a half years ago, I put forward legislative principles and a draft bill to begin the conversation, and I continue to stand ready and willing today to work toward finding a lasting legislative solution that will resolve the dispute over net neutrality once and for all.

Thankfully, the net neutrality debate has not distracted the FCC from important work in other areas. For instance, the FCC's proposed rulemaking on robocalls is a positive step in the right direction. The government must do everything we can to protect consumers from those who are truly bad actors, but we also must be sure that the government's rules are not unfairly punishing legitimate callers who are not acting maliciously. The FCC's notice of inquiry will give that conversation a much needed jump-start.

Furthermore, Chairman Pai's focus on the expansion of rural broadband and acceleration of next-generation infrastructure deployment will help close the digital divide—a goal that we all share. He has also worked tirelessly to help ensure communications services are restored to the communities affected by Hurricanes Harvey, Irma, and Maria.

Given the FCC's importance to the future of our economy and our society, it is important for the Commission to seek opportunities for common ground. In the past, people used to say that communications policy was not particularly partisan and that both sides of the aisle could often find common ground to work together. Well, times have changed, and the debate on this nomination is another example of that.

I know that agreement is not always possible. Nevertheless, as a corrective to the Commission's recent history, I urged Chairman Pai at his confirmation hearing to treat all Commissioners fairly, to respect the law, to be willing to ask Congress for guidance, and to seek consensus whenever and wherever possible. I believe doing so will improve the agency's credibility and will result in actions that are more likely to endure, and I believe that Chairman Pai will do these things.

As I noted at the outset, Chairman Pai has already made much needed reforms to improve the processes at the FCC and to empower his fellow Commissioners. He has already shown a commitment to ensuring transparency and openness at the Commission, which gives me great confidence in the direction that he will lead the agency. Chairman Pai's new approach, I believe, will lead to more long-lasting and positive results at the FCC. That is why I believe the elevation of Ajit Pai to be the Chairman of the Commission is a much needed breath of fresh air, and why I believe he should be confirmed promptly and without further delay.

So I urge my colleagues to support this nomination.

I yield the floor.

CLOTURE MOTION

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Pursuant to rule XXII, the Chair lays before the Senate the pending cloture motion, which the clerk will state.

The legislative clerk read as follows:

CLOTURE MOTION

We, the undersigned Senators, in accordance with the provisions of rule XXII of the Standing Rules of the Senate, do hereby move to bring to a close debate on the nomination of Ajit Varadaraj Pai, of Kansas, to be a Member of the Federal Communications Commission.

Mitch McConnell, Joni Ernst, Thom Tillis, Ben Sasse, Steve Daines, Mike Crapo, Jerry Moran, Tom Cotton, John Thune, Pat Roberts, James M. Inhofe, Johnny Isakson, John Cornyn, James Lankford, John Boozman, James E. Risch, Roger F. Wicker.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. By unanimous consent, the mandatory quorum call has been waived.

The question is, Is it the sense of the Senate that debate on the nomination of Ajit Varadaraj Pai, of Kansas, to be a Member of the Federal Communications Commission shall be brought to a close?

The yeas and nays are mandatory under the rule.

The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk called the roll.

Mr. CORNYN. The following Senators are necessarily absent: the Senator from Mississippi (Mr. COCHRAN), the Senator from Alabama (Mr. STRANGE), and the Senator from North Carolina (Mr. TILLIS).

Mr. DURBIN. I announce that the Senator from New Jersey (Mr. MENENDEZ) is necessarily absent.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. PERDUE). Are there any other Senators in the Chamber desiring to vote?

The yeas and nays resulted—yeas 55, nays 41, as follows:

[Rollcall Vote No. 208 Ex.]

YEAS—55

Alexander	Flake	Paul
Barrasso	Gardner	Perdue
Blunt	Graham	Peters
Boozman	Grassley	Portman
Burr	Hatch	Risch
Capito	Heller	Roberts
Carper	Hoeven	Rounds
Cassidy	Inhofe	Rubio
Collins	Isakson	Sasse
Coons	Johnson	Scott
Corker	Kennedy	Shelby
Cornyn	Lankford	Sullivan
Cotton	Lee	Tester
Crapo	Manchin	Thune
Cruz	McCain	Toomey
Daines	McCaskill	Wicker
Enzi	McConnell	Young
Ernst	Moran	
Fischer	Murkowski	

NAYS—41

Baldwin	Feinstein	Markey
Bennet	Franken	Merkley
Blumenthal	Gillibrand	Murphy
Booker	Harris	Murray
Brown	Hassan	Nelson
Cantwell	Heinrich	Reed
Cardin	Heitkamp	Sanders
Casey	Hirono	Schatz
Cortez Masto	Kaine	Schumer
Donnelly	King	Shaheen
Duckworth	Klobuchar	Stabenow
Durbin	Leahy	

Udall
Van Hollen

Warner
Warren

Whitehouse
Wyden

NOT VOTING—4

Cochran
Menendez

Strange
Tillis

The PRESIDING OFFICER. On this vote, the yeas are 55, the nays are 41.

The motion is agreed to.

The Senator from Nebraska.

Mr. SASSE. Mr. President, I would like to extend thanks to my colleagues from Ohio and Maryland for allowing me to cut in line.

PUERTO RICO AND U.S. VIRGIN ISLANDS
RECOVERY EFFORT

Mr. President, a few minutes ago, the Senator from Connecticut made a speech about the natural disaster and humanitarian disaster unfolding in Puerto Rico. He urged the executive branch and, in particular, FEMA, the Department of Homeland Security, and the Department of Defense to move quicker to enable the Congress to do our oversight responsibilities.

Director Long at FEMA today made clear to a number of us on a conference call briefing that there are constraints into and out of the airport at San Juan. There are all sorts of legitimate arguments he has made. At the same time, it is absolutely imperative for the American people and for the disaster unfolding in Puerto Rico that the Congress, in general, and the Senate, in particular, be able to do our oversight work.

I would like to associate myself with the comments of the Senator from Connecticut.

Thank you.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Ohio.

Mr. PORTMAN. Mr. President, I appreciate the comments of my colleague from Nebraska, and our hearts go out to those victims of the hurricane now in the Virgin Islands and Puerto Rico, following the terrible devastation in Texas and Florida. These are American citizens who deserve our assistance and urgent help.

I am glad to hear there is now more support mobilizing on the island. I would like to associate myself with the comments of those who talk about the need to move quickly to save lives.

STOP ENABLING SEX TRAFFICKERS ACT

Mr. President, I rise to talk about something different today, something equally urgent and concerning. It has to do with legislation that is present here in the U.S. Senate and in the House of Representatives. It is about an issue called sex trafficking—human trafficking. It is a crime against humanity. It is a human rights issue that really transcends partisanship and transcends politics.

Every day that we aren't acting here to help push back against this, countless vulnerable women and children are suffering. I personally think it is a stain on our national character that sex trafficking is increasing in this country, in this century, at this time. Experts tell us that it is increasing because of the internet. So the internet,

which has so many positive aspects, also has a dark side. One is the selling of children and women online with ruthless efficiency.

I appreciated the Senate Commerce Committee holding a hearing last week on bipartisan legislation called the Stop Enabling Sex Traffickers Act. I appreciated the opportunity to testify in support of this legislation at that hearing. But, actually, the most powerful testimony by far came from a mom. Her name is Yvonne Ambrose. Yvonne received a call on Christmas Eve that every parent dreads. As a dad of three kids, I can't imagine. Her 16-year-old daughter, Desiree, was murdered while being exploited and sold for sex on backpage.com, the industry leader in the online sex trafficking of minors.

