

persecution. We need to call on the Government of Burma to immediately give humanitarian groups access to the Rohingya who are trapped in Burma, in what some have described as concentration camps. We need to call on Burma's leaders to provide the hundreds of thousands of Rohingya refugees who have been forced to flee their homes and villages with a safe and assisted right of return.

In addition, the Burmese Government—the Burmese nation—needs to figure out how to end the root causes of this conflict—an age-old ethnic and religious conflict—and find a way to embrace the diversity within their nation. Certainly, this is not the first time that the tensions have erupted into violence. It has happened time and time and time again, but this is the worst we have ever seen.

Kofi Annan, the former U.N. Secretary General, is the current chairman of the Advisory Commission on Rakhine State. He and his team have called on Burma to take the appropriate actions to end this cycle of violence, this cycle of radicalization.

The entire Rohingya community is counting on us—the world—to notice and to act. We must immediately see an end to the violence, full access for humanitarian organizations, cooperation with and access for the United Nations fact finding mission, the safe return of refugees, and the implementation of the full set of recommendations from Kofi Annan's report.

It is also critical that the United States and the international community continue to shed light on this horrific problem, provide sustained aid and support to the refugees in Burma and in Bangladesh, and take action to show other repressive governments that there will be consequences for pursuing this type of persecution, starting with a strong U.N. Security Council resolution.

International action to end this violence, increase humanitarian assistance, and extend our aid to the Rohingya people is the right thing to do. I pray that together we will answer that call.

I also thank my colleagues who have already been engaged in this issue. There are a number of them, but I am particularly aware of Senator Richard Durbin's, Senator JOHN McCAIN's, and Senator BEN CARDIN's involvement and leadership.

Let's build on that foundation to have the Senate demonstrate attention to this issue through letters, and we should also try to arrange a Senate trip to visit both Burma and Bangladesh in order to draw additional international attention and build momentum for action.

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

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

HURRICANE RECOVERY EFFORTS AND TARGETED TAX RELIEF

Mr. CORNYN. Mr. President, it has been quite a few weeks now since Harvey hit and, then, Irma. Now Maria has devastated the island of Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands. Of course, my gaze has been firmly on the devastation wrought by Hurricane Harvey back in my home State of Texas. Yet we are joined together with those who suffered under Irma and Maria, and we will remain steadfastly with them as we all work to recover from these terrible hurricanes.

Last week, I rode in a Black Hawk helicopter with Russ Poppe, as well as our Adjutant General, John Nichols. Mr. Poppe is executive director of the Harris County Flood Control District. We were able to survey in the air things I had seen up close during several trips back home, the wreckage of the land and livelihoods.

It is an emotional thing for families and homeowners to basically take all of their worldly possessions out to the front of their house and put it in the front yard because it is completely ruined as a result of the water, along with things like the drywall, trying to attack the mold before it grows and makes the house uninhabitable.

We saw from about 10,000 feet in the air what we had previously seen from the ground, but from the air, you definitely get a different perspective on the waterlogged landscape. You see so much more. You see the levees, the reservoirs, the areas hit. You see the damaged goods and drywall that people have taken out of their homes as the first step toward recovery. It definitely has an impression on you, particularly with the size and scale of the affected area. It is really hard to believe until you see it from that perspective.

So when I took off my headset and sunglasses—and by the way, Speaker PAUL RYAN joined us on that particular trip, and we all appreciate his being there. When we stepped off the chopper, what I thought about was not only what we have done so far but how much further we still had to go. It is not just about building materials, street and roof repairs, or even the temporary housing that people need, although all of those things are surely important. We need to remember that the remedies are not going to be one-size-fits-all. We need broad support, but we also need targeted and narrow support to help people get back on their feet. We need to keep each family in mind and what their own particular needs may be depending on their particular circumstances.

As I started out to say, it is not just Texas we are talking about anymore; it is Florida, Puerto Rico, and the Virgin Islands too. We all remember that those places were hit by Hurricanes Irma and Maria right after Texas was hit by Harvey.

