

diesel, gasoline—the necessities of life. There is a humanitarian crisis in Puerto Rico that requires an immediate and unconditional response from Congress—not from just the Senate but from the House and from the President.

One area where the President had made an announcement today concerns the potential matching amounts of money that Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands may have to provide. There should be no match. There should be no requirement that Puerto Rico or the U.S. Virgin Islands provide a share of the money needed for rebuilding and recovery, and the President should waive every bit of the required matching share. Every dime, every nickel should be waived.

That leads me to talk about the second storm that has hit Puerto Rico. It is less visible and less recent. It is the result of a continually building set of headwinds, a financial storm that had built over many years and has now reduced Puerto Rico to a state of near insolvency, virtual bankruptcy—\$74 billion in debt that would have been a severe storm for the people of Puerto Rico—not of their making—even without the hurricane that directly hit the island.

We have an obligation as immediate and dire with respect to rebuilding and recovering from that second storm as we do for the first. That is the reason I have been involved over a period of many months in seeking to construct solutions, beginning with the PROMESA Act. And I intend—and I commit that I will continue seeking that kind of solution, not just solutions to the buildings that have been collapsed but to an economy that will collapse if we do not act. That is an important obligation that we share to fellow Americans, because this storm is not due to their neglect or profligacy; it is due to the tax laws and healthcare laws that unfortunately failed to treat them fairly.

Delay in meeting the astronomic costs of Hurricane Maria would be unacceptable and unconscionable. We must act promptly. I am hopeful that it will be this week. I am talking to our leader, Senator SCHUMER, who has provided such strong vision and courage in this area. He has been a champion of Puerto Rico, and I hope he will help us craft a solution that is immediate, vigorous, and prompt.

The administration and Congress must ensure as well that the Federal Government plays a robust and responsible role in funding and financing these recovery efforts so that no additional damage is done to Puerto Rico's already fragile economy. It is time to forgo the miasma and bureaucratic rigmarole of Federal redtape and financing constraints, while flooding is still an acute risk to life and health and recovery efforts are just beginning.

The Puerto Rican Government must be granted direct and instant tools to bring electricity back to the people, to feed the hungry, to provide drinking

water and shelter to lives that have been upended by this unforgiving storm. All arms of the Federal Government should be brought to bear to help our fellow citizens in Puerto Rico.

This morning, I asked the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Joseph Dunford, whether he would be ready, willing, and able to help and provide additional assistance on behalf of the Department of Defense and the military that he commands, and his unequivocal response was yes. I commend and thank him for that willingness to help our fellow Americans. And he affirmed they are our fellow Americans, they serve in our military, and they give back to communities in this country.

I am proud to represent 300,000 fellow Americans who have come from Puerto Rico to Connecticut, and they, in turn, reflect families there. I have spoken to friends in Puerto Rico who described to me the dire images outside their window—similar to the images we have seen on national television.

Puerto Rico's debt troubles are no secret to anybody here today. We have discussed them, debated them, and failed to provide adequate assistance to meet them. We must work on two tracks—the immediate recovery effort in the face of this truly destructive hurricane but also the financial peril that continues to put Puerto Rico's economy at risk, jobs in jeopardy, and the island's precarious financial position as much at risk as its water and roads are.

Puerto Rico's infrastructure, energy, water, schools, hospitals, transportation, and other vital facilities necessary for a functioning economy must be rebuilt and made whole. That is our obligation. And the same is true of the Virgin Islands, where fellow Americans are equally at risk, their safety in jeopardy, and their economy potentially struggling.

We owe it to our fellow Americans and friends and families—there are people in Connecticut who have friends and family there—and all of us who share a love for these islands that are populated by patriotic Americans dedicated to our country.

Thank you.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The majority leader.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

EXECUTIVE CALENDAR

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, I move to proceed to executive session to consider Calendar No. 312, Ralph Erickson.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The question is on agreeing to the motion. The motion was agreed to.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will report the nomination.

The bill clerk read the nomination of Ralph R. Erickson, of North Dakota, to

be United States Circuit Judge for the Eighth Circuit.

CLOTURE MOTION

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, I send a cloture motion to the desk.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The cloture motion having been presented under rule XXII, the Chair directs the clerk to read the motion.

The bill 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 Ralph R. Erickson, of North Dakota, to be United States Circuit Judge for the Eighth Circuit.

Mitch McConnell, Orrin G. Hatch, James Lankford, Jerry Moran, Johnny Isakson, John Thune, Thom Tillis, Shelley Moore Capito, Mike Crapo, James E. Risch, Mike Rounds, John Barrasso, John Cornyn, Chuck Grassley, John Boozman, John Hoeven, Rob Portman.

LEGISLATIVE SESSION

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, I move to proceed to legislative session.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The question is on agreeing to the motion. The motion was agreed to.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

EXECUTIVE CALENDAR

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, I move to proceed to executive session to consider Calendar No. 251, Ajit Pai.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The question is on agreeing to the motion. The motion was agreed to.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will report the nomination.

The bill clerk read the nomination of Ajit Varadaraj Pai, of Kansas, to be a Member of the Federal Communications Commission for a term of five years from July 1, 2016.

CLOTURE MOTION

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, I send a cloture motion to the desk.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The cloture motion having been presented under rule XXII, the Chair directs the clerk to read the motion.

The bill 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.

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the mandatory quorum calls for the cloture motions be waived.

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

LEGISLATIVE SESSION

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate resume legislative session.

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

NATIONAL DEFENSE AUTHORIZATION ACT FOR FISCAL YEAR 2018—MOTION TO PROCEED—Continued

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. JOHNSON). The Senator from New Jersey.