A 16-year-old girl should never have been trafficked online, but the tragedy of her death is compounded by the fact that backpage.com, the website she was bought and sold on, has repeatedly evaded justice for its role in child sex trafficking.

We know from the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children that backpage alone is responsible for most child trafficking. In fact, 75 percent of all child trafficking reports the organization receives from the public have to do with backpage.com. We know from a nearly 2-year investigation by the Senate Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations, which I chair, that backpage actively and knowingly facilitated online sex trafficking, coached its users on how to post so-called clean ads for illegal transactions, and knowingly edited ads to conceal evidence of crimes, including the concealed evidence of underage girls being sold online.

Despite these facts, which are horrendous, courts have consistently ruled that a Federal law called the Communications Decency Act protects backpage from its liability for its role in sex trafficking. This law is 21 years old. It shields websites from liability for crimes others commit through their site. It was enacted when the internet was in its infancy. It was intended, by the way, in part to protect children from indecent material on the internet. Now it is protecting websites that sell women and children for sex.

This was never Congress's intention when enacting the Communications Decency Act. In fact, last week, California's attorney general, Xavier Becerra, testified at the Senate hearing I talked about. He was a Congressman in 1996 when the law was enacted. In discussing the Communications Decency Act, he said: "I don't remember in 1996 believing my 'yes' vote meant I was going to allow, 21 years later, for kids to be sold through the internet for sex."

Congress clearly did not intend for this broad immunity to occur, but courts have made it clear their hands are tied because of legal precedent and have invited the Congress to fix this injustice.

Just last month, a Sacramento judge made the most blatant call on Congress yet. The court threw out pimping charges against backpage.com because of the liability protections provided to the website under Federal law. The court opinion stated: "If and until Congress sees fit to amend the immunity law, the broad reach of section 230 of the Communications Decency Act even applies to those alleged to support the exploitation of others by human trafficking."

Because of this interpretation of the law over the last 20 years, only Congress can fix this injustice. Again, that is why I introduced the bipartisan Stop Enabling Sex Traffickers Act.

Along with coauthors Senators BLUMENTHAL, MCCAIN, MCCASKILL, CORNYN, and HEITKAMP, we are determined to get this bill passed to make a difference in the lives of countless women and children who have been exploited by online sex traffickers.

Last week's hearing was a great positive step in that direction. We had bipartisan support in the hearing, and I hope that after the hearing, we can move quickly to a markup. I thank Senator THUNE, who was on the floor earlier—chairman of the committee—for his leadership in this area.

The bill would do two things. They are both very targeted and narrow. One, it would allow sex trafficking victims to get the justice they deserve against websites that knowingly facilitate crimes against them. Second, it would allow State and local law enforcement to prosecute websites that violate Federal sex trafficking laws, again, with the knowing standard.

This standard of knowing is a high bar to meet. Websites would have to be proven to knowingly facilitate, support, or assist online sex trafficking to be liable. Because the standard is so high, our bill protects good technology companies—good actors—and targets rogue online traffickers like backpage. Our bill also preserves the Good Samaritan provision in the Communications Decency Act, which protects the actors that proactively screen their websites for offensive material.

These are commonsense updates to bring a 21-year-old statute into the 21st century.

This bill has received wide bipartisan support. Thirty-three Senators have supported it, one-third of the entire U.S. Senate as cosponsors. We also have the support of dozens of anti-human trafficking groups in all of our States, faith-based groups from around the country, law enforcement groups, all the national law enforcement groups, including the attorneys general, the groups out there that actually are involved in these prosecutions. They have all publicly endorsed this legislation.

Some significant players in the tech and business community have also stepped up to support it. Recently, Oracle endorsed the legislation, also 21st

Century Fox, Hewlett-Packard Enterprise, Walt Disney Company, and others have supported our narrowly crafted legislation because they know it is necessary, it is needed, and it doesn't affect the good actors.

I would love to see others in the tech community step forward and help us. We want them to partner with us in this. They should be as concerned as anyone, if not more, because online, on the internet, this is taking place. They should want to support, address this injustice, where traffickers exploit women and children with immunity.

Some in the tech community have argued this bill would inadvertently harm good-intentioned websites. I don't believe that is true, but, more importantly, nor do legal scholars who have looked at this.

Attorney General Xavier Becerra explained in last week's hearing that "we have to prove criminal intent. We can't win a prosecution unless we can show that the individuals we're prosecuting, like Backpage, had the intent—the knowledge—to do what they are doing. The legislation that you have before you is very narrowly tailored. It goes only after sex trafficking."

That was our intent, to do it narrowly. The bill targets websites that knowingly facilitate sex trafficking and protects those that don't. It is as simple as that. I think those in the tech community who remain in opposition to this legislation have to realize that by doing so, they are protecting these bad actors, bringing a bad name to the internet. Instead, they should partner with us to protect our kids.

I have spoken about courts and attorneys general calling on Congress to change the Communications Decency Act. The most powerful call on Congress actually came at the Senate hearing last week—not from a lawyer, not from a judge. It came from a mom.

Yvonne Ambrose, whom I mentioned earlier, the mother of the late 16-year-old, Desiree Robinson, with great courage, stated:

Backpage.com and other companies like it must be held responsible for what they have created. I'm sure when this act was put in place in [19]96, the Internet was in its infancy, and it was not intended to allow companies to legally sell children on the internet. But somehow, a dollar has become more important than a human life. If you're going to fix this problem, fix it.

Let's fix it. Last week's Senate hearing was a step in the right direction. Senators from both sides of the aisle understood the injustice that occurs and were passionate in expressing their desire to find a solution. I would just tell you that we have very carefully assessed this problem over the last couple of years, carefully and thoughtfully not just assessed it but looked for a legislative fix that would be a solution to the problems we have identified. We now need to act on it as soon as possible to save those women and children who are being trafficked online every day as we wait.

The Stop Enabling Sex Traffickers Act stops an injustice. I urge the Sen-

ate to take up this legislation, seize this opportunity, have the markup, get it to the floor, get it to the House where there is companion legislation, and fix this problem to protect our kids.

Thank you.

I yield back.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Maryland.

Mr. CARDIN. Mr. President, first, I want to compliment Senator PORTMAN for his leadership on this issue of ending modern-day slavery and trafficking. The United States is taking the leadership globally in fighting trafficking.

We had the Trafficking in Persons Report that is looked upon as being the most authoritative document on how well every country is doing in fighting modern-day slavery and trafficking, but we must make sure we take care of issues here at home.

I applaud Senator PORTMAN's efforts to make sure we do everything in this country we can to protect those victims who are being trafficked for sex or labor. We need to redouble our efforts. I compliment my colleague for his leadership in this area. I can tell him that all of us here want to work with him to make sure America continues to lead in our fight to end modern-day slavery.

HEALTHCARE

Mr. President, I would like to say one thing about the fellows who serve in our office. I know many of us are privileged to have fellows who get assigned to us. Arnold Solamillos has been assigned to my office and has helped us in so many different areas. His expertise from the Social Security Administration is a valuable service. I, personally, thank him for the contributions he has made not just to my Senate office but to the work we do in the U.S. Congress.

Mr. President, I want to comment about the status of healthcare. We had expected that the majority leader might have brought up this week the Graham-Cassidy bill as part of budget reconciliation. I can tell you I am relieved he did not, but I hope this Chamber will consider healthcare legislation not 6 months from now, not a year from now, but there is important work we need to do now in regard to healthcare, and we need to work together, Democrats and Republicans.

