beyond the burned-out site of the fire. Hundreds of miles downwind, air can become unhealthy and even hazardous. I remember visiting Saskatchewan with Senator GRAHAM and seeing skies there clouded from Oregon’s fires. Last month, air in the northwest had the title of the largest problem facing air quality and climate issues going forward.” According to a 2016 study in the journal Climatic Change, wildfires were to blame for more than two-thirds of the bad-air days out in western U.S. cities in unhealthy levels of particulate matter.

Smoke and pollution from western wildfires get picked up by the jet stream and can be carried 3,000 miles across the United States, all the way to our east coast, contaminating air throughout the country with noxious particulate matter, methanol, benzene, ozone, and other toxins. This image shows the plume of smoke from west coast fires over here spilling across the country. NASA reports that when airborne contaminants are drawn down to ground level, as happened in Iowa last summer, wildfires can trigger air quality warnings hundreds, even thousands, of miles away.

The scourge of these wildfires in Senator WYDEN’s home State and throughout the West is one of the most dangerous symptoms of carbon pollution and climate change. His Oregon constituents, devastated by wildfires firsthand. Senator WYDEN has helped to rush additional resources to Federal firefighting agencies to step up the response to these exploding wildfires. I thank him for joining me here today as we implore our colleagues to recognize what is going on.

If you don’t believe me, simply go to your own home State universities and ask them. Whether it is Alaska’s, Texas’s, Oklahoma’s, Rhode Island’s, or Oregon’s universities, they will tell you. This is stuff that is so clear that it is taught in your home State universities. Yet here in the Senate, we continue to indulge the pretense that we don’t know what is going on. Well, it is climate change, plain and simple, as we careen toward what could be an irreversible shift in our climate, changing our Earth into what one recent report called a “hothouse.” Yet here we are, the great Congress of the United States, the first and foremost political, fiddling under the Capitol dome while the western United States burns. I thank my distinguished friend from the great State of Oregon for joining me here today.

I yield the floor.

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

The legislative clerk read the nomination of A. Marvin Quattlebaum, Jr., of South Carolina, to be United States Circuit Judge for the Fourth Circuit.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The majority whip is recognized.

REPUBLICAN ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Mr. CORNYN. Mr. President, today we will confirm two more appellate judges, bringing our total to 26 since the Trump administration began. This has been one of the hallmarks of the President and of our agenda, and it is critically important. So I thank the President, as well as all of our colleagues who have worked so hard to fill these vacancies on our courts.

There have been many accomplishments this last year and a half, but perhaps the greatest has been the new, energized state of our economy. This is a direct, tangible impact on the quality of life of all Americans. The Declaration of Independence designates, among the unalienable rights, the right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. I like to think that by getting our foot off the neck of the economy, by repealing unnecessary overregulation, and by cutting taxes and letting people keep more of what they earn, we are pursuing those unalienable rights on behalf of the American people—certainly the pursuit of happiness.

The Labor Department reported earlier this month that unemployment had fallen to 3.9 percent in July, which is close to the 18-year low that was achieved in May of this year. One of the highlights of the jobs report was that high school dropouts and others who struggled during the Obama recession are doing significantly better. Their unemployment rate fell to 5.1 percent, the lowest since the government started collecting data on those without a high school diploma. Of course, this is pointed out particularly at a time when labor is in short supply; that is, there are a lot of good-paying jobs for which there are not trained workers who could qualify for those jobs. I think it makes it incumbent on all levels of government—Federal, State, and local—to do more to help train workers so they qualify for these good, well-paying jobs that right now are going unfilled because of a shortage of trained workers. That is one of the contributions of our Congress, which is focused on creating more job opportunities, trying to help the American worker.

The July report showed that the economy grew by 4.1 percent in the second quarter. That is an incredible number. The economy is literally on fire, and that is a good thing for the American people. All of this positive economic news is complemented by the tax reform package I mentioned a moment ago that we passed last December. The corporate tax rate was set at 21 percent. This is something that Democrats, like President Obama, as well as Republicans, have supported in the past, recognizing that we were chasing investment overseas and any effort on investments overseas were not coming back to the United States to be invested here in workers and infrastructure. This was a self-inflicted wound that we have now cured. We also were successful in helping working families by doubling the child tax credit.

