

STEEL AND ALUMINUM IMPORTS
INVESTIGATIONS

Finally, one final topic: steel and aluminum. Recently and shockingly, Commerce Secretary Ross has said he is waiting for the Republican tax plan before completing critical investigations into how steel and aluminum imports are impacting the capacity of steel and aluminum U.S. producers to supply our defense needs. I am not sure why the Republican tax plan has anything to do with this national security investigation, which could finally lead to some relief from the predatory trade practices from China and other countries. The two are entirely unrelated.

Secretary Ross's comments smell like an excuse for further delays—and a bad one at that. I would like to see him explain his decision to the thousands of steelworkers whose jobs are on the line because their companies aren't competing on a level playing field because China repeatedly subsidizes, doesn't play by the rules, and cheats.

It is another classic example of the Trump administration promising one thing and doing another. President Trump has promised many times to crack down on China, and still, 10 months into his administration, his Commerce Secretary is once again needlessly delaying a preliminary step in that effort.

I have known him for 30 years. He is a New Yorker like I am. Every time I see Secretary Ross, I say to him: When are we going to do something on China?

Oh, we are going to do something tough.

Each time, there is a different excuse. This should have happened in the first 2 months of the administration. It hasn't.

Because of the Republican inaction, because of the President's unfulfilled and rapidly becoming broken promise on being tough with China, Senate Democrats will be sending a letter to President Trump and Commerce Secretary Wilbur Ross demanding that the administration keep its promise to crack down on China's unfair and predatory trade practices. We are asking that they continue these investigations and expeditiously complete them. These trade investigations have nothing to do with tax reform, and there is no need to delay them.

One more thing on China. Today I read that Tesla—our great car manufacturing company—will be relocating to China.

When you want to sell cars and many other advanced products in China, you have to do one of two things: set up a joint ownership company which lets them steal our intellectual property or face huge tariffs. That is based on the fact that the WTO was poorly negotiated and China was regarded as a developing country. That was the fault of President Bush and President Obama; neither did enough to stop China.

Based on his campaign rhetoric, one would think President Trump would be

tougher as China steals our family jewels. It is no longer clothing and furniture; it is our best industries. They steal our intellectual property by these joint ventures. Sometimes they do it by cyber theft—a lot of times they do it by cyber theft—and it is hurting the good-paying jobs that might be available to our children and grandchildren. Based on campaign rhetoric, one would think President Trump would be tougher on China, but so far it has been a lot of talk and not very much action, and the delay in these investigations is another example.

I yield the floor.

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

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mrs. ERNST). Without objection, it is so ordered.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

EXECUTIVE CALENDAR

Mr. McCONNELL. Madam President, I move to proceed to executive session to consider Calendar No. 117, Scott Palk.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The question is on agreeing to the motion.

The motion was agreed to.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will report the nomination.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read the nomination of Scott L. Palk, of Oklahoma, to be United States District Judge for the Western District of Oklahoma.

CLOTURE MOTION

Mr. McCONNELL. Madam President, I send a cloture motion to the desk.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The cloture motion having been presented under rule XXII, the Chair directs the clerk to read the motion.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

CLOTURE MOTION

We, the undersigned Senators, in accordance with the provisions of rule XXII of the Standing Rules of the Senate, do hereby move to bring to a close debate on the nomination of Scott L. Palk, of Oklahoma, to be United States District Judge for the Western District of Oklahoma.

Mitch McConnell, Orrin G. Hatch, John Cornyn, Chuck Grassley, Thom Tillis, Pat Roberts, John Barrasso, Johnny Isakson, Roger F. Wicker, John Thune, Marco Rubio, James Lankford, Richard Burr, Steve Daines, Mike Crapo, John Boozman, James M. Inhofe.

LEGISLATIVE SESSION

Mr. McCONNELL. Madam President, I move to proceed to legislative session.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The question is on agreeing to the motion.

The motion was agreed to.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

EXECUTIVE CALENDAR

Mr. McCONNELL. Madam President, I move to proceed to executive session to consider Calendar No. 179, Trevor McFadden.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The question is on agreeing to the motion.

The motion was agreed to.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will report the nomination.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read the nomination of Trevor N. McFadden, of Virginia, to be United States District Judge for the District of Columbia.