I want to make one thing clear, though: We in Texas stand together

with our fellow Americans who suffered from Hurricanes Maria and Irma, as well as those who suffered from other natural disasters occurring in and around our country, and we will do everything we can to help the people who were harmed and damaged, even devastated by these terrible storms. We will help them fight to get back on their feet, to recover, and to return their lives to some form of normalcy.

One way we can work together and deliver relief to different people in different geographic areas is in providing temporary tax relief. Now, I know this sounds kind of like a small thing to do, but if you think about it, this is a thousand-year storm. Hurricane Harvey dropped 34 trillion gallons of water on the same area over a period of about 5 or so days. Many people were not in the hundred-year floodplain, which is typically where you would buy flood insurance, so many people suffered losses that were not covered by flood insurance. What many of these folks will have to do is dip into their retirement savings and other savings in order to help to get life back to normal. This relief will help folks get back on their feet as they rebuild their homes and businesses and neighborhoods in the wake of these hurricanes.

We recently passed—earlier this afternoon—a Federal Aviation Administration reauthorization, but it also included the tax package I am talking about now that provides this targeted relief. These provisions will help hurricane victims in all of the devastated areas keep more of their paycheck, first and foremost, but be able to deduct the cost of their property damage on their tax return and encourage even more Americans to generously donate to hurricane relief to help their neighbors and employees.

I know this tax package is a small matter. It is not a panacea and certainly not a cure-all, and it is not supposed to fix every storm-related problem or absolve us from honoring our ongoing responsibilities in the days ahead. But as John Steinbeck once said, “and now that you don’t have to be perfect, you can just be good,” and I think these are good reforms. They will complement other measures by the Federal Government, as well as other State and local actors.

Similar provisions were introduced in a noncontroversial section of the FAA reauthorization bill that unfortunately House Democrats, led by Leader PELOSI, tried to block earlier this week. Despite the delays, I am pleased that the House acted a second time earlier today to ensure that this relief is delivered to those who need it most—again, not just in Texas but in Florida, the Virgin Islands, and in Puerto Rico, which reportedly has been devastated. Now we in this Chamber seem to have finally gotten the message, too, by passing this relief just this very afternoon as part of the FAA bill.

Our colleague from Florida, Representative CARLOS CURBELO, said

about the hurricane victims in his home State: “They don’t have time to wait. They certainly don’t have time to play political games.” He is right, and now we can say we have taken those words to heart.

So I remember what I saw from that helicopter. Now that the time for surveying the scene has ended, what is no longer up in the air is this: For many Texans, Floridians, and Puerto Ricans, targeted tax relief will serve to make a difficult year just a little easier.

So I salute the House for getting the job done, and I am glad we in this Chamber have quickly followed suit.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Hawaii.

Mr. SCHATZ. Mr. President, I want to thank the senior Senator from Texas for his leadership in the disaster response, and I pledge my commitment to whatever is needed for Houston and the areas around Houston, as well as Florida. I appreciate the commitment at the legislative level for what needs to be done in Puerto Rico.

Mr. President, we also need to continue to apply pressure to the administration because it does appear as though there is an unequal response between what is happening in Puerto Rico and what has happened in Houston and in Florida. So we need to hold as a country the executive branch accountable for the lack of a sense of urgency for 3.5 million Americans who are mostly going to be without power for 9 months, who are currently without potable water, who are in a devastated situation. It is our obligation to do everything we can.

Mr. President, the Senate is about to make an important decision about who leads the Federal agency that oversees everything from the internet, to the TV, to radio.

This vote is a choice: We can either give our stamp of approval on the FCC’s direction under the leadership of Chairman Pai, or we can decide that his leadership has put the FCC on the wrong track and that it is time for someone else to take charge.

Generally speaking, here is how I approach a nomination. There are three reasons one might reject a nominee. If the person is corrupt, it is a nonstarter. If the person is nonqualified, it is also a nonstarter. And even on policy grounds, in the policy space, just disagreeing with someone can often boil down to the fact that there is a President from another party and is not sufficient to vote no.

Chairman Pai is someone I know. He is skillful, he is a decent human being, he is very smart, and he is qualified. When we disagree, we can do it in a way that doesn’t ruin our ability to work together on the following day on the following issue. And this is no small thing in today’s political climate. So it is important that if we are ever going to get something done, we are able to disagree and find common ground afterward.

