

## NOMINATION OF MIKE POMPEO

Mr. McCONNELL. Madam President, speaking of personnel business, I wish to say a few words this morning about Mike Pompeo, our CIA Director and the President's extraordinary choice to serve as Secretary of State.

In recent days, the world learned that Director Pompeo had undertaken initial conversations with Kim Jong Un directly, over the Easter weekend, to discuss denuclearizing the Korean Peninsula. Obviously, he has the confidence of the President—engaged in the most sensitive undertaking one could imagine in today's world—and yet so many on the other side are suggesting they have reservations about this outstanding nominee.

Pursued with clear-eyed realism and clear objectives, this is a worthy effort. North Korea has been a perplexing problem for President after President after President, and Mike Pompeo is on the point of this effort, which hopefully will finally lead to some outcome. Although every Commander in Chief has insisted it would be unacceptable for North Korea to obtain a nuclear-armed intercontinental ballistic missile, it is this administration that finds itself having to actually achieve that objective because time has run out. So, as a matter of policy, it would be hard not to be encouraged by the fact that there were actually talks—direct talks—underway.

Based on Director Pompeo's impressive record at the CIA, the North Koreans undoubtedly view him as credible, determined, and insightful. Isn't that what we would want in a Secretary of State? The quiet nature of these discussions reflect how serious they were. The mission also speaks to Mike Pompeo's future as Secretary of State.

Here is a man who—through mastery of the daily briefings he receives, counsel on our Nation's most sensitive intelligence activities, and proven leadership in returning our CIA to the aggressive gathering of foreign intelligence—has inspired the confidence of not only the national clandestine service but, very importantly, the Commander in Chief. Hallmarks of Mike's leadership are listening, trusting career staff, acting decisively, and treating everyone fairly.

I have recently heard some critics claim that the Trump administration places too little emphasis on diplomacy. In truth, the public statements of Secretary Mattis, former Secretary Tillerson, and former National Security Advisor McMaster have signaled a clear preference for aggressive, realistic diplomacy over potentially risking American lives. I have heard Secretary Mattis say over and over again that the last thing he wants to do is use the military. He wants to buy time so diplomacy can work. But, regardless, in confirming Mike Pompeo as Secretary of State, the Senate can ensure that the Nation has a chief diplomat who enjoys the complete confidence of the President. Isn't that

what we should all want, regardless of party?

Those who claim to want a larger role for diplomacy should match those words with action and vote to approve him. What would be a better example of diplomacy than just what we were talking about—the visit to North Korea and direct conversations with Kim Jong Un.

We all know Mike's resume. He is a graduate of the U.S. Military Academy and Harvard Law School. He has served as a U.S. Army officer, on the House Intelligence Committee, and as Director of the CIA. In my view, Mike Pompeo is uniquely qualified to restore esprit de corps throughout the ranks of the Foreign Service. It is hard to imagine a better choice for Secretary of State than Mike Pompeo.

## PHILOSOPHICAL DIFFERENCES

Mr. McCONNELL. Now, one final matter. We have been talking all week about a big philosophical difference between Democrats and Republicans. Tax reform has thrown it into stark relief.

On the one hand, the Democrats' governing philosophy is about consolidating as much money and power as possible right here in Washington, DC. Under President Obama, we watched Democratic leaders turn every challenge the country faced into an excuse to raise taxes and impose regulations. Our dear friends on the other side are the party of taxation, regulation, and litigation as well. We saw who wins under this top-down philosophy and who loses.

America did not recover quickly enough from the great recession, and the unimpressive growth we did see during the Obama administration was extremely uneven. According to one study, nearly three-quarters of the job growth and 90 percent of the net population growth from 2010 to 2016 went to metropolitan areas with more than 1 million residents. The occupant of the Chair and I represent a lot of rural and smalltown folks. They didn't benefit from whatever job creation there was; it went to the big cities all across America. In the wealthiest coastal cities, there was some improvement, but the simple fact is that the Democratic policies left the rest of the country behind. In small towns and smaller cities and rural areas, opportunities dried up, paychecks stayed flat, and hope for a more prosperous future began fading.