CLOTURE MOTION

Mr. McCONNELL. Madam President, I send a cloture motion to the desk.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The cloture motion having been presented under rule XXII, the Chair directs the clerk to read the motion.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

CLOTURE MOTION

We, the undersigned Senators, in accordance with the provisions of rule XXII of the Standing Rules of the Senate, do hereby move to bring to a close debate on the nomination of Trevor N. McFadden, of Virginia, to be United States District Judge for the District of Columbia.

Lamar Alexander, Susan M. Collins, John Boozman, Chuck Grassley, Orrin G. Hatch, Steve Daines, Dean Heller, Bill Cassidy, Cory Gardner, Michael B. Enzi, Thom Tillis, John Thune, John Kennedy, John Cornyn, David Perdue, Joni Ernst, Mitch McConnell.

Mr. McCONNELL. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the mandatory quorum calls for the cloture motions be waived.

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

LEGISLATIVE SESSION

Mr. McCONNELL. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate resume legislative session.

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

BANKRUPTCY JUDGESHIP ACT OF
2017—Continued

Mr. McCONNELL. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the mandatory quorum call with respect to the cloture motion on the House message to accompany H.R. 2266 be waived.

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

The Senator from Florida.

Mr. NELSON. Madam President, to accommodate the majority leader, I ask unanimous consent—I understand that he will object, and I will explain it afterward, but it involves what you see here in the aftermath of the hurricane, all of this citrus fruit on the ground—

that it be in order to call up my amendment No. 1575—approximately \$3 billion for all of the agriculture for Florida and Texas, which Senator CORNYN, Senator RUBIO, and I have all been working on—to the motion to concur with an amendment to the House message on H.R. 2266 and that the amendment be agreed to with no intervening action or debate.

In order to accommodate the majority leader, I will explain it after he has returned to his meeting.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

The majority leader.

Mr. MCCONNELL. Madam President, reserving the right to object, I would say to my good friend from Florida that I hope he knows that the Senate remains committed to doing its part to support the ongoing hurricane relief efforts. We all see this as a multistaged process in providing needed relief. There will be additional rounds, and we are all fully committed to meeting the needs that have arisen as a result of these devastating hurricanes.

For the moment, I object.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Objection is heard.

The Senator from Florida.

Mr. NELSON. Madam President, in my explanation, I will go into it in detail.

It is my hope that the White House promise that this will be taken up in November, which is the next tranche of the hurricane money, the disaster assistance. It has been well past a month since Hurricane Irma hit Puerto Rico and 2 months since it hit Florida, and Floridians all across our State are working as hard as ever to recover.

One group of individuals who were hit especially hard by this storm is Florida's citrus growers. I will refer again to this photograph. You can see the citrus grove. You can see the branches on the citrus trees. Some of the trees have blown over, but in the meantime, you can see all of the fruit that is on the ground.

Toward southwest Florida, at least 75 percent of the crops are on the ground. In more central Florida, it is upward of 50 and 60 percent. Of all the times, this was going to be a bumper crop. Lord knows, with the greening disease—its nickname is "greening," but it is a bacteria—it will kill the tree in 5 years, and it has been declining the citrus production over the course of the last 10 years. We had suffered enough through all of that, and then here had come this hurricane. When it looked as if there was going to be a good crop to turn around the lessened production that had occurred over each of the last 10 years, this is what happened.

If that were not enough—all of the fruit on the ground—take a look at this. This is what has happened to citrus groves. Whole trees have been blown over. Whether you are talking about a grove that is totally demolished or a grove that has lost almost all of its crop, that is why the Florida

citrus growers are in such a very difficult economic situation. Some of Florida's farmers lost nearly everything when Irma tore through the State. In fact, the statewide agricultural industry has lost more than \$2.5 billion. Included in that is \$760 million that Florida's citrus industry alone, just by itself, has lost, as you see in these photographs.

Earlier this month, the U.S. Department of Agriculture released its first crop estimates for the 2017–2018 citrus season. They estimated that Florida's citrus growers would harvest 54 million boxes of oranges this year, but that number doesn't yet fully account for all the damage caused by Hurricane Irma.

According to the folks on the ground, they believe the actual estimate is going to be only 31 million boxes this season. Now compare 31 million boxes to a decade ago when Florida harvested over 203 million boxes. Ten years before that, Florida growers harvested 244 million boxes. Now they are estimating, after the storm, a yield of only 31 million boxes.

