

General Abizaid faces a tall challenge, but I believe he is up to the job. He has the experience and leadership necessary to both manage a large mission and get the currently fraught relationship with Saudi Arabia back on track in a way that advances our security interests and stays true to our ideals.

I urge my colleagues to support General Abizaid's confirmation. His leadership, deep regional expertise, management skills, knowledge of Arabic, and experience in having served in conflict areas will make him an effective U.S. Ambassador to Saudi Arabia.

CONFIRMATION OF PATRICK R. WYRICK

Mr. President, I want to spend a moment on the issue of judicial nominees—specifically the President's nominee for the U.S. District Court for the Western District of Oklahoma, Mr. Patrick Wyrick.

Mr. Wyrick's record suggests he is little more than a rightwing crusader in the war against the reproductive rights of women. In 2014, he spearheaded an amicus in the *Sebelius v. Hobby Lobby Stores, Inc.*, case, arguing that corporations' religious rights were violated by the Affordable Care Act's requirement that employers' health plans cover birth control. By a 5-to-4 margin, the Supreme Court agreed. Likewise, while representing Oklahoma in *Pruitt v. Nova Health Systems*, Mr. Wyrick defended a law mandating that women who seek abortions first submit to having ultrasounds. Fortunately, the Oklahoma Supreme Court struck down that law.

I could go on, but the bottom line is that Mr. Wyrick embodies President Trump's pledge to only nominate judges who are committed to rolling back reproductive rights even if they are seriously unqualified for lifetime appointments.

Let's be honest about why the Republicans seek to confirm these judicial nominations at record speed. After being punished at the polls for their assault on affordable healthcare, they want our courts to do their dirty work for them. How convenient it is that the Republicans can confirm judges who have hostile records on healthcare even as they distance themselves from the Trump administration's reckless decision to declare the entire Affordable Care Act as unconstitutional, including the law's protections for patients with preexisting conditions, the tax credits that help families to afford premiums, the expansion of Medicaid, and so much more.

I am tired of watching the majority stack our courts in favor of wealthy special interests even as they know full well that Americans overwhelmingly oppose their morally bankrupt agenda. Once again, Americans oppose letting health insurance companies discriminate against people with preexisting conditions. They oppose their plan to end Medicaid as we know it and their trillion-dollar tax cuts for big corpora-

tions. They oppose this President's assault on the rights of consumers, workers, students, and women.

Democracy is supposed to be a battle of ideas, but when it comes to healthcare or student loan debt or climate change, the Republican Party does not have any. When you can't win on the merits, what do you do? You tip the scales of justice in your favor. Well, I, for one, will not stay silent. I will continue to speak out against unqualified nominees like Patrick Wyrick, and I will continue to vote against judges whose views are grossly out of step with the views of the vast majority of Americans on everything from the environment to women's reproductive rights to healthcare for all.

I yield the floor.

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. THUNE. I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

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

TAX REFORM

Mr. THUNE. Mr. President, tax day is not anyone's favorite day, but thanks to the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act, millions of American families are facing a less painful tax bill this year. They are also seeing a lot of economic opportunity.

When Republicans took office after President Trump's election, we were determined to make things better for American families. Under the Obama administration, the economy had stagnated, wages barely grew, job growth was weak, business investment growth was low.

Republicans knew that if we wanted to make life better for families, we had to turn that around. American families can't thrive if the economy isn't thriving. You need a strong, growing economy to give Americans access to good wages, good jobs, and real opportunities.

So we got right to work. We repealed burdensome regulations that were acting as a drag on economic growth, and we passed a comprehensive reform of our Nation's outdated Tax Code.

Why the Tax Code? Well, the Tax Code has a huge effect on our economy. A small business owner facing a huge tax bill is unlikely to be able to expand her business or to hire a new employee. In fact, if her tax burden is heavy enough, she may not even be able to keep her business open.

Similarly, a large business is going to find it pretty hard to create jobs or improve benefits for employees if it is struggling to stay competitive against foreign businesses that are paying much less in taxes.

Prior to the passage of the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act, our Tax Code was not helping our economy. In fact, it was doing the opposite, and so we made reforming our Tax Code a priority.