One of the tangible benefits of the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act is that more than 700 companies have used the tax savings to benefit their employees as seen in the corporate rate from 35 to 21 percent. This is something that Democrats, like President Obama, as well as Republicans, have supported in the past, recognizing that we were chasing investment overseas and any effort on investments overseas were not coming back to the United States to be invested in workers and infrastructure. This was a self-inflicted wound that we have now cured. We also were successful in helping working families by doubling the child tax credit.

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Federal judges is one of the most important things that we do here in the Senate. It is not something the House of Representatives has any role in. Under the Constitution, it is our responsibility to provide advice and consent to the Federal judges, and who gets selected to be Federal judges, indeed the judicial philosophy they have is one of the reasons why I believe President Trump won the election over Hillary Clinton. People understood, based on a list that the President made public before he was elected, the type of people he would be looking at to fill these judicial vacancies—judges who would faithfully interpret the Constitution and would say what the law is, not what their personal policy preferences might be or what they wish the law to be. That is our job, and that is the reason we run for election in the political branches of government—the executive and legislative branches.

Judges were, in the words of Alexander Hamilton, the Federalist papers, called the least dangerous branch. By that meant that their job was to figuratively call balls and strikes. In other words, they were not seen as policymakers, or else they never would have given judges lifetime tenure. They are insulated from politics. It is precisely because they are insulated from politics that they should perform the critical but limited role of interpreting the Constitution and laws as written.

Of course, the most notable example of a judicial confirmation we have had during the last year and a half was the confirmation of Neil Gorsuch to fill the seat left by Justice Scalia. But now, on September 4, Chairman Grassley on the Judiciary Committee has announced that we will begin the hearings on the nomination of Brett Kavanaugh to succeed Justice Anthony Kennedy on the Supreme Court.

But the Supreme Court that is important. It is the courts below the Supreme Court that do the day-to-day work of the federal judiciary, including the 26 appellate judges that I mentioned earlier. That includes Texans like Don Willett, Jim Ho, and Andy Oldham, all of whom now serve on the Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals.

Of course, we should mention the very talented district court judges whom we have confirmed as well—three of them from Texas: Karen Scholz, and Patricia Rangel Rodriguez are three of those talented district court judges whom we have confirmed.

Overall, we have confirmed more than 50 of President Trump's judicial nominations. Again, I believe this is one of the most important jobs we perform here in the Senate.

Third on my list of accomplishments that I want to talk about today I alluded to a moment ago when I talked about small business. The most important things we have done since we have been here during the Trump administration is repealing overly burdensome, Obama-era regulations through something called the Congressional Review Act. We have used this device 16 times to eliminate agency rules that were sometimes snuck in during the waning hours of the Obama administration.

On top of that, we repealed the Independent Payment Advisory Board, or the IPAB, under ObamaCare. This will allow senior citizens and their families to take better control of their own healthcare decisions without being subjected to the whims of unelected bureaucrats. Also, we made ObamaCare voluntary by eliminating the individual mandate, which is a tax on middle and low-income people who couldn't afford to purchase the ObamaCare policies.

ObamaCare's main problem was that it represented perhaps the most intrusive government mandate into the lives of the American people by saying: You don't have any choices anymore when it comes to your healthcare. You must buy this government-approved healthcare policy, and, by the way, it doesn't make a cence if you have coverage that you don't want or can't afford. You have to buy it. If you don't buy it, we are going to fine you.

We have repealed that tax on low-income and middle-income Americans, and we truly have made healthcare more available by allowing a market to be created where people have choices. Kudos to our Secretary of Labor, Mr. Acosta, who worked with the administration to provide for access to local health care providers across state lines, and the administration, the Health and Human Services Secretary, recently announced that people can buy policies on an annual basis that are subject to renewal that provide them greater choice and flexibility.

This is part of creating a market, which is the best regulator of all, as opposed to government. People wonder why conservatives believe Big Government is a bad thing sometimes, and it is precisely when government gets bigger, our freedoms shrink in proportion to that growth in the flow of the Federal Government.