So the Florida citrus growers are really taking a hit. They have to have disaster assistance. The citrus industry is a vital part of Florida's economy, and that is why Senator RUBIO is here with us. We have been pushing so hard to get our citrus growers some help.

Just a couple of days after the storm, Senator RUBIO and I met with a group of growers in a citrus grove in Polk County in Central Florida, where the loss is about 50 or 60 percent, unlike South Florida, where the loss is 75 to 90 percent.

Unfortunately, the White House has been saying: No, we can't do it in this disaster assistance bill. As we have been working on a bipartisan amendment that would provide the growers with the help they need, the same amendment that the majority leader had to object to, President Trump has reportedly been making calls urging others in the Chamber to move forward with the overall package as is and to nix the money we need to help Florida's farmers.

Florida's citrus industry may have been one of the industry's hardest hit by the storm, but it certainly wasn't the only industry that was affected in Florida. Florida's fruit and vegetable farms lost more than \$180 million when their fields were flooded and their bushes were ripped straight out of the ground. Row crops, such as peanuts, cotton, sweet corn, potatoes, and sugarcane together experienced nearly \$450 million in losses from the hurricane-force winds and heavy rains.

Senator RUBIO went to Hastings to see the potato farms. He saw how they had been ripped to shreds. Florida's nurseries lost nearly \$625 million when their greenhouses were damaged by the winds. Florida's timber industry lost \$261 million. Florida's cattlemen, whose ranches, barns, fences, and equipment were severely damaged, lost

a total of \$237 million in losses. Dairy farmers had to dump more than \$2 million worth of milk because they couldn't store it properly after they lost power.

Farmers are the lifeblood of this country and an important part of Florida's economy. Right now, they desperately need our help. In urging the Senate to move forward with this disaster package as it is, not amended, President Trump has told some of our colleagues that he would support adding this additional agriculture money in a later supplemental next month. To my colleagues who have farmers and ranchers in their own States, you know as well as we do that these families and businesses can't wait any longer. They need our help, and they need it now. I ask you to consider how you would react if those farmers and ranchers suffered \$2.5 billion in losses from a single natural disaster, as our agriculture industry in Florida has.

So, to accommodate the majority leader, I already made the unanimous consent request, which the majority leader objected to. I want to further state that to fulfill the White House promise of including the disaster aid farmers desperately need, I have placed a hold on the President's nominee for Deputy Director of the Office of Management and Budget. Getting the additional money next month could be the difference between whether Florida's farmers can replant their crops next year or not.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Florida.

Mr. RUBIO. Thank you, Madam President.

I thank the senior Senator from Florida on this issue. I want to elaborate on it a little further. Any time we ask the taxpayers of this country to step in and help a private industry, it is important and incumbent on us to justify why. The amendment he just made that we have been working to get included in what is before the Senate obviously deals with agriculture at large, and he described some of the different industries in Florida that have been hurt in agriculture and some of the crops in Florida that were impacted by the storm.

The reason I want to focus my attention on citrus is not because we don't care about the other industries that were damaged, but citrus is in a unique and precarious place. I want to describe it to people who may not be as familiar with this as those who live in Florida and see it all the time.

First, I would say that one of the signature issues in the campaign and in politics today is the desire to make more and produce more in the United States; the idea that somehow, because of these changes in the global economy, we have lost significant industries to other countries, and we talk about that primarily in manufacturing, but we also talk about it in technology and things of this nature. I don't think

we should leave agriculture out of that conversation. If we want there to be agriculture in the United States, then we have to deal with each of those crops and the unique challenges they face. We most certainly want to have agriculture in the United States.

A lot of people don't identify Florida as an agricultural State. It is better known for its tourism and being one of the largest places where people move to be in warm weather and not have State income tax, but Florida is a large agricultural State. I encourage people to look at the numbers. If you have spent any significant time in Florida, it is not just something we put on our license plates and not something we call ourselves in our heritage, it is real now. Tens of thousands and hundreds of thousands of jobs across the supply chain and entire communities are sustained by the presence of agriculture. In the case of citrus, the overwhelming majority of growers are actually families who have had these operations for sometimes two or three generations and are trying to stay afloat.

