

Mr. LEAHY. 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. BARRASSO. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.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. BARRASSO. Madam President, when we were debating the tax relief law at the end of last year, it was a very familiar debate in many ways.

Republicans came to the floor with facts and figures on how much extra money people were going to see in their pockets and their paychecks. Democrats came to the floor with the same old tired line that you always hear them talk about—the millionaires and billionaires.

Republicans pointed out economic studies that showed that workers right now pay more than 70 percent of the cost of corporate taxes. We talked about a study by the Tax Foundation that predicted that if we passed the tax relief bill, the average family would actually see a gain of about \$2,600 a year in their after-tax income. It was partly because of getting the tax cut and partly because their employers would then pass on much of the tax cut in higher wages. Democrats didn't believe it. They said that only rich people would benefit and that businesses would never share their tax savings with the workers. The Democratic leader said that "tax cuts like these benefit the wealthy and the powerful to the exclusion of the middle class."

Here we are. It is the month after we passed the tax relief bill, the tax reduction bill, and the tax simplification bill, and the question is, Who was right? The very day the tax bill passed in Congress, AT&T came out and said it was giving its workers a bonus. It said that 200,000 hard-working employees were going to get an extra \$1,000 each directly because of the new tax relief, tax reduction, tax cut bill. The Tax Foundation predicted that they would eventually get an extra \$2,600, and these people are already getting \$1,000 each on day one.

That has opened the floodgates to other companies doing the exact same thing and employees around the country experiencing the exact same thing. Businesses started sharing the tax savings with rank-and-file, middle-class workers, and it started on day one—not just the wealthy and the powerful, as Senator SCHUMER has predicted. Over 120 companies have said they are raising wages, giving out bonuses, and investing in their workers because of the tax law. It adds up to over \$980 million—\$980 million in the pockets of hard-working men and women around the country. How many people are seeing that? By last count, almost 1 million hard-working Americans—over 970,000 hard-working Americans have already gotten the good news.

There is more good news coming every day, with more announcements today. It is exactly what Republicans said would happen. It is happening for people who work at banks, who work at insurance companies, who work at airlines. It is happening for people who work at big companies, such as AT&T, Visa, and Comcast, but it is also happening for people who work at smaller companies, such as a winery in California and an aviation company in Texas. These are businesses and people in communities who are important parts of their communities and doing important jobs. The employees work hard, and now they are getting a share of the relief the Republicans had predicted they would get all along. And they are not just getting cash bonuses. There is a bank in Massachusetts called Berkshire Hills Bancorp. They announced last week that the people working there will be getting a \$1,000 bonus and will also see the minimum wage raised to \$15 an hour.

More is being invested in employee development and training programs. When you invest more in employee development and training programs, that means people are going to have additional skills that make them even more productive, better at their jobs, and qualify for even higher wages.

This bank in Massachusetts is also contributing an extra \$2 million to its charitable efforts, including scholarships. That helps improve the communities where the workers live and where they raise their families.

Democrats said it is not going to happen. It has happened. It is happening every day. They said that businesses would keep the money for themselves. That is not what we are seeing all across the country.

Ms. WARREN, the senior Senator from Massachusetts, went on PBS. The senior Senator from Massachusetts said that the idea that tax relief would lead to higher wages was, in her words, "the big lie that Republicans have been selling" for decades. She said that tax relief was "an insult to working families across America."

I would point out to Senator WARREN that many of the people who work at this bank are in her home State of Massachusetts. People have gotten wage increases. People have gotten additional money spent on training so they can become more valuable and make even more money. People have seen the minimum wage in that business go up. The workers getting these bonuses and raises in their pay are her constituents. Does she think these people are feeling insulted? Does she believe they have been insulted by getting a \$1,000 bonus and getting an increase in their salaries and having investments in terms of additional training? Is that an insult to those people? I don't think so. I bet they are feeling pretty glad to be supported and valued by their employer.

There is another business in Nevada, South Point Casino. Workers there are

receiving \$1 million total in bonuses. Previously, this business had actually planned to increase the share of health insurance costs that its employees would have to pay because health insurance costs have gone up.

Health insurance prices have skyrocketed ever since ObamaCare was passed. Companies have struggled with how to deal with these rising costs. Many have tried to pass these on to the employees.

This company in Nevada has said that because of the Republican tax relief law, they are canceling their plans to raise insurance costs—canceling their plans to raise the costs. That is more money in employees' pockets. The owner of the business said: "We want to be sure that our extended family is taken care of." That is the way these people think of the people who work for them—as part of their extended family. That is how employers are responding to tax relief all around the country, and that is what we said would happen.

