

HONORING ROBERT MCKEITHEN

Mrs. HYDE-SMITH. Mr. President, I respect the time-honored practice of this body which encourages new Members to listen and observe before speaking on the floor. There is value in humility—knowing when to talk and when to listen.

First, let me say it is a great privilege to represent the people of Mississippi in the United States Senate. I am working hard to support the needs of all Mississippians and to justify the confidence placed in me by the people of my great State.

Today I rise to speak on several important topics. First and foremost, I rise to honor Officer Robert McKeithen, a 24-year-decorated veteran of the Biloxi Police Department who lost his life in the line of duty this past Sunday night, May 5.

Officer McKeithen was described by his chief as “an unbelievably fine policeman.” He was an Air Force veteran, a husband, and a father who dedicated his life to serving the people of Biloxi, my State, and our Nation. His loss is a tragedy and a stark reminder that law enforcement officers risk their lives daily to keep us safe. Officer McKeithen’s family, colleagues, and friends certainly have my deepest sympathy.

DISASTER RELIEF

Mr. President, I also rise to speak on behalf of thousands of Mississippians who have been affected by catastrophic flooding and other natural disasters this year. Their plight and the unmet commitment made to them long ago provide us an opportunity to evaluate how we as public servants meet the expectations of the people.

On February 25, 2019, the Governor of Mississippi declared a state of emergency due to strong storms, torrential rainfall, and severe flooding. Homes, property, businesses, and public infrastructure had been damaged statewide. On April 23, President Trump granted a major disaster declaration for the State of Mississippi to help communities recover from these events. I am grateful for the President’s actions.

A large portion of West Central Mississippi is experiencing the worst flood records since 1973. On April 1, more than 512,000 acres were flooded. Now, a little more than a month later, more than 488,000 acres in this highly productive agricultural region are still underwater, with conditions forecasted to get worse before they improve. To put that into perspective, these floodwaters span nearly 762 square miles as we speak. This flooding is affecting homes, roads, bridges, churches, schools, and the overall health and public safety of area residents. Septic tanks are overflowing. Snakes are in houses. The bloated bodies of drowned deer, bear, hogs, and other wildlife float in stagnant water. The residents of Mississippi’s Eagle Lake are basically on an island. If someone needs emergency healthcare, it is virtually impossible for an ambulance to get to them.

Further, hundreds of thousands of acres of prime agriculture and timberland will suffer significant damage or simply go unplanted this season. The economic impact on agriculture alone will be in the hundreds of millions of dollars.

I observed the magnitude of the flooding and damages firsthand in a flyover with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers a month ago. The situation on the ground is no different today. It is truly heartbreaking to see. While the full extent of damage can’t be assessed until the floodwaters recede and residents can return to their homes, Mississippians, along with those in the Midwest experiencing similar challenges, need relief also.

I commend the Appropriations Committee chairman and vice chairman for their continued efforts to reach an agreement on an emergency funding measure to help individuals and communities recover from natural disasters. I am especially grateful for their willingness to consider expanding the scope of the legislation to address the 2019 natural disasters. Federal assistance alone will not solve all the problems, and a long road to recovery lies ahead. However, disaster supplemental legislation will provide a very important first step.

The outcome of the push and pull over disaster assistance highlights the need for us, as elected representatives, to consistently evaluate the Federal Government’s performance on delivering promises to the American people. I cannot speak for others, but Mississippians would like to see more action and less acting from their leaders in Washington. Our Nation’s environmental review and permitting process for infrastructure projects is the epitome of a flawed and broken bureaucracy in desperate need of repair.

President Trump’s Executive orders to expedited environmental reviews and approvals for high-priority infrastructure projects speak to the American public’s frustration toward Washington and the never-ending bureaucratic redtape carried over from the Obama administration. I am grateful this administration has taken a strong stance to bring common sense to government operations. It should not take years and numerous acts of Congress to expand and deepen ports or tackle important infrastructure projects that would generate jobs and add billions to our Nation’s economy. It should not take decades and numerous acts of Congress to complete critical flood control projects that will protect the lives and property of Americans while preventing the need for multibillion-dollar disaster measures. Congress should make it abundantly clear that one Federal Agency should not be able to prevent or delay another Federal Agency from delivering critical flood protections specifically authorized by the legislative branch. There are numerous examples of this—what most Americans consider bad government—

across the country. The catastrophic flooding taking place in Mississippi is a prime example of one Agency that has worked at odds with another to the detriment of the public. So many Mississippians are exasperated by the fact that they are losing their homes and way of making a living, all the while knowing it could have been prevented.