I do like Chairman Pai as a person. I think he is ethical and he is capable. But he is just so wrong on policy. For me, that means he is not the right leader for the FCC. I want to highlight four of the concerns I have.

First, the FCC really is trying to end the internet as we know it by getting rid of net neutrality. If they succeed, your internet service provider will have the power to stop you from seeing certain kinds of content. They will be the ones that make decisions about what you can access online and how fast and how much you have to pay for it.

Some people say that companies aren’t going to change the internet because it is not in their interest to change the internet, even if the law goes away. But think about this: Most often, these ISPs are publicly traded companies, and they are going to make decisions based on their own financial interests. It is not just an objective; it is their obligation. If there is an opportunity to change their business model for internet service, they are duty bound to pursue it. They do not have any obligation to a free and open internet; they have an obligation to shareholders and to profits.

That is why net neutrality exists in the first place—because we should not leave it up to any company to decide whether they are going to charge people more to stream video, for example, or block certain content altogether. If we allow the FCC to end net neutrality, Americans across the country are going to find that the internet no longer works in the way that it should. And this has happened under Chairman Pai’s leadership.

It is not just bad policy that he is pursuing; they have also had some serious process fouls. When Chairman Pai announced that the FCC was revisiting the rules, he made clear that the FCC was going to get rid of net neutrality regardless of what happened throughout the process. He said: “This is a fight we intend to wage and it is a fight we intend to win.” Why is that a significant thing to say? “This is a fight we intend to wage and it is a fight we intend to win.” This a quasi-judicial agency. They just opened up a public comment period. There were 22 million members of the public who submitted public comments after the Chairman of the Commission has already announced that he has decided which way they are going to go. I think that is antithetical to the governing statute, and it is antithetical to the basic premise that if you have an open comment period where an individual has an opportunity to express themselves, you have to listen to them. You don’t say: I already decided, but you 22 million people—if you have an opinion, I will be happy to receive it and file it and do what I planned to do all along. That is the exact opposite of how this is supposed to work.

The agency proposes the rule, the public weighs in, and then the agency

considers the comments from the public in making the decision. But Chairman Pai turned it upside down. The FCC has tried to diminish the fact that so many people tried to weigh in. About 96 percent of the roughly 22 million people who have weighed in have weighed in in favor of net neutrality. They are trying to lay the groundwork to get rid of net neutrality even though the vast majority of people are for it. By doing that, the FCC is effectively saying that lobbyists and law firms matter more than regular citizens.

This is just the tip of the iceberg. The FCC has claimed that cyber attacks kept people from being able to comment, but they have not been forthcoming about what exactly happened, and we are still working in our oversight role to figure that all out.

Secondly, I would like to address media ownership. Local TV broadcasters are an essential part of every community. People know their local TV station. They trust it. There is a range of perspectives offered. Because the broadcasters are based in the community, they have relationships with their viewers that make their content better and more relevant.

For decades, Congress and the FCC have taken steps to keep local broadcasting local because it benefits the public interest. These are the public airways. It is like fast food options across the country. You may not mind McDonald’s once in a while, but you don’t want that to be the only option in your hometown. You want something that captures the local culture in your community. That is what local broadcasting does. It makes TV in Honolulu different from TV in Hartford or Houston.

But now the American tradition of local broadcasting is in real danger because the FCC is going to change the rules so that these stations can be bought out by a single company without any limits. I have no doubt this would create a world of sort of nationalized content distributed through each of these local companies, with consumers having to watch whatever is distributed to them by their national headquarters. This is no longer local news, and this is not the broadcast media that Americans deserve.

The third area I want to talk about is broadband access. Right now, Americans have widely different levels of internet speed basically based on where they live. In some places, you have great broadband access, no trouble streaming video, accessing government services online, downloading, uploading, but in rural and Tribal communities, they are very, very far behind. As the FCC noted, 39 percent of rural America and 41 percent of those on Tribal land lack access to advanced broadband. Even if they have cell phones with internet access, a mobile network will typically offer slower speed than fixed broadband, so they can’t go online and do the things we can in Washington, DC, or in many

other cities across the country. So everyone, on a bipartisan basis, understands that this needs to change.

