The Senate met at 10:01 a.m. and was called to order by the Honorable Tom Cotton, a Senator from the State of Arkansas.

PRAYER
The Chaplain, Dr. Barry C. Black, offered the following prayer:

Let us pray.
Immortal and Invisible God, You continue to be our shelter in the time of storms. Thank You for being our Nation's protection.

Give our Senators the wisdom to place their confidence in You, instead of in national power and prestige. Lord, inspire our lawmakers with Your presence. Dispel all fear. May they remember that in the most turbulent and unpredictable times, You are still in charge of our Nation and world.

Give each of our citizens the ability to know and do Your will. Lord, be in our midst so that we will experience peace even in the midst of a storm.

We pray in Your great Name. Amen.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE
The Presiding Officer led the Pledge of Allegiance, as follows:

I pledge allegiance to the Flag of the United States of America, and to the Republic for which it stands, one nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.

APPOINTMENT OF ACTING PRESIDENT PRO TEMPORE
The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will please read a communication to the Senate from the President pro tempore (Mr. Hatch).

The senior assistant legislative clerk read the following letter:

U.S. SENATE,
PRESIDENT PRO TEMPORE,
Washington, DC, September 27, 2017.

To the Senate:

Under the provisions of rule I, paragraph 3, of the Standing Rules of the Senate, I hereby appoint the Honorable Tom Cotton, a Senator from the State of Arkansas, to perform the duties of the Chair.

Orrin G. Hatch, President pro tempore.

Mr. Cotton thereupon assumed the Chair as Acting President pro tempore.

RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME
The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, the leadership time is reserved.

CONCLUSION OF MORNING BUSINESS
The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Morning business is closed.

NATIONAL DEFENSE AUTHORIZATION ACT FOR FISCAL YEAR 2018—MOTION TO PROCEED
The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, the Senate will resume consideration of the motion to proceed to S. 1519, which the clerk will report.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

Motion to proceed to Calendar No. 165, S. 1519, a bill to authorize appropriations for fiscal year 2018 for military activities of the Department of Defense, for military construction, and for defense activities of the Department of Energy, to prescribe military personnel strengths for such fiscal year, and for other purposes.

Mr. Cotton thereupon assumed the Chair as Acting President pro tempore.

A bill (H.R. 3354) making appropriations for the Department of the Interior, environment, and related agencies for the fiscal year ending September 30, 2018, and for other purposes.

Mr. McConnell, Mr. President, in order to place the bill on the calendar under the provisions of rule XIV, I object to further proceedings.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Objection having been heard, the bill will be placed on the calendar.

TAX REFORM
Mr. McConnell, Mr. President, later today, I look forward to joining members of the Senate Finance Committee, the House Ways and Means Committee, and other congressional leaders in unveiling a unified framework for fixing our Nation’s broken Tax Code. It is an idea that can bring much needed relief to middle-class families and small businesses and help keep more jobs right here in America. It is the result of a lot of hard work and input from Members, committees, staffs, and the administration, to name a few, and I want to thank them again for their continued diligence on behalf of our country.

This framework is focused on supporting American jobs, while making taxes fairer, and on growing families’ paychecks. It is a refreshing change from our current outdated Tax Code, which for too long hasn’t worked for many Americans.

The current code forces individuals, families, and small businesses to navigate a web of schedules, deductions, and penalties. Rates are too high. Incentives often make little to no sense. Some actually encourage companies to ship American jobs overseas. Moreover, for 8 years under the Obama administration, our economy grew at a sluggish rate—never living up to its real potential. Too many Americans struggled to get ahead, many living paycheck to paycheck. It is time for a significant change in favor of families and jobs.

• This “bullet” symbol identifies statements or insertions which are not spoken by a Member of the Senate on the floor.

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This is our once-in-a-generation opportunity to fundamentally rethink our Tax Code. We can unleash the economy—promoting growth, attracting jobs, and improving American competitiveness in the global market. Instead of sending jobs overseas, we can modernize our Tax Code to help bring strong investment and good-paying jobs home and keep them here. Through this framework, we can lower taxes for individuals and families, so hard-working Americans are able to keep more of their hard-earned money.

Later this afternoon, President Trump will bring our shared vision of tax reform to the people of Indiana and to Americans more broadly. He will explain his support for putting Americans across the country on a more level playing field, because when they are, they can win.

I thank the President and his team for their efforts to develop the framework. Together, we can continue that work and grow and growth to the people of our States, such as the workers, small businesses, and families of Kentucky and promote economic growth in America.

Using the framework we will release today as a roadmap, the Senate Finance Committee, under Chairman HATCH’s leadership, will continue to hold a series of hearings to discuss how to make taxes lower, simpler, and fairer for middle-class families and for small businesses. Like its counterpart in the House, the Ways and Means Committee, the Senate Finance Committee will continue working to provide much needed relief to encourage jobs and investments to come back to the United States. The work of these committees will help build a stronger country.

Many of our Democratic colleagues have voiced support for overhauling our Tax Code. Throughout this process, I hope they will choose to work with us in a serious way.

A fundamental overhaul of our Tax Code is a daunting task. We have a lot of work ahead, but America deserves it—like the hard-working men and women of the middle class saving for retirement and the small businesses trying to expand and grow and the families hoping to send their kids to a good college. These Americans deserve real tax reform. I urge all of my colleagues to join me in working from this framework to deliver for them.

Here is the point: It is time to take more money out of Washington’s pockets and put more of it in the pockets of Americans.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Without objection, it is so ordered.

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

Mr. SCHUMER. Good morning, Mr. President. First, I would like to talk about this framework.

Today, President Trump and Republican leaders will announce several proposals as part of their tax plan. According to recent reports, that plan will include proposals to repeal the estate tax, lower the rates on pass-through entities, lower the top rate, and actually raise the bottom tax rate. Each of these proposals would result in a massive windfall for the wealthiest Americans and provide almost no relief to middle-class taxpayers who need it most.

It seems that President Trump and Republicans have designed their plan to be cheery in the country clubs and the corporate boardrooms. How does repealing the estate tax help middle-class people?

Only 5,200 of the wealthiest families in America, couples whose estates are worth $11 million, pay the estate tax. Are there any middle-class families that will benefit from this? Is that the President’s definition of the middle class?

The estate tax is skewed to the very wealthiest among us, and they are going to repeal it. This is not going to fly with the American people, let me tell you.

Our Republican colleagues tried to do something the public disliked on healthcare—taking away benefits, reducing healthcare. Now they are trying to do the same thing on taxes, helping the very wealthiest. They are going to be in for a rude awakening because the American people are going to rise up against this. Over 70 percent of Americans are against tax breaks for wealthy Americans and wealthy corporations.

Lowering the rate on pass-through entities would create a huge loophole, allowing very wealthy Americans, such as hedge fund managers, to funnel their income through a business entity in order to avoid the top bracket and pay a much lower rate. So the upper middle-class family making $100,000 or $200,000 or $300,000 can pay 39 percent, but these wealthy hedge fund managers, lawyers, and whoever, through a pass-through, can pay no corporate tax and then a 25 percent rate on the rest. Does that help middle-class Americans? Absolutely not. Does it help the wealthiest who have the largest estates, benefit the wealthiest Americans. I don’t begrudge them. Many of them have worked very hard to get their money. Some of them get it through an estate; so be it. But the wealthiest among us, middle-class taxpayers who need it, they need a tax break. They are doing great.

All of the statistics show that those at the highest end are making more money than ever before and the middle class is flat or sinking. Who needs the biggest tax break? The Washington Post-ABC poll showed yesterday that more than 70 percent of Americans say our tax system already tends to favor wealth more than the middle class. This bill makes it much worse.

One more thing to watch today is whether the President and his Republican colleagues provide any details about how they intend to pay for these massive cuts. Without these details, I suspect Republicans will turn the age-old trick of promising that economic growth will make up for the entire difference. Some of them call it dynamic scoring, but that name obscures what dynamic scoring really is.

President Trump calls the media outlets fake news. Dynamic scoring is fake math. It is just made-up, fake math to hide another deficit-busting tax cut to benefit the wealthiest Americans.

No less of an authority than James Baker, a conservative Republican and former Republican Treasury Secretary who led the last successful tax reform effort under President Reagan, said: “We must not let tax revenues decline and worsen the deficit. In other words, tax reform must be revenue neutral and should be judged on its own merits, with no dynamic scoring and no fake math.”

I am amazed that President Trump, whenever he talks, says he wants to help the middle class, and his plan at best throws crumbs at some middle-class people. Some will get a tax increase, especially those in high-tax States like New York, but his plan benefits the wealthy.

Has the President read this plan? Has he been involved in creating this plan or is it the people around him—many
of them from Wall Street—who came up with this plan, and the President doesn’t even know what it does?
I will tell you, if he goes to Indiana today and says that his plan helps the middle class rather than the wealthy, he keeps it backward. It helps the wealthy far more than it helps the middle class.

HEALTHCARE
Mr. President, yesterday the majority announced it would not be holding a vote this week on the latest healthcare legislation, Tom-Cassidy. Every American should breathe a deep sigh of relief.
The majority has vowed to revisit ACA repeal, maybe even with this legislation. But President Trump and our Republican colleagues should have learned from these failures that the American people do not want to cut healthcare. If they try to do it a third time, they will fail again for the simplest reason in politics: The public is against it and does not want it.

This administration, which campaigned it is for the people and populists, on healthcare is doing what people don’t want and on taxes is doing what people don’t want. What is going on?
I remind my Republican colleagues that continuing to threaten repeal is like hanging a giant sword of Damocles above our Nation’s healthcare system. It causes great uncertainty in the healthcare market, and it leads insurers to raise premiums on average.

Now, I understand that for political purposes Republicans don’t want to ever admit that ACA repeal is off the table. They promised it to the American people for 7 years but deluded them on what it really meant. The average American thought that, if you took ACA off the table, premiums would go down and coverage would go up. The bills the Republicans have proposed in a bipartisan manner have not changed why they do it. They promised it so often. But those promises have a real human consequence in the form of higher costs for everybody. The responsibility and the blame for the rate hikes, should they occur—they probably will—will fall squarely on the Republican shoulders. President Trump and the Republicans are in charge.