We also predicted that one way businesses might deal with lower taxes would be to cut prices for consumers, let people who use their services or buy their products keep more of their hard-earned money. Americans are starting to see that prediction come true in the form of lower utility bills. Gas, electric, and water utilities across the country are getting ready to cut their rates because the taxes are going down under the law. Customers of the power company in Baltimore are going to receive millions of dollars in the form of lower rates. It has been a cold winter on the east coast, and a lower electric bill is going to be good news for a lot of people in that area. Customers are also likely to see the same thing in Missouri, South Carolina, and Louisiana.

These are the kinds of effects we are seeing all across the country, in various ways. It is all good news for consumers, all good news for people at home as a result of the tax reduction, tax relief, tax cuts passed by Republicans and signed by President Trump.

Americans are getting the benefits of tax relief. They are getting the benefit of regulatory relief and the pro-growth policies of Republicans in Congress and the Trump administration. People are seeing it in their daily lives. The polling company Gallup said that as soon as Donald Trump was elected President, economic confidence in this country soared. That is what the polls found. It has stayed positive almost without interruption ever since. It is the exact opposite of what polls were showing during the previous 8 years, in the previous administration. That was during the so-called economic recovery.

Why are people so optimistic now? It is because you can't open a newspaper or turn on a television without seeing more good news about the economy. New employment numbers came out last Friday. CNN had a headline: "U.S.

economy added 2 million jobs in 2017.” The Washington Post’s headline was “Trump’s first-year jobs numbers were very, very good.” Bloomberg reported that the Christmas shopping season was “probably the best one in a decade.” People are feeling confident. They are seeing higher wages, they are seeing cash bonuses, and soon they will start seeing the tax cut in their paychecks.

The American people know that Republicans have kept our promise. We are cutting regulations, cutting taxes, putting more money back in their pockets. That is what hard-working Americans have asked us to do, and that is what we are going to continue to do.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. TILLIS). The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

Mrs. ERNST. Mr. President, I rise to discuss the positive impact the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act will have on Iowa farmers.

Of course, our Iowa agricultural economy is really important, and those men and women who are serving as farmers, ranchers, and growers in the State of Iowa mean the world to me, coming from a farm my family had in Southwest Iowa.

We all understand this has been a very challenging time for farmers in our rural communities. The community I come from in Southwest Iowa has just 10,000 people in our county. Many of them have faced the challenges of the economic downturn. Since their peaks in 2012, corn prices have declined by 60 percent and soybean prices have declined by 47 percent. My neighbors are hurting, folks. Farm income has nearly been cut in half since 2013.

A lot of our producers are hurting, especially our young and beginning farmers who have gotten their start just in maybe the last 10 years or so, but, fortunately for our farmers, our ranchers, and our growers, tax relief is on its way. The Tax Cuts and Jobs Act will provide sweeping tax cuts for farmers and rural communities, allowing our producers to keep more of those hard-earned dollars.

About 95 percent of farms are organized as passthrough businesses, such as sole proprietorships, partnerships, and S corps. These businesses are taxed under individual tax rules and will benefit from lower tax rates for every income bracket. On top of that, they will see significant relief through a new 20-percent deduction on passthrough business income. The law also provides relief from the costly individual mandate which forced many farmers to choose between buying an expensive ObamaCare plan through their State exchange or being fined.

Now, just a couple of years ago, I remember a very intense conversation I had with a beginning farmer in Northeast Iowa. When he was purchasing his insurance through the State exchange, the cost had more than doubled. He was shaking he was so upset about it, and he explained to me the additional cost of that individual policy was his truck payment. There was no room in his budget for the additional cost of that insurance policy so he had to make that choice: Do I purchase through the individual exchange or do I make my truck payment? Fortunately, within this bill, we have that relief. He can make that choice, and the choice is his on whether he makes that truck payment and forgoes the insurance or whether now he can do without that type of insurance and not be fined because he was too poor to afford it.

In addition, the bill dramatically expands section 179 expensing and allows 5 years of 100 bonus depreciation. Both of these changes will foster much needed investment in farms throughout Iowa.

The law also preserves a number of important tax provisions for farmers, including the interest deduction, cash accounting, and the use of like-kind exchanges for property.

Last, but certainly not least, the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act doubles the Federal estate tax exemption while preserving the stepped-up basis. The death tax can have a devastating impact on family farms. Over 90 percent of farm assets cannot be sold easily without losing value. Especially as we continue to experience a downturn in that ag economy, family farmers are sometimes left with no choice but to sell land or the equipment they use to farm that land when they are forced to pay that tax.

The Tax Cuts and Jobs Act is a big step in the right direction for agriculture. I am thankful to the President for his leadership and to my colleagues in the Senate and the House for helping get this long-needed bill done. On behalf of agriculture, thank you.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

Mr. BOOZMAN. Mr. President, I rise to highlight the positive impacts our historic tax reform law will have on the agricultural community.