High-speed broadband is the cornerstone to economic development, public safety, and quality of life in every community, no matter how many people live in your community. The FCC has historically worked so that every home, school, and business has had adequate access to the internet because that is what it will take to unlock the innovation and potential for all Americans.

The FCC has worked on this issue by setting the bar for what it will take to connect more Americans to the internet. There is already a threshold in place which says that this is what high-speed internet access is, so we know who has it and who doesn't. But instead of actually working to get more people broadband, the FCC is working to change the definition of broadband so that it looks as if they have gotten people more broadband. That way they can say that more Americans are covered, even if they have internet service that does not meet their needs. In other words, they are not actually solving the problem; they are literally just redefining what it means to have access. Rather than giving people access, they are papering over the problem that they are not solving. This is a real issue, and it is something that the Commerce, Science, and Transportation Committee members have worked on on a bipartisan basis.

The way to get more people broadband access is to get more people broadband access. It is not to change the rules and to change the metrics so that you can come back to the Congress and say: Look, we just achieved more access by allowing these companies to claim that people are covered who are not.

The fourth and final concern I want to raise is a little more sensitive because, as I said, I like Chairman Pai, and I respect Chairman Pai, but he made some comments during his confirmation hearing that worried me. I asked if he agreed with the President's comments calling the media the enemy of the state. He would not give a direct answer.

I understand that Mr. Pai is a Republican. That is not the problem. I understand Republicans will be appointed in a Republican administration. I am the former Democratic Party chairman of the State of Hawaii, so I understand party loyalty. I respect party loyalty.

We have a President and a White House that are pushing to blur the legal, moral, and ethical boundaries in our Nation's Capital. This is not the time to get cute when we ask a question about the rule of law. This is not the time to finesse an answer. The only acceptable answer is this: I will not let anyone interfere with my work, whether it is the President or anyone else, and the media is not the enemy of the state. Mr. Pai did not take that oppor-

tunity. This was one of a few opportunities Mr. Pai had to be unequivocal. The senior Senator from New Mexico, if I remember correctly, and other members of the panel, sort of gave him a second and third bite at the apple so that he could get it right. It was an easy one to get right.

I understand it is politically complicated, but sometimes you have to set aside the politics and just say what is right and do what is right. My instinct is that he will not use the FCC to do anything that crosses any ethical boundaries that I am worried about, but the fact that he will not say so leaves an opening that should not be there.

The President has tweeted about media companies that give him bad coverage. He consistently refers to the media as "fake news" media and "garbage" media and makes unsubstantiated claims about various networks and newspapers and threatens to come after them. So it is not out of the realm of possibility that this could go beyond some partisan talking point from the Democrats in the Commerce, Science, and Transportation Committee and into a real crisis.

I just want to hear from Mr. Pai. He will be confirmed on Monday, but I want to hear from Mr. Pai that he does not believe the media is the enemy of the state and he will not allow any interference from the White House.

I would like to end by bringing this back to the American people. This vote is our chance to stand up for them. There will not be a vote on net neutrality on the floor in the next weeks or months, but they deserve to keep their faith in local broadcasting, they deserve a free and open internet, and they deserve to have adequate access to the internet no matter where they live. That is why I have to vote no on this nominee.

I admire Chairman Pai. I like him as a person, but he is the wrong leader for the FCC. I urge my colleagues to join me and vote no on his nomination.

I yield the floor.

THE PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from New Hampshire.

Ms. HASSAN. Mr. President, I, too, rise today to oppose the renomination of Ajit Pai to serve as Chairman of the Federal Communications Commission. I will start my remarks by acknowledging my friend, the Senator from Hawaii, and echoing his sentiments about the respect I have for Chairman Pai's ability, his skill, his intelligence, his dedication, and commitment, but I, too, as a member of the Commerce Committee, have sat through testimony from Mr. Pai and watched a number of things unfold with regard to policy that is critically important to people of New Hampshire and our country. I find that I, too, am in a position of being unable to support this nomination.