Saying, gee, something in the past caused it, when they failed to correct it, is unacceptable.

My Republican friends, you are no longer in the minority. You are running the show. It is your responsibility to help bring premiums down. We want to do that and, in fact, there are good bipartisan sprouts. Senators Alex- to do that and, in fact, there are good bipartisan agreement. Now, we hope our Republican colleagues will not just sit back, repeatedly threaten repeal, and watch as millions of Americans pay higher premiums. That will be wrong substantively, and, politically, it will fall right on their shoulders.
So I hope we can have the negotiations pick up between Senators MUR- and the right where they left off. Each of them said they were close to an agreement before Chairman ALEXANDER was pulled away by Republican leadership.

Insurers are about to set their rates for the next year, and whether we can come together or not could be the difference between a stable market and premiums that are hundreds of dollars more expensive. So for the sake of the American people, for the sake of turning over a new leaf on healthcare, let’s find the bipartisan way to shore up and improve our Nation’s healthcare.

PUERTO RICO AND U.S. VIRGIN ISLANDS RECOVERY EFFORT

Finally, Mr. President, on the crisis in Puerto Rico, the U.S. Virgin Islands, Hurricanes Irma and Maria have left the islands—home to well over 3 million American citizens—hanging on for dear life. You have seen the pictures, and they are devastating. Water, food, blankets, shelter, security, the basic needs of human survival are limited and running out in Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands. Diabetic patients who require insulin shots are unable to keep their lifesaving medicine refrigerated. Hospitals still lack power and running water. This was a catastrophe on an epic scale. It may have been one of the worst humanitarian crises within our borders. I yield the floor.

Mr. KING. Mr. President, first I want to join the Democratic leader in his comments about the devastation of the hurricanes. These are truly a malign visitation on our country over the last several weeks. Florida, Texas, the Virgin Islands, and Puerto Rico have really suffered and are suffering. I know that the administration is working hard on this, and I commend them for the efforts that they have made.

I think that now much of our attention is turning to Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands in order to mitigate what is really a humanitarian disaster. One difference between those islands and Florida and Texas is the fact that they are islands. It is harder to get there. It is harder to get aid there. I understand that just this morning the San Juan airport was opened for the first time, and it has opened in a limited way.

So this is clearly a responsibility that we have as Senators, as Members of Congress, and as Americans to reach out to our neighbors in a situation such as this. When a crisis hits, it often calls forth the best of America, and I believe that is happening right now.

OPIOID EPIDEMIC

Mr. President, I want to talk about a different kind of hurricane, a slow-motion hurricane. It is a slow-motion hurricane that is ravaging our entire country, not just the Southwest. It is sweeping through our small towns, our cities, our families, and our schools. It is taking lives on a scale that is unprecedented and almost unthinkable.

I am talking about the hurricane epidemic of opioid abuse and overdose deaths. Many of us this week are watching with rapt attention Ken Burns’ magnificent study of the Vietnam war. We are losing more people per year to overdose deaths than were lost in the entire Vietnam war. That is one way to think about the magnitude of this catastrophe that is striking our country. The problem is that it strikes
The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. SULLIVAN). The clerk will call the roll.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. SULLIVAN). The clock will now strike all in one place. So it is not so apparent. If we were losing a small city in America or 36,000 people once a year we would be turning ourselves inside out to solve the problem that was causing those deaths, and 63,000 people were killed last year through overdose deaths. It was almost 400 in my State of Maine. That is more than one a day. All of those are that are good meaning—one a day. Now, 63,000 is about 7 people an hour—24 hours a day, 365 days a year—who are succumbing to this plague. That is the right term for it. It is a medieval plague that is affecting people all over our country.

Lives are lost, families torn apart, and our communities compromised. It is a huge cost. I hesitate to talk about things like dollars when you are also talking about lives, but it is a cost in both. Not only are lives being lost and families being torn apart, but the estimates are that it costs our society something over $400 billion a year in everything from medical costs and criminal justice costs to lost economic and productivity in our society and our economy.

But I am here today because all hope is not lost. Contrary to what some people hear—and you hear sometimes that this is hopeless and that there isn't anything we can do about it—there is ample evidence that treatment can work. This is not a death sentence. Opioid abuse is terrible, and from talking to people who have suffered from it, it literally changes your brain, and it becomes almost impossible to escape. But it can be escaped. The reason we know that is that there is data from across the country, but the reason I know that is because of my friends in Maine—Andrew, Matt, and Chris.

You know where I am from, with whom I have interacted, and with whom I have sat down. Andrew is a guy who is at the University of Southern Maine. He was trapped in the throes of addiction. He went through treatment, and now he is in recovery. Indeed, there are 25 million people in this country who are in recovery, and they will tell you that they will always be in recovery because they can never shake this disease, whether it is alcohol or the really destructive one that we are focusing on right now, which is opioids.

Andrew has made a new life. He is at school. He is at the University of Southern Maine. He has helped form a student-centered community to help people who are in recovery or who are working on getting there. Matthew is a young man who, in 2009, again was trapped by this horrible scourge. Now he is hoping to go to medical school.

Matthew is a young man who, in 2009, again was trapped by this horrible scourge. Now he is hoping to go to medical school. He was convicted. But now he is a member of the Maine State Bar Association. He got himself through school, and he got himself through law school.

There was an important moment that I think all of us should think about this. I work with people who are in this situation. When we went to apply to law school, the people at the law school said: Well, we don’t know if we can take you because you have this record.

His question, which was brilliant and indicates to me that he is going to be a pretty good lawyer, was this: What was my sentence when I was convicted? The response was 3 years. He said: You are putting me in for life. If you don’t let me move forward with my life, you are making that a life sentence, not a 3-year sentence. He was accepted to law school. He graduated, and this year he passed and was accepted in the Maine State Bar Association. He is making a contribution to his community.

Treatment can work. It doesn’t always work the first time. Anybody that has been through this, whether it is alcohol or even quitting smoking or anything else, will tell you that it doesn’t necessarily work the first time. Sometimes it does, and sometimes it doesn’t. Sometimes it will take multiple trips through the recovery and treatment process, but it can work. We know it can work. I have 25 million people who said so to me that it can work and 3 that I know.

I am going to be introducing a resolution later today—I hope the Senate can take it up and pass it—designating next month as National Recovery Month, honoring and recognizing the people who are in recovery. So if it works, what is the problem? Why is this hurricane still sweeping our country? Why does 2017 look like it is going to be worse than 2016?

Well, the sad truth is that, out of all those millions of people who are addicted, who are stuck, who are trapped, only 1 in 10 has access to treatment—only 1 in 10. Now, what do we have to do to deal with this problem? Of course, it is like most other problems. There is no single answer. It involves law enforcement. It involves interdiction, and let me pause for a moment on interdiction. The Presiding Officer and I are both on the Armed Services Committee, and I have to do for our committee that we only have the Coast Guard and Navy resources to interdict one-fourth of the drug shipments that we know of coming up from South and Central America by sea. In other words, we have intelligence where we know of 100 boats, and we can only stop 25. There is no excuse for that. So, yes, law enforcement, at the source or along the way in our States, is an absolutely essential part of this process, but it is not the whole answer. We also have to work on prevention.

Frankly, I have been talking to groups around Maine and around the country on this. We are all still trying to figure out how to make prevention work. What will work? I haven’t yet heard a really strong answer to that question. I guess it varies from person to person, but prevention has to be part of it. Treatment can work, but if only in 10 people have treatment available to them or have agreement, that means 9 are sentenced to life and maybe to death.

Last year, a year and a half ago, we passed CARA, the Comprehensive Addiction Recovery Act. It is a great bill, and there are a lot of good things in it, but no money. That is like sending the fire department to the fire and saying: Fight that fire, but we are not going to give you any water. We know this costs money, and it is something we have to commit to. It has to be part of it.

Whatever we do around here about healthcare and about budgets, we have to realize we are losing our people, and these aren’t bad people. These aren’t people over there. I sat at a roundtable in Orrington, ME. Next to me was a deputy sheriff. He lost his daughter, These aren’t strangers. These are often middle-class people. These are people whose kids or sometimes parents—this is not age specific—are caught up in this scourge.

I guess I want to leave us today with two points. One is, treatment works. The second is, we need more of it. If we know something works, but only 1 in 10 people have access to it, shame on us. That means that we have a ways to go. That is when you have a good case. To me, the most tragic case—and I have talked to people in Maine about this—the saddest moment, the most tragic case is when someone who is in the throes of opioid abuse is ready to ask for help and they have to be put on a waiting list. That is tragic and inexcusable. It is hard to get to that point. It is hard to admit that you are trapped and that you are no longer in control of your life. Once you are willing to do that and say, “I need help,” there is a good chance that help is there. That is what we are talking about today.

So this is a different kind of hurricane, but it is a hurricane, nonetheless, that is destroying our families, destroying our communities, and wrecking the lives of our friends, but it is no act of God. We can't stop the winds of Maria or Irma, but we can mitigate the effects, ameliorate the effects, soften the effects. That is exactly what we need to do for those who are victims of the hurricane of opioids that is sweeping our country.

I hope and believe we will respond to this challenge as we have at other times in our history, and, indeed, as we are this week to the threats of the Caribbean. I want to respond also to the hurricane that is sweeping America that we can, indeed, ameliorate, mitigate, and soften.

Thank you, Mr. President. I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.
The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

NOMINATION OF AJIT PAI

Ms. CANTWELL. Mr. President, I rise to strongly oppose the nomination of Ajit Pai to serve a second term as Chairman of the FCC.

Since taking over the FCC leadership in January, Chairman Pai wasted no time moving the agency away from its key mission to promote the use and deployment of communications in the public interest. For example, he has been involved in dismantling the rules that preserve the diversity of content in media ownership, potentially negatively impacting forever the number and variety of voices in the media market.

