

years of 3 percent growth. Now, that is a great aspiration, but any responsible business would not base its assumptions of its budget on a going-forward basis of rejecting our official referee, the CBO, and in effect plucking a number out of the air.

Why do they do it?

Those rosy and unrealistic economic assumptions allow the administration to claim a fictional \$3 trillion in additional tax revenue over the next 10 years. That is the differential in 1.2 percent of additional growth in 7 years straight. The administration, in its proposal, then uses this fake revenue to cloak additional tax cuts and spending cuts under the banner of fiscal responsibility. That is wrong and irresponsible, and no responsible organization or business would take those actions.

Second, the administration cannot shift costs to others and then claim it as a savings. Look no further than what the Trump budget does with Federal programs for the poor. Over the next decade, it calls for slashing more than \$600 billion from Medicaid, and that does not include the additional cuts to Medicaid that were proposed in its ill-fated healthcare reform. The truth is, Medicaid is a partnership between the Federal Government and the States, and as a former Governor, I am aware of this in real time. So a \$600 billion cut at the Federal level has a direct impact on State Medicaid responsibilities. It simply squeezes the balloon, forcing the States to either dramatically up their shares of the cost to Medicaid or dramatically cut back services.

Third, the administration claims that its tax reform plan will pay for itself and stimulate so much economic growth that it will not add to the deficit. This is maybe the most spurious claim of all made by the administration. Here is the basic problem. The truth is, at least what the Trump proposal has put out so far has really very little to do with comprehensive tax reform. Instead, it is a two-page wish list of tax cuts—a wannabe of every interest group that would like to get its special deal in the Tax Code to its advantage. Every time we promised tax cuts would pay for themselves, it has not worked out.

Let's remember that Ronald Reagan's 1981 tax cut provided a short-term stimulus, but then deficits ballooned, and President Reagan had to raise taxes in 1982 and 1984. Likewise, President George W. Bush's tax cuts in 2001 and 2003 provided that quick sugar high, but ultimately they had little impact on economic growth. Instead, the Bush tax cuts produced large deficits into the trillions and trillions of dollars that moved us from a budget surplus on an annual basis, which he inherited, to the point at which, when President Obama came in, the deficits were approaching \$1 trillion a year.

Fourth, paying for tax cuts through deficit spending is a really bad idea. It

will make reaching any responsible fiscal goal that much more difficult. Also, studies show, tax cuts that add to the deficits are worse for growth over the long term than those that are paid for and actually can reduce growth over time. So any lawmaker who says he supports not paying for tax cuts should also have to explain why he thinks adding to our national debt is a good idea—a national debt that already stands at a record high, a national debt that is already at \$20 trillion, a national debt that when interest rates will go up, which they will, will end up sucking out \$160 billion a year in additional payments on an annual basis just for a 1-percent increase in interest rates.

Fifth, it would be foolish to try to balance the budget by shortchanging investments that actually strengthen our economy and our competitiveness over the long term. The budget proposals we have seen from the administration and the House Republican leadership takes a meat cleaver to a couple of the key areas that actually government should be invested more in—research and development, education and workforce training, and infrastructure. As a former business guy, as somebody who has invested in more businesses, created public companies, was a venture capitalist for almost two decades, I have looked at businesses, and I have based my willingness to invest on whether they had good plans in terms of investing in their workforces, investing in their plants and equipment, and investing and staying ahead of the competition. For a government, that means, with regard to the workforce, investing in education. When investing in plants and equipment, that means infrastructure. Staying ahead of the competition means investing in research and development.

Let's put it like this. I would never have invested in a business that spends less than 10 percent of its revenues on those critical investments. That is not the way for our country to make responsible investments either. The truth is, the Trump proposals would take our current investments in education, infrastructure, and research and development to way less than 10 percent of our total revenues.

Finally, we can achieve fiscally responsible and bipartisan tax reform, and I actively look forward to working with my colleagues on both sides of the aisle on these reforms. There is no area I have spent more time on, and I think I bring something to the table as both a former Governor and, more importantly, perhaps as somebody who has built businesses for more than two decades.

I also strongly suggest that nothing could help our economy more than a bipartisan agreement on a responsible path to making sure we do not simply salute when our deficit is only \$400 billion or \$500 billion a year but when we actually start to bring that deficit down.

Those are the challenges that are before us. In many ways, we will start to see the outlines of those challenges this month. I look forward to actually trying to move the ball forward on these very important issues.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

HURRICANE HARVEY

Mr. CORNYN. Mr. President, it has been 1 week since Hurricane Harvey hit the State of Texas, and although the rain has now stopped, the damage continues, as much of the water that has moved through Houston is now moving downstream to rivers and bayous and areas south of Houston. People's lives are still being disrupted, and unfortunately more and more bodies are being found, as the water has receded in places that have been flooded. Eight days ago, Harvey's wrath was still being felt.