The Federal Government has yet to put in place the flood control improvement it has promised area residents since 1941. The fact is, they have made it worse. Make no mistake, today’s flooding in Mississippi should not be happening. It is time for the Federal Government to step up and make good on its promises. It is time for the Federal Government to listen to the people in need of help and to help them.

Over the past seven decades, significant taxpayer dollars have been invested in the Lower Mississippi River Valley to construct a comprehensive, systematic flood control solution which today consists of levees, drainage channels, and floodgates. The last remaining feature of this 77-year effort remains unconstructed due to the excessive, overburdensome regulations and redtape. Because of this, Mississippians are once again losing their homes and businesses, roads and bridges are being destroyed, and wildlife is dying—their habitat lost to contaminated floodwaters.

I bring this to the attention of my colleagues because passage of disaster legislation is vital to my constituents and millions of people across the country. I also call attention to this situation to encourage us to strive to do a much better job in delivering for the American people. That is what our constituents expect, and that is what they deserve.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Maryland.

NATIONAL SMALL BUSINESS WEEK

Mr. CARDIN. Mr. President, today I rise to speak about National Small Business Week. As ranking member of the Senate Committee on Small Business and Entrepreneurship, I want to thank the 30 million small businesses in America for their contributions to our economy during this National Small Business Week.

I look forward to National Small Business Week every year because it is a chance for us to honor the small businesses and communities in Maryland and across the country that may not make headlines, but they steadily move our economy forward by improving industries, developing new products, and creating employment opportunities for more than 47 percent of all American workers.

One tradition of National Small Business Week is that the Small Business Administration selects a Small Business Person of the Year from each State, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, the U.S. Virgin Islands, and Guam.

This year’s Maryland Small Business Person of the Year is Zhensen Huang,

the chief executive officer of Precise Software Solutions—an innovative information technology company that is based in Rockville, MD. Dr. Huang is also a professor of information systems at the University of Maryland Baltimore County, where he is training future leaders in Maryland's technology sector.

Small business owners like Dr. Huang are the cornerstone of Maryland's economy, and their deep roots in the community help to shape the culture and character of our State. I thank Dr. Huang for bringing dynamism and ingenuity to Maryland's economy, and I wish him and his colleagues continued success.

I have met with countless small business owners like Dr. Huang as I have traveled across my home State of Maryland, which we proudly call "America in Miniature" due to our diversity. From bustling metropolitan areas like Baltimore City and the DC suburbs to rural communities on the Eastern Shore and in Mountain Maryland, small businesses are not just where we buy products and services; they are the building blocks that make up our communities.

That is why I requested a seat on the Small Business and Entrepreneurship Committee when I began serving in the Senate in 2007. I wanted to make sure small businesses in Maryland and across the country were receiving the support they needed from Washington. Nationwide, small businesses account for 99.9 percent of all businesses, with there being a total of nearly 31 million small businesses that employ 60 million Americans.

According to the Small Business Administration Office of Advocacy, small businesses created 1.8 million net jobs in 2016, the most recent year for which data is available. Of those jobs created, more than 1.2 million were created by small businesses with fewer than 20 employees. It is clear that small businesses are the growth engine that power our economy, so it is on us in Congress to ensure that they receive the support they need to overcome the unique challenges they face.

When I meet with small businesses across Maryland, one of their top concerns is often their access to capital. Capital is the lifeblood of small businesses. So, for many small businesses, an SBA-backed loan is a lifeline that is the difference between success and failure in the early, fragile stages of a small business's life.

I see the benefits of SBA-backed loans every time I drive past Under Armour's headquarters in Baltimore. Without an SBA-backed loan, Under Armour may not have been able to grow from a small business being run out of a basement to the global brand, with thousands of employees in Baltimore, that it is today. Last year alone, SBA-backed financing helped nearly 75,000 small businesses access more than \$36 billion in capital, and it supported more than 725,000 jobs.