Our goal with the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act was twofold: put more money in

Americans' pockets immediately and get the economy going again to give Americans access to good jobs, good wages, and opportunities for the long term, and that is exactly what we did. To put more money in Americans' pockets right away, we cut tax rates for American families, doubled the child tax credit, and nearly doubled the standard deduction, and now families are seeing the effects.

The liberal Tax Policy Center reports that under the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act, 90 percent of middle-class families are seeing a tax cut. For 2018, the typical family of four saw a tax break of more than \$2,000. That is more money every month to put toward a family vacation, a home or car repair, or a kid's braces, or to tuck away in savings for a rainy day.

That is not all. As I said earlier, families aren't just seeing a lower tax bill; they are also seeing more economic opportunity thanks to the economic growth spurred by the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act.

The Tax Cuts and Jobs Act lowered tax rates across the board for owners of small- and medium-size businesses, farms, and ranches. It lowered our Nation's massive corporate tax rate, which up until January 1 of last year was the highest corporate tax rate in the developed world. It expanded business owners' ability to recover the cost of investments they make in their businesses, which frees up cash they can reinvest in their operations and in their workers. It brought the U.S. international tax system into the 21st century so that American businesses are not operating at a competitive disadvantage relative to their foreign counterparts.

Those measures have done exactly what they were supposed to do: Get our economy going again. Economic growth is up. Job creation is up. Wages are up. Personal income is up. Business investment is up. Unemployment is down.

Since tax reform was enacted, job growth has averaged 215,000 jobs per month. That is almost twice—almost twice—the monthly average during the Obama administration.

In 2018, for the first time ever, the number of jobs outnumbered the number of jobseekers; 2018 was the first time ever.

The Department of Labor reports that the number of jobs available has now exceeded the number of those looking for work for 12 straight months. Unemployment has now been at or below 4 percent for 13 months. In the last week of March, the number of jobless claims hit its lowest level in 50 years.

U.S. manufacturing, which saw thousands of job losses during the Obama years, is booming. Since tax reform was passed 15 months ago, the manufacturing industry has added thousands of jobs.

Wages have been growing at or above 3 percent for 8 straight months. Since

wages are growing faster than inflation, that is translating to a real increase in purchasing power for American consumers.

Business investment is up. Since the passage of tax reform, business investment growth has averaged 7 percent, almost twice—almost twice—what it averaged during the Obama administration.

What do all of these numbers mean? They mean more and better jobs for jobseekers. They mean more money in your paycheck to spend or save for the future. They mean more and better opportunities to advance in your career.

Thanks to tax reform, more families can afford to pay that orthodontist bill and still save some money for a family vacation. More families can afford to cover that unexpected car repair or plumber's bill. More families can afford to put a little extra away each month for the kids' education or for their retirement.

I am proud that tax reform is making life better for American families. Republicans will continue working to secure the gains that we have made for the long term and to expand opportunities for hard-working Americans even further.

I yield the floor.

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. Mr. 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.

NOMINATION OF DAVID BERNHARDT

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, later this week the Senate will vote on the confirmation of David Bernhardt, a longtime lobbyist, to the position of Interior Secretary. An oil and gas lobbyist will be entrusted with our sacred—sacred—inheritance, the great lands of America.

I urge Senators to oppose this nomination.

The Department of the Interior is the Agency entrusted with protecting our Nation's public lands, our water supplies, our wildlife, and our energy resources. It grapples directly with some of the biggest questions our country faces: how to respond to climate change, how to protect endangered species, and how to care for our precious natural resources. Yet to lead our Interior Department, President Trump has nominated Mr. Bernhardt, an oil and gas lobbyist who has made a career harming the environment, subverting environmental protections, and helping polluters sidestep Federal regulation.

As former Secretary Zinke's deputy, he has paved the way for even more polluters to run rampant without accountability. Under his watch, the Department of the Interior has already opened a colossal 17 million acres of

Federal land for oil and gas leases, generating millions in revenue for energy companies, all while Bernhardt recklessly managed our national parks during the government shutdown.