Of course, we are still counting the cost, and, as one lady in Houston told my staff, "Normal is a long way off." It is more than just days we are counting, though. As families return to their homes and piece their lives back together, the numbers keep rolling in. Numbers are how we keep track, and I want to mention a number of numbers that I think will help all of us understand the magnitude of what has occurred and will help us wrap our heads around what this disaster has meant for not only Texas but for the country.

The largest numbers are the toughest—not the toughest to swallow, and I will get to those in a moment, but simply to comprehend. They are the ones that make your jaw drop.

Twenty-seven trillion—that is the number of gallons of rain that Harvey pummeled on Texas and Louisiana.

Then there is 2.7 million—that is how many liters of water have been provided to Texas by FEMA as of last Friday. Don't forget that parts of the city of Beaumont are without drinking water or are subject to a boil notice for 7 more days.

There is another number: 1 million. That is the number of cars reportedly destroyed by the storm—1 million cars.

Forty thousand—that is the number of homes Harvey permanently wrecked. At least that many people are still, even today, in shelters, living off of cots at convention centers, inside government-funded motel rooms, or living with friends and family.

Next come the middle batch of numbers, slightly smaller and more manageable sums. Some of these actually come as a relief. Some of them remind

us why writer Walker Percy, a native of our neighbor Louisiana, used to say that hurricanes, as terrible and life-altering as they are, sometimes give us hope—because they draw people closer together as neighbor helps neighbor.

Four thousand two hundred—that is the number of pounds of flour employees went through at El Bolillo restaurant in Southeast Houston. The bakers were trapped inside their kitchen for 2 days during the storm, so what did they do? They did what bakers always do: They baked. In this case, they baked up pan dulce—traditional Mexican pastries—for flood victims. Their ovens were on all night for their neighbors. One young girl on Twitter praised the Bolillo bakers as “angels.” They gave people what they needed most, perhaps, during this storm, and that is a sense of normalcy.

Two thousand seven hundred thirty-one—that is the number of cattle, horses, and sheep which various ranchers and helicopter pilots, like Ryan Ashcraft, have saved in places like Brazoria County and which are now inside makeshift stables in fairgrounds and parking lots. Animal rescue has been a crucial and difficult part of the equation in communities affected by the storm. Of course, in the shelters Senator CRUZ and I visited, they had to make accommodation for pets because people wouldn't leave their cat or dog in the floods. They wouldn't leave unless they could bring their animal with them. They have had to make some accommodation—and they have—which made it easier for people to leave their flooded homes.

Then there is another number: 200. That is the number of soaking-wet, stranded Houstonians Jim McIngvale and his staff rescued in their delivery trucks. Most of us from Texas, and especially from Houston, know Mr. McIngvale as “Mattress Mack.” He is in the furniture business, and he opened up his giant furniture showrooms as shelters. They provided portable showers and an inventory of brand-new beds and sofas for folks who had nowhere else to sleep.

Getting rest couldn't have been easy, though, not when so many displaced people were still thinking about the storm and its consequences, still feeling the dampness in their clothes and remembering the pounding rain and wondering what they were going to do to get on with their lives.

One hundred thirty-two—that number represents the speed in miles per hour of the most punishing wind gusts recorded in Port Aransas on August 25. It is hard to imagine the power of the wind attacking homes and structures—eight times faster than a charging bull.

In the days ahead, we need to remember just how strong the storm really was. I brought a few charts to help remind us of that and the aftermath.

This is a picture outside of Houston. I visited a synagogue in a place called Meyerland in the Houston area where they have literally been flooded 3 years

in a row. This is one of the members of that congregation, and she invited me to come to her home so I could see all the damaged drywall, furniture, and other items on her front lawn which have now been pulled out of her house.

Finally, we come to the last set of numbers, the smallest ones but in many ways the most painful, the hardest to forget, numbers like 45, which is the angle in degrees of bent electric poles I saw in Rockport when I toured the destruction after the storm last week. Other electrical poles lay on the ground. The town smelled of gasoline and even natural gas leaks, which we smelled in the Rockport area. Of course, the ground was littered with broken glass and strewn books and things like that. Boats in the marina had been tossed about and smashed, their sails ripped to shreds, as local residents had mostly fled. Here is another picture of that damage in Rockport, TX.

Harder still, though, is the number 25, which is the years Andrew Pasek lived before he tragically stepped on a live electrical wire in ankle-deep water on August 29. A resident of Houston, Andrew was an animal lover, and he was trying to locate and save his older sister's cat when he stepped on this electrical wire and lost his life.

We, of course, offer our condolences to all of those families who have lost loved ones, including Andrew's, in their time of grief, and we pledge to remember him and all of the flood victims in our prayers. Sadly, Andrew was joined by 59 others who lost their lives. As I said earlier, that number continues to grow each day as the waters recede and as we find people who did not leave their homes, perhaps because they were elderly and unable to get out, living alone, for example. So we expect that number to, sadly, get even higher.

