

press, in my view, is probably not that interested in this number because in places like Washington, everything seemed to be going great. But it wasn't going great.

Think about this: If Washington or L.A. or New York or San Francisco are growing at 3 or 4 percent growth and yet the country is at about 1.5 or 2 percent, then there are probably huge parts of America that are actually shrinking, not growing at all.

These charts talk about economic growth, GDP. It can sound a little bit wonky. Really, GDP is a marker for the health of our economy. It is an indicator of American progress. It is a proxy for the American dream and optimism in the future.

As this chart shows, we have had a sick economy over the last 10 years, a lost decade of economic growth. The press hasn't written much about it, and when they have, they have typically bought the line of the previous administration saying: Hey, look, we know that the traditional levels of economic growth are close to 4 percent. Look at Clinton, look at Reagan—4½, 5, 6. We know that is the case. We know 3 percent is OK. But we haven't hit that in the last 10 years, so what is wrong? Well, the press started buying the line from the last administration: That is the "new normal." We can't hit 3 percent anymore. We certainly can't hit 4 percent anymore. So 1½, 2 percent is America hitting on all cylinders. I believe that is a surrender. I believe dumbing down our expectations for economic growth is a retreat from the American dream.

As you know, the American people aren't buying this. They are not buying the dumbing down. They are not saying: Oh yeah, we can live with this 1½ percent growth. Sure. No problem. They are wise, and they aren't buying the dumbing down.

We all saw the book recently released by former Senator and Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, and her book is entitled "What Happened." What happened? This is what happened: Our citizens saw the American dream slipping away after a lost decade of economic growth, and they weren't ready to surrender to the new normal.

What do we need to focus on in the Senate? We have to start moving beyond this. We have to. We need policies that are going to focus on reigniting growth—the growth that Democrats and Republicans have supported for decades. What is that? I think there is a lot of agreement—infrastructure, less burdensome regulations, energy. America has enormous supplies of energy that we can take advantage of. Yet the issue we are starting to debate now in the Senate is tax reform.

As we debate this and work in a bipartisan way—I have heard a lot of my colleagues say that we do need to undertake tax reform. We need to keep asking ourselves, on all these policies, what they will do to reignite growth, to reignite the American dream, to

allow hard-working American families to keep more of their paychecks, and to return to the optimism that comes with a robust economy, not just along the coast of America but throughout the entire country, to get back to that optimism and growth. That is what I am going to be doing as we undertake this debate on tax reform.

The Trump administration is off to an OK start. The first quarter—again, kind of a hangover from the Obama years—1.2 percent growth. That is not good at all. The last quarter, second quarter, was 3.1. It hit above 3 percent, which is what the President says his policies are meant to do. As long as they are focused on that, I certainly am going to be somebody who wants to support those kinds of pro-growth policies, and I think it is imperative, whether it is tax reform, infrastructure, regulatory reform, or energy, that we all come together in this body and make sure we work together so the next decade of growth in America does not look like this last one and gets us over 3 percent, gets us back to traditional levels of growth. I don't think there is anything more important we can do in the Senate than getting back to those important levels of growth for our country and our citizens.

TRIBUTE TO TYLER ROBERTS AND MICHAEL SOUKUP

Mr. President, I wish to say a few words about some of my staff who have done a great job serving Alaskans and who are leaving my office soon. I am going to miss them a lot. One is here now, and he will probably be embarrassed that I am talking about him on the Senate floor—Tyler Roberts.

Tyler has been a legislative assistant of mine, handling healthcare, budget, tax. He is leaving to join the private sector. He has been with me from the beginning, 2½ years ago. I can tell you this: He has worked long hours serving the people of our great State and has set a tone in the office of hard work, diligent work, good-natured, and we are going to miss Tyler very much.

I wish to also recognize Michael Soukup. Michael is our digital director and press secretary. From educating Alaskans on what we are doing in DC to designing poster boards like this, creating awesome graphics and videos, Michael has been an invaluable member of my team as well. He is an artist. Like all good artists, his work has a distinctive look and style. If you see one of my photo montages on Facebook and you think it is well-done, which we do, you can thank Michael. We call them Soukup specials.

Tyler has also worked tirelessly for me and Alaska, his home State. I know that he will bring the same amount of creativity, ingenuity, and integrity to all he does as he moves into the next phase of his career.

Thank you to all my staff.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

#### DISASTER TAX RELIEF AND AIRPORT AND AIRWAY EXTENSION ACT OF 2017

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, as in legislative session, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate proceed to the immediate consideration of H.R. 3823.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will report the bill by title.