Agriculture is Arkansas’ largest industry by far, adding \$16 billion to our economy every year and accounting for approximately one in every six jobs. We are the top rice-producing State in the Nation, No. 2 in the Nation in broiler chicken production, and the third largest producer of catfish in the United States. We could also clothe

and shelter ourselves from fiber grown in Arkansas, as we are the third in the Nation in cotton production and the fifth largest softwood lumber-producing State. You could keep going down the list, and you would find Arkansas as one of the Nation’s top 10 producers of a number of agricultural commodities.

Clearly, ensuring that Washington helps create an economic environment that allows the agricultural industry to thrive is extremely important to my home State of Arkansas. When President Trump signed the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act into law, his signature provided much needed tax relief to America’s farmers. More than 94 percent of farms are organized as passthrough businesses, which means they are impacted by the same tax provisions as individual filers. Lower tax rates across the board and a 20-percent deduction from their taxable income means immediate savings, which can be reinvested to help grow their operations.

Ninety seven percent of the farms in Arkansas are family owned, and the vast majority of them will now be exempt from the estate tax—the death tax. This is a big deal. It will help keep those farms and ranches in the family for generations to come.

Finally, farmers and ranchers will be able to expense 100 percent of their capital investments, such as equipment, over the next 4 years. In his address to the Farm Bureau earlier this week, the President called this the “sleeper” in the bill. He is right. People don’t realize and there hasn’t been enough talk about how beneficial this provision will be for our family-run agricultural operations. The substance of the President’s Farm Bureau speech tilted heavily toward our efforts to bring stability and predictability to the economy.

As we have witnessed over the course of the previous administration, uncertainty is devastating to our economy. There are few industries that are inherently more affected by uncertainty than agriculture. This is why we have taken steps to eliminate some of the punitive, needless regulations that create uncertainty for our farmers and our ranchers.

It is also why my colleagues and I on the Agriculture Committee, under the steadfast leadership of Chairman ROBERTS, are working hard to reauthorize the farm bill. Programs are authorized by the farm bill that are absolutely vital to farmers, ranchers, and consumers. These programs will provide more certainty in rural America to address the challenges ahead. Finally, it is why we took great care to ensure that the agricultural industry will see the benefits of tax reform. Establishing a tax code that works for our farmers and ranchers, as opposed to against them, is vital to their ability to plan for the future and invigorate our rural communities.

I am proud of our efforts to pass this landmark tax reform law, and I am

confident it will have lasting, positive effects for our economy.

With that, I yield back.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

NOMINATION OF MICHAEL BROWN

Mr. ISAKSON. Mr. President, I am honored and privileged to come to the floor of the Senate today to talk about Michael Brown, appointed by President Donald Trump to be a district judge on the U.S. District Court for the Northern District of Georgia.

Mr. Brown is an outstanding citizen of our State. He is married to a wonderful lady and has three wonderful children. He is a graduate of Marist School, a graduate of Georgetown University, and a graduate of the University of Georgia Law School, magna cum laude, in 1994.

He has a record of practicing law in the private sector that is unparalleled, having worked for both King & Spalding and also Alston & Bird.

King & Spalding produced many of the judges on the bench of the United States of America with distinguished records, not the least of which is the Attorney General under President Jimmy Carter, Griffin Bell, an outstanding Attorney General from our State. They also produced Sam Nunn, an outstanding Member of the Senate. They produced many judges in our State. Many were also produced from the firm where he practices now, which is Alston & Bird.

It is a privilege for me to talk about Michael for many reasons. Most importantly, he comes with a background of experience in the private sector. He has been recommended by the U.S. Chamber of Commerce as one of the great lawyers in the United States of America in business matters. One of the things our courts need is a tempered balance of business and consumers. There is no question that someone who is not a voice for business as a judge but has experience in business as a judge will make a tremendous difference. I know he will in the Northern District of Georgia.

I thank the President for nominating Michael and making this appointment. To the Members of the Senate, I urge you to join me in voting for Michael Brown for the Northern District of Georgia to be our next judge there. He will be a great judge on the bench. It will be a great decision for us, and it will continue the growth and improvement of outstanding jurists confirmed by this Senate in this year 2018.

I yield back.

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

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

Mr. BURR. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to begin the series of votes.

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

The question is, Will the Senate advise and consent to the Parker nomination?

Mr. BURR. I ask for the yeas and nays.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there a sufficient second?

There appears to be a sufficient second.

The clerk will call the roll.

Mr. CORNYN. The following Senator is necessarily absent: the Senator from Arizona (Mr. MCCAIN).