I am especially troubled this morning because POLITICO reported that under Mr. Bernhardt's watch, the Department of the Interior might even greenlight offshore drilling off the coasts of Florida—a prospect both parties in the State say they oppose. This should be a wake-up call to my colleagues all up and down the coast—Atlantic, Pacific, and the gulf. If they can't find a reason to oppose this nominee based on the other serious and troubling issues that have been raised, maybe this is reason enough for them.

It is hard to imagine someone whose background is so at odds with the Department's mission as Bernhardt's. For all his talk of draining the swamp, President Trump wants to add yet another Washington swamp creature lobbyist to his Cabinet.

By the way, our resources—our oil and gas resources—are large. The motivation here to spoil public lands for oil and gas drilling—it is the power of the oil companies. It has nothing to do with the plan for natural resources. Bernhardt is an exemplary example of the power of these oil companies.

Gravely troubling is the long list of conflicting interests that Bernhardt brings to Trump's Cabinet. Up to 20 of his former clients have lobbied the Department of the Interior since his arrival, and the New York Times reported last week that he very likely has been less than forthcoming about when he stopped lobbying. No other Cabinet-level nominee in the Trump era has so many conflicts of interest, and that is a low bar. It is a distinction no one should be proud to hold.

Worst of all, Bernhardt is a hardened enemy of climate science. If you are a lobbyist for oil and gas companies, you would say that climate change isn't real too. The Washington Post reported he attended a session of administration officials that "debated how best to establish a group of researchers that could scrutinize recent federal climate reports." Translation: Bernhardt is actively working to set up the White House's fake panel to deny basic science.

I have already introduced legislation to prohibit any funding from going to this fake climate panel, but knowing Mr. Bernhardt's role in setting it up should send shivers down the spines of every American who is worried about the impact of our changing climate on their families, their farms, and future generations.

We cannot entrust our public lands to someone known to wage a campaign of censorship against facts and reason. Now, later today, I am going to be able to meet with Mr. Bernhardt to discuss his qualifications. I am letting him know now that I will ask him the same three questions I have asked my Republican colleagues in this Chamber.

One, does Mr. Bernhardt agree that climate change is real; two, does he agree it is a product of human action; and three, should the Federal Government have a role in combating its effects? His record suggests his answer to all these questions is no, but let's see what he says today.

Caring for our planet and being good stewards of our natural resources are the most important responsibilities we owe to future generations, so I am gravely concerned about Bernhardt's nomination to the Department of the Interior, and I urge my colleagues to vote no on his confirmation.

One final point. It still amazes me that Donald Trump campaigns on cleaning up the swamp, and he does exactly the opposite when in office. An oil and gas lobbyist is head of the Department of the Interior? My God, that is an example of the swampiness of Washington, if there ever was one. When are Donald Trump's supporters going to understand this; that what he promised them, in so many different instances, he is not delivering. It is baffling. It is a sign of the weakness of our democracy that someone can walk into the Presidency promising so many things and then just immediately do the opposite and still a large chunk of Americans say they support him. It is amazing to me.

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Mr. President, for months, American citizens have been reeling from natural disasters and are in desperate need of Federal aid. Parenthetically, I remind Mr. Bernhardt that a lot of these disasters, scientists believe, are because the climate is warmer, and the weather is changing, but rather than work with us to provide the much needed aid to large chunks of America, our Republican colleagues have once again decided to follow President Trump and refuse to compromise. They are so afraid of him that even when he proposes something they know is wrong and irrational, they do a 180-degree hairpin turn and support what he is doing.

Now, that would be just politics, except millions are awaiting aid and need help. Their homes, their farms, their offices, and their factories are underwater, literally, in a lot of places still.

Just yesterday, House Democrats offered a solution. We said: Let's provide disaster relief not to some Americans but to all Americans struggling to recover and rebuild from natural disasters.

Their new proposal that the House offered includes an additional \$3 billion—this is House Democrats, not Senate Democrats, by the way. Their new proposal includes an additional \$3 billion to address urgent needs following the floods in the Midwest and the tornadoes in the South. This plus-up includes \$1.5 billion for the Army Corps of Engineers to support flood risk reduction so crucial in the Missouri River Valley, \$1 billion in CDBG for long-term recovery needs, and \$500 million in agriculture funding to help