

Nation. We created over 250,000 jobs and actually put North Carolina on the map by all references—CEO measures and by independent organizations. It is the State where businesses want to set up and do business.

We took the corporate tax from 6.9 down to 2.5. We took personal income tax rates from 7.75 down to 5.49. We got people back to work.

Along the way, we had our challenges. Everybody in Washington is for tax reform. They are for tax relief. They will come into your office and tell you: Let's get her going. Then on the side they will say: except for that one righteous exemption I may need. We have to have Members who have the courage to do tax reform that helps working families, that creates jobs, and that silences the people who want to take this exemption or that exemption away, so we do what is right for the generation that is about to look for jobs and the people who need a job today.

They want their businesses to grow. They want their economies to thrive. They want the United States to be the strong, great economy that it can be. It is going to take courage. It is going to take discipline. It is going to take time—but only so much time.

I believe this Congress, this Senate, over the course of a few months, if we focus on it and with the support of the President and in collaboration with the House, can get this done. We have to get it done. We promised the American people last year that if we had majorities, we would do what we had to do to deliver on this promise. It can be done. A lot of times, people ask me what keeps me up at night. I tell them two things: coffee and the national debt. Coffee is for the obvious reasons, but why the national debt? I will tell you why. Because when I have people on the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the service chiefs come into the Senate Armed Services Committee and say the single greatest threat to our national security is our debt, we should take notice. These are people who are skilled in warfare. They are people who know how to take the fight to the enemy. When they think the greatest threat to this Nation is our national debt, we had better take that seriously.

How do you resolve the national debt? You grow the economy. How do you grow the economy? You create jobs and help businesses throughout. How do you do that? You do that through tax reform. You also take criticism that is going to be waged by some people on the far left when we talk about corporate tax reform. They are going to say: How could you favor the big guy over the little guy? I don't know about you all, but I worked for companies before in my life. When I was 19 and living in a trailer park, I was working for a corporation. I was a little guy working for that corporation. Fortunately, in the 1980s, we had a President who had the wisdom to know that, if you reduced the tax burden on corporations,

more little guys like me—that 19-year-old living in a trailer park—could get a job—a better-paying job—and, ultimately, have enough money to put himself through school.

So when we get into this argument, don't take the bait by some people who will say that because we are focusing on corporate taxes and reducing the tax burden on businesses, that is somehow a guy in a suit trying to help out a business. That is a guy who has worked his way from that trailer park now into the U.S. Senate and benefited when Congress had the courage to reduce taxes and get the economy back on track. That is what we better do. That is what we promised. That is what we are here to do today. The time is now to get it done.

The President has shown wisdom in the blueprint—and our leadership here, in terms of the broad strokes about what tax reform needs to look like. Now it is our job—each and every individual Member of the Senate and the House—to deliver on the promise to produce tax reform to help the little guy and to get this economy going to be the great economy that it has been in the past, and I have every reason to believe that it will be so in the future.

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

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

EXECUTIVE SESSION

EXECUTIVE CALENDAR

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate proceed to executive session for the en bloc consideration of Calendar No. 95, the nomination of Heath Tarbert to be Assistant Secretary of the Treasury, and Calendar No. 106, the nomination of Makan Delrahim to be Assistant Attorney General. I further ask that there be 5 hours of debate on the nominations, equally divided in the usual form, and that following the use or yielding back of time, the Senate vote on confirmation of the nominations in the order listed, with no intervening action or debate, and that if confirmed, the motions to reconsider be considered made and laid upon the table, and the President be immediately notified of the Senate's action.

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

Mr. McCONNELL. I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

PUERTO RICO AND U.S. VIRGIN ISLANDS RECOVERY EFFORT

Mr. BLUMENTHAL. Mr. President, in the last 24 hours since I came to the floor to talk about Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands, there has been progress but far less progress than is necessary at this critical time of humanitarian crisis, when the people of those islands literally face a chasm, a deepening canyon of needs and challenges.