In addition, his confirmation to this important position will also have a negative impact on one of the most important issues, I believe, of our time; that is, preserving net neutrality. A strong and open internet is key to an economy of the future—to promoting an environment for innovation and catalyzing the creative jobs that are going to come along with an open internet architecture.

Chairman Pai is poised to undo the bedrock principles that are already in place to protect an open internet. Despite the fact that defense in the face of evidence that these rules are important to an internet economy and millions of jobs, he is determined to try to rewrite them.

On Monday, the Senate will vote on whether to confirm Ajit Pai for another term as Chairman of the FCC. As I have said, I think his leadership has shown that on net neutrality, he believes the rules should be changed. As long as he continues to hold that position, I cannot support his nomination.

As the Chairman of the Federal Communications Commission, he has demonstrated disdain for the important public interest principles he is supposed to be upholding. He shows a disregard for the innovators in America who are striving to build the economy of the future. The public interest mission of the FCC is encoded in the agency's DNA. The law that created the FCC clearly states that the agency's mission is promoting access to communications networks for all people around the United States. This means the FCC has the responsibility to promote the expansion of communications networks and to ensure they have the incentive and ability to compete fairly with one another in providing broadband services. The mission does not include letting a big telecom company or cable company run over small businesses or consumers and saying to them: Unless you pay me more, I am not going to give you essential services. Imagine if that happened to the telephone industry decades ago, if you couldn't get access because someone had decided, 'I'm going to let the highest bidder rule the roost.'

The President's nomination of Pai and his desire to have him continue as Chair continues to show a desire to undermine the internet and the internet economy. As I have pointed out, Chairman Pai announced his intention, as Chairman, to go against the demands of American consumers and reverse the rules that are already on the books to protect consumers. Chairman Pai wants to create a fast lane for those big telecom and cable companies to erect toll lanes that would further burden the nature of the internet and innovation that its economy supports. He plans to go against more than 10 million American consumers and innovators who have told him to keep the internet open and free.

Recent studies have shown that the internet economy is now over 7 percent of U.S. GDP, it employs 7 million people and is worth a trillion dollars. Our forebears, wrong without question, have helped keep that economic growth. Our economy is in a massive technological transformation. It is in an information age, and in an information age, making sure you have an open and fast internet is key to continuing to grow business.

Every business plan of every startup relies on the ability of consumers to get equal access to content. Large, as a result of the innovations, the open internet has supported the creation of thousands of tech jobs in the United States. The internet economy is almost a trillion dollars, and at 7 percent of GDP, it is growing faster and stronger than many other sectors, including construction, mining, utilities, agriculture, education, and entertainment.

It is disturbing to me that Chairman Pai has made it clear he wants to rewrite the rules that protect those businesses and create an artificial fast and slow internet. "If you want to go slow, you better pay me more money." We can't afford to do that for all the internet applications and all the small businesses that are continuing to work on growing our economy. We need to make sure that instead of shedding jobs in the United States, as we did in the last economic downturn, that we are creating jobs and creating power for consumers.

We have seen what has been termed the "app economy," which consists of everybody who makes money as a job thanks to a mobile app that was also powered by the internet. Today, 1.7 million Americans have jobs because of that economy. Nearly 92,000 of them are in the State of Washington. Over the past 5 years, that app economy and those jobs have grown at an annual rate of 30 percent. The average growth rate for all other jobs is 1.6 percent. So, literally, Chairman Pai is trying to clog the arteries of one of the fastest growing economic opportunities in America.

By 2020, the app economy is estimated to grow to over $100 billion. This demonstrates that the internet economy is a dynamic, supercharged, job-creating engine, with economic growth that should not be artificially slowed down because some industries believe they have the right to do so.

If the facts, and making sure we protect an open internet, are why we should not support Chairman Pai. The slow lanes and the fast lanes are not like a highway where a consumer can take one route or plan another course. Here, you are creating barriers that are wedges between businesses and their consumers, between doctors and their patients, between industry solution providers and the customers they are trying to serve.

The growth of the internet platform for economic activity is something we do not want to see destroyed, and Chairman Pai's dismantling of that robust internet architecture and the support of those innovators is extremely troubling to me.

I think about all the internet applications that I have seen in my State, whether it is a business like McKinstry that provides building efficiencies to school districts all over our State and in Puget Sound. Let's pretend now that McKinstry, which is trying to tell North Shore School District that they are using too much power could reduce their costs by just setting simple things—but now, all of a sudden, because the net neutrality rules go away, McKinstry has to charge school district more if they want to get that information to them on time. A closed artery was an issue in the context of just some very everyday ways we experience the impact of an open internet. Like people going to get coffee. In my State, they will now preorder. They go online, and then they show up to get their coffee—all so they can avoid the long lines. But now, all of a sudden, if net neutrality goes away, is that going to mean another charge or, an extra toll, just to get consumers connected to the coffee shop so they can avoid a long line? Are cable companies and internet service providers going to say to the consumer: You have to pay more if you want a fast lane.

While Chairman Pai doesn't realize is that the internet is now a full-blown ecosystem with many attachments; that the internet is like the artery system that connects it all and connects it in so many ways beyond even our imagination. Yet he is proposing to close those arteries, to hold us ransom if only we will tell a cable company it is OK to charge the American consumer more.
We cannot afford to ruin the internet economy by doing this. We need to have an open internet architecture that allows everybody to access this information at the same time and the same rate so that we can continue to innovate free.

There are ways to grow the internet and grow internet investment in the delivery system. In fact, during the time period of the open internet rules, we have seen just that—a continued investment. So we do not now have to rewrite the rules. We do not now have to throw a roadblock, a hurdle, a clogging of the arteries at the small business and internet economy that is growing so rapidly with all its devices.

God forbid that one of our colleagues would be on the other side of town and get a delayed message about when a vote started just because we in the Senate hadn't bought a higher, faster speed lane, and maybe they would miss a vote. It is hard to say what slowing down means and what it artificially would do because it is so connected to everything we do today, and that is why we have to stop this from happening.

I would be happy to hear that Chairman Pai has decided to drop his insistence of change the rules of an open internet. If he did that, I might think differently about his nomination. But until then I will continue to fight for my State’s economy, which depends so greatly on net neutrality, and continue to fight for the millions of consumers around the United States who are trying to grow what are smarter, more intelligent, more cost-effective businesses.

Even the healthcare debate we just had is instructive on the issues of net neutrality—I believe in home healthcare. I believe we can implement it and drive down costs. But if you are telling a patient that they might not get the information back from their doctor because he can’t afford a fast internet connection that the cable companies are charging, then I guarantee my colleagues we are not going to reduce our healthcare costs.

So, please, I say to my colleagues, you will not have another chance at this. You will hear from your constituents about this issue, and you will not be able to take back this vote. Please make sure you understand that Chairman Pai is marching ahead on a very different anti-consumer road, and be able to take back this vote. Please guarantee my colleagues we are not going to reduce our healthcare costs.

I urge my colleagues to vote no on Chairman Pai’s nomination.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The majority whip.

TAX REFORM

Mr. CORNYN. Mr. President, today I would like to talk about a topic that most of us don’t want to discuss, and that is taxes, except today is different. This time, you don’t have to groan over spreadsheets and calculations or worry about how much of your hard-earned pay you are going to have to send to Uncle Sam. Today, leaders in the House and in the Senate will unveil their core principles for tax reform. The President will travel with our colleagues to announce his support for these core principles.

Taxes can be confounding and complicated and painful to deliberate, but for folks back home, what I believe deliberation in terms of paying our taxes is the more take-home pay, and that works for everybody. In other words, you actually reduce your living costs because Uncle Sam takes less of your paycheck, meaning you get to keep more of it and take that home and spend it on things that you would prefer to spend it on. So more take-home pay is our bottom line.

I look forward to working with the chairman of the Finance Committee, Majority Whip John Barrasso, and Speaker Ryan and Chairman Kevin Brady of the House Ways and Means Committee—another good Texan—on their ideas, which I know we were born from many long hours and tough conversations.

But this is going to be a national conversation, starting with the President kicking this off this afternoon in Indiana. He is going to invite the American people to express their views on what tax reform should look like.

For me, in addition to more take-home pay, I am looking for a tax code which is shorter, simpler, and which makes us more competitive in the global economy. But also, I want to be sure that we do it in a way that means you get to keep more of it and for folks back home, what I believe defines the economy in the world.

It is a great relief, believe me, to have a President who understands how taxes and the uncertainty they place on job creators stifles economic growth. The reason economic growth is so important is that when the economy grows, more jobs are created and for the jobs that exist, the people who have them will actually earn more money and be able to pursue their dreams.

Just as importantly, though, this President understands that the job creator is not the enemy. A former colleague of ours, Gordon Smith from Oregon, once told me that the problem with some of our Democratic friends is that they claim to love the worker, but they hate the job creator. To me, that sort of summarized it pretty well. I know he didn’t mean “hate” in the traditional sense, but he did mean Congress and especially our colleagues on the Democratic side—likes to implement additional burdens, such as higher taxes or more regulation, more obstacles in the way of our job creators, when we should be tearing down those walls, lowering taxes so that they can be successful, and in the process, we can all succeed. Well, this President understands that our economy, too, is crucial but extremely fragile, and he joins all of us here in the House who live every day, hard every day, and understand that people have to hire in order to stay, grow, and work harder only to see more and more regulation, and ultimately the government getting in our way, constantly throwing a wrench into their plans.

I also believe we should provide tax relief for small businesses because small businesses are the engine of our economy. It is not the Fortune 500 that creates the vast percentage of jobs in this country. It is small businesses, which often face an unyielding regulatory state. We should lower taxes for all American businesses so that they can compete with foreign ones.

As the so-called Big 6 committee has said, the goal of any new plan should be to throw a roadblock, a hurdle, a clog the internet. It means that all of us, based on our country’s original vision, should be free to follow our dreams without government getting in our way, constantly thinking our burdens heavy. We should be free to pursue happiness.

Average American citizens should not be numbed or stifled by mandatory participation in a system that depletes their energy and discourages them, and that is what our Tax Code does today. It exhausts people when it comes to fully complying with our arcane and convoluted and complex laws because they have to hire in order to do that. The people we have simply outsource that by hiring some lawyer or some accountant to prepare their taxes because it is so complex. We can do better than that. We can make it simpler and fairer and flatter.

