

of Indiana. He is joining Hoosiers to celebrate the new jobs and prosperity our Republican agenda is delivering to communities in Indiana and all over the country. After years of Democratic policies that made life harder for job creators, the United States of America is officially open for business once again.

Surveys show that since President Trump and this Republican Congress were elected, the percentage of small and independent employers feeling confident about expanding their businesses has nearly tripled. The amount that employers spend on wages, salaries, and benefits for American workers grew more in 2017 than in any calendar year of the Obama administration. The number of Americans receiving unemployment benefits is the lowest—the lowest—since 1973. Let me say that again. The number of Americans receiving unemployment benefits is the lowest it has been since 1973. Richard Nixon was in the White House back then. Republicans have focused like a laser on getting Washington out of the way. More job opportunities, higher pay, and greater prosperity are already reaching middle-class Americans.

My colleague Senator YOUNG has been sharing some of the great news that awaits the President when he gets to Indiana. He has heard from constituents like Donald from Noblesville. Donald said:

I don't consider myself rich, but applying next year's tax changes to this year's income, I'll pay over \$1,000 less in taxes next year. Everyone benefits with the new tax cuts.

A Bloomington resident named Cathy said this about her husband's tax reform bonus:

We have never had this happen. It was much appreciated.

First Farmers Bank & Trust is raising wages, writing employee bonus checks, and investing more in development for the communities it serves, with 34 branches all across Indiana.

There are stories like these being written all over the country—largely because Republicans rolled back job-killing regulations and cut taxes significantly for working families and for small businesses.

Oddly, our Democratic colleagues can't bring themselves to admit this is a good thing. Even when the facts show our growing economy is making life better for middle-class Americans, they try to shrug off the facts and fall back on the same old class warfare rhetoric. Even when people like Donald and Cathy explain how tax reform is helping them, Democrats scoff at their household finances, saying multi-thousand-dollar tax cuts are just "crumbs."

Crumbs? Maybe in New York or San Francisco, but in Kentucky, where I come from, working families don't see their tax cuts, bonuses, and pay raises as crumbs. I have a hunch it is the same in Indiana.

It is curious that only one of Indiana's Senators voted to give Hoosiers

these tax cuts and these new job opportunities. Indiana's senior Senator voted in lockstep with Democratic leaders to block tax reform from ever taking effect. Instead of working with Republicans and the President to keep the new prosperity coming, he and his colleagues have chosen to obstruct and resist on nearly every subject.

Just the other day, the Democratic leader in the House declared she plans to campaign on repealing the tax reform—that is, the Democratic leader in the U.S. House—campaign on repealing the tax reform. Tax cuts versus tax hikes, that is about as clear a contrast as you can imagine. Fortunately, for Hoosiers, Kentuckians, and all the other communities that are finally growing again after years of atrophy, Republicans will defend the American people's tax cuts and defend their new jobs.

RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the leadership time is reserved.

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 and resume consideration of the following nomination, which the clerk will report.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read the nomination of Michael B. Brennan, of Wisconsin, to be United States Circuit Judge for the Seventh Circuit.

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

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

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

The Democratic leader is recognized.

Mr. SCHUMER. Madam President, later today the Senate will vote on the confirmation of Michael Brennan to the Seventh Circuit over the objections of one of his home-State Senators, Ms. BALDWIN, who has not returned a blue slip on his nomination.

It is an abject breach of senatorial courtesy that both parties have long respected. In fact, the seat Mr. Brennan will fill on the Seventh Circuit has been held open for 6 years by the senior Senator from Wisconsin, Mr. JOHNSON,

via the same process, the blue slip. When Barack Obama was President and when PATRICK LEAHY was chairman of the Judiciary Committee, we Democrats obeyed the blue slip, and it led that seat to be vacant for 6 years. Now that the shoe is on the other foot, the Republican majority will ignore the blue-slip rights of the Democratic Senator even though it fervently believes that we ought to listen to the rights of the Republican Senator from Wisconsin. The actions of the Republican leader erode one of the few remaining customs in the Senate that forces consultation and consensus on judicial nominations.

In the grand scheme of things, the vote may seem to some of my colleagues on the other side like a small one—one judge for one circuit court. But in truth, the vote on Mr. Brennan is a death by a thousand cuts of the grand tradition of bipartisanship and comity in the U.S. Senate. I know all too well that there is plenty of blame to go around on both sides of the aisle, but if we don't take a step back now, the Senate will soon become a rubberstamp or graveyard for Presidential nominees, rendering our advice and consent nearly meaningless.

I understand the pressure on the leader from the hard right. They want judges who are not bipartisan. They wanted a judge in this case who did not go through a bipartisan judicial panel, composed of both Democrats and Republicans, who have always sent us judges from Wisconsin. Two were sent, but, instead, Brennan, who couldn't get through the panel, was sent.

This is so wrong. This goes beyond what we have seen done before. When Leader McCONNELL changed the rules on the Supreme Court—which we didn't—many on the other side, I understand, said: Well, that is tit for tat because Democrats changed the rules on the lower courts. But the blue-slip tradition has always been obeyed. We didn't change that. We could have. We could have stuffed through our nominees with no Republican support, but we didn't.

I hope for the sake of comity that one or two of my Republican colleagues will stand up and vote against Mr. Brennan's nomination, not because of his beliefs—which they may agree with, for all I know—but for the sake of the Senate, for the grand tradition of the Senate, for the right afforded to every Senator to consult on judges from their State, minority or majority, and most of all, for the traditions that have held this body together for more than two centuries and separated it from the more partisan Chamber on the other end of the Capitol.

RELEASE OF AMERICAN HOSTAGES IN NORTH KOREA

Madam President, on another matter—North Korea—early this morning, the three American hostages who were being held in North Korea were returned home. It was great to see them come home, back in America, back with their families.