One of the urgent issues is to reauthorize the Children's Health Insurance Program, CHIP. That program, as I am sure the Presiding Officer knows, expires in the next 2 days. We need to make sure there is predictability for our States to continue this extremely important program that protects the health of our children.

It was created as a bipartisan program, enjoyed bipartisan support. I certainly compliment Chairman HATCH and Ranking Member WYDEN for their work together to reach an agreement on the reauthorization of this program. I hope we can consider that very shortly.

I also would like to point out that we have very important healthcare policies that have time limits on it and expire, and we need to pass what is known as extenders in health. Some of these policies expire in the next 2 days.

I am going to just mention one. There are many others I could mention, but I want to mention one that I have been involved with ever since Congress made the mistake of placing a limit known as the therapy cap on rehab services. This limit makes absolutely no sense. It made no sense 20 years ago when it was imposed. It was put in there to reach a budget number and reconciliation and had nothing to do with policy.

Today, those who have the most serious needs of therapy services are the ones who are the most at risk. So I would urge my colleagues that we need to take up these medical extenders, and we need to do it now. We need to do it quickly. We don't want to leave the uncertainty out there. Every day we leave the uncertainty, there is a question in the minds of individuals who need these services and those who are providing these services whether, in fact, Congress will extend the policies.

Let me talk a little bit about the broader issue of the Affordable Care Act. We had, I thought, a very informative hearing before the Senate Finance Committee on the Graham-Cassidy amendment to the Reconciliation Act. We had that hearing on Monday, and I thought it was a very informative hearing for the members of our committee and the American public. We had the opportunity to have one of the members of our committee on the panel of witnesses. Senator CASSIDY was a witness at the witness table. During the questioning, I said to him that he had mentioned many examples of individuals who are facing very high premium increases or they don't have the ability to pay the premiums and the out-of-pocket costs. He was using those examples, as some of my other colleagues were using, as to why we have to deal with a change in the Affordable Care Act.

I had the opportunity to question what individuals he was talking about. He identified the group. The group is those who are in the individual marketplace. These are not the families who have policies through their employers or in the group plans, these are individuals who have no other opportunity but to go into the individual market in order to buy their health insurance. Secondly, these are individuals who don't qualify for subsidies because their income is too high.

So I asked Mrs. Miller, who was on the panel who is the insurance commissioner from Pennsylvania, whether my estimate of the number of people who fall into this category is correct. She confirmed it is somewhere between 1 to 2 percent of the population that fall in the individual marketplace and incomes are too high for subsidies.

That is a significant number of Americans, and we need to deal with their concerns. Let me sort of spell out what that is all about. In my State of Maryland, the average cost—capital cost—of healthcare is somewhere around \$8,600 a year. If you don't have an employer helping to contribute to your healthcare insurance or cost or you don't qualify for any subsidies and you are a husband or wife with two children, then your average costs are going to be in excess of \$34,000. That is if you buy insurance so you are not exposed to the unexpected costs. A lot of families just can't afford that.

The problem is, the individual marketplace is not stable. There are too many uncertainties, and those premium costs can become unaffordable for those families whose incomes are too high to receive subsidies. It is an important group, but let's keep in mind it is 1 to 2 percent, so let's not jeopardize the healthcare of 98 to 99 percent of Americans in an effort to say we are doing something for the 1 or 2 percent.

Here is the rub. The Graham-Cassidy bill didn't help that 1 to 2 percent. In fact, it made it worse. It made it less likely that they would be able to get affordable coverage so they didn't deal with the problem that was identified for the reason for the reform. Instead, what the Graham-Cassidy bill did was basically to block grant the Medicaid Program to the States. They had a complicated formula, where many States, like Maryland, would lose a lot of money because we used our State resources to expand Medicaid, and now we are being penalized for it. The bottom line was every State was going to have a cap as to how much money the Federal Government was going to make available, and that cap became tighter and tighter every year.

So I asked one of the witnesses on our panel on Monday: How would you deal with that?

The witness who is responsible in his State said: Well, you manage to the cap. Those were his exact words: "You manage to the cap."

So I said to Mrs. Miller, the insurance commissioner from Pennsylvania: What does that mean, managing to the cap?

She said: Well, it means that in order to make the cap, you either knock people off the rolls and change the eligibility so fewer people have coverage in our State—and let me remind my colleagues the Congressional Budget Office, although they didn't give us a finite score, did say there would be millions of people who would lose their coverage under the Graham-Cassidy bill—so that is one way. Also, the bill eliminated the expansion of Medicaid, which was part of the Affordable Care Act and was responsible for tens of millions getting healthcare coverage. So there would be millions of people who would lose their benefits because the States have to manage to this cap that was in the bill.

The second way Mrs. Miller said you can manage to the cap is to reduce benefits, and many States have done that. They can impose caps. Caps means that if—I had so many people who wrote me letters, and I am sure the Presiding Officer got letters from people in his State—but the ones who really got to you was when you heard from a young husband and wife who have a child with special needs and that person indicated that within the first couple of months, they would have exceeded the cap that was in the insurance policies before the passage of the Affordable Care Act.

What are we supposed to do? If the State, in order to save money to manage to the cap, imposes a cap on how much the coverage is and you have a child with special needs, what do you do about that?

Well, the answer, quite frankly, is you either sell everything you have, mortgage everything you have, or go into a bankruptcy in order to take care of your child because you just can't do it.

So that is what was at risk.

There was a third way to manage to the cap, and Mrs. Miller said: We could cut provider fees, and States have done that. Cutting provider fees means that in areas where there is a large Medicaid population, you are going to have a hard time finding a hospital or a doctor that will be willing to treat the lack of access to care. We saw that over and over again, where people may have coverage, but they can't get a provider. That is not access to care.

So, for all of these reasons, what would have been done under the Graham-Cassidy bill would not have dealt with the 1 to 2 percent where we do have an issue and we need to work on it, it would have created significant problems for millions of others, and I haven't even gotten to the fact that it eliminated the Patients' Bill of Rights and insurance protections that we put into law against preexisting conditions and things like that. So I was glad to see we are not considering that amendment this week. That, to me, was the right decision.

I know we are now going to end this fiscal year in the next 2 days and that next week we are likely to see come out of the Budget Committee another budget document so that we are back on fiscal year 2018 rather than fiscal year 2017. We don't know whether that will deal with taxes or with healthcare, but there will come a time that we may be getting back to this debate. I would hope we don't need a budget resolution to do it. I hope we can move in a bipartisan manner and get some things done now to improve and stabilize the Affordable Care Act.

I have been participating, under the leadership of Senator ALEXANDER, the chairman of the HELP Committee, and Senator MURRAY, the ranking Democrat on the committee—who have been conducting hearings over the last several weeks, and we have invited Members who are not on that committee to

join them. We were able to ask the witnesses questions. We were able to find out whether there were some common areas where we could in fact help stabilize the market that includes the 1 to 2 percent I have already talked about who are the ones who have issues here.

I have met with our insurance carriers in Maryland in reference to why we were having large increases in the individual marketplaces, and we went over the various reasons. The three principal reasons were all talked about in this bipartisan group. Quite frankly, Senator ALEXANDER said: Look, we are trying to see whether we can't come together with some legislation, perhaps to pass as early as this month, which gave a lot of us confidence that at long last we are coming back to work, Democrats and Republicans.