Six is the number of family members Samuel Saldivar lost when a van he was driving was tossed by a strong current into the bayou. As with Andrew's family, our thoughts and prayers go out to Samuel during what I am sure has been a dark and trying week, one nearly impossible to make sense of.

But for each story of loss, each family that is hurting, there are many other reasons for hope as we embark on what is a long road to recovery.

Consider five—the number of bed-ridden, elderly patients from Cypress Glen Nursing Home who required special boats to get them out, boats with generators that could power their life support assistance.

We are grateful for Good Samaritans like Dan LeBlanc from Port Arthur, Doug Barles, Jr., and Robert Bode for managing this operation, which was no easy task. Here is a picture of those gentleman. Volunteers with no special expertise in search and rescue, these gentleman saved more than 100 patients.

Finally, the number I will end with is zero. That is the amount of complaining done by a gentleman named

Jim Rath who exemplifies the Texas spirit. His house was destroyed in a flood 2 years ago, and he had just finished rebuilding it when Harvey hit and destroyed it again. Was he shaken by this course of events? Well, sure, he was. But did he complain? No, he did not. Of all his lost possessions, Mr. Rath said, “The main thing is: This is just stuff.” Then, like other Texans are doing now, he rolled up his sleeves. With saws and jackhammers, they are already moving forward.

Zero is also the amount of time we have to waste here in Congress. The Texans I know aren't just sitting around waiting for the government or for government aid, but that doesn't mean we should twiddle our thumbs here in Washington, DC. We have to act. That is why I am working with Senator CRUZ and the entire Texas delegation in crafting an aid request that addresses flood relief but without imposing burdensome mandates or regulations. As Peggy Noonan wrote in the Wall Street Journal this week, this measure needs to be tight and specific. She said:

There should be no larding up or loading it down with extraneous measures. This is an emergency.

But that means we have to act and act with dispatch.

I applaud the House of Representatives for moving quickly today to approve an initial \$8 billion downpayment on disaster relief, and I urge my colleagues in this Chamber to follow the House's lead and expedite passage for this first tranche, this downpayment on what will surely be a more expensive list of costs. We are going to continue to work with Governor Abbott and the team back in the State to make sure the Federal, State, and local actors are all on the same page. But right now, let's quickly send Texas a downpayment. Let's show that we are actually serious.

I was gratified by the outpouring of emails and texts—even the Presiding Officer reached out, and I appreciate that—from people expressing their concern about what was happening in Texas. I appreciate that very much. But now we need to demonstrate that those weren't just words and follow them up with concrete action.

As we all process the numbers from the storm, I believe the important one today is zero—the amount of time we have to lose.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Texas.

Mr. CRUZ. Mr. President, I rise today in support of heroes, in support of unity, and in support of love and compassion. I thank the senior Senator from Texas for his heartfelt remarks and leadership during this time of crisis, and I thank leaders across the State of Texas and across the country who are standing with the people of Texas.

Texas is hurting. This hurricane, Hurricane Harvey, is unlike anything

we have seen. I grew up in Houston. When you live on the gulf coast, you are used to hurricanes. It is part of life. I remember as a kid sheltering in the bathroom with my parents when Hurricane Alicia hit. We had a tree come down in the front yard. Harvey was different. Harvey was unlike anything we have ever seen before. Harvey is being described accurately as a 1,000-year storm, something that occurs every 1,000 years.

In Texas, we have never seen anything like it. Harvey started out as a category 4 storm, hitting South Texas, hitting Corpus Christi, Victoria, Rockport, Port Aransas, and Aransas Pass, all of which I visited in the past 2 weeks. Those communities were devastated by category 4 winds that destroyed homes, that destroyed schools, that destroyed county courthouses, city halls, and buildings and took down wires, took down power, took down water, and took down sewage.

As I visited each of those communities, you would drive down the street, and you would simply see home after home that had been obliterated by hurricane winds. I remember talking to the mother of a high schooler at Rockport High School who doesn't know where her son is going to go now because Rockport High School has been largely destroyed by the hurricane. She was saying how much the kids wanted to graduate from their high school, but their high school is badly damaged right now.

Harvey wasn't finished after making landfall and wreaking destruction. Harvey then turned north, north and east, and moved over the city of Houston and just sat there, sat there dumping rain, day after day after day.

I was home with my wife and kids. I live in Houston. For every day of those rains, it kept coming and coming. It is actually what made Harvey different. We are used to getting hit by a hurricane. Then it leaves, and you go and repair the damage and pick up the pieces. Harvey didn't have the good graces to leave. It sat there and dumped 27 trillion gallons of rain. Over 50 inches, which is typically as much as Houston receives in an entire year, fell in 4 days.