That's pretty important, repealing those regulations and eliminating the individual mandate. The fourth major accomplishment, I believe, is providing relief to America's community and midsized banks and credit unions, which have been hit hardest by some of the onerous rulemaking approaches under the Dodd-Frank bill. Again, one of the problems about legislating and regulating in Washington, DC, is we live in a big and diverse country, and one-size-fits-all doesn't work when it comes to local conditions.

In this case, we were addressing the excesses of Wall Street, small banks and credit unions were the collateral damage. What that meant is, consumers didn't get access to the credit they needed when businesses didn't get access to the loans they needed in order to start a business or to grow a business.

The next thing I want to mention, in terms of the accomplishments of the last year and a half, has to do with our commitments to servicemembers and our military as well as veterans. We have restored America's defense with the greatest investment in the military since the largest troop pay raise in nearly 10 years. If you think about all the things the Federal Government does, not all of them are equal. Some are more important than others. On top of the list providing for our common defense because it is that defense of our freedom and our liberty and our way of life that makes possible all of the other things we enjoy, the blessings of liberty we enjoy as Americans. Making sure our military is properly funded and that we take care of the troops who wear the uniform of the U.S. military is the most important job of the Federal Government.

Then, it is important to keep our commitment to our veterans when they take off that uniform. We did this year in passing the VA MISSION Act, which makes significant reforms to the Department of Veterans Affairs, strengthening the healthcare and community care options that are available to America's veterans.

We are all aware of some of the scandals in the VA system, where veterans have had to travel hundreds of miles or wait months to get access to care. We progressed this year with the VA MISSION Act, which reinforces Veterans Choice. In other words, if you would rather go see a healthcare provider in your local community, if the wait is too long to be seen at a dedicated VA facility, or, if you have to go too far to get to a VA facility, you can get access to local healthcare provider in your community, and the VA will pay for it. To me, that is a really important element of our veterans' healthcare system.

Last, but certainly not least, is our sixth achievement of this last year and a half during the Trump administration and Republican majorities in both Houses. We have taken steps to rebuild and protect our local communities. We passed nearly $147 billion in disaster relief for storms like Hurricane Harvey, which devastated Texas 1 year ago this month.

On top of that, we have enacted the Stop Enabling Sex Trafficking Act, which provided resources to fight the rape kit backlog and improve school safety by a bill I sponsored called Fix NICS to make sure people who are illegally disqualified from purchasing or possessing firearms are prosecuted to the fullest extent of the law and prevented, if possible, from getting access to those firearms. These are just a handful of ways we are doing what we told the American people we would do during our campaign with the great privilege of being stewards of that public trust. We put money back in Americans' pockets. We have rolled back regulations that
have made their lives easier. We strengthened the military. We have given healthcare flexibility to our veterans. We have protected our communities from harm.

Of course, there is more work that needs to be done. Just before the Senate work period concluded last week, the Senate voted to proceed to a conference on the farm bill. This bill is of great importance to the people of my State. City dwellers may not fully appreciate it, but according to the 2012 census, one out of every seven working Texans. With 28 million Texans, that is a huge number of farmers and ranchers directly affected by what we do in the farm bill.

What people don’t realize, however, is that nutrition programs—not agriculture funding—account for almost 80 percent of the cost of the farm bill. This includes the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, formerly known as food stamps.

Although I am proud to support the Senate’s version of the legislation, I was somewhat disappointed it did not include stronger reforms to some of these nutrition programs, including work requirements for people who are able-bodied adults who need additional or community service for people who can’t work or don’t want the training but at least provide some service to their local communities.

I appreciate what the House has done to provide for those work requirements in the bill that my friend Chairman CONAWAY included in the House version. These reforms are not last-minute additions. There was a long, thorough process leading to the introduction of the House farm bill. Chairman CONAWAY held more than 20 hearings on these nutrition programs, including some during the Congress, and afterward he put together some very common-sense work requirements that were based on broad stakeholder input.

During this record of low unemployment across the Nation, it is not unreasonable to try to use this opportunity, which comes only once every 5 years, to take a look and ensure our Federal dollars are being spent wisely, that able-bodied adults are getting the training they need in order to earn good pay, and that Federal assistance is only used to provide for those who are unable to provide for themselves.