I was criticized by some of my constituents during this debate who asked: Where is your proposal? How are you going to fix it? So several months ago I filed legislation, and I was pleased to see that a couple of the issues I included in my legislation were consensus proposals in this bipartisan group that has been meeting for the last couple of weeks.

One of those that is in my legislation and that is in conversation is to have predictable funding for the cost sharing. As we know, President Trump has raised a question as to whether he is going to continue to pay the insurance companies for keeping the copays and deductibles and premiums low for low-income families. He is doing it on a month-to-month basis. If we could make that a predictable payment, as was anticipated under the Affordable Care Act, that could affect a significant part of the premium increase that has been sought in the individual marketplace. That was what was told to me in Maryland, and that was confirmed by a wide network of groups from many States in the discussions with Senator ALEXANDER and Senator MURRAY. That is something we could do right now. We anticipated that would be done. We can do that, and then we can help those people whose examples were given for reasons why we need to address the Affordable Care Act.

A second issue that is included in my legislation that was very much included in this discussion is, let's make it easier for States to implement a reinsurance program. A reinsurance program takes the high risks and spreads them over so an insurance company doesn't have to impose higher premiums because they have unknown risks. It is a pretty simple process, to use reinsurance. The State Senate used reinsurance and it has worked. It was in the original Affordable Care Act.

The problem is, the States' budgets have already been put to rest. In order to do a reinsurance program, you have to put some money upfront in order to save money. The States just don't have those funds. So let's look for ways we can make it easier for States to implement the reinsurance program, and

part of that is to deal with the waivers that are in the Affordable Care Act. We have guardrails to make sure States use waivers but do not compromise the protections that are in the statute. So let's make it easier for States to implement a reinsurance program which could also bring down rates. Quite frankly, I didn't see anyone object to those two suggestions that were made, which would certainly help.

There are other things I hope we can do. The three main reasons given by the insurance carriers in Maryland for the premium increases are, No. 1, the uncertainty of the cost-sharing payments; No. 2, the reinsurance program; and, No. 3, that we are not enforcing the requirement that everybody be in the pool. We don't do that. You get those that are at the highest risk who are going to come in, but those who feel like they are not going to be using the policies stay out, and then we have adverse risk selection and therefore higher premiums than there should be.

So we really need to do a better job to try to get people into the plans. That is why many of us have been urging our appropriators to provide the funds so we can inform people about the advantages of having healthcare coverage and we can get a broader market in there. I certainly hope a law is passed by Congress that requires the coverage would be enforced. These are things I think we all could do.

There are other issues I hope we can deal with that I think will help all people, in addition to the 1 to 2 percent who need immediate help, as well as bring down the entirety of our healthcare costs. Part of that is to bring down healthcare costs generally. We all know prescription drugs are too expensive in this country. We pay twice what other countries pay. One simple way is to get the same discounts for Medicare as we get for Medicaid. My understanding is that saves billions of dollars. It was in my legislation, just one simple way. I think that if you can collect the bargaining power of the Medicare marketplace, we can certainly get better prices than we get by using a divided market.

So there are things we can do. We can have a better delivery system for providing healthcare to people in this country. I have talked about this many times—collaborative and integrative care models. In Maryland, we have Mosaic, which is a behavioral health facility, working with Sheppard Pratt, a mental health hospital. They worked together in order to have a more efficient delivery system. We need to encourage those types of models that use integrative care to bring down healthcare costs.

Lastly, we need more competition. Yes, I have always supported a public option under the exchanges. I think that makes sense.

We have a lot of other proposals that have been given. Let's sit down and talk about these proposals to see if we can't find ways to make our system better.

We have, once again, reached a situation where the majority has pulled the budget reconciliation, this time permanently, from the fiscal year 2017 calendar year. Let us start the new year that begins on October 1—the new fiscal year—with a commitment from Democrats and Republicans to work together, to share our best ideas, to make sure our children are protected by the extension of the CHIP program, to make sure policies that are currently in place that protect our constituents such as the therapy cap relief are extended.

Let's join together so the Affordable Care Act can be made stronger, particularly in stabilizing the problems in the individual marketplace, and help bring down the growth rate of healthcare costs. That is what we should be working on now, and I encourage my colleagues to do just that.

With that, I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. MERKLEY. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. CASIDY). Without objection, it is so ordered.

BURMA

Mr. MERKLEY. Mr. President, anyone who watches the news, reads the newspaper, or goes on social media knows there are a lot of bad things happening in our world. Folks at home and across the globe are confronting devastations from hurricanes, earthquakes, floods, wars, and forest fires, as in my home State. Tensions between the United States and North Korea have never been higher, reaching a dangerous level. The world is watching all of this with bated breath.

In the midst of this deluge of news, a human rights catastrophe is unfolding virtually unnoticed. I am talking about the members of the Burmese military engaging in horrific acts of unthinkable violence against the Rohingya—a Muslim minority population in a predominantly Buddhist nation.

The Burmese military, along with civilian accomplices, have slaughtered more than 3,000 innocent civilians. They have raped thousands of Rohingya women. They have beheaded children as young as 6 years old. They have burned countless villages to the ground. Through these brutal acts, the Burmese military has driven half a million Rohingya refugees to camps in nearby Bangladesh, with Burmese soldiers continuing to shoot at them as they try to cross the border—a border, by the way, along which landmines have been laid by the Burmese military.

The brutality of what is happening in that country is truly beyond comprehension. The Burmese Government calls it a security operation, but we need to call it exactly what it is—eth-

nic cleansing. So often I have heard the words “never again,” that the United States will stand up to ethnic cleansing. This is one of those moments when we must stand up.

What is happening in Burma is a crime against humanity. As a country, we have more responsibility to take a stand and to speak out against it, to make the world take notice of the atrocities, call for their end, and to work toward their end.

The Rohingya are a people trapped in a cycle of violence and persecution by the Burmese Government and military. The Government of Burma has turned them into stateless people—refusing to recognize them, refusing to give them citizenship in spite of the fact that much of the Rohingya community has been there for centuries. They need our help.

The Burma Government has adopted laws that ban the Rohingyas from traveling without official permission, from owning land, from securing a public education, from obtaining employment by either a state or private business.

When the Burmese Government says that it will welcome back the refugees who can prove their citizenship, they are being completely disingenuous and completely treacherous, because they know—and the whole world should know—that the very laws of Burma make it impossible for the Rohingya to prove their citizenship since they have been denied citizenship by the Government of Burma. We cannot sit idly by and let ethnic cleansing continue.

One nation that has stepped up is Bangladesh. As the leaders of Burma have persecuted the Rohingya and burned the villages and shot the refugees as they were fleeing, the Government of Bangladesh has opened its door. It has proceeded to allow humanitarian groups access and the United Nations access. This is commendable, but more needs to be done. These refugee camps are overcrowded. There are not enough supplies, clean toilets, food, or clean water. Doctors Without Borders says that they are on the brink of a “public health disaster.” Unlike Bangladesh, other countries have yet to speak up.

Indeed, I am concerned by reports that some factions within India have been explicitly, publicly seeking to expel India's own Rohingya population. It is important for the international community to weigh in with them and to ask them to respect international law and to protect the Rohingya refugees. India knows full well that there is nowhere to send them. If they send them back to Burma, there will just be more persecution of the men, the women, and the children.

It underscores the fact that the Rohingya need help and that the world should answer the call. As we do, we must use what influence we have to put an end to the violence and the persecution of this ethnic minority. We need to call on Burma's leaders to protect these minorities, not to assist in the

persecution. We need to call on the Government of Burma to immediately give humanitarian groups access to the Rohingya who are trapped in Burma, in what some have described as concentration camps. We need to call on Burma's leaders to provide the hundreds of thousands of Rohingya refugees who have been forced to flee their homes and villages with a safe and assisted right of return.