That is what President Trump and this Republican Congress were elected to change. Our governing philosophy is very different. We think that more of the American people's hard-earned money should be left in their own hands—their hands—to spend or save as they see fit. We think government needs to give workers and job creators some breathing room. We think every American community deserves to flourish. So we passed record-setting rollbacks of harmful Federal rules that had thrown a wet blanket on the econ-

omy, and we enacted sweeping tax reform to help families and reignite growth.

What are the early results? Consumer confidence hit a 14-year high, jobless claims a 45-year low—jobless claims, a 45-year low—and millions of Americans receiving bonuses, pay raises, and new benefits. Ninety percent of wage earners expected to see lower income taxes than last year. Ninety percent of wage earners—lower income tax rates than last year.

The philosophical difference is especially stark in States where one Senator votes to let all of this good news happen, but the other Senator tried to stop it from taking place.

Bonnie Brazzeal from Missouri told President Trump last month that she is using her tax reform bonus to save for retirement.

In West Virginia, Sean Farrell says he is using expanded 529 savings eligibility to afford Catholic school tuition for his children.

Chelsea Hatfield from Indiana is using her permanent raise to pay for community college classes, working toward her associate's degree.

At some point, the Democratic Senators from these States I just mentioned will have to explain why they voted to stop all that from happening. They will have to tell Bonnie and Sean and Chelsea that they agree with the Democratic leader, who has said Washington knows how to spend money better than citizens do.

But, my Republican colleagues and I will stay on the side of the American people.

Madam President, 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. Madam 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

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Democratic leader is recognized.

Mr. SCHUMER. Madam President, it is good to see the Acting President pro tempore back in the Chair a second time.

## NORTH KOREA

Mr. SCHUMER. Madam President, let me begin by addressing the administration's ongoing effort to secure a diplomatic deal with North Korea to achieve the denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula.

It is a worthy and ambitious goal. Indeed, we should all root for a diplomatic resolution to the decades-long conflict. It is undeniable, however, that

this meeting is fraught with peril. My primary concern is that the President, in his penchant for spur-of-the-moment decision making, could lead the United States into danger in one of two ways.

My first concern is that the President, without a clear or coherent strategy, will buy a pile of magic beans, accepting an agreement—any agreement—that allows him to declare victory. We know what he will say: the greatest compromise ever, greater than Versailles, greater than anything. Talking is good, but it is very far from an agreement to disarm.

President Trump should not accept a deal that doesn't include concrete steps to verifiably roll back North Korea's nuclear and missile programs, including those that threaten our allies and partners. So that is one concern: that the President accepts any agreement because he is just so eager to tout that he was a great deal maker and made an agreement, even if it is a rotten agreement for America.

My second concern is sort of the opposite. My second concern is that the President, without a disciplined or coherent strategy, will walk away from a bilateral meeting if he doesn't get everything he wants. There is also the possibility that the President will walk away from an agreement after the fact if he decides later he is unhappy with it. We have seen him do that on so many occasions. As someone who has negotiated deals with the President, I know it is a very real possibility.

Now, some may say that these are opposite possibilities. They are, in a certain sense. If he takes too little, he walks away because he didn't get everything. But they are all underlined by one coherent fact: There is no strategy—at least apparent to just about everyone.

The President seems to operate on a whim, saying one thing one day and another thing the next. When there is no coherent strategy, each of these dangers is too real. Either scenario could leave relations with a rogue state worse and more dangerous than before.

Now, the President said last night at Mar-a-Lago that he would leave a meeting with Kim Jong Un if it wasn't fruitful.

Mr. President, this is not like a business deal. There is a very real danger to walking away from a meeting with a nuclear-armed dictator. It could risk serious escalation. If the United States is seen as the one walking away from talks, we should be under no illusions that China, Russia, and others will not follow suit.