The SBA's finance programs are models of public-private partnerships and do a lot of good in this country, but some of the programs are not adequately reaching underserved communities, especially those of minorities, women, and veterans. I do note that the SBA's Microloan Program and the 7(a) Community Advantage Pilot Program do punch above their weight in reaching underserved borrowers. We can learn from how those programs are being operated to help underserved communities in order to help modify loan programs such as the 7(a) and 504 so they may be able to reach more of the underserved communities.

The chronic shortfall of SBA loans reaching the minority communities is especially important in Maryland, which I am proud to say has the highest average number of minority-owned businesses in the country. Minority-owned firms are two to three times more likely to be denied credit, more likely to avoid applying for loans based on the belief that they will be turned down, and more likely to receive smaller loans and pay higher interest rates on the loans they do receive.

Last September, I held a field hearing in Baltimore at Morgan State University—a revered HBCU—to learn more about the struggles minority entrepreneurs face in their accessing of capital.

One of the key takeaways from the hearing was that minority small business owners need SBA to fill the gaps when private lenders often fall short. Additionally, access to capital must go hand in hand with entrepreneurial development training. The entrepreneurial development programs at the SBA provided mentorship, business advice, and training to more than 1.2 million entrepreneurs during fiscal year 2018.

These programs are invaluable. Data show that small businesses created by entrepreneurs who receive at least 3 hours of SBA counseling have higher success rates than small businesses created by entrepreneurs who have not received that amount of counseling.

Knowing that small businesses, especially minority-owned small businesses, need more support from the SBA, not less, is why I remain deeply troubled by the administration's efforts to make vital business counseling and SBA-backed loans more difficult to access.

The administration's fiscal year 2020 budget proposed more than a quarter of a billion dollars in new fees for SBA-backed loans. Simply put, this is a \$255 million tax on American small business owners. Additionally, instead of investing in entrepreneurial development programs, the administration's recent budget proposed \$67 million in cuts to these programs.

The administration's efforts to undermine the SBA are even more concerning considering the current lack of leadership at the Agency. Since the resignation of Administrator Linda

McMahon, the President has not sent Congress a nomination for a new Administrator. I also remain concerned about the administration's failure to nominate a Deputy Administrator—a position that has been vacant for more than 12 months.

We hear from the administration that we haven't acted on their nominees. We don't have the nominees to act on. As I speak, there are thousands of small business owners from across the country who are visiting Washington, DC, in order to participate in the National Small Business Week events that have been scheduled, and many more are participating in events across the country.

Let us honor them and their contributions by giving the SBA the tools and leadership it needs to help entrepreneurs build successful small businesses. I look forward to continuing to work with Chairman MARCO RUBIO and our colleagues in the House, in a bipartisan fashion, to support American small businesses so they can continue developing innovative products and services and creating jobs.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mrs. FISCHER). The Senator from Iowa.

Mr. GRASSLEY. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the order of the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection.

REMEMBERING ROBERT PEAR

Mr. GRASSLEY. Madam President, I come to the floor today to pay tribute to a revered and distinguished member of the press corps, Robert Pear, a longtime reporter for the New York Times. He spent four decades in the corridors of this U.S. Capitol.

I often say that journalists are the watchdogs of democracy, and I really believe that—policing their beats to inform the public and, more importantly, to hold wrongdoers and especially our big government accountable. That makes them very valuable to preserving our representative system of government. These journalists serve as the eyes and ears of the American people—reporting on issues that impact the daily lives and livelihoods of our neighbors. From crime to education, healthcare, and foreign policy, journalists serve as guardians of the First Amendment.

That brings me to Robert.

On Tuesday, the healthcare beat lost a legendary reporter. The death of Robert Pear will be mourned for many years to come. As the dean of the national healthcare reporters, he established a reputation for hard-nosed reporting. For decades, he carried out a noble mission to inform the public, and he did it with integrity and fairness. He leaves behind a legacy of unmatched institutional knowledge, particularly in the area of healthcare policy.