The FCC plays a critical role in overseeing our communications networks, protecting consumers, and ensuring

that our Nation's businesses can compete on a level playing field. Unfortunately, throughout his tenure at the FCC, and particularly during his time as Chairman, Mr. Pai has not demonstrated a commitment to those goals. To start, I have real concerns with the Chairman's actions to undermine net neutrality and the impact that would have on people in New Hampshire and throughout our country.

A free and open internet is essential to consumers, essential to entrepreneurs and innovative small businesses that are the foundation of our economic success. Net neutrality is the concept that internet service providers should provide equal access to applications and content online, and they should not be able to discriminate against content and content providers by making certain web pages, applications, or videos load faster or slower than others. Put simply, net neutrality ensures that even the smallest voices and businesses can be heard and can thrive. People and businesses in New Hampshire know this. Granite Staters have called and written to my office in support of net neutrality, and the FCC has received a recordbreaking number of public comments, reaching tens of millions, from people looking to make their voices heard on this topic.

Chairman Pai is not addressing the concerns of Americans who are speaking out. Instead, he is listening to big cable companies and internet service providers and taking direct aim at net neutrality protections. That is unacceptable. Protecting net neutrality is essential, but with Chairman Pai at the FCC, these critical rules are in danger.

I also oppose this nomination because Chairman Pai is putting rural broadband advancements at stake. Recently, Chairman Pai and the FCC released a notice of inquiry that raises questions about its goals, suggesting it will consider mobile broadband as an adequate replacement for fixed broadband, which would allow speeds that are two-thirds slower. For many parts of New Hampshire, mobile is not dependable enough or fast enough to meet our economy's needs, promote innovation, and connect young students with their homework. We must address the challenges that rural communities face in getting access to broadband. But by focusing instead on mobile broadband, the Chairman would have us leave rural America without a reliable connection.

Finally, I have concerns about Chairman Pai's ability to adequately evaluate the pending Sinclair-Tribune merger that sits before the FCC. For decades, our Nation has maintained a policy that limits the number of broadcast stations that one company can own nationwide. This policy has protected Americans by allowing them to receive robust and fair news content about their communities and has provided a diversity of voices in the broadcast news media marketplace.

This merger would result in Sinclair's ability to reach over 70 percent of Americans across our country, far exceeding the Commission's ownership caps and threatening the diversity in broadcast news that Americans deserve and expect.

Since Chairman Pai took the lead of the FCC, the Commission has worked to loosen regulations regarding media ownership, and, in turn, Sinclair benefited. As this proposed merger is still under consideration, we need someone at the helm of the FCC who will thoroughly vet the implications and ensure that it is in the public interest. There is too much at stake with this merger, and Chairman Pai's actions raise doubts that he can evaluate it impartially.

We need an FCC that is focused on putting consumers first and ensuring that all Americans have the opportunity to thrive in the 21st century economy. There are simply too many concerns about Chairman Pai's record, his ability to express impartiality on key decisions, and his goals for Federal Communications Commission priorities. I will vote against Chairman Pai's renomination, and I urge my colleagues to do the same.

Thank you.

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

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

TAX REFORM

Mr. WYDEN. Mr. President, I am going to take some time this afternoon to respond to the remarks of the President's top economic adviser, Mr. Gary Cohn, with respect to this administration's approach to taxes.

Let me be clear right at the outset. The President and his parade of millionaires are executing a middle-class con job. I am going to be very specific in saying why I reached that judgment with respect to what they are saying about taxes.

The President said: "I don't benefit. Very, very strongly I think there's very little benefit for people of wealth." Those are the President's exact words. "It's not good for me, believe me," the President said in his speech unveiling the tax reform blueprint on Wednesday.

Unless the President paid zero tax, the President is going to benefit enormously from his tax plan. His family would save billions if the estate tax is eliminated, as he has proposed. His more than 500 passthroughs will be able to take advantage of the new Grand Canyon-sized passthrough loophole that his plan proposes. Based on his 2005 tax return—that is the only one available—the President would save millions each year if the alternative minimum tax is eliminated.

Today, the President's top adviser, Gary Cohn, said: "We've also said that wealthy Americans are not getting a tax cut." They expect you to believe them and not your lying eyes.

I want to take a few minutes and describe exactly what the well-to-do are getting in this bill.