Over the next 24 hours, over the next 24 days, over the next 24 months, this crisis must be met with a strategy, an overarching plan, a Marshall Plan for Puerto Rico that commits the resources unequivocally and unambiguously, making sure we match the depth of this crisis with a magnitude of resources and commitment that is needed and deserved. That kind of response, which has been lacking so far, is absolutely necessary for the hope of Puerto Rico because as the threats of disease and contaminated water increase, not to mention the lack of proper medicine, healthcare, roads, transportation and communication, food, water, medicine, basic necessities rise on that island, the people of Puerto Rico will lose trust and confidence in fellow Americans that must do more. We need to give them the hope they deserve, and that hope has to be more than rhetoric and more than patting ourselves on the back as the President has done. It has to be a real commitment.

In fact, there is no reason for back-patting. The response so far has been inadequate, lacking the full attention and commitment that is needed. It has been a story of inattention and inadequate strategy so far to meet this deepening humanitarian crisis.

The people of Texas, Florida, and throughout the gulf coast and the Southeast who have been affected by the storms have received the full commitment of America. It is what we owe our fellow Americans. That same commitment is owed to Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands. We saw an immediate disaster response there that must also be devoted to Puerto Rico. The emergency aid and full funding made to the victims of those storms in the gulf coast and Florida must be given to Puerto Rico, and I am hopeful that a relief bill will be fashioned this week.

I am also hopeful that the financial control board that has responsibility for Puerto Rico's internal finances can be given the flexibility and that the Government of Puerto Rico will be given the flexibility that is needed to deal with this disaster—nothing less than a full court press, a full plan and strategy, and a plan that directly addresses the needs of Puerto Rico in so many areas.

On transportation, what is the plan to ensure that basic goods can move from one end of the island to another? Right now the roads are unusable. By

all accounts, getting things across the island by road is impossible. Radar and navigation systems at the airports are down. The transportation mechanism of the island is literally ripped apart. So potable water, food, and fuel are impossible to move where they need to go. That state of affairs is inadequate and unacceptable in America in 2017.

Electricity and power are disrupted across the island. What will be done to restore power and electricity throughout the island? What will be done to make sure that diesel is available there and in the Virgin Islands? Many of the machines essential for lifesaving at the hospitals cannot be powered by generators alone. That state of affairs is inadequate and unacceptable in America in 2017.

All five of the hospitals in Arecibo, one of Puerto Rico's largest cities, are without power. Many other hospitals are shuttered as well. Clinics are closed.

Mosquito-borne diseases are a real and present danger. Deadly ailments in contaminated food and water may cause serious and possibly deadly diseases. As these diseases spread, what is the plan to stop this kind of inadequacy? It is unacceptable in America in 2017.

As to communications, or the basic ability to talk to each other, to reassure each other, and to know what is going on with relatives and loved ones and friends—no wonder that angst and alarm are spreading beyond Puerto Rico to Connecticut, where those relatives and friends live now—this kind of lack of communication is unacceptable in America in 2017. What is the plan to correct it?

On public safety, looting and theft are becoming more prevalent. As the days drag on, law and order will deteriorate unless public safety is addressed more effectively.

There is another kind of challenge. A dam that is about to burst and could cause havoc in surrounding areas is a clear and present safety danger that illustrates again the weakness of Puerto Rico's infrastructure.

Towns throughout the island have suffered severe flooding. So housing and basic shelter are inadequate. What is the plan to rebuild?

Payment for medicines cannot be made unless cash is available, and the lack of electricity means that the ATM machines are not working. If there is no cash for residents to buy basic goods, including food and water, how does the administration plan to solve this problem? This kind of inadequacy is unacceptable in America in 2017.

Rebuilding will require a long-term commitment. It will require a plan and a strategy, not just over the next 24 hours or 24 days but 24 months and longer. It must deal with a financial situation that is a storm of its own.

As I described it yesterday, this storm is not a natural disaster. It is a manmade disaster, the result of healthcare and tax programs that are

beyond any fault of the people of Puerto Rico. It is not of their doing.