We saw flooding in parts of the city that had never flooded. I went in an airboat, just north of the Addicks Dam in northwest Houston, riding through a neighborhood with water up to the roofs of houses. It was an ordinary suburban neighborhood. You could see all the vestiges of families playing there. You could see children's toys floating in the water in the backyard. You could see holes in the roof, where either people in the attic had taken an ax and broken through to get out to escape the rising water or where first responders had broken in to get them out.

We took a boat down Clay Road, a fairly large road in northwest Houston. I know Clay Road well. I became a Christian at Clay Road Baptist Church.

Clay Road is completely underwater. It looks like you are in the middle of a lake. You look out and see nothing but water as far as the eye can see. I rode with a local constable right down the middle of Clay Road, going over cars, but the water was high enough—8, 10 feet high—you didn't even know when you were passing over cars that were submerged beneath you. As we were going down Clay Road, we saw an alligator swimming across Clay Road.

The scope of this disaster defies words. It is not one community or two communities or three communities. It is over 250 miles, stretching from Corpus Christi all the way to Louisiana. In the Houston area alone, the flooding is massive—neighborhoods where there is a real possibility that every single home will have to be knocked down and rebuilt, every single government building will have to be knocked over and rebuilt.

On the airboat, I saw the county courthouse up to the roof in water. I saw a local LDS Church up to the roof in water. I saw a gas station with six or seven cars still parked outside. The water was right at the roof of the cars. It shows you just how fast that water rose. They were parked at the gas station. They had presumably stopped for some last-minute supplies, and the water rose so high they couldn't get out. They are still in their parking spots, but yet the water is at their roof.

That same gas station, up high on the door was a red neon sign that said "Open" that was still lit, flickering "Open" as you look out over the vast expanses of water.

The damage continued going east, hitting communities like Beaumont, like Port Arthur, like Nederland, like Orange, and into Louisiana—all of those communities I visited in the past 2 weeks and have massive devastation.

Texas is hurting mightily, and yet, as I said, my remarks today are not about pain and suffering, they are not about death and loss and despair; they are, instead, about hope—hope that begins with the heroes of Harvey. We saw, over the last 2 weeks, incredible illustrations of bravery over and over again, every day, every hour, every minute. There were the first responders, the firefighters, the police officers, and EMS who risked their lives, including, tragically, Sergeant Perez of the Houston Police Department who lost his life in this storm. He went to go to work, and his wife pleaded with him: Please don't go to work. It is too dangerous out there.

He said: I have to go. It is my job to save lives.

He went. He couldn't go to his regular duty station. All the roads were flooded. There was no way to get there so he went to look for another duty station to report to, and tragically he got caught in high-rising water and drowned.

There were the coastguardsmen who flew in choppers and dove into wild

water to save people's lives. I have spent a lot of time in the last 2 weeks visiting with the men and women of the Coast Guard—what incredible heroes—flying in the chopper with them, surveying the damage of the Houston Ship Channel, talking with Coast Guard swimmers. You want to talk about a tough bunch of heroes, the swimmers—almost every one of them ripped at the guys that know their way around a weight room—who in hurricane winds and hurricane waters will dive off of a chopper and swim to someone in distress. Many times the person in distress is so terrified, their first reaction is to grab the swimmer and practically try to pull the swimmer under too. These swimmers have to be strong, strong enough to help someone terrified and at the verge of death get in that basket, get in that basket of life, be pulled up to a chopper. In the last 2 weeks I visited with person after person who was pulled off of the roof of their home by the Coast Guard into a chopper.

The National Guardsmen, I have spent a lot of time thanking them over the last 2 weeks. We had 14,000 National Guardsmen called up in the State of Texas, but National Guardsmen from 41 States across the country came flooding in. That was part of the story of heroes.

There were a great many Houstonians, there were a great many Texans from all over Texas, but there were people from all over the country. When I drove through Refugio—a small town on the gulf coast that had been devastated by hurricane winds—I stopped at the fire department unannounced just to come in and thank the firefighters. Actually, I met a couple of firefighters. They were not the local ones. They had expelled the local firefighters to go home and get some sleep after several days of having no sleep at all. They were a couple of California firefighters who jumped in their truck and had driven east from California to get to Texas.

At the fire station in Rockport, there was a whole line of firetrucks, one after the other. You looked at each firetruck, on the door, and it was the name of a different city. Every one of them had the same story. They saw what was happening and said: I can help. They jumped in the firetruck and they headed to Texas.

The outpouring of love we have seen has been extraordinary. It wasn't just the first responders who were so extraordinary. We cannot overstate the gratitude Texas feels for those heroes of Harvey, but I will tell you the most powerful story of Harvey, I believe, are the thousands of ordinary men and women who stepped up to save their neighbors, who went and grabbed a boat or a jet ski or anything that could float and went into harm's way to pull people out of life-endangering situations—hundreds and hundreds of red-necks in bass boats. Texas at its very finest.