In addition, the Burmese Government—the Burmese nation—needs to figure out how to end the root causes of this conflict—an age-old ethnic and religious conflict—and find a way to embrace the diversity within their nation. Certainly, this is not the first time that the tensions have erupted into violence. It has happened time and time and time again, but this is the worst we have ever seen.

Kofi Annan, the former U.N. Secretary General, is the current chairman of the Advisory Commission on Rakhine State. He and his team have called on Burma to take the appropriate actions to end this cycle of violence, this cycle of radicalization.

The entire Rohingya community is counting on us—the world—to notice and to act. We must immediately see an end to the violence, full access for humanitarian organizations, cooperation with and access for the United Nations fact finding mission, the safe return of refugees, and the implementation of the full set of recommendations from Kofi Annan's report.

It is also critical that the United States and the international community continue to shed light on this horrific problem, provide sustained aid and support to the refugees in Burma and in Bangladesh, and take action to show other repressive governments that there will be consequences for pursuing this type of persecution, starting with a strong U.N. Security Council resolution.

International action to end this violence, increase humanitarian assistance, and extend our aid to the Rohingya people is the right thing to do. I pray that together we will answer that call.

I also thank my colleagues who have already been engaged in this issue. There are a number of them, but I am particularly aware of Senator Richard Durbin's, Senator JOHN McCAIN's, and Senator BEN CARDIN's involvement and leadership.

Let's build on that foundation to have the Senate demonstrate attention to this issue through letters, and we should also try to arrange a Senate trip to visit both Burma and Bangladesh in order to draw additional international attention and build momentum for action.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. CORNYN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

HURRICANE RECOVERY EFFORTS AND TARGETED TAX RELIEF

Mr. CORNYN. Mr. President, it has been quite a few weeks now since Harvey hit and, then, Irma. Now Maria has devastated the island of Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands. Of course, my gaze has been firmly on the devastation wrought by Hurricane Harvey back in my home State of Texas. Yet we are joined together with those who suffered under Irma and Maria, and we will remain steadfastly with them as we all work to recover from these terrible hurricanes.

Last week, I rode in a Black Hawk helicopter with Russ Poppe, as well as our Adjutant General, John Nichols. Mr. Poppe is executive director of the Harris County Flood Control District. We were able to survey in the air things I had seen up close during several trips back home, the wreckage of the land and livelihoods.

It is an emotional thing for families and homeowners to basically take all of their worldly possessions out to the front of their house and put it in the front yard because it is completely ruined as a result of the water, along with things like the drywall, trying to attack the mold before it grows and makes the house uninhabitable.

We saw from about 10,000 feet in the air what we had previously seen from the ground, but from the air, you definitely get a different perspective on the waterlogged landscape. You see so much more. You see the levees, the reservoirs, the areas hit. You see the damaged goods and drywall that people have taken out of their homes as the first step toward recovery. It definitely has an impression on you, particularly with the size and scale of the affected area. It is really hard to believe until you see it from that perspective.

So when I took off my headset and sunglasses—and by the way, Speaker PAUL RYAN joined us on that particular trip, and we all appreciate his being there. When we stepped off the chopper, what I thought about was not only what we have done so far but how much further we still had to go. It is not just about building materials, street and roof repairs, or even the temporary housing that people need, although all of those things are surely important. We need to remember that the remedies are not going to be one-size-fits-all. We need broad support, but we also need targeted and narrow support to help people get back on their feet. We need to keep each family in mind and what their own particular needs may be depending on their particular circumstances.

As I started out to say, it is not just Texas we are talking about anymore; it is Florida, Puerto Rico, and the Virgin Islands too. We all remember that those places were hit by Hurricanes Irma and Maria right after Texas was hit by Harvey.

I want to make one thing clear, though: We in Texas stand together

with our fellow Americans who suffered from Hurricanes Maria and Irma, as well as those who suffered from other natural disasters occurring in and around our country, and we will do everything we can to help the people who were harmed and damaged, even devastated by these terrible storms. We will help them fight to get back on their feet, to recover, and to return their lives to some form of normalcy.

One way we can work together and deliver relief to different people in different geographic areas is in providing temporary tax relief. Now, I know this sounds kind of like a small thing to do, but if you think about it, this is a thousand-year storm. Hurricane Harvey dropped 34 trillion gallons of water on the same area over a period of about 5 or so days. Many people were not in the hundred-year floodplain, which is typically where you would buy flood insurance, so many people suffered losses that were not covered by flood insurance. What many of these folks will have to do is dip into their retirement savings and other savings in order to help to get life back to normal. This relief will help folks get back on their feet as they rebuild their homes and businesses and neighborhoods in the wake of these hurricanes.

We recently passed—earlier this afternoon—a Federal Aviation Administration reauthorization, but it also included the tax package I am talking about now that provides this targeted relief. These provisions will help hurricane victims in all of the devastated areas keep more of their paycheck, first and foremost, but be able to deduct the cost of their property damage on their tax return and encourage even more Americans to generously donate to hurricane relief to help their neighbors and employees.

I know this tax package is a small matter. It is not a panacea and certainly not a cure-all, and it is not supposed to fix every storm-related problem or absolve us from honoring our ongoing responsibilities in the days ahead. But as John Steinbeck once said, “and now that you don't have to be perfect, you can just be good,” and I think these are good reforms. They will complement other measures by the Federal Government, as well as other State and local actors.

Similar provisions were introduced in a noncontroversial section of the FAA reauthorization bill that unfortunately House Democrats, led by Leader PELOSI, tried to block earlier this week. Despite the delays, I am pleased that the House acted a second time earlier today to ensure that this relief is delivered to those who need it most—again, not just in Texas but in Florida, the Virgin Islands, and in Puerto Rico, which reportedly has been devastated. Now we in this Chamber seem to have finally gotten the message, too, by passing this relief just this very afternoon as part of the FAA bill.

Our colleague from Florida, Representative CARLOS CURBELO, said

about the hurricane victims in his home State: “They don’t have time to wait. They certainly don’t have time to play political games.” He is right, and now we can say we have taken those words to heart.

So I remember what I saw from that helicopter. Now that the time for surveying the scene has ended, what is no longer up in the air is this: For many Texans, Floridians, and Puerto Ricans, targeted tax relief will serve to make a difficult year just a little easier.

So I salute the House for getting the job done, and I am glad we in this Chamber have quickly followed suit.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Hawaii.

Mr. SCHATZ. Mr. President, I want to thank the senior Senator from Texas for his leadership in the disaster response, and I pledge my commitment to whatever is needed for Houston and the areas around Houston, as well as Florida. I appreciate the commitment at the legislative level for what needs to be done in Puerto Rico.

Mr. President, we also need to continue to apply pressure to the administration because it does appear as though there is an unequal response between what is happening in Puerto Rico and what has happened in Houston and in Florida. So we need to hold as a country the executive branch accountable for the lack of a sense of urgency for 3.5 million Americans who are mostly going to be without power for 9 months, who are currently without potable water, who are in a devastated situation. It is our obligation to do everything we can.

Mr. President, the Senate is about to make an important decision about who leads the Federal agency that oversees everything from the internet, to the TV, to radio.

This vote is a choice: We can either give our stamp of approval on the FCC’s direction under the leadership of Chairman Pai, or we can decide that his leadership has put the FCC on the wrong track and that it is time for someone else to take charge.