Vast swaths of resources have been swept away in Puerto Rico, including many of the attractions important for Puerto Rico's tourist industry. The same is true, for example, on the island of St. John in the Virgin Islands. Tourism is a key component of Puerto Rico's economy. It may take years and possibly decades to restore. What is the long-term plan? What is the strategy for Puerto Rico and for the Virgin Islands? There needs to be a kind of Marshall Plan for rebuilding because the devastating damage done is no less than what Europe suffered as a result of World War II. We have an obligation—certainly, no less than rebuilding our European allies—to restore and rebuild Puerto Rico.

All of these natural disasters and the financial manmade storm come as Puerto Rico continues to endure the struggles of its internal financial commitments that are necessary for the lifeblood of the economy. Jobs and economic progress must be the end goal.

With so many questions about the President's plan or lack of plan, I am struck by the need for this body and this Congress to take the initiative. I think we will need to begin action, begin hearings, and begin a process of building a plan if the administration fails to present it.

I believe, too, that we share so much with the island of Puerto Rico in people who have come to Connecticut and other parts of the country that we will find a ready and enthusiastic audience and support for such an effort.

In the past 2 days, after silence through much of it about Puerto Rico, the President seemed to blame the island itself, its financial struggle, other storms, and even the size of the ocean. There should be no excuses. There must be a call to action.

I thank the Coast Guard, our military, the first responders, the rescuers, and relief organizations—from Americares to the Red Cross to Save the Children—that have devoted so much and given so much in these times of crisis. They have been stretched thin. They have performed with courage and generosity and so have the donors who have come forward in Connecticut and around the country. People are calling my office asking what they can do for the people of Florida and the gulf coast and Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands. They are all fellow Americans, and we owe it to them to do more and do better to make sure that we keep faith with our fellow Americans.

I thank you, Mr. President, for the opportunity to talk about this subject.

NOMINATION OF AJIT PAI

Mr. President, I want to express as well my concern regarding the renomination of Ajit Pai to be Chairman of the Federal Communications Commission. I will oppose his nomination. As much as I respect his background and his achievements, his intelligence and

ability, I believe that, during his tenure over the past year, he has taken one step after another that is contrary to the public interest. He has launched an attack on net neutrality, and he is working adamantly for undoing the open internet order.

The open internet order was established based on 10 years of evidence about how the internet has changed, and it was most recently fully upheld by the U.S. Court of Appeals for the DC Circuit in June 2016. The most recent evidence shows that net neutrality has not inhibited network investment at all, in contrast to Chairman Pai's claim.

On broadband privacy, Chairman Pai forcefully advocated in support of efforts to rescind the FCC's broadband privacy rules, a blatant attack on consumer privacy rights—all the more striking in light of recent dramatic concerns about privacy. Signing up for the internet should not mean that you have to sign away your rights to privacy, and that is why it is so important to have baseline privacy and data security rules that our broadband providers subscribe to, observe, and follow.

Earlier this year, Senate Republicans gave broadband providers a green light to sell sensitive personal information to the highest bidder—a move that came with cheers of support from Chairman Pai. By supporting this measure, I think Chairman Pai raised severe doubts about his commitment to the average American consumer.

One of Chairman Pai's first actions after his designation as chairman was to direct the FCC's Wireline Competition Bureau to overturn an order designating nine wireless companies to provide lifeline broadband service through the USF Lifeline Program, despite the assertion that his foremost goal was to close the internet and digital divide. I strongly criticized this decision and led a letter to Chairman Pai expressing that this action not only forfeits and affects these providers consumers' interests, but it may also have a chilling effect on other broadband providers that were interested in participating in the Lifeline broadband program. This action would limit choice and increase the cost of service for the lifeline participants.

Finally, as Chairman of the FCC, Mr. Pai has a duty to review whether Sinclair's proposal to acquire Tribune Media complies with the FCC's broadcast media ownership rules and serves the public interest by promoting localism and diversity. Rather than scrutinizing this deal as closely and carefully as I believe he should, Mr. Pai has focused his efforts on loosening restrictions to enable the deal. This transaction not only blatantly violates existing rules, but it also abridges existing FCC policy. Those policies were just recently scrapped under Mr. Pai's watch.

This action can only be explained by interest in prioritizing the demands of Sinclair over the public interest. It