You look at this and ask: What is this industry doing wrong to be under these circumstances? Yes, they had a storm, but why can't they rebuild like everybody else? Two things. First, citrus in Florida was already facing an extraordinary challenge. It wasn't a better orange or better grapefruit that some other countries are doing than we are. It is a disease called citrus greening that didn't just blemish the fruit the way the canker did, but it killed the trees. You have a significant number of growers who are on the borderline of being out of business because unlike—and I am not diminishing other people's losses here, on the contrary—but unlike a manufacturing plant that gets wiped out by a storm, where you put the new machine in and in 6 months you are up and running, that is not the way it works with citrus.

The time between when you plant the new tree and produce fruit is 4 to 5 years, and you have to stay afloat in between. They are already facing that. So that already has them on the brink of catastrophe, and they have been working very hard to get around and design scientific solutions. They have made some advances, thanks to the work at the University of Florida, but they are not there yet. In the process, they have been hurting already.

You heard about the production figures and how low they have gotten, and here comes the storm. The first thing it does is knock all the fruit off the trees. When we flew over these groves, all we saw on the ground was fruit all over the place. As those familiar with agriculture know, once that fruit gets in the floodwater, it can't be sold, and you can't do much with it. The fruit continued to fall over the days to come.

On top of everything else they were facing, they lost this year's crops. A lot of these fields were flooded, so they were sitting in feet of water. That kills

the trees, and they will continue to lose trees in the weeks to come.

Put yourself in the position of the grower who has to say: I have already lost everything for this year. I lost a bunch of trees that I will not have next year or the year after that. I was facing citrus greening. Do I really want to replant or has the time come to sell my land for some other use, development, or has the time come for me to go into another crop or has the time come to declare bankruptcy? This is the life challenge of American agriculture families in the State of Florida.

Look, I hope very much that in November we are going to be here next month and we are going to pass a new bill and it will have this money in there and it will be fantastic, but we know how this place works, and I don't know why we wouldn't do it now. Do we truly want to keep American businesses in America? This is a great example of an opportunity to do it.

It is not an industry that benefits from anything extraordinary from the government. They are literally on the verge of going away unless we help them sooner rather than later. We have the entire Florida delegation in the House in favor of it, and they couldn't get it in the House bill. You have both Senators here for it. It can't be a part of this because if we change it, it goes back, and we lose time.

No one can tell you why it is not in there, no one can tell you why they are against it being in there, but it is not in there. Sometimes you start to wonder, and you guess why people look at this process and shake their heads.

Unfortunately, it looks like this has been foreclosed. Obviously, Senator NELSON moved forward and made that motion and it was objected to so it will not be a part of this package, but I hope we think about these men and women and families who own the groves. How do you explain it to them and what happens if it goes away? What happens if we lose this industry? It will not just hurt Florida, I think it hurts the country. I think it sets a precedent for other crops that might be threatened by floods in the future.

I hope this can be reversed, and I am hopeful we will deal with it in November, but if we don't, I just want everyone to understand what this means. This is not hyperbole. This industry is in a lot of trouble. I am not telling you that the amount of money we are asking for alone will save them, but without it, sooner rather than later, I feel we will lose not just Florida citrus, but I feel we will lose something as a key part of the State's heritage and a key crop for the country, and we will depend more than ever on foreign imports to feed our people with this problem.

With that, 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 motion to concur in the House amendment to the Senate amendment to H.R. 2266.

Mitch McConnell, Pat Roberts, Roy Blunt, Shelley Moore Capito, Mike Rounds, John Thune, Orrin G. Hatch, Deb Fischer, Cory Gardner, John Barrasso, Johnny Isakson, John Boozman, Thom Tillis, Richard Burr, James M. Inhofe, Roger F. Wicker, Lindsey Graham.

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 motion to concur in the House amendment to the Senate amendment to H.R. 2266, an act to amend title 28 of the United States Code to authorize the appointment of additional bankruptcy judges; and for other purposes, shall be brought to a close?

The yeas and nays are mandatory under the rule.

The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk called the roll.

Mr. CORNYN. The following Senators are necessarily absent: the Senator from South Carolina (Mr. GRAHAM), the Senator from Kansas (Mr. MORAN), and the Senator from Alaska (Mr. SUL-LIVAN).

Mr. DURBIN. I announce that the Senator from New Jersey (Mr. MENENDEZ) and the Senator from Michigan (Ms. STABENOW) are necessarily absent.