Generally speaking, here is how I approach a nomination. There are three reasons one might reject a nominee. If the person is corrupt, it is a nonstarter. If the person is nonqualified, it is also a nonstarter. And even on policy grounds, in the policy space, just disagreeing with someone can often boil down to the fact that there is a President from another party and is not sufficient to vote no.

Chairman Pai is someone I know. He is skillful, he is a decent human being, he is very smart, and he is qualified. When we disagree, we can do it in a way that doesn’t ruin our ability to work together on the following day on the following issue. And this is no small thing in today’s political climate. So it is important that if we are ever going to get something done, we are able to disagree and find common ground afterward.

I do like Chairman Pai as a person. I think he is ethical and he is capable. But he is just so wrong on policy. For me, that means he is not the right leader for the FCC. I want to highlight four of the concerns I have.

First, the FCC really is trying to end the internet as we know it by getting rid of net neutrality. If they succeed, your internet service provider will have the power to stop you from seeing certain kinds of content. They will be the ones that make decisions about what you can access online and how fast and how much you have to pay for it.

Some people say that companies aren’t going to change the internet because it is not in their interest to change the internet, even if the law goes away. But think about this: Most often, these ISPs are publicly traded companies, and they are going to make decisions based on their own financial interests. It is not just an objective; it is their obligation. If there is an opportunity to change their business model for internet service, they are duty bound to pursue it. They do not have any obligation to a free and open internet; they have an obligation to shareholders and to profits.

That is why net neutrality exists in the first place—because we should not leave it up to any company to decide whether they are going to charge people more to stream video, for example, or block certain content altogether. If we allow the FCC to end net neutrality, Americans across the country are going to find that the internet no longer works in the way that it should. And this has happened under Chairman Pai’s leadership.

It is not just bad policy that he is pursuing; they have also had some serious process fouls. When Chairman Pai announced that the FCC was revisiting the rules, he made clear that the FCC was going to get rid of net neutrality regardless of what happened throughout the process. He said: “This is a fight we intend to wage and it is a fight we intend to win.” Why is that a significant thing to say? “This is a fight we intend to wage and it is a fight we intend to win.” This is a quasi-judicial agency. They just opened up a public comment period. There were 22 million members of the public who submitted public comments after the Chairman of the Commission has already announced that he has decided which way they are going to go. I think that is antithetical to the governing statute, and it is antithetical to the basic premise that if you have an open comment period where an individual has an opportunity to express themselves, you have to listen to them. You don’t say: I already decided, but you 22 million people—if you have an opinion, I will be happy to receive it and file it and do what I planned to do all along. That is the exact opposite of how this is supposed to work.

The agency proposes the rule, the public weighs in, and then the agency

considers the comments from the public in making the decision. But Chairman Pai turned it upside down. The FCC has tried to diminish the fact that so many people tried to weigh in. About 96 percent of the roughly 22 million people who have weighed in have weighed in in favor of net neutrality. They are trying to lay the groundwork to get rid of net neutrality even though the vast majority of people are for it. By doing that, the FCC is effectively saying that lobbyists and law firms matter more than regular citizens.

This is just the tip of the iceberg. The FCC has claimed that cyberattacks kept people from being able to comment, but they have not been forthcoming about what exactly happened, and we are still working in our oversight role to figure that all out.

Secondly, I would like to address media ownership. Local TV broadcasters are an essential part of every community. People know their local TV station. They trust it. There is a range of perspectives offered. Because the broadcasters are based in the community, they have relationships with their viewers that make their content better and more relevant.

For decades, Congress and the FCC have taken steps to keep local broadcasting local because it benefits the public interest. These are the public airways. It is like fast food options across the country. You may not mind McDonald’s once in a while, but you don’t want that to be the only option in your hometown. You want something that captures the local culture in your community. That is what local broadcasting does. It makes TV in Honolulu different from TV in Hartford or Houston.

But now the American tradition of local broadcasting is in real danger because the FCC is going to change the rules so that these stations can be bought out by a single company without any limits. I have no doubt this would create a world of sort of nationalized content distributed through each of these local companies, with consumers having to watch whatever is distributed to them by their national headquarters. This is no longer local news, and this is not the broadcast media that Americans deserve.

The third area I want to talk about is broadband access. Right now, Americans have widely different levels of internet speed basically based on where they live. In some places, you have great broadband access, no trouble streaming video, accessing government services online, downloading, uploading, but in rural and Tribal communities, they are very, very far behind. As the FCC noted, 39 percent of rural America and 41 percent of those on Tribal land lack access to advanced broadband. Even if they have cell phones with internet access, a mobile network will typically offer slower speed than fixed broadband, so they can’t go online and do the things we can in Washington, DC, or in many

other cities across the country. So everyone, on a bipartisan basis, understands that this needs to change.

High-speed broadband is the cornerstone to economic development, public safety, and quality of life in every community, no matter how many people live in your community. The FCC has historically worked so that every home, school, and business has had adequate access to the internet because that is what it will take to unlock the innovation and potential for all Americans.

The FCC has worked on this issue by setting the bar for what it will take to connect more Americans to the internet. There is already a threshold in place which says that this is what high-speed internet access is, so we know who has it and who doesn't. But instead of actually working to get more people broadband, the FCC is working to change the definition of broadband so that it looks as if they have gotten people more broadband. That way they can say that more Americans are covered, even if they have internet service that does not meet their needs. In other words, they are not actually solving the problem; they are literally just redefining what it means to have access. Rather than giving people access, they are papering over the problem that they are not solving. This is a real issue, and it is something that the Commerce, Science, and Transportation Committee members have worked on on a bipartisan basis.

The way to get more people broadband access is to get more people broadband access. It is not to change the rules and to change the metrics so that you can come back to the Congress and say: Look, we just achieved more access by allowing these companies to claim that people are covered who are not.

The fourth and final concern I want to raise is a little more sensitive because, as I said, I like Chairman Pai, and I respect Chairman Pai, but he made some comments during his confirmation hearing that worried me. I asked if he agreed with the President's comments calling the media the enemy of the state. He would not give a direct answer.

I understand that Mr. Pai is a Republican. That is not the problem. I understand Republicans will be appointed in a Republican administration. I am the former Democratic Party chairman of the State of Hawaii, so I understand party loyalty. I respect party loyalty.

We have a President and a White House that are pushing to blur the legal, moral, and ethical boundaries in our Nation's Capital. This is not the time to get cute when we ask a question about the rule of law. This is not the time to finesse an answer. The only acceptable answer is this: I will not let anyone interfere with my work, whether it is the President or anyone else, and the media is not the enemy of the state. Mr. Pai did not take that oppor-

tunity. This was one of a few opportunities Mr. Pai had to be unequivocal. The senior Senator from New Mexico, if I remember correctly, and other members of the panel, sort of gave him a second and third bite at the apple so that he could get it right. It was an easy one to get right.

I understand it is politically complicated, but sometimes you have to set aside the politics and just say what is right and do what is right. My instinct is that he will not use the FCC to do anything that crosses any ethical boundaries that I am worried about, but the fact that he will not say so leaves an opening that should not be there.

The President has tweeted about media companies that give him bad coverage. He consistently refers to the media as "fake news" media and "garbage" media and makes unsubstantiated claims about various networks and newspapers and threatens to come after them. So it is not out of the realm of possibility that this could go beyond some partisan talking point from the Democrats in the Commerce, Science, and Transportation Committee and into a real crisis.