A report from the American Enterprise Institute, Michael Strain, wrote about this recently. He wrote that the question of “[w]hether there should be a mandatory work component in public policies designed to assist low-income households is part a question of ‘... economics,’” but it is also moral and philosophical as well.

Whom should we expect to work in our society? Should a healthy person in the prime of their life who doesn’t have young children at home be working—yes or no? In other words, does that person owe some share of his or her energy, ability, and intelligence to the rest of society from which we all benefit, including them? Some think it is nobody’s business but the individual’s whether they work or not and still receive these benefits, but I disagree with that.

When the question involves Federal benefits that are paid for by all taxpayers, whether to work or not is no longer just a private, personal decision. We as a country have decided that part of our social contract with each other will be providing a safety net where needed, and that is important. The flip side is, to benefit from that safety net, there also ought to be certain obligations. In other words, you can’t have rights without responsibilities. One of them should be to work, if you are able to do so.

While I wish the members of the conference committee my best as they try to reach consensus on the farm bill, I encourage them to take another look at Chairman CONAWAY’s ideas on work requirements. I hope my colleagues will be willing to revisit this issue in the conference committee on the farm bill.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Hawaii.

REAFFIRMING THE VITAL AND INDISPENSABLE ROLE THE FREE PRESS SERVES

Mr. SCHATZ. Mr. President, we swore an oath to support and defend the Constitution of the United States, including its First Amendment, which says, in part, “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment, or religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press.”

We can’t let statements by the President declaring the press is the enemy of the people go unchallenged. Both parties complain about the media, but who can argue with Thomas Jefferson, who wrote that ‘our liberty depends on the freedom of the press, and that cannot be limited without being lost’” or with James Madison, who said that “the freedom of the press is one of the great bulwarks of liberty, and can never be restrained but by despotic governments,’” or with President Reagan, who said that “freedom of the press is one of our most important freedoms and also one of our oldest,” or with Justice Kennedy, who wrote that “the First Amendment is often inconvenient. But that is beside the point. Incovenience does not absolve the government of its obligation to tolerate speech.”

These words of past leaders should inspire us to act, to send a message that we support the First Amendment, and we support the freedom of the press.

Sens. SCHUMER, BLUMENTHAL, and I have introduced a resolution that does just that. It affirms that the press is not the enemy of the people, and it reaffirms the vital and indispensable role of the free press, serving to inform the electorate, uncover the truth, act as a check on the inherent power of the government, further discourse and debate and advance our most basic and cherished democratic norms and freedoms.

This resolution also condemns attacks on the press—on the institution of the free press—and we support the freedom of the press as a check on the inherent power of the government, further discourse and debate and advance our most basic and cherished democratic norms and freedoms.

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The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from South Carolina.

Mr. GRAHAM. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to complete my remarks before the vote.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection.

Mr. GRAHAM. Mr. President, in a few minutes, we are going to vote on Marvin Quattlebaum to be a circuit judge for the Fourth Judicial Circuit in Richmond, VA. He is a South Carolina native, and I’m proud of this district court judge in South Carolina. I have known Marvin for well over 20 years. He is one of the most capable lawyers I have ever met. He has a great reputation as a district court judge.

I thank President Trump for nominating him. I thank my Senate colleagues for moving his nomination forward. He will be a great addition to the Fourth Circuit. He is a very sound, fairminded. To my Democratic colleagues who moved his nomination forward and the Judiciary Committee, thank you.

Later in the day, we will vote on cloture on the nomination of Jay Richardson, also from South Carolina, to be on the Fourth Circuit. He was reported out of committee 20 to 1. Both gentlemen are rated unani-

ously “well-qualified” by the ABA. Jay is one of the great legal minds of our time, and I think he is going to be a great addition to the Fourth Circuit.

He prosecuted the Dylann Roof case, a great addition to the Fourth Circuit. He is a very sound, fairminded. To my Democratic colleagues for moving his nomination forward and the Judiciary Committee, thank you.

The Assistant Bill Clerk called the roll.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mrs. SHUMER). Without objection, the mandatory quorum call is waived.