We all want to see negotiations with North Korea succeed. If it is true that North Korea will take its demand for U.S. troops to leave the Korean Peninsula off the table, that is a good step. Our commitment to the Korean people and our alliances with Korea and Japan are not subject to negotiation. But, I repeat, if these talks are going to truly succeed, the President and his team require a coordinated strategy, some-

thing this administration hasn't been able to show with respect to Russia, Syria, Yemen, the Middle East, and other hotspots around the world.

#### SPECIAL COUNSEL LEGISLATION

Mr. SCHUMER. Madam President, on another topic, I have come to the floor several times over the past month to document the number of ways in which this administration has signaled a willingness—perhaps a desire—to interfere with Special Counsel Mueller's probe into Russian interference in the 2016 elections.

Beyond troubling statements from the White House Press Secretary and the President's allies in the media, President Trump himself has publicly mused about the firing of the special counsel. So while I appreciate that the majority leader believes the President would be wrong to fire the special counsel, I believe it is a real mistake not to pass legislation to protect the investigation. I sincerely hope Leader MCCONNELL reconsiders his refusal to entertain bringing such a bill to the floor. It is a bipartisan bill.

I have talked to Members on both sides of the aisle who are worried about a constitutional crisis. We all know the consequence of Presidential interference in the Russian probe and how dire it would be for the rule of law, fundamental to our democracy, and the constitutional crisis that it would create should be avoided at all costs. Unfortunately, there is substantial evidence that the President has thought about firing the special counsel more than once in the past and may well do so in the future.

The bipartisan legislation introduced by Senators GRAHAM, COONS, TILLIS, and BOOKER has no real downsides to it. It would simply provide a legal avenue to restore the special counsel if existing DOJ regulations are breached and he is fired for political reasons.

So what is the reason not to do it? Why not head off a constitutional crisis at the pass rather than waiting until it is too late? The rule of law is fundamental to the functioning of our democracy. Why even flirt with the prospect of a President challenging the very nature of our system of government?

So I would urge my friend Leader MCCONNELL to think twice about this—to think not simply about his responsibilities to his party and not simply about doing what the President might want, but to our country and our Constitution. If we think of it in those terms, I think it is inevitable that we would want to pass this legislation. That is because the rule of law is fundamental to the functioning of our democracy. Why even flirt with the prospect of a President challenging the very nature of our system of governance and rules?

So I hope the Judiciary Committee moves forward with the bipartisan bill. I hope there is no attempt to water it

down or to create a back channel for political interference in ongoing investigations. It is clear that several Republicans, including Chairman GRASSLEY, Senator TILLIS, Senator GRAHAM, and others, see a need to pass this legislation. Let them prevail upon the Republican leader to reconsider his position.

I yield the floor.

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. NELSON. Madam 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.

#### 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.

#### EXECUTIVE SESSION

#### EXECUTIVE CALENDAR

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, the Senate will proceed to executive session and resume consideration of the following nomination, which the clerk will report.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read the nomination of JAMES BRIDENSTINE, of Oklahoma, to be Administrator of the National Aeronautics and Space Administration.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from Florida is recognized.

#### PUERTO RICO BLACKOUT

Mr. NELSON. Madam President, it is hard to believe, but the entire island of Puerto Rico yesterday descended into darkness. An excavation happened to hit a main line that cut out the electricity of the entire island—3½ million people—an island that is not a small island; it is a large island. It was a total blackout. Now, 24 hours later, a large number of the people on the island are still in the dark.

Tomorrow marks 7 months since Hurricane Maria made landfall in Puerto Rico, and yet Puerto Ricans are still dealing with constant setbacks and unreliable power. This is simply unacceptable.

Senator RUBIO and I have asked the Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources Committee to conduct an additional oversight hearing on the overall hurricane recovery and get to the bottom of this. I understand this