I just want to hear from Mr. Pai. He will be confirmed on Monday, but I want to hear from Mr. Pai that he does not believe the media is the enemy of the state and he will not allow any interference from the White House.

I would like to end by bringing this back to the American people. This vote is our chance to stand up for them. There will not be a vote on net neutrality on the floor in the next weeks or months, but they deserve to keep their faith in local broadcasting, they deserve a free and open internet, and they deserve to have adequate access to the internet no matter where they live. That is why I have to vote no on this nominee.

I admire Chairman Pai. I like him as a person, but he is the wrong leader for the FCC. I urge my colleagues to join me and vote no on his nomination.

I yield the floor.

THE PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from New Hampshire.

Ms. HASSAN. Mr. President, I, too, rise today to oppose the renomination of Ajit Pai to serve as Chairman of the Federal Communications Commission. I will start my remarks by acknowledging my friend, the Senator from Hawaii, and echoing his sentiments about the respect I have for Chairman Pai's ability, his skill, his intelligence, his dedication, and commitment, but I, too, as a member of the Commerce Committee, have sat through testimony from Mr. Pai and watched a number of things unfold with regard to policy that is critically important to people of New Hampshire and our country. I find that I, too, am in a position of being unable to support this nomination.

The FCC plays a critical role in overseeing our communications networks, protecting consumers, and ensuring

that our Nation's businesses can compete on a level playing field. Unfortunately, throughout his tenure at the FCC, and particularly during his time as Chairman, Mr. Pai has not demonstrated a commitment to those goals. To start, I have real concerns with the Chairman's actions to undermine net neutrality and the impact that would have on people in New Hampshire and throughout our country.

A free and open internet is essential to consumers, essential to entrepreneurs and innovative small businesses that are the foundation of our economic success. Net neutrality is the concept that internet service providers should provide equal access to applications and content online, and they should not be able to discriminate against content and content providers by making certain web pages, applications, or videos load faster or slower than others. Put simply, net neutrality ensures that even the smallest voices and businesses can be heard and can thrive. People and businesses in New Hampshire know this. Granite Staters have called and written to my office in support of net neutrality, and the FCC has received a recordbreaking number of public comments, reaching tens of millions, from people looking to make their voices heard on this topic.

Chairman Pai is not addressing the concerns of Americans who are speaking out. Instead, he is listening to big cable companies and internet service providers and taking direct aim at net neutrality protections. That is unacceptable. Protecting net neutrality is essential, but with Chairman Pai at the FCC, these critical rules are in danger.

I also oppose this nomination because Chairman Pai is putting rural broadband advancements at stake. Recently, Chairman Pai and the FCC released a notice of inquiry that raises questions about its goals, suggesting it will consider mobile broadband as an adequate replacement for fixed broadband, which would allow speeds that are two-thirds slower. For many parts of New Hampshire, mobile is not dependable enough or fast enough to meet our economy's needs, promote innovation, and connect young students with their homework. We must address the challenges that rural communities face in getting access to broadband. But by focusing instead on mobile broadband, the Chairman would have us leave rural America without a reliable connection.

Finally, I have concerns about Chairman Pai's ability to adequately evaluate the pending Sinclair-Tribune merger that sits before the FCC. For decades, our Nation has maintained a policy that limits the number of broadcast stations that one company can own nationwide. This policy has protected Americans by allowing them to receive robust and fair news content about their communities and has provided a diversity of voices in the broadcast news media marketplace.

This merger would result in Sinclair's ability to reach over 70 percent of Americans across our country, far exceeding the Commission's ownership caps and threatening the diversity in broadcast news that Americans deserve and expect.

Since Chairman Pai took the lead of the FCC, the Commission has worked to loosen regulations regarding media ownership, and, in turn, Sinclair benefited. As this proposed merger is still under consideration, we need someone at the helm of the FCC who will thoroughly vet the implications and ensure that it is in the public interest. There is too much at stake with this merger, and Chairman Pai's actions raise doubts that he can evaluate it impartially.

We need an FCC that is focused on putting consumers first and ensuring that all Americans have the opportunity to thrive in the 21st century economy. There are simply too many concerns about Chairman Pai's record, his ability to express impartiality on key decisions, and his goals for Federal Communications Commission priorities. I will vote against Chairman Pai's renomination, and I urge my colleagues to do the same.

Thank you.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. WYDEN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

TAX REFORM

Mr. WYDEN. Mr. President, I am going to take some time this afternoon to respond to the remarks of the President's top economic adviser, Mr. Gary Cohn, with respect to this administration's approach to taxes.

Let me be clear right at the outset. The President and his parade of millionaires are executing a middle-class con job. I am going to be very specific in saying why I reached that judgment with respect to what they are saying about taxes.

The President said: "I don't benefit. Very, very strongly I think there's very little benefit for people of wealth." Those are the President's exact words. "It's not good for me, believe me," the President said in his speech unveiling the tax reform blueprint on Wednesday.

Unless the President paid zero tax, the President is going to benefit enormously from his tax plan. His family would save billions if the estate tax is eliminated, as he has proposed. His more than 500 passthroughs will be able to take advantage of the new Grand Canyon-sized passthrough loophole that his plan proposes. Based on his 2005 tax return—that is the only one available—the President would save millions each year if the alternative minimum tax is eliminated.

Today, the President's top adviser, Gary Cohn, said: "We've also said that wealthy Americans are not getting a tax cut." They expect you to believe them and not your lying eyes.

I want to take a few minutes and describe exactly what the well-to-do are getting in this bill.

The plan outlined by the Trump administration would cost upwards of \$5 trillion, and it is overwhelmingly skewed toward the wealthy and the biggest corporations. It lowers the corporate rate from 35 to 20, and much of that goes to wealthy shareholders.

The new passthrough, which would give this big gift to high-flyers, hedge funds, basically would let them start calling ordinary income business income, so it could be taxed at a much lower rate, and they would in the process harm Social Security and Medicare because they aren't paying those payroll taxes.

I mentioned the estate tax. This is for just a few thousand people. The exemption for a couple is already \$11 million. This break would cost the American people between \$250 to \$270 billion. That is an awful lot of money to parcel out to a few thousand families.

They would lower the individual top rate from 39.6 to 35 percent. Let's make no mistake about it—the President of the United States and his top economic adviser have said they are not going to give tax cuts to the wealthy. That is not what they said yesterday. They said that the top rate was going to go down from 39.6 to 35 percent. And to add insult to injury, for those at the bottom of the economic system who pay 10 percent now, theirs would go up to 12 percent. So this is just making a mockery out of the President's pledge that this was going to be about working families and not about the wealthy. The fact is, with respect to the middle class, the Trump team is running a sleight-of-hand shell game. What they give with one hand, they just take away with the other.

They touted yesterday that they were going to be helping middle-class folks by doubling the standard deduction. First of all, that is walking back the bipartisan proposal we had here in the Senate—written by myself and my colleague Dan Coats, now a member of the Trump administration—that would triple the standard deduction.

What is particularly outrageous is that the Trump people aren't leveling with those middle-class families. Basically, they are saying: Oh, you are really going to do well. You are going to double the standard deduction. What they don't tell them is that they are going to eliminate the personal exemption that large middle-class families rely on. In effect, those large middle-class families—I think a lot of working-class families who may have supported the President—are going to see a tax increase under the President's tax outline that we heard about yesterday, even with this larger standard deduction.

The President's team also took a big pass on the opportunity to expand the child tax credit to make sure more working families would benefit from it. There are no specifics about the child tax credit in this plan.