The legislative clerk read as follows:

A bill (H.R. 3823) to amend title 49, United States Code, to extend authorizations for the airport improvement program, to amend the Internal Revenue Code of 1986 to extend the funding and expenditure authority of the Airport and Airway Trust Fund, to provide disaster tax relief, and for other purposes.

There being no objection, the Senate proceeded to consider the bill.

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Cassidy amendment at the desk be agreed to and the bill, as amended, be considered read a third time.

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

The amendment (No. 1108) was agreed to, as follows:

(Purpose: To strike the provisions relating to development of a private flood insurance market)

Strike title IV.

The amendment was ordered to be engrossed and the bill to be read a third time.

The bill was read the third time.

Mr. McCONNELL. I know of no further debate on the bill.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. If there is no further debate, the bill having been read the third time, the question is, Shall the bill pass?

The bill (H.R. 3823), as amended, was passed.

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the motion to reconsider be considered made and laid upon the table.

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 legislative 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.

#### EXECUTIVE CALENDAR—Continued

PUERTO RICO AND U.S. VIRGIN ISLANDS  
RECOVERY EFFORT

Mr. BLUMENTHAL. Mr. President, I am here for the third time in as many days to talk about this Nation's response to a humanitarian crisis affecting millions of Americans—the people

of Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands. It is similar to the situation in Florida, in the gulf coast, and, some years ago, in Connecticut and in other parts of this country when they faced a natural disaster that was almost as devastating as an attack would be by a foreign power. Analogous but different, this category 4 Hurricane Maria caused consequences as devastating and destructive as any that man could do. It is a natural disaster, not manmade, but it is turning into a manmade disaster.

So far, the response from our government has been underwhelming. In fact, it has been inadequate and anemic. It has been shamefully slow and undersized and should be vastly upgraded and increased.

Just moments ago, I learned that Lieutenant General Buchanan has been appointed to head the military efforts in Puerto Rico. That appointment followed a call just an hour or so ago with all of the representatives, including FEMA, the Department of Defense, other Federal agencies, and the Red Cross, during which I urged our U.S. military to be mobilized, much as we would be in responding to a natural disaster in Connecticut or Texas or Florida or other places in this country on the mainland where we have seen the same kind of storm.

The 3.4 million people in Puerto Rico are almost exactly the same number as the population of Connecticut. I hope, and I believe, the response would be better in Connecticut if we were to face the same kind of natural disaster. Yet the manmade disaster is the failure to move food, fuel, medicine, water, other necessities, and communications equipment from the ports and the airports into the interior of the country, even into the major cities, where currently apparently a lack of drivers and passable roads make it all the more difficult. Whether the supplies of food and fuel and medicine and water are adequate on the island or need to be increased on an emergency basis and whether there are sufficient shipments and airlifts going into the island, the simple fact is that Puerto Rico faces a disaster—manmade after natural.

I commend the loyal and dedicated people of FEMA and all of the National Guard, including the National Guard of Connecticut, who have performed with such heroism and dedication in the face of the most difficult circumstances imaginable, but their efforts need to be matched by many others. There are 4,500 American military personnel now in Puerto Rico. Rather than 5,000, there should be 50,000 of our National Guard, not to occupy the island, not to enforce martial law but to make sure the logistics—the transportation, the means of delivery of the lifeblood of that island in food and fuel and medicine and water and other basic necessities—are sufficient to move those basic supplies to the places they are needed. The troops who are there now are performing heroic, Herculean work, and so are many volunteers, along with FEMA

officials, the Coast Guard, and others, but they need more help.

Nearly a week after this storm, Maria, more than 90 percent of the island's residents are without power, 42 percent have no water, the vast majority of the country's 69 hospitals cannot function, and only 10 percent of the cell towers are working. If those conditions existed in Connecticut, I would be on the floor 24 hours a day. Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands have no one here, and they have no elected Representatives in the House of Representatives. They are voiceless or at least voteless in this body. We need to stand for them, speak out, and fight for them. That is why I am here for the third day in a row.

We need a plan and a strategy, which has been lacking from this administration. In that phone call earlier today with FEMA officials and the Department of Defense, I asked about a plan. They are working on it. The military, U.S. Northern Command, is working on a plan. They could not tell me when it will be ready or what it will say or what the total number of troops or other logistical supplies will be nor could they commit that there would be a waiver under FEMA regulations of the C through G conditions, which apply to permanent recovery.

The only decision that has been made is A to B, which provides for debris and other emergency responses over the next 180 days, and that is part of what the island needs—a longer term plan as well as an immediate one to make sure there is a road to recovery, that there is a path that will provide hope. Not only is the well-being and health of this island threatened but so is hope, which is so important for progress to be made.