The motion is agreed to.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. On this vote, the yeas and nays are necessary absent: the Senator from Texas (Mr. ALEXANDER), the Senator from Arizona (Mr. FLAKE), the Senator from South Carolina, the Senator from Georgia, the Senator from Illinois, the Senator from Oklahoma, the Senator from Utah (Mr. LEE), the Senator from Arizona (Mr. MCCAIN), the Senator from Florida (Mr. RUBIO), the Senator from North Carolina (Mr. TILLIS), and the Senator from Pennsylvania (Mr. TOOMEY).

Further, if present and voting, the Senator from Tennessee (Mr. ALEXANDER) would have voted “yea” and the Senator from Florida (Mr. RUBIO) would have voted “yea.”

Mr. SCHUMER. I announce that the Senator from Illinois (Mr. DURBEN) and the Senator from Washington (Mrs. MURRAY) are necessarily absent.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Ms. FISHER). Are there any other Senators in the Chamber desiring to vote? The result was announced—yeas 62, nays 28, as follows:

(Rollcall Vote No. 183 Ex.)

YEAS—62

Baldwin
Barrasso
Bennet
Blunt
Boozman
Burr
Capito
Carper
Cassidy
Collins
Corns
Corker
Cornyn
Cotton
Crapo
Cruz
Daines
Donnelly
Ernst
Fischer
Morgan
Lawson
Markavsk
Nelson
Pan
Perdue
Portman
Roei
Risch
Roberts
Rounds
Saake
Scott
Shahen
Shelby
Sullivan
Tester
Thune
Warner
Whitehouse
Wicker
Young

The nomination was confirmed.

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

The senior assistant legislative 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 Julius Ness Richardson, of South Carolina, to be United States Circuit Judge for the Fourth Circuit. Mitch McConnell, Cindy Hyde-Smith, David Perdue, Mike Crapo, Mike Rounds, John Boozman, Ron Johnson, John Barrasso, Steve Daines, John Cor-


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 Julius Ness Richardson, of South Carolina, to be United States Circuit Judge for the Fourth Circuit, shall be brought to a close?

The yeas and nays are necessary under the rule.

The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk called the roll.

Mr. CORNYN. The following Senators are necessarily absent: the Senator from Tennessee (Mr. ALEXANDER), the Senator from Arizona (Mr. FLAKE), the Senator from South Carolina (Mr. RUBIO), the Senator from Minnesota (Mr. FEINSTEIN), the Senator from Oklahoma (Mr. INHOFE), the Senator from Utah (Mr. LEE), the Senator from Arizona (Mr. MCCAIN), the Senator from Florida (Mr. RUBIO), the Senator from North Carolina (Mr. TILLIS), and the Senator from Pennsylvania (Mr. TOOMEY).

[Rollcall Vote No. 184 Ex.]

YEAS—80

Baldwin
Barrasso
Bennet
Blunt
Boozman
Burr
Capito
Carper
Cassidy
Collins
Corns
Corker
Cornyn
Cotton
Crapo
Cruz
Daines
Donnelly
Ernst
Fischer
Morgan
Ticklis
Tommy
Van Hollen
Klain
Markavsk
Nelson
Pan
Perdue
Portman
Roei
Risch
Roberts
Rounds
Saake
Scott
Shahen
Shelby
Sullivan
Tester
Thune
Warner
Whitehouse
Wicker
Young

NAYS—10

Baldwin
Barrasso
Bennet
Blunt
Boozman
Burr
Capito
Carper
Cassidy
Collins
Corns
Corker
Cornyn
Cotton
Crapo
Cruz
Daines
Donnelly
Ernst
Johnson
Jones
Kaine
Kennedy
Kennis
Knowles
Kyl
McCaskill
McCottering
McCullough
McConnell
Merkel
Menendez
Murray
Nelson
Paul
Perdue
Peters
Portman
Roei
Risch
Roberts
Rounds
Saake
Shahen
Shelby
Smith
Stabenow
Stefanik
Sullivan
Tester
Thune
Warner
Whitehouse
Wicker
Young

The PRESIDING OFFICER. On this vote, the yeas are 80, the nays are 10.

The motion is agreed to.