Today, many of the obstacles that exist that prevent the American from pursuing their dreams and reaching their full potential, which ought to be what joins us all together. One of those is an outdated and highly convoluted tax system that actually penalizes hard work, stymies ingenuity, and enriches the lawyers and accountants that people have to hire in order to just comply with all of its convoluted complexity costs. Call this the terrible teardrop of taxes. It zaps our energy rather than unleashing it. It erodes our work ethic, because if you work harder and harder only to see more and more regulation, it is like living in a prison. What does that do to incentivize people to work harder? It erodes our work ethic, as we see less reason to labor for what ultimately gets taken from us.

The mission of the so-called Big 6 committee, which was put together a blueprint for reform, has been to protect American jobs and make the Tax Code simpler, fairer, and lower for average American families. In a sense, it is all about putting families first. Families build individuals, and families mold character. We have to give every opportunity to families who need to thrive. We have to keep the uninvited guest of government away from the front door, constantly worrying for more work, more time, and more attention, and constantly throwing a wrench into their plans.
be, first and foremost, to reduce tax rates as much as possible. Let’s make sure this “first cut is the deepest,” as the song goes, but also to place a priority on permanence, to create a system that encourages American companies to bring jobs back from abroad, along with the profits they will not bring back because they will be taxed twice, and to put more money back in the pockets of all Americans.

As Ronald Reagan said, there is one simple fact you have to keep in mind when it comes to taxes: “The problem is not that the people are taxed too little, the problem is that the Government spends too much.”

This is not just about sheer wealth we are after but about earned success—the ability of mothers, fathers, and families to work a long day and to keep more of their hard-earned paychecks to use as they please—to save it for their retirement, to spend it on their house, or even to dole out on their children. When families have more of the money they earn, they are more inclined to take advantage of or to create their own opportunities, including new businesses. Social mobility increases and so does room for charity. The United States is the most charitable and generous country in the world. People don’t just turn to government for help during times of need. We saw that in Hurricane Harvey and in Hurricane Irma and now in Hurricane Maria. Many, many Americans generously dip into their own resources to help provide for their fellow human beings in need during times of tragedy. It is our prosperity that comes from job creation—getting to keep more of what you earn and pay the government less—that makes that possible.

When Alexis de Tocqueville came to the United States, shortly after our country’s founding, in his book “Democracy in America,” he pointed out that one of the unique things about America—certainly much different than Europe—was the organizing and voluntary associations. These often are charitable organizations—whether they are churches or synagogues or mosques or just community organizations—that as part of their good work provide charitable benefits for our fellow man and woman. We ought to encourage that.

Of course, none of us is an island. It is not that lower tax rates translate to everyone looking out exclusively for No. 1. Oftentimes, that is the way our friends across the aisle will depict our priorities, as the Federal Treasury also will be looking out for the wealthiest Americans who are looking for those giveaways to the wealthiest Americans of this generation and many generations to come, and we can keep the promise of the Declaration of Independence that we are endowed by our Creator with certain unalienable rights, including life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.

Ultimately, that is what we are talking about when we talk about tax reform. We shouldn’t just be wearing green eyeshades, getting out our spreadsheets, and plugging the numbers. This is about keeping the promise of the Declaration of Independence that we are endowed by our Creator with an unalienable right to pursue happiness.

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. MEEKLEY. 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

Mr. MEEKLEY. Mr. President, our Constitution begins with three simple words: “We the People.” The Founders wrote that in supersized font to remind us that this is what our Nation is all about. It is not about the privileged. It is not the elite. It is not to make the wealthy wealthier. It is not to add more to the abundance of those who already have much. It is to establish government that reflects the will of the people or, as President Lincoln put it, “of the people, by the people, for the people.”

In this age where vast sums are spent on campaigns by a few billionaires to buy the votes of, by, and for the people with government of, by, and for the powerful, we have an enormous challenge to maintain the integrity of the mission of our Constitution and the responsibility of this Senate.

We probably haven’t seen a challenge to “we the people” in years like the equivalent of TrumpCare. Certainly, it is designed to plan for massive tax giveaways to the wealthiest Americans of hundreds of billions of dollars and to rip healthcare away from 20 to 30 million ordinary working families.

What a travesty that is of our responsibility under our Constitution. What an amazing misguided effort to do damage, rather than to assist and provide a foundation for families to thrive by providing:

A few years ago, a woman came up to me at a fundraiser for multiple sclerosis—a walk—and she said: Things are so different this year, Senator, than they were last year.

I asked her: How so?

She said: A year ago, if our loved one was diagnosed with MS and they had

it possible for us to spend more money on our priorities, like national defense, which right now is underfunded, or medical research or other priorities that the American people may have.

By delivering on these principles, we can restore prosperity for this generation and many generations to come, and we can keep the promise of the Declaration of Independence that we are endowed by our Creator with certain unalienable rights, including life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.
insurance, they were likely to have an annual cap or a lifetime cap and run out of coverage.

That was a terrible situation to be in because MS is a mysterious and expensive disease.

She said: If the individual didn’t have insurance, they now had a preexisting condition, and they wouldn’t able to get insurance.

She said: Now, we have the peace of mind that if our child or our loved one becomes ill, if our child or our loved one becomes ill, he or she will get the care they need.

Isn’t that the summary of what we should be seeking in our healthcare system—the peace of mind that if our child or our loved one becomes ill, our child or our loved one becomes ill, he or she will get the care they need? Shouldn’t that be what we are fighting for?

Instead, we had the opposite. We had the TrumpCare bill that was designed to rip away peace of mind, trample all over peace of mind so the wealthy could have more giveaways from the Federal Treasury.

We had that House bill, and it was estimated that 23 million people would lose healthcare over 10 years and that our hospitals and our clinics would have a lot less funding to be able to provide care to everyone. Yet it passed the House. Then President Trump got briefed on what was in the bill after he held a Town Hall meeting at the White House and celebrated its passage. He said: Oh, wait. This bill is mean and heartless.

Over here in the Senate, the Senate’s secret 13 went to work to try to produce a bill without holding any public hearings or having any discussions with stakeholders. They were secreted away in a room, and no one could find out where they were in order to be able to offer any insights. They did not hold any meetings. They had no back room, and they had no meetings here. The public was totally blocked out. The secret 13, amazingly, came up with an almost identical bill to the House bill. Oh, the estimate was instead, maybe, of there being 23 million people who would lose insurance, 22 million people would lose insurance. Fortunately, the secret 13 bill was defeated—but just barely—here in this Chamber.

Then came another version of this called the fake insurance bill. This fake insurance version said: Hey, let’s let the insurance companies put out policies that are really, really cheap but that do not actually cover anything. Won’t that make us feel good that everyone in America will be able to afford a policy that only costs $40 or $50 a month.

Of course, fake insurance is fake; that is, when you go to the emergency room, it does not cover the visit. When you get a blood test, it does not cover the blood test. When you get an xray or an MRI, it does not pay for it. Oh, don’t even begin to think about its covering hospitalization or any other normal medical service because it is fake insurance. The fake insurance bill failed by a few votes on the Senate floor.

Then we had repeal without replacement, and that failed. Then we had the skinny bill, and that failed by a single vote.

How is it possible that we came that close to passing a bill that is completely the opposite of the vision of our Constitution—to legislate for the foundation for people, not the American privileged and not the American powerful. Yet it came within a vote of passing.

This week, we have the block grant version—the block grant version that proceeds to destroy immediately the exchanges, the healthcare marketplaces. Of course, the great irony is, that was the Republican idea: Let’s create a marketplace within which people can compare individual policies, pick the ones best for their families, and get tax credits to be able to buy them. So the Republicans came out against their own plan.

In addition, it wiped out Medicaid expansion. In my home State of Oregon, the exchange is responsible for roughly 150,000 people who have access to healthcare, insurance, the marketplace, and 400,000 people gaining access through Medicaid expansion. There are a half a million Americans in just my State, my humble State of Oregon. Yet here was a bill that they do not care. We are going to wipe out healthcare for a half a million Oregonians and untold millions across the country—20 to 30 million across the country.

We owe a big thank-you to grassroots America. We owe a big thank-you to ordinary citizens who believe in the vision of this country. They proceeded to connect with Capitol Hill—to fill the streets and to flood the phones and to overflow our inboxes—saying: What are you doing about this? Please stop trying to destroy the peace of mind of Americans. They said: Make healthcare work better, not worse.

Is that really too much for us to ask?

As we ponder how to make healthcare work better, those in grassroots America have expressed a lot of ideas. They have said: We have a really complicated system that creates all kinds of obstacles for ordinary families, for working families.

For example, whether you have a job that provides you with insurance and your family with insurance but then the company changes the policy and only covers you. How are you going to get your children covered? Are you going to be able to get them through right away in the Children’s Health Insurance Program? How do you go about doing that?

Then your employer says: By the way, you now have to start paying us in order for us to provide you with healthcare.

You say: Wow. That is a huge chunk out of my check. Can I possibly afford that and still pay my rent? Am I going to have to choose between healthcare and homelessness? It is not a choice families should have to make.

Then, perhaps, people are working several part-time jobs, and their employers have no healthcare programs at all. They sign the Oregon Health Plan or the equivalent Medicaid plan across the country. They might like that, but it is complicated to apply, and they have to reapply periodically. What happens if their incomes go up just a little, and now they are over the line? As a result of being over the line, they now have to go back into the individual markets. How do you do that in the middle of the year when it is not an open enrollment period?

There is such complexity, such difficulty. That is why it is so appealing to think about the vision of a seamless, simple healthcare program that you have that will provide quality healthcare when you need it—portable and private—and have peace of mind of your being an American. That is a beautiful vision, and it is not out of reach. Every other developed country has found some version of that and made it a reality. We need to ponder as to how to make this a simple system down the road, but right now we have a more immediate task.