Mr. President, as an Alaskan, I can promise you, you would have been right at home with the rednecks in bass boats. All these guys in duck waders, fearlessly walking into the churning waters, pulling people out, one after the other, after the other.

The Harris County Emergency Operation Center had an entire wall covered with Post-it Notes because when the local officials put out a call, if you have a flat-bottom boat, if you have a personal watercraft and can help, we need your help, hundreds and hundreds of calls began coming in. They put them all on Post-its with the name and cell phone. Then the emergency operation center operated essentially as a dispatch, where a 911 call would come in, somebody in distress, and they would pick up the phone and call someone's cell phone and say: Hey, your neighbor 6 blocks down needs your help. Can you be there?

There were hundreds upon hundreds risking their lives to save their neighbors. Texans helping Texans. We had, among others, Louisiana sending the Cajun Navy—over 100 boats. They would go in and save people and then they cooked jambalaya. That is neighborly love.

I met people who had come from Fort Worth, from Lubbock, from East Texas, from Oklahoma, from Illinois, from Alaska, from New York. I was at the George R. Brown Convention Center, the shelter that was set up. I met an individual there. He was a New York firefighter, a big guy. He told me he was serving the New York Fire Department on September 11. He told me, when 9/11 hit New York, when that terrorist attack hit, the love New York received from across the country, the outpouring of support New York received from across the country made a profound impact on him.

He said now, when there is a major natural disaster, he gets in his truck and heads down to help. He said: You know what. That is my way of saying thank you, my way of saying thank you for what the country did on September 11. He wanted to be in Harvey and pull people out of harm's way to say thank you.

All I could do is simply give him a hug. That heroism was happening every day and every hour. We all mourn the loss of life. There are tragic stories, heartbreaking stories, whether Sergeant Perez, whether it is the young mother in Beaumont who gave her life saving her little girl. Her little girl was pulled from her dead mother's chest, floating in the water, just minutes before being lost forever. As tragic as it is, that little girl will always know the love her mother had for her. There is the story the senior Senator from Texas just told of the van in Houston that took six to their death. Two elderly grandparents dealing with Alzheimer's disease and four children all lost their lives.

We mourn those tragedies, but I will tell you that we celebrate also. This

disaster easily could have seen a death toll 10 times higher or 100 times higher. There were recorded over 51,000 people saved by search-and-rescue missions. Roughly 2,000 pets were saved by search-and-rescue missions. One of the things the first responders told me over and over was this: You had better be able to take the pets because there are a whole lot of people, as the water is rising, who, if you are not willing to take Fluffy or Fido, will stay in the rushing water. So we celebrate the bravery of all those who risked their lives to save others.

In any disaster, there are three phases. Phase No. 1 is the active crisis, where search and rescue is the only priority—saving lives. Let me say that in the city of Houston and the State of Texas, we saw a coordination across levels of government I have never seen before. The city officials, the county officials, the State officials, and the Federal officials were all working hand-in-hand seamlessly, not engaging in the bickering. There were no party lines. There were no Republicans. There were no Democrats. There was no Black, White, or Hispanic. There were Texans and Americans saving the lives of each other. You saw government working seamlessly together, not having the turf wars that in other contexts might so easily shut down getting anything done, by simply saying: How can I help? What can I do? What else do you need?

After the search and rescue is over, after the saving of lives, there is the next phase, and that phase is relief—providing relief to the people who have lost everything right then. We have roughly 260 shelters that have been stood up across the State of Texas by wonderful private organizations. The Red Cross has done a phenomenal job. The Salvation Army has done a phenomenal job. Churches have done an incredible job. Private nonprofits have done an incredible job.

There are individual citizens, such as "Mattress Mack," who owns Gallery Furniture. He is a friend of mine. He is a terrific Houston entrepreneur who opened up his furniture stores as shelters. He said: Come on in. Do you need a bed? We happen to have a furniture store full of beds. It was not only that. He sent out his delivery trucks to pick people up in harm's way.

At one of the shelters last week, I visited with an older woman who was on oxygen and uses a walker. She described how her house began filling with water, and she walked out of her house in waist-deep water pushing that walker.

My mom uses a walker. I know how difficult it is to get around when you are mobility impaired. I cannot imagine how difficult it was for her pushing through the waist-deep water, fleeing for her life. She was picked up by a Gallery Furniture delivery truck. She was picked up and taken to the shelter.

I called Mack and told him that story. I told him just one story of the

lives he was saving. That is just one example of the heroes who stepped forward for their community.

Anheuser-Busch shut down beer production to deliver more than 155,000 cans of water. Now, you know we are in a time of miracles when Anheuser-Busch isn't producing beer, but that is a generosity of spirit.

One of the State officials who was helping lead the disaster relief called Academy. They had a warehouse just west of Houston, out in Katy. He said: How many boats do you have in the warehouse?