PUERTO RICO AND U.S. VIRGIN ISLANDS RECOVERY EFFORT

Mr. BOOKER. Mr. President, I appreciate the words from all the colleagues I have seen. It is great to see bipartisan sentiments about dealing with the most powerful hurricanes in recorded history. These hurricanes have left thousands of families homeless, destroying infrastructure, and leaving most people without power for the foreseeable future. There are thousands of individual stories of loss of life, of loss of possessions, of everything people own, devastated by this storm.

What is important to me now is that we turn these words into action. I am grateful for the leadership we are seeing from the State of Texas and the State of Florida, but I want to focus in on what is happening in Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands. We know, right now, close to 31.5 million American citizens on these islands are on the brink of a humanitarian catastrophe, including the 3.4 million people who live in Puerto Rico and over 100,000 Americans on the U.S. Virgin Islands. The American citizens living in Puerto Rico are part of a population that is bigger than the States of Wyoming, Vermont, North Dakota, and Alaska combined, but they don't have eight Senators representing them in this body—working for them, fighting for them.

When Superstorm Sandy hit New Jersey, I know the constant work Senator MENENDEZ, I, and my predecessor Senator Frank Lautenberg put into working on making sure our communities could recover. We don't have direct Senators representing this incredible population of Americans. They don't have folks here every single day who are pressing for the interests of these Americans, for their safety, their security, their lives. We have to—the 100 of us—step up to make sure that we are focusing on the interests of our fellow Americans after what has been one of the worst storms in recorded history.

The Americans in Puerto Rico pay taxes. They love this country. They serve in the military. In fact, they serve in the military at a rate almost twice as high as the general U.S. population. These are patriots. They are our

brothers and our sisters. These Americans deserve action from this body and from the President of the United States.

Puerto Rico's Governor has spoken directly to this crisis, noting that just 40 percent of the residents of Puerto Rico have access to drinking water—meaning that 2 million American citizens right now in Puerto Rico do not have access to clean drinking water. This is a serious crisis.

More than this, we know the vast majority of Puerto Rican residents still don't have electricity. They are struggling to access food. They do not have basic means of communications on the island, even to family here. They can't access bank accounts. Their sanitation systems have come to a complete standstill. Access to basic medications—often urgently needed medication and healthcare—is under threat.

It is estimated that it is going to take months before power comes back, and recovery and rebuilding will take years for the islands. The next few weeks of recovery are critically important in the effort to save lives.

I saw in Superstorm Sandy how it wasn't just the hurricane itself that took lives; in fact, in my city, it was in the hours and days after that people lost lives. We know that right now in Puerto Rico, every minute, every hour, every day we wait to get critical aid—necessary aid—our failure to act could mean the difference between life and death or between grave suffering and relieving that suffering for hundreds of thousands of people in Puerto Rico, as well as the U.S. Virgin Islands.

We cannot afford to wait any longer to better mobilize support and resources and help our fellow Americans in Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands right now. I hope that over time we are able to develop larger and more comprehensive aid packages, such as those being discussed for survivors of the hurricanes in Florida and Texas. The urgency we have in Puerto Rico right now, the urgency we have to provide vital security, energy, food, and health needs—we must answer that urgency with action.

Puerto Rico needs U.S. military, disaster, and humanitarian assistance to maintain order and provide security, water, food, and fuel. Puerto Rico needs additional first responders, and they need generators, emergency vehicles, and fuel. Also, Puerto Rico needs to see that its government—the U.S. Government—will respond the way we have for other disasters.

There cannot be a double standard when it comes to Americans. We are one country. We are one Nation. Whether it was Hurricane Sandy in New Jersey and New York or Hurricanes Harvey and Irma that ravaged Texas and Florida, when our Nation sees a natural disaster destroy the homes of thousands, take lives, knock down power—when a challenge like that comes to the United States of

America, we must be there for our citizens. Yet I have read so many heart-breaking stories. This shows the lack of urgency, the lack of being present, the lack of being there when we are needed.

The Washington Post reported that when journalists were looking to go and provide coverage—somehow journalists are making it there to report on the extent of the damage—they were in a remote area of Puerto Rico when local residents saw them. Their first response was simply to ask: Are you FEMA? Are you our government? Are you coming to address the crisis?

Right now Americans are suffering. Right now Americans are facing devastation and potentially death in these hours and these days.

I worry about this body now heading toward Thursday or Friday. How can we in good conscience go back to our homes this weekend, knowing that hundreds of thousands of American citizens in Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands may be homeless, may not have shelter, may not have food, and may not have water? We cannot allow our fellow Americans to fall deeper into this crisis.

Nosotros somos gente de esperanza; somos gente de fe. Pero nuestra historia siempre ha sido una que conecta oraciones y palabras con acciones. Necesitamos actuar ahora.

We are a people of hope; we are a people of faith. But our history has always been one of matching prayers and words with actions. We must act now.

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.

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

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

HEALTHCARE

Ms. STABENOW. Mr. President, first of all, I rise with a sigh of relief that the decision has been made not to go forward with a vote on a very divisive healthcare bill.

More importantly today, I rise to say this is really an opportunity for us to work together to get something done—something very positive—as it relates to healthcare costs and healthcare coverage for the people whom we all represent in our States and the people across the country. I am hopeful we will see action soon, and I am hopeful it will be this week when we can come together around very good work that is being done in the Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions Committee with our two great leaders—Senator ALEXANDER and Senator MURRAY.

They have been holding a number of committee meetings and forums, and I am very pleased to have participated in those. We have had great bipartisan participation in focusing on how to stabilize the current insurance marketplace. We know that has to be step one