Mr. DURBIN. I announce that the Senator from New Jersey (Mr. BOOKER) is necessarily absent.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Are there any other Senators in the Chamber desiring to vote?

The result was announced—yeas 98, nays 0, as follows:

[Rollcall Vote No. 5 Ex.]

YEAS—98

Alexander	Gardner	Nelson
Baldwin	Gillibrand	Paul
Barrasso	Graham	Perdue
Bennet	Grassley	Peters
Blumenthal	Harris	Portman
Blunt	Hassan	Reed
Boozman	Hatch	Risch
Brown	Heinrich	Roberts
Burr	Heitkamp	Rounds
Cantwell	Heller	Rubio
Capito	Hirono	Sanders
Cardin	Hoeven	Sasse
Carper	Inhofe	Schatz
Casey	Isakson	Schumer
Cassidy	Johnson	Scott
Cochran	Jones	Shaheen
Collins	Kaine	Shelby
Coons	Kennedy	Smith
Corker	King	Stabenow
Cornyn	Klobuchar	Sullivan
Cortez Masto	Lankford	Tester
Cotton	Leahy	Thune
Crapo	Lee	Tillis
Cruz	Manchin	Toomey
Daines	Markey	Udall
Donnelly	McCaskill	Van Hollen
Duckworth	McConnell	Warner
Durbin	Menendez	Warren
Enzi	Merkley	Whitehouse
Ernst	Moran	Wicker
Feinstein	Murkowski	Wyden
Fischer	Murphy	Young
Flake	Murray	

NOT VOTING—2

Booker	McCain
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The nomination was confirmed.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the motion to reconsider is considered made and laid upon the table and the President will be immediately notified of the Senate's action.

CLOTURE MOTION

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Pursuant to rule XXII, the Chair lays before the Senate the pending cloture motion, which the clerk will state.

The bill clerk read as follows:

CLOTURE MOTION

We, the undersigned Senators, in accordance with the provisions of rule XXII of the Standing Rules of the Senate, do hereby move to bring to a close debate on the nomination of Michael Lawrence Brown, of Georgia, to be United States District Judge for the Northern District of Georgia.

Mitch McConnell, Deb Fischer, John Barasso, John Thune, Roger F. Wicker, James M. Inhofe, Johnny Isakson, Mike Crapo, Tom Cotton, Chuck Grassley, Thom Tillis, Mike Rounds, Michael B. Enzi, James Lankford, Lindsey Graham, Pat Roberts, Todd Young.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. By unanimous consent, the mandatory quorum call has been waived.

The question is, Is it the sense of the Senate that debate on the nomination of Michael Lawrence Brown, of Georgia, to be United States District Judge for the Northern District of Georgia, shall be brought to a close?

The yeas and nays are mandatory under the rule.

The clerk will call the roll.

The assistant bill clerk called the roll.

Mr. CORNYN. The following Senator is necessarily absent: the Senator from Arizona (Mr. MCCAIN).

Mr. DURBIN. I announce that the Senator from New Jersey (Mr. BOOKER) is necessarily absent.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. TOOMEY). Are there any other Senators in the Chamber desiring to vote?

The yeas and nays resulted—yeas 97, nays 1, as follows:

[Rollcall Vote No. 6 Ex.]

YEAS—97

Alexander	Gardner	Paul
Baldwin	Gillibrand	Perdue
Barrasso	Graham	Peters
Bennet	Grassley	Portman
Blumenthal	Harris	Reed
Blunt	Hassan	Risch
Boozman	Hatch	Roberts
Brown	Heinrich	Rounds
Burr	Heitkamp	Rubio
Cantwell	Heller	Sanders
Capito	Hoeven	Sasse
Cardin	Inhofe	Schatz
Carper	Isakson	Schumer
Casey	Johnson	Scott
Cassidy	Jones	Shaheen
Cochran	Kaine	Shelby
Collins	Kennedy	Smith
Coons	King	Stabenow
Corker	Klobuchar	Sullivan
Cornyn	Lankford	Tester
Cortez Masto	Leahy	Thune
Cotton	Lee	Tillis
Crapo	Manchin	Toomey
Cruz	Markey	Udall
Daines	McCaskill	Van Hollen
Donnelly	McConnell	Warner
Duckworth	Menendez	Warren
Durbin	Merkley	Whitehouse
Enzi	Moran	Wicker
Ernst	Murkowski	Wyden
Feinstein	Murphy	Young
Fischer	Murray	
Flake	Nelson	

NAYS—1

Hirono

NOT VOTING—2

Booker	McCain
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The PRESIDING OFFICER. On this vote, the yeas are 97, the nays are 1.

The motion is agreed to.