The fellow from Academy told him.

He said: Fine, we want them. We want them all.

He said: Great, come take them. They are yours.

DPS sent trucks. They loaded up the boats and sent the boats out to rescue people.

J.J. Watt, the great Texans football player who, I hope, a year from now will be wearing a Super Bowl ring, launched a charity effort raising over \$10 million on Twitter, just saying: Let's help people who are hurting.

Shelters were stood up at the George R. Brown Convention Center and the NRG Center, both of which I have spent significant time at during the last 2 weeks.

I remember one morning at the George R. Brown Convention Center. I was helping to serve breakfast. We were serving oatmeal. There was a fellow standing to my right, and I turned to him and said: Thank you for being here.

Something I try to do a lot of is just to thank people. I don't think you can thank people enough in the midst of a crisis for what they are doing.

Thank you for being here. Thank you for helping other folks.

He just began laughing. He said: Well, you know, I have to be here; my house is under water. He said: I am staying here; this is the only place I have to sleep. Yet he was up at the food line helping to serve others.

There were two gentlemen whom I met at that same shelter, and I asked them, as I tried to ask everyone: How are you doing? How is your home doing?

Two different gentlemen told me: Well, I don't have a home. I am homeless.

One said: I sleep under the bridge.

Both of them were volunteering. Both of them were sweeping the floor. So they weren't just taking shelter. Even in the midst of distress, they were helping out to keep the facility clean and to care for the needs of others.

Earlier this week, I was in Port Arthur. Port Arthur is a relatively low-income community in Texas, heavily minority. It was hit very, very badly by the storm. There were devastating floods in Port Arthur. I was at an African-American church helping to give out food and supplies to people who had lost everything, and I was visiting a

line of cars as people were driving up. You would say to each person: What do you need? They would need some water. They would need some food, some diapers, or maybe some dog food or cat food.

Several things were amazing. One, almost to a person, was what I have heard at least a hundred times in the last 2 weeks when you talk to someone who has lost their car or who has lost their house. You would say: I am so sorry. We are praying for you, and we are with you. Over and over, I heard people say: You know what; there are people a lot worse off than me. I may have lost my home, but at least I have my life. At least I have my kids.

It is powerful to hear over and over, when you try to comfort someone, and they say: Look at everyone else who needs it more than I do. But at the same time, when you would hand something to someone who came in—a young mom would come in who needed diapers—and you would hand her two packets of diapers, she would say: No, no, I will just take one. Somebody else needs that other one. Give that to someone else who needs that.

I heard that at relief centers in Port Arthur, in Beaumont, in Victoria, in Rockport, in Houston. I heard that same message over and over: There is someone else who needs it. At that church in Port Arthur, there was a couple there, both of whom had lost their home. They had lost everything, and they had been from dawn to dusk at the church, volunteering and helping others. They said, actually: Helping others is how we are getting through this.

Now, there are also moments of joy. I visited with two little boys who were in their home and the water rose to waist level, and they had to be rescued, I think, by boat. I think they were about 8 and 10 years old. I asked the boys: Boys, was that scary?

They laughed and said: Are you kidding? We got to swim in our living room.

Those moments of laughter and joy are important, even in the face of fear, death, and destruction. The unity we are seeing has been remarkable.

Then, the third and final phase will be rebuilding. Rebuilding is going to be a project that is going to take days, and, then, it is going to take weeks, and, then, it is going to take months, and it will ultimately take years. The scope of this devastation is massive. There are multiple estimates that this may prove the costliest natural disaster in U.S. history. Having seen firsthand the scope of the disaster and the thousands of homes and businesses destroyed, I can readily believe it.

I am here to say that Texas is coming back. We are going to rebuild.

In East Texas, I visited with the mayor of a small town whose entire town was destroyed. Every home, every building was under water. Her home was under water. The mayor was just in tears. The whole town was gone. She

said: If we rebuild—and I was there with several firefighters, police officers, and a county judge. We all hugged her. We said: There is no “if.” We will rebuild. We will come together. We will stand as one, and we will rebuild.

We are seeing incredible generosity from Texans, and we are seeing leadership. I want to commend leadership at every level of government. I want to commend President Trump for his leadership during this crisis. I have spoken to the President multiple times throughout the course of this storm. From the very first call, right when the storm was about to make landfall, his message was consistent. He said: TED, whatever Texas needs, it has. The answer is yes. When the Governor asked for a disaster declaration, the President signed it while the Governor was still on the phone.

The President convened a week ago a Cabinet meeting via teleconference and instructed every Cabinet member to lean in. Whatever the State needs, give it to them. Give it to them fast. Be there. Every resource we have, make it available.

I began to see Cabinet member after Cabinet member picking up the phone and calling.

The Secretary of Health and Human Services said: All right, on the health side, what more can we be doing? How can we be helping the people in hospitals who are being evacuated?