The plan outlined by the Trump administration would cost upwards of \$5 trillion, and it is overwhelmingly skewed toward the wealthy and the biggest corporations. It lowers the corporate rate from 35 to 20, and much of that goes to wealthy shareholders.

The new passthrough, which would give this big gift to high-flyers, hedge funds, basically would let them start calling ordinary income business income, so it could be taxed at a much lower rate, and they would in the process harm Social Security and Medicare because they aren't paying those payroll taxes.

I mentioned the estate tax. This is for just a few thousand people. The exemption for a couple is already \$11 million. This break would cost the American people between \$250 to \$270 billion. That is an awful lot of money to parcel out to a few thousand families.

They would lower the individual top rate from 39.6 to 35 percent. Let's make no mistake about it—the President of the United States and his top economic adviser have said they are not going to give tax cuts to the wealthy. That is not what they said yesterday. They said that the top rate was going to go down from 39.6 to 35 percent. And to add insult to injury, for those at the bottom of the economic system who pay 10 percent now, theirs would go up to 12 percent. So this is just making a mockery out of the President's pledge that this was going to be about working families and not about the wealthy. The fact is, with respect to the middle class, the Trump team is running a sleight-of-hand shell game. What they give with one hand, they just take away with the other.

They touted yesterday that they were going to be helping middle-class folks by doubling the standard deduction. First of all, that is walking back the bipartisan proposal we had here in the Senate—written by myself and my colleague Dan Coats, now a member of the Trump administration—that would triple the standard deduction.

What is particularly outrageous is that the Trump people aren't leveling with those middle-class families. Basically, they are saying: Oh, you are really going to do well. You are going to double the standard deduction. What they don't tell them is that they are going to eliminate the personal exemption that large middle-class families rely on. In effect, those large middle-class families—I think a lot of working-class families who may have supported the President—are going to see a tax increase under the President's tax outline that we heard about yesterday, even with this larger standard deduction.

The President's team also took a big pass on the opportunity to expand the child tax credit to make sure more working families would benefit from it. There are no specifics about the child tax credit in this plan.

The Treasury Secretary went on FOX News and said that the tax plan is going to cut the deficit by a trillion dollars. Mr. Mnuchin is doubling down on the failed experiment—the idea that the tax cuts, in effect, pay for themselves through economic growth. History shows that just is not true.

The tax cuts don't pay for themselves. The 2001 and 2003 Bush tax cuts were billed as tax relief for the middle class to spark economic growth. Instead, the benefits skewed to those at the very top, and they added trillions of dollars to America's debt. Middle-class wages fell. Unemployment increased. This is a pattern that working families, middle-class families, cannot afford to have repeated.

Now the Secretary of Treasury's claim is: Well, the Trump tax cuts will not just pay for themselves; they are going to bring in an additional \$1 trillion in revenue atop their own cost. William Peter Wyden, age 9, my son, would say: That is just a bunch of whoppers. It couldn't be further from the truth.

As even Republican-appointed Budget Office Director Keith Hall has said and made clear, the tax cuts do not pay for themselves: "No, the evidence is that tax cuts do not pay for themselves." Those are the words of the Budget Director appointed by the Republicans.

That Budget Director, Mr. Keith Hall, went on to say that the models they are doing—the macroeconomic effects, the fancy kind of economic lingo for the big picture in the long term—show it.

The other comment that was noteworthy from Mr. Gary Cohn is that the President remains committed to ending the carried interest deduction. Despite his campaign promise that won him bouquets from political commentators and typical middle-class voters, once again, the President's plan doesn't close the carried interest loophole. This is the second big occasion on which the President has failed to follow through on his campaign promise.

A few months ago, in the spring, they had a one-page outline. They said that was where they were going on taxes. They said that one-page outline was shorter than a typical Fred Meyer receipt. Fred Meyer is kind of an iconic store in our State. They had one page then and didn't do anything about following through on the President's promise to get rid of the carried interest loophole.

Yesterday—again, we didn't get a bill, but at least when you kind of eliminate all the white space, they put out close to five pages. Once again, they didn't close the carried interest loophole.

In fact, the plan gives such massive tax cuts to those at the top, investment managers will not be the only