

that our brave law enforcement, firefighters, and emergency personnel will be there for us on our worst days, forgetting that, for them, heroism and service are everyday realities. I would like to recognize some of our own colleagues who immediately sprang into action to assist the wounded. Senator CASSIDY and Congressmen WENSTRUP, BURGESS, ROE, and BUCSHON are all doctors by training, as are Senator CASSIDY's wife Laura and Congressman BUCSHON's wife Kathryn. All of them sprang into action and rushed to aid the victims, alongside our attending physician, Dr. Brian Monahan. Senator FLAKE and several others also hurried to help.

I thank all of them for their efforts when every moment counted, and I am proud to call them colleagues and friends.

FRA ADMINISTRATOR NOMINATION

Mr. MCCONNELL. Madam President, on a related matter, in the few days since last week's tragedy, yet another fatal train crash has already taken place. Two lives were lost yesterday when a passenger train and a freight train collided in South Carolina. Last December, three people were killed and scores were injured near Seattle when a passenger train jumped its tracks and crashed into a busy highway.

This worrying spate of accidents offers a sobering reminder that partisan obstruction has kept the Federal Railroad Administration, the top rail regulator, without an Administrator.

The President's nominee, Ronald Batory, has more than 40 years of rail experience. I know of no questions about his qualifications. He was reported out of committee by voice vote on August 2 of last year, meaning that this important safety regulator has now been sitting on the Senate calendar for 6 months—6 months. My Democratic colleagues are holding his nomination over a parochial issue that is completely unrelated to rail safety. This needs to come to an end.

The FRA Administrator is the Nation's top rail safety regulator. There is an urgent need and a highly qualified candidate. I hope my colleagues on the other side of the aisle will put a stop to their partisan games on this front. We can and should confirm Mr. Batory today—today.

FUNDING THE GOVERNMENT

Mr. MCCONNELL. Madam President, on another matter, our deadline to fund the Federal Government is this Thursday. Serious bipartisan negotiations continue on long-term spending levels, along with other important issues. I am optimistic that these talks will bear fruit.

In the meantime, as broader discussions continue, we have the opportunity to remove the uncertainty facing our all-volunteer Armed Forces.

Since the passage of the Budget Control Act, it has become increasingly ob-

vious that current funding levels are not sufficient for our Armed Forces to accomplish each of the missions and tasks that our Nation asks of them.

Secretary Mattis's new national defense strategy will require considerable new investment, and he has repeatedly pointed out that short-term continuing resolutions harm the readiness of our forces.

I am pleased that we are making real headway in our negotiations over spending caps and other important issues, but there is no reason why our warfighters need to continue to face uncertainty until all of the other issues are resolved.

Last week, a bipartisan majority in the House passed a bill that would fund our national defense through fiscal year 2018. Democrats and Republicans came together, voting to secure adequate, predictable, annual funding for our Armed Forces while we continue our productive negotiations on all these other subjects. The Senate will soon take up this House-passed bill.

I have recently heard many of my Democratic colleagues detail the harmful effects of short-term funding measures on our servicemembers. Soon, each one of us will have a chance to vote to give them the certainty they deserve while our other work continues.

TAX REFORM

Mr. MCCONNELL. Madam President, on one final matter, in the State of the Union Address last week, President Trump detailed signs that our Nation's economy is thriving under the policies of his administration and this Republican Congress. Evidence keeps piling up that good things happen when the government takes its foot off the brake and gets out of the way of American workers and job creators.

Last week, UPS, the largest private employer in my hometown of Louisville, KY, announced that tax reform will enable them to invest \$12 billion in expanding their smart logistics network, funding employee pensions, and other capital improvements.

Their chairman and CEO had this to say:

We applaud President Trump and Congress for their bold action. . . . Tax reform is a tremendous catalyst.

On Thursday, another major American employer, Lowe's, announced that it will give bonuses of up to \$1,000 to more than a quarter of a million hourly employees and expand family friendly employment benefits, like adoption assistance and paid parental leave.

The very same day, the major pharmaceutical company Amgen, which houses a distribution facility in Louisville, announced that tax reform is causing them to shift more of their planned investments here to the United States, including the construction of a new "next-generation manufacturing plant" right here at home.

Already, our historic tax reform law is giving employers the flexibility to

invest more, expand more, hire more American workers, and give bonuses, pay raises, and new benefits to their employees, and, already, middle-class families across the country are seeing the benefits.

I suggest the absence of a quorum. The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

CONCLUSION OF MORNING BUSINESS

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Morning business is closed.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

EXECUTIVE CALENDAR

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate will proceed to executive session to consider the following nomination, which the clerk will report.

The legislative clerk read the nomination of Andrei Iancu, of California, to be Under Secretary of Commerce for Intellectual Property and Director of the United States Patent and Trademark Office.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, there will be 30 minutes of debate, equally divided in the usual form.

Mr. GRASSLEY. Mr. President, I wish to speak on the nomination of Andrei Iancu to be Under Secretary of Commerce and Director of the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office.

Intellectual property is critical to our national economy because it encourages the innovation that improves lives and creates jobs. The U.S. Patent and Trademark Office plays a critical role in fostering innovation by protecting intellectual property rights, so it is important that the office have strong and accountable leadership.

Mr. Iancu holds a B.S. and M.S. in engineering from the UCLA School of Engineering and a J.D. from the UCLA School of Law. He currently is the managing partner of the Los Angeles law firm Irell & Manella, where he has practiced intellectual property law since 1996. Mr. Iancu has represented both patent owners and accused infringers, large and small companies, and individuals in a large number of patent cases.

Mr. Iancu possesses strong legal qualifications, has a proven record in the field of intellectual property law, and is well respected in the intellectual property community. Last December, the Senate Judiciary Committee approved Mr. Iancu's nomination by a voice vote. I support Mr. Iancu's nomination, and I urge my colleagues to vote for him.