That immediate task is to stop the sabotage of the healthcare system we have. President Trump has engaged in a lot of maneuvering to try to force the collapse of the insurance markets. One is to withhold the cost-sharing payments from insurers so they no longer have the funds they were promised. That uncertainty has caused many companies to say: Do not count on us to be in that market in the future if we cannot count on you, the Federal Government, to honor your obligations.

Why isn’t the Senate body demanding that the President honor the obligations of those cost-sharing payments?

In addition, we have the President shutting down advertising during the open period so people will not know they can sign up. We have President Trump cutting the enrollment period in half. We have a plan now from the administration to cut the funds for consumer outreach and enrollment assistance, which enables folks who need to get healthcare to find out how they can actually get through the complicated application process.

Most recently, the administration announced it is actually going to shut down the website periodically on weekends during the open enrollment period, which is when people will have the time and energy to try to fill it. They are going to shut down the website so people will not be able to apply during portions of the weekend.

All of us should unite—100 Senators should unite—and tell President Trump: Enough of this sabotage. If you want to drive up insurance policies by 20 percent over any other increase they might otherwise have and if you want
to be responsible for millions of people not gaining access because of your irresponsibility, then we are going to hold you accountable for it. Everybody in grassroots America is going to hold you accountable for it.

Fortunately, we have a bipartisan process that has been underway to remedy these conditions. I, profoundly, thank LAMAR ALEXANDER, chair of the HELP Committee, and PATTY MURRAY, the ranking Democrat on the HELP Committee, for saying: Let’s have the normal, rational process that we go through to try to understand how we can improve the healthcare system.

They have held a series of hearings. They have brought in the experts, and they have brought in the stakeholders. They have done it in front of the public so the public can weigh in. They have consulted constituents and encouraged all of us to consult with our constituents and be part of that conversation. Pragmatic, experienced legislators are gaining expertise from those on the frontline so they can make the system work better. Isn’t that the way the Senate is supposed to work?

Their work shows a lot of promise. There are some very straightforward things they have heard from those experts.

They have heard we need to lock down the cost-sharing payments. No insurance companies are going to be in the insurance markets if they do not know they are going to get paid what they have been promised or they are going to raise their premiums incredibly high to cover the risk that they will not get paid. Then, of course, people will not be able to afford that insurance.

They have heard from the experts that you have to have reinsurance. If people will not be able to afford that insurance, they will then have money to pay their wages, more take-home pay, and we are going to be able to produce more jobs. Americans will have higher wages, more take-home pay, and we will have a stronger economy.

According to the Internal Revenue Service, Americans spend about 6 billion hours a year on taxes, just trying to prepare their taxes. Between businesses and individual families, we spend an average of 18 hours for every man, woman, and child in America, just trying to comply with Washington’s complicated Tax Code. The National Taxpayers Union says that the total cost of all of this is $263 billion a year. That works out to about $200 for every person in America. This is not spending that does anything productive. It is just figuring out how much tax to pay, and how to do it in a way that will not couple knocking at your door—how to get you numbers right.

The instructions for last year’s standard 1040 tax form were 106 pages long. These are the instructions—15 pages to fill out just to try to fill out the forms. The people who can deal with this level of complexity are the ones who basically can afford to hire expensive accountants and lawyers, who then take full advantage of a very complicated tax code. It penalizes hard-working Americans who can’t afford the high-priced help that helps them fill out and take full advantage of a complicated tax code.

We hear a lot about people who talk about how millionaires and billionaires are gaming the system so that they can pay less in taxes. If that is their concern, then maybe we should try to make this system simple enough that they can understand it. And just think about how much we could save this country if we simplify things even a little bit. All the time we could save, all the extra money in the pockets of hard-working American families—that would really help to grow the economy and do it quickly. It would also make life a lot simpler for most Americans.

If we also, at the same time as simplifying the Tax Code, lower the tax rates, that keeps even more money in people’s pockets. It gives them more money to decide what to save, what to spend, and what to invest—money they can spend going out to dinner if they choose. They can invest it if they want, and save for the future. If they actually choose to spend the money by going out to dinner, that helps the economy around the community where they live. People at the restaurants get paid what they live. People at the restaurants, that helps the economy around the community where they live. People at the restaurants get paid what they live.

Here is a list of a million things we could do together to make our healthcare system work better. Wouldn’t that be a beautiful closing chapter to the nightmare, the repeated horror stories we have been playing in the Senate that threaten to rip healthcare from millions of people and simply awaken from that war over healthcare and work together to address these fundamental questions.

We actually had public hearings in the HELP Committee, which we have not done before. We have actually listened to the experts, which we have not done before. We have actually encouraged people to consult with their constituents and not hide from their constituents. The result would be a significant strengthening of what we have—lower premiums as a result, more competition in the exchanges, more awareness of how to sign up, more and healthier young people getting involved in the exchanges, which means the premiums will come down.

I think, as we ponder the goal of our healthcare system—the question of peace of mind—that is our best immediate goal to provide peace of mind, to end the sabotage of the system we have, and address the shortcomings the healthcare experts and the people of America have pointed out.

Let us be that mission statement under this vision of ‘we the people’ government. In that we pursue healthcare that is designed for the people of America in order to create peace of mind, so when their loved ones become ill or when their loved ones are injured, they will get the care they need, and they will not end up bankrupt. We should be able to make that happen.

Thank you. I suggest a quorum of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mrs. ERNST). The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. BARRASSO. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum be dispensed with.

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

TAX REFORM

Mr. BARRASSO. Madam President, last week the Senate passed the bipartisan Defense Authorization Act. The world is a very dangerous place. This legislation is very important to keeping our country safe.

Another thing we need to do to keep America safe is to get the economy going. It is a strong and healthy economy in this country, and we need it now. A strong economy means a strong country with enough money to pay for the defense needs that we have at this time.

Over the 8 years of the Obama administration, Washington doubled its debt. Why? Because our economy grew so slowly and the administration spent too much money. If this sort of thing continues, it is going to leave America in a much more vulnerable position.

America needs a stronger economy that grows faster. To get the kind of growth we need, we are going to have to provide real tax relief for America, for hard-working families, and for the economy. That means cutting tax rates, and it means simplifying taxes for everyone. If we get this right, we are going to be able to produce more jobs. Americans will have higher wages, more take-home pay, and we will have a stronger economy.
helps an economy become stronger and healthier.

There is another important part of tax relief we need to remember. We need to be sure we solve a big problem with the taxes that not just individuals pay but businesses pay. The reason we need to do that is because many people think of businesses as big, faceless companies, but the simple fact is that these businesses actually don’t pay the taxes personally. People have to pay the taxes. That is because businesses pay taxes with money they get from their customers.

If the government says it is going to put a big tax on some company, that basically gets passed on to the workers there and also to the people who buy that product. The Congressional Budget Office looked into this. Their office looked into it, and they found that more than 70 percent of the cost of corporate taxes actually comes from the people who work for these businesses. Nearly every $4 of tax that is paid in taxes would have ended up going back to the workers to have that money—workers who are either buying products or working within the company. Maybe it would have been in better wages or better benefits or some other way that people would have gotten a benefit from the money that otherwise just gets collected and sent to the government.

Obviously, a big chunk of the money is from the workers, and another big chunk is from the consumers. If a family buys something, part of the price they are paying is to cover the taxes that business has to pay. The higher taxes mean higher prices for people who go to buy something.

The third way that people pay these business taxes is when they get paid by the people who own a share of the business. If you take a look, there are a lot of people on the other side of the aisle who like to talk about taxing the rich who own stock in companies that are all across our country. The only problem is, most of the people who actually own shares in these companies are far from rich. More than half of Americans actually own stocks in corporations that are paying these high taxes. Maybe they have an IRA, a retirement plan, a 401(k) through their work. Whatever it is, Americans who are investing for their future are also being taxed.

Some of the biggest owners of these corporations are actually the pension funds of public employees. That includes teachers, it includes firefighters, it includes people in every community around America. Taxes take away money that could make these pensions worth more. When the government takes taxes away, there is less money in the pension plans for our teachers, for our firefighters, for our first responders. So it is a real problem that these high tax rates are really hurting back the entire economy and hold back the entire country.

If you look at the most developed countries around the world, the United States has the highest corporate tax rate of all of them. The average tax rate of all of these major countries around the world—is 24 percent. In the United States, it is 39 percent. We are the highest in tax rates than the average of the major countries around the world. So that is the top Federal rate, and when you include the average for State and local taxes, it gets you to 39 percent—24 percent of that is how far out of the ordinary American taxes have become.

It is a huge disadvantage for American companies that are trying to compete on the world stage. Frankly, the reason we are at such a disadvantage is that other countries have been cutting their tax rates over the years. There was actually a time when the U.S. tax rates were fairly low, and other countries continued to cut theirs below ours. It is a story where the average for developed countries around the world is at 24 percent, and the United States is at 39 percent. Places like Germany, Japan, and Canada have all cut their rates going back over the last 60, 70 years. We haven’t done it here at all. Now it is time to do it.

It is one of the reasons our economy has been stuck with the slow growth rate that we had during the Obama administration. It is what we have seen over the last 8 years—a very sluggish economy with very little growth. If we can cut corporate tax rates, personal rates, that is going to really help stimulate the economy.

People pay taxes. It is the individuals who pay the taxes that in many ways run the government. Many people I talk to in Wyoming feel, rightly so, that the problem isn’t that they are taxed too little; it is that the government takes too much.

We need to get the economy going, and we can do that by simplifying and lowering the tax rates. It is true that, with taxes, people actually struggle with trying to figure them out at the kitchen table. I have talked to those folks at home. It is continually a problem—the simplification, as well as how much money the government takes from them. Taxes raise prices. Taxes chip away at retirement savings that people have.

Tax relief and simplifying taxes makes sense for American families. It means more jobs. It means higher wages. It means a safer America and a stronger America. It is good for our economy, and it is good for all hard-working taxpayers and the families those taxpayers support. Thank you.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Delaware, Vice President Mike Pence.

Mr. COONS. Madam President, yesterday we learned that, once again, my Republican colleagues do not have the votes to pass their latest effort to repeal the Affordable Care Act, even though the budget reconciliation process we are currently under requires only 50 votes. There are not 50 votes.

