

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.