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

The yeas and nays resulted—yeas 79, nays 16, as follows:

[Rollcall Vote No. 246 Leg.]

YEAS—79

Alexander	Feinstein	Murphy
Baldwin	Fischer	Murray
Bennet	Franken	Nelson
Blumenthal	Gardner	Peters
Blunt	Gillibrand	Portman
Booker	Grassley	Reed
Boozman	Harris	Roberts
Brown	Hassan	Rounds
Burr	Hatch	Rubio
Cantwell	Heinrich	Sanders
Capito	Heitkamp	Schatz
Cardin	Heller	Schumer
Carper	Hirono	Scott
Casey	Hoeven	Shaheen
Cassidy	Isakson	Tester
Cochran	Kaine	Thune
Collins	Kennedy	Tillis
Coons	King	Udall
Corker	Klobuchar	Van Hollen
Cornyn	Leahy	Warner
Cortez Masto	Manchin	Warren
Cruz	Markey	Whitehouse
Daines	McCain	Wicker
Donnelly	McCaskill	Wyden
Duckworth	McConnell	Young
Durbin	Merkley	
Ernst	Murkowski	

NAYS—16

Barrasso	Johnson	Sasse
Cotton	Lankford	Shelby
Crapo	Lee	Strange
Enzi	Paul	Toomey
Flake	Perdue	
Inhofe	Risch	

NOT VOTING—5

Graham Moran Sullivan
Menendez Stabenow

The PRESIDING OFFICER. On this vote, the yeas are 79, the nays 16.

Three-fifths of the Senators duly chosen and sworn having voted in the affirmative, the motion is agreed to.

Cloture having been invoked, the motion to refer falls.

The Senator from Utah.

Mr. LEE. Madam President, as we speak, our fellow citizens in Puerto Rico, Texas, and Florida are recovering from a series of devastating hurricanes. Over 100 people have lost their lives because of these terrible storms, and many more are struggling to get by day to day.

The crisis is perhaps most acute in Puerto Rico, where 35 percent of the population still does not have access to safe drinking water and four out of five Puerto Ricans do not have power.

The people of Florida, Puerto Rico, and Texas have responded with great tenacity and admirable creativity to this disaster. I wish the same could be said of the politicians here in Washington, DC.

Once again, this body is poised to fail the American people. Instead of helping the victims of these disasters through responsible aid paired with lasting reform, Congress has rushed to its favorite so-called solution—billions of dollars in new spending with little accountability or meaningful oversight.

If this \$36.5 billion aid package passes, it will mean even more money and more power for government programs that in some cases left us vulnerable to these disasters in the first place. If it passes, the politicians and lobbyists will pat themselves on the back for doing a good deed and then move on to the next multibillion dollar spending opportunity. Meanwhile, the people of Florida, Puerto Rico, and Texas will be left to pick up the pieces and to deal with the disastrous consequences of this approach.

Puerto Rico, in particular, has to contend with the effects of a devastating storm and decades of malfeasance that has left Puerto Rico with \$74 billion of debt.

This crisis calls for emergency aid, yes. More than that, it calls for true lasting reform, the type of reform that is noticeably absent from this measure. That is why I am voting no on this shortsighted bill, because it is easy to caricature a vote against emergency aid as calloused or cruel, but it is hard to do the real work that is necessarily required by real, lasting, meaningful reform.

It is harder still to defend these packages when their contents are exposed fully to the light of day. If you were evaluating an emergency aid package, you might reasonably expect it to direct all of its spending to programs that actually help the people of Florida, of Puerto Rico, of Texas, but this proposal does not even come close

to directing all of its money to broad-based recovery efforts.

Just under half of the \$36.5 billion in new spending would bail out the National Flood Insurance Program, or NFIP. In the Houston area, just 17 percent of homeowners were enrolled in the NFIP. In Puerto Rico, the numbers are even more sparse. Just 5,600 Puerto Ricans are enrolled in NFIP, less than 1 percent of homeowners. That means 99 percent of Puerto Ricans will not get anything at all from the \$16 billion to NFIP. But then again, it is not clear that NFIP recipients get much from NFIP to begin with.

The National Flood Insurance Program represents the triumph of good intentions over sound public policy. Its generous subsidies were supposed to reduce the need for Federal aid after massive storms. Instead, NFIP encourages thousands of Americans to live in some of the most dangerous real estate in the country.