The Treasury Secretary went on FOX News and said that the tax plan is going to cut the deficit by a trillion dollars. Mr. Mnuchin is doubling down on the failed experiment—the idea that the tax cuts, in effect, pay for themselves through economic growth. History shows that just is not true.

The tax cuts don't pay for themselves. The 2001 and 2003 Bush tax cuts were billed as tax relief for the middle class to spark economic growth. Instead, the benefits skewed to those at the very top, and they added trillions of dollars to America's debt. Middle-class wages fell. Unemployment increased. This is a pattern that working families, middle-class families, cannot afford to have repeated.

Now the Secretary of Treasury's claim is: Well, the Trump tax cuts will not just pay for themselves; they are going to bring in an additional \$1 trillion in revenue atop their own cost. William Peter Wyden, age 9, my son, would say: That is just a bunch of whoppers. It couldn't be further from the truth.

As even Republican-appointed Budget Office Director Keith Hall has said and made clear, the tax cuts do not pay for themselves: "No, the evidence is that tax cuts do not pay for themselves." Those are the words of the Budget Director appointed by the Republicans.

That Budget Director, Mr. Keith Hall, went on to say that the models they are doing—the macroeconomic effects, the fancy kind of economic lingo for the big picture in the long term—show it.

The other comment that was noteworthy from Mr. Gary Cohn is that the President remains committed to ending the carried interest deduction. Despite his campaign promise that won him bouquets from political commentators and typical middle-class voters, once again, the President's plan doesn't close the carried interest loophole. This is the second big occasion on which the President has failed to follow through on his campaign promise.

A few months ago, in the spring, they had a one-page outline. They said that was where they were going on taxes. They said that one-page outline was shorter than a typical Fred Meyer receipt. Fred Meyer is kind of an iconic store in our State. They had one page then and didn't do anything about following through on the President's promise to get rid of the carried interest loophole.

Yesterday—again, we didn't get a bill, but at least when you kind of eliminate all the white space, they put out close to five pages. Once again, they didn't close the carried interest loophole.

In fact, the plan gives such massive tax cuts to those at the top, investment managers will not be the only

people who can get away with paying less than their fair share. Many of the megawealthy are going to be able to do so. It is all going to be legal under the President's plan.

What is the one question on which the Trump team doesn't bend the truth? Whether their plan will protect the middle class from a tax hike. On ABC, the Trump adviser, Mr. Cohn, said that he couldn't guarantee taxes will not go up for middle-class folks. On ABC, the Treasury Secretary said that he couldn't guarantee middle-class folks would not pay more under the tax plan.

What is really striking about this, and it is quite a contrast, is that what people at the very top are going to get is spelled out in detail—in detail. They are going to see the abolition of the estate tax, an incredible windfall to a few thousand families.

Middle-class folks—can't guarantee you will not pay more. Mr. Cohn said: We are aiming to help the middle class. But then he was asked: Would you commit to it? His answer: Well, I don't know. There might be somebody somewhere.

Then there are State and local taxes. He just wouldn't stand behind the middle class the way that this administration stands foursquare behind those at the top. It is why I have said that the President and his parade of millionaires are executing a middle-class con job, and we sure saw it today.

The President's ultrawealthy, out-of-touch advisers clearly fail to understand that the time is now to deliver tax relief to middle-class folks who need it most. It is time to go back to the drawing board and come up with a plan that doesn't threaten middle-class Americans, particularly those with larger families, and doesn't hit them with a tax increase they can't afford.

I want to close by way of saying that on our side, we have repeatedly said we share the view that the tax system is a dysfunctional, broken-down mess filled with loopholes. Then you have the inversion virus. Often my wife says: Why don't you stop there? Any more is going to frighten the children.

We share the view that the tax system is broken. I have been very proud over the years to join two senior Republicans, close allies—the majority leader, MITCH MCCONNELL—in a tax reform proposal that is bipartisan that really puts the focus on the middle class and on red, white, and blue jobs.

Our proposal—the outline laid out by Democrats—was that there had to be fiscal responsibility, it had to focus on the middle class, and the tax relief couldn't go to the 1 percent. The bill I wrote that had Republican support, the outline led by the distinguished Democratic leader, Senator SCHUMER, doesn't even go as far as Ronald Reagan and the Democrats went in 1986.

President Reagan, whom no one would call a flaming liberal, entered into an agreement with Democrats in

1986 that said there would be equal treatment of income earned by a cop or a nurse with that earned by someone from a hedge fund or an investment shop.

In effect, Ronald Reagan said that a dollar is a dollar is a dollar. Everything ought to be treated fairly. That was important then, and it is even more important now because, in reality, there are two tax systems in America. There is one for the cop and the nurse. They have their taxes taken out every paycheck. That taxation is compulsory—no Cayman Island deal for them.

Then there is another tax system for the kind of people who benefit from what the President outlined yesterday. Those are the high-fliers. They get to pay what they want when they want to. I think it is very unfortunate that what the President has described is another gift to that group I just described, who pay what they want when they want to. To quote the President, it is really sad to hear that this administration and the President are pretending that they are doing something else and putting the focus on the middle class when what they really are doing is advancing the cause of the parade of millionaires, a number of whom are part of this administration.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. BLUNT). Without objection, it is so ordered.

EXECUTIVE CALENDAR

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate proceed to the en bloc consideration of the following nominations: Executive Calendar Nos. 328, 334, 335, and 336.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

The clerk will report the nominations en bloc.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read the nominations of John R. Bass, of New York, a Career Member of the Senior Foreign Service, Class of Minister-Counselor, to be Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the United States of America to the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan; Jon M. Huntsman, Jr., of Utah, to be Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the United States of America to the Russian Federation; Justin Hicks Siberell, of Maryland, a Career Member of the Senior Foreign Service, Class of Minister-Counselor, to be Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the United States of America to the Kingdom of Bahrain; and A. Wess Mitchell, of Virginia, to be

an Assistant Secretary of State (European and Eurasian Affairs).

Thereupon, the Senate proceeded to consider the nominations en bloc.

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate vote on the nominations en bloc with no intervening action or debate; that if confirmed, the motions to reconsider be considered made and laid upon the table en bloc; that the President be immediately notified of the Senate's action; that no further motions be in order; and that any statements relating to the nominations be printed in the RECORD.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

The question is, Will the Senate advise and consent to the Bass, Huntsman, Siberell, and Mitchell nominations en bloc?

The nominations were confirmed en bloc.

EXECUTIVE CALENDAR

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate proceed to the en bloc consideration of the following nominations: Executive Calendar Nos. 316, 317, 318, and 319.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

The clerk will report the nominations en bloc.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read the nominations of Robert J. Higdon, Jr., of North Carolina, to be United States Attorney for the Eastern District of North Carolina for the term of four years; J. Cody Hiland, of Arkansas, to be United States Attorney for the Eastern District of Arkansas for the term of four years; Joshua J. Minkler, of Indiana, to be United States Attorney for the Southern District of Indiana for the term of four years; and Byung J. Pak, of Georgia, to be United States Attorney for the Northern District of Georgia for the term of four years.

Thereupon, the Senate proceeded to consider the nominations en bloc.

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate vote on the nominations en bloc with no intervening action or debate; that if confirmed, the motions to reconsider be considered made and laid upon the table en bloc; that the President be immediately notified of the Senate's action; that no further motions be in order; and that any statements relating to the nominations be printed in the RECORD.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

The question is, Will the Senate advise and consent to the Higdon, Hiland, Minkler, and Pak nominations en bloc?

The nominations were confirmed en bloc.