The people of Puerto Rico have been met with, at best, ambivalence and ambiguity by the President of the United States. Earlier this week, he seemed more inclined to blame the island itself and the size of the ocean than in advocating for help. I hope we can come together on a bipartisan basis. With the kind of situation that is there now—the danger of epidemic as well as immediate health threats before disease takes hold—we must act before people die. We must come to the aid of Puerto Rico. They need medical care. They need access to food and safe drinking water, and, yes, they need greater security.

The 78 mayors of Puerto Rico, along with the Governor, are doing also heroic and Herculean work, but a whole of government response is necessary from this body and from the Federal Government at a much higher magnitude. In the long term, we must have a martial plan—a strategy for rebuilding the island's roads, bridges, rail, airports, ports, and VA facility, much as we do in this country, except that, there, the need is so much more dire and immediate. Hospitals, transportation, electricity, power, communications, safety, housing all have been de-

stroyed, and the consequences will be deadly.

My hope is that Lieutenant General Buchanan will expedite that plan. So far, it has been lacking. It should be done today. It should be integrated with the FEMA approach, and I hope they will permit visits by Members of the Congress who, so far, have been prevented from going there.

The American people deserve to have elected Representatives there because Puerto Rico has none here. The extraordinary work done by the cable TV and reporters for the print media and others who are there have given us a picture—and often a picture is worth a thousand words—of the devastation that now continues from a manmade disaster that must be avoided before it takes lives and destroys hope.

Thank you.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from South Dakota.

Mr. THUNE. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to be able to complete my remarks.

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

Mr. THUNE. Mr. President, I rise to voice my strong support for the nomination of Ajit Pai to a second 5-year term as Commissioner of the Federal Communications Commission.

Mr. Pai has served as a Commissioner of the FCC since 2012, when he was first confirmed by a voice vote in the Senate. Mr. Pai was designated by President Trump to be the 34th Chairman of the FCC in January of this year and was renominated to a second term to the FCC in March.

In July, the Senate Commerce, Science, and Transportation Committee, which I am privileged to chair, held a hearing on the nomination of Mr. Pai, and the committee reported out his nomination favorably on August 2.

Prior to becoming a Commissioner, Chairman Pai worked on telecommunications policy in both the public and private sectors, notably serving in the Senate as a staffer on the Judiciary Committee as well as in the general counsel's office at the FCC.

It is my belief that Mr. Pai's stellar career and communications policy, his integrity, and his tireless work ethic all serve him well as he continues to serve the FCC and guide the agency back to being a more collaborative and productive institution.

In just 9 months since becoming Chairman, Mr. Pai has made much needed reforms to improve transparency at the FCC and to improve the agency's processes. I am particularly heartened by Chairman Pai's efforts to treat his fellow Commissioners fairly by instituting the process of sharing documents with other Commissioners before discussing them publicly.

Additionally, under Chairman Pai's leadership, the public is now able to view the text of all agenda items in advance of Commission meetings. Also,

to better reflect the realities of today's competitive landscape, Chairman Pai has announced the creation of an Office of Economics and Data to provide cost-benefit analyses to better inform the FCC's work.

These measures are a significant step forward from the last Chairman's leadership style, which I frequently criticized as being hyperpartisan and warned would lead to counterproductive outcomes over the long term. That is why, a little over a year ago, I felt compelled to stand in this same spot and to strongly criticize the previous Chairman of the FCC for leading the Commission with unprecedented partisan zeal. At that time, I noted that the voting record for open meetings at the Commission showed a long history of consensus-building with the previous five permanent FCC Chairmen combining for only 14 party-line votes at open meetings during their tenures. However, this all changed under Chairman Wheeler as he pursued a highly partisan agenda, driven by ideological beliefs more than by a sober reading of the law. Chairman Wheeler forced 3-to-2 votes on a party-line basis a total of 31 times. To put it another way, in 3 years under Chairman Wheeler, the FCC saw over twice as many partisan votes than in the previous 20 years combined.

While partisan differences are sometimes inevitable, what were once very rare events have become standard operating procedure at the Commission. This extreme partisanship was used to do the following things: a complete upending of how the internet is regulated, creating years of uncertainty for everyone; stripping important consumer protection responsibilities from the Federal Trade Commission; a failed attempt to override States' rights on municipal broadband and a power grab that was overturned by the courts; increasing the size of the Universal Service Fund by billions of dollars by simultaneously undermining bipartisan efforts to improve the program's accountability; the unnecessary and possibly unlawful disclosure of trade secrets and a plan to have the FCC and its Media Bureau design and dictate the future of television ads.

I was not alone in noticing Chairman Wheeler's overreach. On several occasions other Federal agencies refused to support his actions. The Copyright Office strongly criticized a proposal for set-top boxes. The staff at the Federal Trade Commission called the FCC's privacy rules "not optimal," which is bureaucrat speak for really bad. The Obama administration's Department of Justice refused to defend the FCC's unlawful action on municipal broadband.