On the education side, the Secretary of Education said: How can we help the kids whose schools have been flooded?

There was the Secretary of Energy, former Governor of Texas Rick Perry.

The Secretary of HUD focused on the massive housing challenges.

Of course, the Director of FEMA has been down in Texas repeatedly. The Federal Government leaned in with all the resources with a swiftness that I have never seen.

At the State level, let me say that Governor Greg Abbott has done an extraordinary job. He is a close friend and mentor. He has led the State when we had crises playing out. When the city and county officials in Houston told me they didn't have enough emergency response vehicles, enough choppers, enough boats, enough high-water trucks, within hours the Governor and the Federal Government were able to flood the region with assets, with manpower, with the National Guard, with DPS troopers, and with coastguardsmen, so that those thousands and thousands of rescues could happen.

At the local level, all across Texas there are county judges. One county judge in East Texas, whom I visited with a few days ago, just buried his mother. His mother had died right before the storm, and the storm was such that she couldn't be buried in the midst of the storm. So she was in the funeral home until just a couple of days ago, and he was able to put her to rest. Yet he was out there leading the effort.

There are mayors and county judges. In Houston, Mayor Sylvester Turner

and Harris County Judge Ed Emmett—one a Democrat and one a Republican—are working seamlessly as one. That unity has been powerful.

In the next stage of rebuilding, we will have resources available. There are going to be very, very significant State resources. My office is working very closely with Governor Greg Abbott to mobilize the State resources and make them available and then at the Federal level.

I commend the leadership in Congress and the administration for responding swiftly with the relief mandated under statute. The relief efforts are being led by the Texas delegation in the House and by Senator CORNYN and myself here in the Senate, and we will see, I believe, strong bipartisan support for the Federal relief needed to help people come out of this.

But Texas will rebuild. We will come out stronger, and it will be through that same spirit, that same fearlessness, and that same compassion and love and unity that brought us through the crisis and saved thousands of lives. That same spirit will help us rebuild even stronger.

Let me finally say to all the men and women across the State of Texas, across the United States, and across the world who have been lifting us up in prayer, thank you. Thank you for your prayers.

I was at a church in Port Arthur visiting family after family, hugging women and men and children who had lost everything. A message of comfort I tried to give to each and every one of them was this: When you go to bed tonight, you are not alone. You are being lifted up in prayer by millions of people across Texas, across the country, and across the world. You are going through this journey surrounded by prayer warriors.

The day before yesterday, my family and I went to a home in Missouri City. A woman had lost everything in the flood. We joined a church group in helping her clean out her house and helping her tear down the sheetrock the floodwater had destroyed. My girls Caroline and Catherine took part in it. I would say that Caroline, my 9-year-old, we discovered, can wield a mean hammer when it comes to taking out sheetrock. The experience for my girls and my family and that group was just helping, neighbor helping neighbor.

As this woman grieved the loss of priceless memories, she also held on to special and wonderful memories. One thing we found was a note she had written to Santa Claus as a 9-year-old; that was saved. Another was a lock of hair from when she was 3 years old that was in an envelope and carefully preserved; that was safe.

What I shared with her is the same thing I shared with Texans suffering across the State: You are not alone. America stands as one.

Today, there are no Democrats, there are no Republicans. On other days, there may be issues that divide us. We

will continue to debate tax policy and everything else, but today we are all Americans and we are all Texans. We are standing as one. That is the spirit that built our Nation, and it is the spirit that will rebuild Texas and Louisiana after this disaster.

Let me note that it is also the spirit that has us standing in unity with the people of Puerto Rico, the people of the Caribbean, and the people of Florida who are in harm's way as Irma bears down upon them. Our prayers are that the storm will turn into the Atlantic, dissipate, and turn away from people, but whatever happens, if there is to be yet another major storm hitting America, know that we will stand united in harm's way. We will stand as one, and united we can overcome anything.

With that, I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mrs. ERNST). The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

MONTANA WILDFIRES

Mr. TESTER. Madam President, today I rise to talk about a different natural disaster. It is happening in the great State of Montana, and every corner of our State of Montana has felt the impacts of wildfires.

In Montana, we are experiencing a historic drought. As you can see from the map, the red indicates it is very severe, and it gets less from there. But the fact is, there is a large portion of land along our northern tier that is experiencing incredible drought, and Montana is in the middle of it all. Nearly all of our great State is under historic drought conditions.

With dry grass, high winds, and dry lightning storms, it is no wonder that currently in our State we have nearly 30 high-priority fires raging as I speak today. Just last week, we had over 40 new fires spark in Montana. That isn't counting the ones that are currently in existence; there are over 40 new ones.

Over the last month, I went across my State and saw with my own eyes the fires across Montana. All Montanans are dealing with smoke-filled air, often in highly hazardous conditions. You can see here the chart of the smoke. It has been incredibly debilitating, quite frankly.