Many of my colleagues have spoken on this floor about the challenges, the population, which specifies the latest iteration of the Graham-Cassidy bill. We have also heard as a body from many organizations all over the country that represent Americans in healthcare: the American Medical Association, which speaks for our doctors; the American Hospital Association, which speaks for our hospitals; America’s Health Insurance Plans; the American Cancer Society; many other patient advocacy groups; and the AARP, which advocates for seniors. All have weighed in about the challenges with this legislation.

But rather than continuing to bear down on that point, I would like to quote a colleague and hero of mine. Senator JOHN MCCAIN said on this floor:

We should not be content to pass healthcare legislation on a party-line basis. . . . The issue is too important, and too lives are at risk. We have been hearing the American people guessing from one election to the next whether and how they will acquire health insurance. A bill of this impact requires a bipartisan approach.

Senator McCAIN also said:

I hope that in the months ahead, we can join with colleagues on both sides of the aisle to arrive at a compromise solution that is deliverable to more of us, and serves the interests of Americans as best we can.

Senator McCAIN is right. Fixing and improving our healthcare system cannot be done on a partisan basis. When it has been attempted to turn big bills into law on a narrow party-line basis, the results are often not sustainable. That is why we have work to do together, because this issue of providing for America’s healthcare is too complex, too big, and too important for us to do with only one wing or one party.

I was encouraged, as were many colleagues on both sides of the aisle, when Senators ALEXANDER and MURRAYS, the Republican and Democratic leaders of the Senate Health and Education Committee, held bipartisan hearings. They brought in Governors, insurance commissioners, healthcare experts, physicians, and hospital leaders from across the country to talk about what we need to do short term and long term to stabilize healthcare markets and to lay the foundation for improvements to our healthcare system.

So let’s listen to Senator McCAIN. Let’s give that bipartisan effort another chance. Let’s work together and do this because of us, and serves the interests of Americans as best we can.

I ride the train back and forth almost every day from Wilmington to Washington, and the Delawares I hear from on that train or at home in the grocery stores, and my State are tired of Congress fighting endless partisan battles with their healthcare. And it is not just frustrating to hear about on television; we
The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. WHITEHOUSE. Mr. President, may I bid a public farewell to Emily Enderle, who is here with me and who has served as the legislative, administrative, and busy environment unit for quite some time now. She is going on to another role in Washington and will continue to serve our cause. She has done an amazing job, and I want to be sure to say that on what will be her last appearance in these halls for one of our “Time to Wake Up” speeches.

Mr. President, I have spoken before, as you know, about the fossil fuel industry’s persistent effort to undermine public understanding of climate change and to confuse people about the actual effects of carbon pollution on our atmosphere and oceans.

I have mentioned Drexel University Professor Robert Brulle’s follow-the-money analysis, which reveals the complex network of organizations and funding—what we have called the web of denial—that is designed to obscure the fossil fuel industry’s fingerprints and perpetuate the fossil fuel industry’s climate denial.

Dr. Brulle calls this “a deliberate and organized effort to misdirect the public discussion and distort the public’s understanding of climate.” That is what this industry is up to.

One front group for that industry is called the Heartland Institute. It is a nice name, but they are not very nice people. For decades, the Heartland Institute has played a prominent role disseminating alternative facts and fake science at the behest of its industry funders. They have a long history of doing the bidding of industry funders. In the 1990s, it was teamed up with Philip Morris to challenge the facts about the health risks of tobacco. Using the same tactics—along with funding from the Koch Family Foundations, ExxomMobil, and other fossil fuel interests—it undermines public confidence in the established scientific consensus about climate change.

Heartland is quite shameless in its methods, once sponsoring a billboard comparing those who accept the science of global warming to the Unabomber.

For my 180th “Time to Wake Up” speech, I would like to explore the Heartland Institute’s latest gambit, which is to air drop climate denial propaganda directly into children’s classrooms.

This spring, Heartland delivered packages to hundreds of thousands of K-12 and college-level science teachers across the country. These materials were designed to have a veneer of credibility. Each one was stamped with the headline “Study: Science Teachers Unbalanced Education on Climate Change.” This intriguing story was attributed to something called Environment & Climate News.
Inside the package, the teachers found a report titled “Why Scientists Disagree About Global Warming.” It was issued by something called the Nongovernmental International Panel on Climate Change. As a bonus, each teacher received a DVD copy of the “History of Climate Change in Greenland,” produced by Idea Channel.

A cover letter from Heartland’s Center for Transforming Education—transforming education into propaganda, I assume—is how that sentence gets finished. The letter is addressed to “consider the possibility” the science of climate change isn’t settled.

That is the package they got. Let’s look behind that veneer. When you do, the smell gets pretty rotten. It turns out that the Environment & Climate News is not actually news. It is not a news outlet. It is the monthly newsletter of, guess who, the Heartland Institute. They are citing themselves, masquerading their newsletter as a news outlet. The foolishness goes on.

Their featured article, “Study: Science Teachers Giving Unbalanced Education on Climate Change,” was written by a person named Bonner Cohen, who is a featured expert—guess where—with the Heartland Institute, who previously held senior positions in—believe it or not—Philip Morris front groups.

Their Nongovernmental International Panel on Climate Change sounds legit. It is called Idea Channel. However, the Idea Channel DVD in the Heartland packet has nothing to do with that series. It was actually produced by something called the Free To Choose Network, whose funding is linked to the fossil fuel industry. It is another masquerade designed to mislead.

One of the tricks of Heartland’s little scheme was to dupe legitimate scientists into participating. One of the experts on Norse culture, a professor at Greenland’s Narsaq Museum, was told she was participating in a video on Norse history for the Discovery Channel. When she found out what she had been duped into, she said: “I am somewhat horrified.”

Other participants are frequent fliers in the climate denial circus, like Willie Soon, who received over a million dollars in funding from the notorious Koch brothers, the American Petroleum Institute, ExxonMobil, and other fossil fuel interests. The year the video was released, Willie Soon received nearly $200,000 from Free To Choose.

The Heartland cover letter asked teachers to “consider the possibility” the science of climate change isn’t settled. Even that is not new. This echoes the infamous Big Tobacco declaration, “Doubt is our product.” The heart of the fossil fuel industry’s scheme is to undermine legitimate science with false doubts. Because of the financial stakes behind industry science denial and because of the communications advantages propaganda has over real science—you don’t need to waste a lot of time and energy educating people, you go straight to the networks—this scheme is a real problem for institutions like our schools that cherish and support real science.

All this masquerade and subterfuge by Heartland and its affiliate looks like a lot of the Heartland Institute is masquerading their newsletter as a news outlet. The heart of the fossil fuel industry’s scheme is to undermine legitimate science with false doubts. Because of the financial stakes behind industry science denial and because of the communications advantages propaganda has over real science—you don’t need to waste a lot of time and energy educating people, you go straight to the networks—this scheme is a real problem for institutions like our schools that cherish and support real science.

That simple request drew quite the response from our friends at the Heartland Institute. “Your letter is a monumental misuse of your office and a betrayal of the trust of your constituents,” wrote Heartland CEO Joseph Bast. He called our letter “defamatory” and “despicable.” “Shame, shame, shame,” he proclaimed in bold contempt that is exactly what our science community was so motivated by what they heard, they requested to share their projects with other grades in the school. One of Miss Emery’s students said: “This is important and the other kids need to know this.”

Students in Jane Ramos’s eighth grade science class at Gallagher Middle School in Smithfield learn about climates around the world. They read, research, and make slides about the human contributions to climate change, including the carbon cycle, burning fossil fuels and the greenhouse effect, deforestation, livestock practices, and the production of methane. They discuss the effects of warmer oceans, expansion of water, melting ice, and rising seawater levels. These are important issues for Rhode Island, the Ocean State.

Science students from Brenda Dillmann’s class at South Kingstown High School planted grass on the Narrow River salt marsh as part of a major unit on climate. During the lessons, the students learned about the role that salt marshes play as carbon sinks—absorb carbon from the atmosphere. They got their living facility, where students pair up with a senior buddy. The students interview their senior buddies, asking how the climate has...
changed over time and looking for lessons that can be applied today.

In their math class, students learn how to read charts and graphs and how to frame a convincing argument through data. In social studies, the students learn about the geopolitical regions of the United States, about their differing climates, and about how each is affected by climate change. In science, the students learn about erosion and weather patterns and the effects of human activity, pollution, and sediments. Students make observations about climate change all around them and delve into society’s responses to the harms of climate change.

This past spring, the Norman Bird Sanctuary, in Middletown, hosted seventh graders for a beach ecology lesson at nearby Third Beach. The director of education, Rachel Holbert, and her staff led a discussion with the students about the greenhouse effect associated with fossil fuels. They explained how the excess heat trapped in the atmosphere puts stress on the oceans, undermining the oceans’ ability to stabilize the global climate and, of course, the heart and lungs of the climate, what some call the climate’s immune system, is the heart and lungs of the climate, what some call the climate’s immune system.

Teachers like them play such an important and formative role in helping the next generation understand the world we live in. They teach our children to make observations, collect information, and use evidence to formulate conclusions. They are honest and they are decent.

The fossil fuel industry, on the other hand, is neither honest nor decent. The filthy hand of the fossil fuel industry has, regrettably, a firm grip on this Congress. There is a reason that we never do anything about climate change, and it does not involve the merits of the issue. It involves the politics of the issue. We have, perhaps, not yet plumbed the bottom of how low they are willing to go, but, surely, this is a new low to reach with their game of destruction.

There are two ways to get more take-home pay. One is for the government to take less out of it—and I am for that—and the other one is to do things in the Tax Code to make us more competitive so that there are better jobs with better pay to start with. If we combine those two things—better jobs and better pay—with the government taking less out of the paycheck, that is really where families would like to be. We are going to be here talking about this in a way that drives toward a result.

The Senator from West Virginia is here, and she is basically going to start that effort today, as we really now have enough specifics on what the Finance Committee is looking at in the Senate and the Ways and Means Committee in the House and what the White House is putting on the table. We can begin to explain to American working families why this is the right course for them and for our country.