With respect to internet regulations, I am pleased that Chairman Pai has sought to hit the reset button on the 2015 title II order because, as I have previously said, the FCC should do what is necessary to rebalance the agency's regulatory posture under current law. I continue to believe, how-

ever, that the best way to provide long-term protections for the internet is for Congress to pass bipartisan legislation.

Two and a half years ago, I put forward legislative principles and a draft bill to begin the conversation, and I continue to stand ready and willing today to work toward finding a lasting legislative solution that will resolve the dispute over net neutrality once and for all.

Thankfully, the net neutrality debate has not distracted the FCC from important work in other areas. For instance, the FCC's proposed rulemaking on robocalls is a positive step in the right direction. The government must do everything we can to protect consumers from those who are truly bad actors, but we also must be sure that the government's rules are not unfairly punishing legitimate callers who are not acting maliciously. The FCC's notice of inquiry will give that conversation a much needed jump-start.

Furthermore, Chairman Pai's focus on the expansion of rural broadband and acceleration of next-generation infrastructure deployment will help close the digital divide—a goal that we all share. He has also worked tirelessly to help ensure communications services are restored to the communities affected by Hurricanes Harvey, Irma, and Maria.

Given the FCC's importance to the future of our economy and our society, it is important for the Commission to seek opportunities for common ground. In the past, people used to say that communications policy was not particularly partisan and that both sides of the aisle could often find common ground to work together. Well, times have changed, and the debate on this nomination is another example of that.

I know that agreement is not always possible. Nevertheless, as a corrective to the Commission's recent history, I urged Chairman Pai at his confirmation hearing to treat all Commissioners fairly, to respect the law, to be willing to ask Congress for guidance, and to seek consensus whenever and wherever possible. I believe doing so will improve the agency's credibility and will result in actions that are more likely to endure, and I believe that Chairman Pai will do these things.

As I noted at the outset, Chairman Pai has already made much needed reforms to improve the processes at the FCC and to empower his fellow Commissioners. He has already shown a commitment to ensuring transparency and openness at the Commission, which gives me great confidence in the direction that he will lead the agency. Chairman Pai's new approach, I believe, will lead to more long-lasting and positive results at the FCC. That is why I believe the elevation of Ajit Pai to be the Chairman of the Commission is a much needed breath of fresh air, and why I believe he should be confirmed promptly and without further delay.

So I urge my colleagues to support this nomination.

I yield the floor.

#### CLOTURE MOTION

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

The 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 Ajit Varadaraj Pai, of Kansas, to be a Member of the Federal Communications Commission.

Mitch McConnell, Joni Ernst, Thom Tillis, Ben Sasse, Steve Daines, Mike Crapo, Jerry Moran, Tom Cotton, John Thune, Pat Roberts, James M. Inhofe, Johnny Isakson, John Cornyn, James Lankford, John Boozman, James E. Risch, Roger F. Wicker.

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 Ajit Varadaraj Pai, of Kansas, to be a Member of the Federal Communications Commission shall be brought to a close?

The yeas and nays are mandatory under the rule.

The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk called the roll.

Mr. CORNYN. The following Senators are necessarily absent: the Senator from Mississippi (Mr. COCHRAN), the Senator from Alabama (Mr. STRANGE), and the Senator from North Carolina (Mr. TILLIS).

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

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

The yeas and nays resulted—yeas 55, nays 41, as follows:

[Rollcall Vote No. 208 Ex.]

#### YEAS—55

Alexander	Flake	Paul
Barrasso	Gardner	Perdue
Blunt	Graham	Peters
Boozman	Grassley	Portman
Burr	Hatch	Risch
Capito	Heller	Roberts
Carper	Hoeven	Rounds
Cassidy	Inhofe	Rubio
Collins	Isakson	Sasse
Coons	Johnson	Scott
Corker	Kennedy	Shelby
Cornyn	Lankford	Sullivan
Cotton	Lee	Tester
Crapo	Manchin	Thune
Cruz	McCain	Toomey
Daines	McCaskey	Wicker
Enzi	McConnell	Young
Ernst	Moran	
Fischer	Murkowski	

#### NAYS—41

Baldwin	Feinstein	Markey
Bennet	Franken	Merkley
Blumenthal	Gillibrand	Murphy
Booker	Harris	Murray
Brown	Hassan	Nelson
Cantwell	Heinrich	Reed
Cardin	Heitkamp	Sanders
Casey	Hirono	Schatz
Cortez Masto	Kaine	Schumer
Donnelly	King	Shaheen
Duckworth	Klobuchar	Stabenow
Durbin	Leahy	