I have heard stories of ranchers in eastern Montana—in fact, I am talking about the eastern two-thirds of Montana—who took the shoes off their horses for fear that the metal clicking on rocks might spark and light up dry grass.

Hikers in Glacier National Park frantically parked their cars and fled due to evacuation notices.

Families in Whitehall, MT, left their homes with keepsakes and the sprin-

klers on the roof, just in case the fires crept closer to the only homes they have ever known.

Children in Seeley Lake, a little town in western Montana, saw their first day of school canceled due to fire danger. I might add that the smoke was incredible in Seeley Lake and has been for about the last month.

More than 900,000 acres across Montana have already burned. To put that in context, the State of Rhode Island is about 777,000 square miles. More than 900,000 acres in Montana have already burned. One fire alone—the Lodgepole Complex—burned 270,000 acres. That is larger than the city of New York. As I stand here today, more than 600,000 acres continue to burn. There are active fires on 600,000 acres. Firefighters have spent \$220 million to try to get a handle in Montana alone.

Nationwide, we have seen a 70-percent increase in acres burned this year than last year, when the Federal Government spent \$1.9 billion fighting fires. Let me put that in perspective. We have 70 percent more fires burning this year than last year, and last year we spent \$1.9 billion fighting fires. The bill is going to be huge this year.

In Montana, we have tragically lost two brave firefighters—Trenton Johnson and Brent Witham. These two young men selflessly and courageously put their lives on the line protecting our great State.

We have seen pastures burn, fences turn to ashes, and structures crumble before our eyes. In fact, the Glacier National Park's Sperry Chalet, a hotel that was built way back in 1913, was engulfed in flames and destroyed. It hopefully will be rebuilt, but the truth is, you do not rebuild a chalet that was built in 1913. It is gone. The historic Lake McDonald Lodge, a cornerstone of Glacier National Park, stands in the path of the flames.

Montana's forests, our national parks, our agriculture industry—these are all backbones of our economy in Montana. As these fires rage, Montana feels that economic impact. Tourists stay home, ranchers lose grazing land, cattle that survive the fire go hungry, river guides stay off the smoky water, and Montana's economy suffers.

Montana has been fortunate to have many brave men and women working together to fight these fires. Folks have collaborated at all levels of government to try to fight Mother Nature, but we all know that Mother Nature bats last.

Whether it is the floods in Houston or Hurricane Irma, which is threatening Florida, the wildfires across the West, or extreme drought in the Plains, we cannot deny that our climate is changing. Over the past 10 years, we have seen hundred-year storms every few years. We have seen hurricanes repeatedly besiege the gulf and east coast. Historic droughts are becoming common, and water shortages are routine. Unprecedented disasters are becoming the new normal, and it is put-

ting a strain on our government, on our economy, and on our citizens.

Climate change is real, and we can't continue to sit in silence. We have to take proactive steps to keep it at bay. It is costing taxpayers, it is altering our way of life, and our economy is suffering in the process.

Since Hurricane Sandy in 2012, we have spent more than \$100 billion in supplemental disaster relief. Let me say that again. Since Hurricane Sandy back in 2012—not that long ago—we have spent more than \$100 billion in supplemental disaster relief. That is \$100 billion in addition to what Congress has budgeted for disaster relief. That is \$100 billion we could be spending serving our veterans or improving our schools or building bridges and roads or paying down this Nation's debt.

But as our climate changes before our eyes, Congress continues to bury its head in the sand. We are left mortgaging our children's future to pay for disaster relief today. Look at the money we are going to spend on wildfires this year. Look at the funding we are going to be sending to Texas and Louisiana. I will state that I am all for sending help to those folks. I will be making sure the folks in this body understand that we also have to give resources to folks along the northern tier, especially Montana, because fighting fire is expensive and dangerous, and drought has dramatic impacts on our agricultural economy.

I am very thankful that we have folks like this gentleman pictured on the frontlines fighting fires, trying to direct Mother Nature in those fires in a way that they will do the least amount of damage.

We have heard a lot about the good folks and heroic folks down in Houston. We have seen the generosity, the heroism, the fighting spirit of Texans. Well, as I have traveled around Montana, I saw that same kind of heroism. I saw young men and women from across the country spending their summers fighting fires in our forests and across our Plains. I saw communities coming together and opening up their doors and sending aid from across the State. I saw seamless collaboration between Federal, State, Tribal, and county agencies to mitigate the damages across our State.

We are seeing natural disasters across this country. This isn't a contest or comparison of devastation and misery; it is a testament to the American spirit. No matter what Mother Nature throws our way, we are going to need to work together to overcome it. Saving lives and property when disaster strikes is a fundamental pillar of government. It is not a Democratic or Republican issue, it is an American responsibility.

The country's faith in Washington, DC, is at an alltime low, but I am confident that we can work together to ensure the victims of Harvey get the relief they need and that the States that