I am pleased to be joined here by Senator Capito.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from West Virginia.

Mrs. CAPITO. Thank you, Mr. President, and thank you, Senator Blunt, for your leadership.

I am excited about what we are talking about today. I am excited for my State of West Virginia. The main thing that people in West Virginia want is a good job. A good job, with more take-home pay and a higher wage, is exceedingly important to the families I represent, so tax reform and any other policies Congress could support will enhance growth and create more job opportunities around the country.

Let me focus on my State of West Virginia. According to the Economic Innovation Group, 34 percent of West Virginians are living in distressed communities. Unfortunately, that number is the highest in any State in the country. At the same time, only 3.4 percent of West Virginians are living in prosperous communities.

There are States that are prosperous and have done very well, but the vast majority of our States have really struggled. Only two in five communities have seen any job growth in the past 5 years during our so-called recovery. That is not the definition of a recovery. Since 2010, fully 50 percent of U.S. job growth has occurred in just 2 percent of our country’s counties. Think about that. Economic growth has only occurred in 2 percent of the counties across this great country.

The truth is that most of our country has been mired in economic stagnation. We have been standing still. I saw Lou Holtz give a speech one time, and he said: If you are standing still, you are going backward. If you are not moving forward, you are going backward. There has been a recovery, but for many West Virginians, there has been no recovery at all.

But it isn’t all doom and gloom in our State because we have an opportunity for change—the change we really need that will help our struggling, working-class families, that changes and revitalizes our distressed communities, changes that lead to economic growth and creates opportunity for future generations.

In fact, West Virginia, in the first quarter, grew by 3 percent. We were the second fastest in growth in the entire Nation. To be sure, one quarter of growth is not a trend, but it does demonstrate the potential we have if we do it right here for our citizens. The potential of capital growth is there, but one of the biggest drags on our economy in recent years has been excessive regulations, which we have addressed quite a bit here in the first 9 months of President Trump’s term. We have worked hard to bring reason into the regulatory environment and also our burdensome Tax Code.

What can we do? We can reduce taxes that impede our growth. Let’s think about our small businesses. In many States, they are the major economic driver of our economy. In my State of West Virginia, 96.6 percent of the businesses are small businesses. They employ nearly half of the West Virginia private sector workforce, so nearly half of West Virginians are working in what is defined as a small business. Yet they can face a tax rate as high as 39.6 percent. Think about that. If you own a bakery or an accounting firm, in a 5-day workweek, you have to work Monday and Tuesday just to pay the government. It is no wonder that small businesses have found it difficult to open, let alone succeed, in many parts of our country.

The United States has the highest corporate tax rate in the developed world. A lot of people are asking, how does that influence me? It is influencing small business, because the working American is bearing the brunt of that tax. Because of our outdated Tax Code, real wages for most workers have barely increased over the years. West Virginians understand that, and just as they work, the government is taking more money from them. It costs them more money every time they go to the grocery store, every time they buy clothing for their children, every time they try to buy a new home. It is just as much no growth in their wages to be able to bear that expense. It feels impossible to get ahead.
We see that all around our States and localities. We see people thinking, I can’t get ahead, and I haven’t been able to over the last 5 to 10 years. I am starting to think it is impossible.

But we can fix this. It is not impossible. We can have a different environment which there is more opportunity available and wages are higher by modifying our Tax Code. We can have a simpler system with lower rates, and families can see relief from the complexity of our Tax Code. I have seen it stack up before, and I am 3 inches, and I think it is taller than I am when stacked up page to page.

Along with the complexities, people need to keep more of their hard-earned money. It will help our companies grow. When our companies grow, what happens? We have more jobs, fairer taxes, and best of all, besides more jobs, we have higher paychecks. With more earnings, companies can hire new workers, increase wages, and invest in new equipment. These are changes that I think West Virginians are hungry for.

The time is now. The stagnation we have felt over the last decade has worn us down, has made us lose our optimism, has made us want to have a better life than our parents had or our children thinking they could have a better life than we had. You know, the American dream is sort of fading for a lot of people, so comprehensive tax reform can provide that kind of relief.

I am excited that we can create that environment of optimism, that environment of confidence in not just our companies and our ability to create more jobs and raise our paychecks, but that confidence that we need as a country that, yes, we can live in our communities in rural America, like West Virginia or North Carolina or Missouri, that we can live in those communities, have a great chance to move ahead, have a good retirement when we decide we are at the end of the line in terms of our working career, and also pass on to the next generation a competitive environment that can compete financially anywhere in the world.

We know we can compete anywhere in the world in a lot of different areas. Right now, we are on an uneven playing field. When we change this and when we fix this—because we can fix this—that will change the playing field for every single American who gets up in the morning, goes to work in the evening, to have the confidence that things are going to be better for them.

I thank the Senator from Missouri, and I look forward to talking about this over the next several weeks.

Mr. BLUNT. Mr. President, when the Senator from West Virginia talked about the 40 percent that can come out of your hard work, the 2 days a week of a regular workweek—and many families are wishing they could get back to a 5-day workweek because they have really been stagnant in terms of the opportunities for their families for a long time. It is a good way to think about how hard families work just so the government can get more of their money.

This is a discussion about how the government can take less of your money. For everybody listening who wonders, “Well, if the government is going to take less money—I thought the government already had a deficit”—we need to work on that. One way to work on that is the tax way to work on that is to have more taxpayers—not higher tax rates but more taxpayers. We are looking at some tax changes here that would allow more taxpayers to share the burden, hopefully paying taxes, as I said earlier this afternoon, on a bigger paycheck to start with. You can take less money out of that paycheck, and the government gets more money because we have more people paying those taxes and more growth.

The 50-year average on growth since World War II is 3.4 percent. Every year, the economy was that much bigger than the year before. That ought to be achievable. For 70 years, we achieved that. We should be able to get back to that sort of growth. But for the last 8 to 9 years, that growth has been less than 2 percent.

Our problem is with jobs that aren’t growing as they should in terms of what they pay and the government is not being able to provide that kind of relief. I am excited that we can create that environment of optimism, that environment of confidence in not just our companies and our ability to create more jobs and raise our paychecks, but that confidence that we need as a country that, yes, we can live in our communities in rural America, like West Virginia or North Carolina or Missouri, that we can live in those communities, have a great chance to move ahead, have a good retirement when we decide we are at the end of the line in terms of our working career, and also pass on to the next generation a competitive environment that can compete financially anywhere in the world.

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have any wealth that you haven’t paid taxes on already. You don’t have anything you have accumulated that you haven’t paid taxes on multiple times. There is an opportunity here to say that we are no longer going to go through that after trying to tax family farm businesses. The death tax is exactly that, and it doesn’t work.

We are going to work to make America more competitive, American jobs more competitive. Again, one way to create more take-home pay—the best jobs to start with. We can have those better jobs if we work hard to be focused on competition, on regulation that makes sense, on tax policy that not only is simple but that everybody believes is fair. We have the greatest compliance of any country. I believe, in the history of the world, but people are less likely to comply if they don’t think that the tax policy is fair and easily understood and means the same to everyone else. You shouldn’t have to have the greatest accountants in the world to figure out what your taxes are or, frankly, to figure out what somebody else’s taxes likely are. Fairness is important here, simplicity is important here, and competition and better jobs are important here.

(The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore assumed the Chair.)

We need better jobs for working families. I think that should be the flag that flies highest as we begin to look at how we reduce the tax burden and increase the opportunity for more people to be paying taxes because we have more people with better jobs.

I know two of the leaders here. That guy who just left the Chair, the Senator from North Carolina, and the Senator from Georgia have been real advocates for what we are trying to do now and also advocates for getting it done. We need to get unemployment and better jobs here. We need to have this debate; we need to get this done.

In my view, this needs to be done this year. It needs to be impacting our economy by the first quarter of next year. It needs to be impacting our economy by the first quarter of next year. It needs to be impacting our economy by the first quarter of next year. It needs to be impacting our economy by the first quarter of next year. It needs to be impacting our economy by the first quarter of next year. It needs to be impacting our economy by the first quarter of next year.

One of the solutions to this debt crisis is a growing economy. President Trump, from day one, has said that growing the economy is job one, but it was part of a bigger strategy in his first year.

There were four components to the strategy in the first year. One was that we had to get Neil Gorsuch confirmed to the Supreme Court, and that was done. Second, we had to roll back some of the more onerous regulations that were stifling the very life out of the free enterprise system. To date, over 800 regulations have been removed from our government. Third was healthcare. We are still trying to fix a collapsed system that is hurting people back home. Lastly, we had to reform our tax package so that we could become competitive with the rest of the world and get our economy going again.

Job one this year was to get the economy going again. To some degree, it is beginning to move. Consumer confidence is at a 16-year high. CEO confidence is at a 20-year high. Why? Because they finally see rhetoric in Washington talking about the things they have been asking for over 10 years, and that is relief from some of the pressure the Federal Government has put on the free enterprise system that keeps us from being competitive with the rest of the world. I have lived around the world, and I have run businesses. I started my career working for an hourly wage in construction. I understand that American businesses need that from the government—has some of the best workers anywhere in the world and in the history of the world. On the back of that, we have innovation, capital formation, and the rule of law. That is what has created this economic miracle over the last few years, but we have taken it for granted. What we have done is allow other countries because of our immigration policy, because of our tax policy, and because of our regulatory policy, particularly of late—we have lost our competitive edge.

We believe that to get this economy going, President Trump is right. I am absolutely committed to the strategy President Trump has laid out. It really is only three things, and we have already started on two with his leadership.

No. 1 is regulatory reform, which I talked about.

No. 2 is that we have to get this energy policy going. What the President has already done with the Keystone Pipeline and the Clean Power Plan has set the stage to allow us to become the energy czar, if you will, of the next century right here in North America.

Lastly—and maybe most importantly—is to get this Tax Code so we can be competitive with the rest of the world. Let’s talk about what competitive means. In 1986, the last time we actually made any real, substantive change to the Tax Code, the United States, after those changes, had the third lowest corporate tax rate in the world. What that did is allow us to compete with the rest of the world and set the stage for the next 10 to 15 years of economic boom that is now part of our history.

What has happened now, though, is that the rest of the world has caught up. They have lowered their corporate tax rates. They have simplified their regulatory environment and taken the burden off some of their people. Today we have absolutely the highest corporate tax rate in the world, and we are the last country of the major OECD countries—the 39 countries—to actually still have a repatriation tax. This is unbelievable. We have been so arrogant as a country that we have let the rest of the world outrun us to the next stop, and they are now outcompeting us.

How does this affect the average man and woman on the street? Well, this I believe—the repatriation tax and indeed the lack of competitiveness in our Tax Code—is an absolute tax on American workers. Why? Because right now, twice as many companies in the United States are being purchased by companies outside of our country than the companies that our U.S. companies are buying outside the United States. That is nothing but a reflection on the
imbalance of our high tax environment here at home, and the people who suffer from that are the people who buy products in the United States and the people who work for companies that sell products in the United States. By companies, I am talking about friends of mine in Atlanta, Georgia. I have a company in South Georgia and have four employees. I am also talking about friends who run large corporations, multinational corporations. All of the above contribute to our economy.

We avoided unwanted acquisitions. Just look at recent history. Burger King was bought by a Canadian firm, Timmy’s. Look at the beer industry in St. Louis. Today, most of those companies are owned by Brazilians and Belgians. These are not mean CEOs who decided to move their corporate headquarters, no. This is a reflection of a competitive disadvantage in which someone outside the country has used our Tax Code and our tax dollars to actually undermine the tax system that they have experience around the world in this with Ernst & Young. Actually, through these tax changes, they will stand to lose revenue because we are simplifying how people calculate what they owe in taxes. His quote is this: “I think it’s truly a bipartisan issue”—I agree—“something everybody can rally around . . . it’s urgent for our country.”

To get this done, we have to move past our issues around politics and Washington games. We saw how we disappointed the American people—both sides. The Democrats in 2009 crammed ObamaCare down the throats of America through a supermajority. We now know it has failed. Republicans were not able to fix it this year, so far. So we all need to look at this tax issue as a bipartisan issue to fix this once and for all for the people back home.

We can’t get bogged down in this scorecard mentality that is only done this way in Washington. People back home don’t run their small businesses this way. They don’t run big businesses this way. They sure don’t run their personal finances this way. They don’t run big businesses this way. They don’t run big businesses this way. They don’t run big businesses this way.

Nearly every CEO surveyed by the BRT. Business Roundtable, said that delays on tax would damage our economy. Here is why. We just heard the Senator from Missouri talk about timing. We have to have a sense of urgency on this for one reason: that is, if you have to act next year, then why you have to get this done this year. Budgets are being finalized for next year right now. Capital investments have already been made in terms of determining how much and where and how those decisions are being made right now—and before the purchases that are made next spring.

We have major CEOs weighing in on this. Randall Stephenson, CEO at AT&T, said that if we get the corporate tax rate lowered, “We will step it up”—in his words—“in investments.”

“Every additional billion dollars . . . is 7,000 hard-hard jobs putting fiber in the ground, cell sites up, and antennas on cell sites.”

David Abney, CEO of UPS, said: “We’d like to bring some of those foreign earnings back, invest them into our network here.”

Finally, Mark Weinberger is the CEO of one of the major accounting firms we have here in the United States. I think that is tantamount to a marching order for us here in the Senate to do this change.

The way forward is very simple. This is what is talked about in this tax package that we are beginning to talk about publicly, and this is only after 9 months of regular order in committee with multiple hearings. We heard in the healthcare debate: Oh, this is not regular order. We didn’t have the chance to talk about it and put amendments in and all this.

Back in tax, it will be by regular order. There will be amendments. There will be debates. There have already been multiple hearings. We are looking for input from all corners.

This strategy has three parts: One, we have to lower this tax on our American workers—lower the corporate tax rate to be competitive with the rest of the world. Two, eliminate this repatriation tax as every other country in the world has done. And, last, we have to simplify our individual Tax Code.

My mom and dad were schoolteachers. They were proud of their ability to pay their taxes, but they were burdened by that. Right now, we don’t need to do that. We have to find a way to make this Tax Code more equitable for everyone.

Nearly 90 percent of Americans want the code changed. Over two-thirds think taxes are too high. Almost two-thirds say that lowering the corporate tax rate would help get the fact that this tax rate is lower in the rest of the world and that it is a penalty on the workers here in the United States.

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Nation. We created over 250,000 jobs and actually put North Carolina on the map by all references—CEO measures and by independent organizations. It is the State where businesses want to set up and do business.

We talk about the corporate tax from 6.9 down to 2.5. We took personal income tax rates from 7.75 down to 5.49. We got people back to work.

Along the way, we had our challenges. Everybody in Washington is for tax reform. They are for tax relief. They will come into your office and tell you: Let's get her going. Then on the side they will say: except for that one righteous exemption I may need. We have to have Members who have the courage to do tax reform that helps working families, that creates jobs, and that silences the people who want to take this exemption or that exemption away, so we do what is right for the generation that is about to look for jobs and the people who need a job today.

They want their businesses to grow. They want their economies to thrive. They want the United States to be the strong, great economy that it can be. It is going to take courage. It is going to take time—but only so much time.

I believe this Congress, this Senate, over the course of a few months, if we focus on it and with the support of the President and in collaboration with the House, can get this done. We have to get it done. We promised the American people last year that if we had majorities, we would do what we had to do to deliver on this promise. It can be done. A lot of times, people ask me what keeps me up at night. I tell them two things: coffee and the national debt. Coffee is for the obvious reasons, but why the national debt? I will tell you why. Because when I have people on the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the service chiefs come into the Senate Armed Services Committee and say the single greatest threat to our national security is our debt, we should take notice. These are people who are skilled in warfare. They are people who know how to take the fight to the enemy. When they think the greatest threat to this Nation is our national debt, we had better take that seriously.

How do you resolve the national debt? You grow the economy. How do you grow the economy? You create jobs and help businesses throughout. How do you do that? You do that through tax reform. You also take criticism that is going to be waged by some people on the far left when we talk about corporate tax reform. They are going to say: How could you favor the big guy over the little guy? I don’t know about you all, but I worked for companies before in my life. When I was 19 and living in a trailer park, I was working for a corporation. I was a little guy working for a corporation. Fortunately, in the 1980s, we had a President who had the wisdom to know that, if you reduced the tax burden on corporations, more little guys like me—that 19-year-old living in a trailer park—could get a job—a better-paying job—and, ultimately, have enough money to put himself through school.

So when we get into this argument, don’t take the bait by some people who will say that because we are focusing on corporate taxes and reducing the tax burden on businesses, that is somehow a guy in a suit trying to help out a business. I worked my way from that trailer park now into the U.S. Senate and benefited when Congress had the courage to reduce taxes and get the economy back on track. That is what we better do. That is what we promised. That is what we are here to do today. The time is now to get it done.

The President has shown wisdom in the blueprint—and our leadership here, in terms of the broad strokes about what tax reform needs to look like. Now it is our job—each and every individual Member of the Senate and the House—to deliver on the promise to produce tax reform to help the little guy and to get the economy going to be the great economy that it was in the past, and I have every reason to believe that it will be so in the future. I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the question be suspended.

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

EXECUTIVE SESSION

EXECUTIVE CALENDAR

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate proceed to executive session for the en bloc consideration of Calendar No. 95, the nomination of Heath Tarbert to be Assistant Secretary of the Treasury, and Calendar No. 106, the nomination of Makan Delrahim to be Assistant Attorney General. I further ask that there be 5 hours of debate on the nominations, equally divided in the usual form, and that following the use or yielding back of time, the Senate vote on confirmation of the nominations in the order listed, with no intervening action or debate, and that if confirmed, the motions to reconsider be considered made and laid upon the table, and the President be immediately notified of the Senate’s action.

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

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, 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. 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.

PUERTO RICO AND U.S. VIRGIN ISLANDS RECOVERY EFFORT

Mr. BLUMENTHAL. Mr. President, in the last 24 hours since I came to the floor to talk about Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands, there has been progress but far less progress than is necessary at this critical time of humanitarian crisis, when the people of those islands literally face a chasm, a deepening canyon of needs and challenges.

Over the next 24 hours, over the next 24 days, over the next 24 months, this crisis must be met with a strategy, an overarching plan, a Marshall Plan for Puerto Rico that commits the resources unequivocally and unambiguously, making sure we match the depth of this crisis with a magnitude of resources and commitment that is needed and deserved. That kind of response, which has been lacking so far, is absolutely necessary.

Mr. President, I want to speak to the people of Puerto Rico because as the threats of disease and contaminated water increase, not to mention the lack of proper medicine, healthcare, roads, transportation and communication, food, water, medical facilities rise on that island, the people of Puerto Rico will lose trust and confidence in fellow Americans that must do more. We need to give them the hope they deserve, and that hope has to be more than rhetoric and more than patching themselves on. The President has done. It has to be a real commitment.

In fact, there is no reason for back-patting. The response so far has been inadequate, lacking the full attention and commitment that is needed. It has been a story of inattention and inadequate strategy so far to meet this deepening humanitarian crisis.

The people of Texas, Florida, and throughout the Southeast who have been affected by the storms have received the full commitment of America. It is what we owe our fellow Americans. That same commitment is owed to Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands. We saw an immediate disaster response there that must also be devoted to Puerto Rico. The emergency aid and full funding made to the victims of those storms in the gulf coast and Florida must be given to Puerto Rico, and I am hopeful that a relief bill will be fashioned this week.

I am also hopeful that the financial control board that has responsibility for Puerto Rico’s internal finances can be given the flexibility and that the Government of Puerto Rico will be given the flexibility that is needed to deal with this disaster—nothing less than a full court press, a full plan and strategy, and a plan that directly addresses the needs of Puerto Rico in so many areas.

Transportation, what is the plan to ensure that basic goods can move from one end of the island to another? Right now the roads are unusable. By