NFIP sells flood insurance at rates well below that of any reasonable private insurer. As a result, its policies do not accurately reflect the risk of living in manifestly flood-threatened, flood-endangered areas. These government policies encourage Americans to live in precisely those areas where their livelihoods—and, in fact, even their lives—can be swept away in an instant.

Economists refer to this perverse incentive as moral hazard, and, in more senses than one, that is just what the National Flood Insurance Program is—a hazard to Americans. It is distinctly immoral for the government to subsidize housing in the Nation's flood plains—deep within the flood plains—or on the edges of its coast. Instead of building your house on a rock, the government wants you to build it on the sand.

NFIP pays out claims for properties that have been swept away not once, not twice, but many, many times before. Homes that have been flooded multiple times make up just 1 percent of NFIP policyholders, but they account for more than one-third of its claims. This has cost taxpayers more than \$12.1 billion in payouts according to the Congressional Research Service.

When Hurricane Harvey swept through Houston last month, it submerged a house that had been flooded 22 times since 1979. The house is valued at about \$600,000. The government has spent \$1.8 million to rehabilitate it.

No private insurance company would ever offer insurance on the terms that NFIP offers. Such a company would endanger its policyholders, and it would run out of money.

That is precisely what has happened under NFIP. The program is \$25 billion in debt and routinely blows through its statutory debt limits.

The emergency aid package Congress is considering today would cancel \$16 billion of NFIP's debt—no questions asked. Congress isn't making NFIP bring its actuarial practices in line with reality or into conformity with

free-market forces. No, it isn't even appropriating new funds for another failed program. That, at least, would be business as usual in Washington. Instead, Congress is effectively giving a debt amnesty to the National Flood Insurance Program. It is absolving NFIP of its sins and making American taxpayers do the penance.

So that is an example of what is in the bill. Let's consider a little bit of what is not in the bill.

If we want to be responsible leaders in a moment of crisis like this one, we need to provide long-term reforms in addition to any short-term assistance. We need to provide a full meal to those affected by these storms and not just a temporary, passing sugar rush.

But this bill does not include any reforms that would help Puerto Rico attain long-term stability or climb out from underneath its \$74 billion debt. It doesn't even attempt to reform the dysfunctional electrical utility program which, through a combination of neglect and profiteering, has left millions of Puerto Ricans in darkness. Without electricity, Puerto Rico can't power hospitals, clinics, food banks, or even sewage systems. And it doesn't repeal the Jones Act, the protectionist regulation that kept foreign-flagged relief ships out of Puerto Rican harbors for precious days after Hurricane Maria and for a long time has forced Puerto Rican consumers to pay significantly higher prices on just about everything they buy.

Simple reform measures such as reforming PREPA, the electric utility company I mentioned a moment ago, or repealing the Jones Act would provide very meaningful, lasting benefits to Puerto Ricans long after the public's attention has drifted and the relief money has dried up. But Congress, true to form, would rather double down on broken laws and broken programs rather than fix them, and Congress would rather take on more debt than spend according to what we have and prioritize in order to get there.

None of this \$36.5 billion in emergency spending is offset by spending reductions on other programs—none of it—not a single dollar. That is the sad irony of this bill. If the trend of deficit-fueled spending continues, one day soon we will wake up to the cries of our fellow Americans and we will have nothing to give them in support.

Again, this bill doesn't take care of those programs, and it is not as if there aren't solutions out there. One of my colleagues, Senator PAUL, has effectively been blocked from introducing an amendment that would call for offsets to this spending. Another one of my colleagues, Senator FLAKE, has tried to introduce an amendment, of which I am a cosponsor, that would bring about some of these other reforms I have described—reforms to the State-owned utility company, to the Jones Act, and reforms to the way that we spend money through the Federal Government in Puerto Rico.

I hope my colleagues will work with me on a more responsible, sustainable, meaningful way to help our brothers and sisters in areas affected by the recent hurricanes. Congress has the authority to lead, especially over Puerto Rico, where we have plenary power that exceeds the authority we have in other parts of the country within States. In this hour of crisis, especially with regard to Puerto Rico, we are the only ones who indisputably have this power, and we are the ones who must act if we are going to achieve meaningful reform.

If we can only offer money and a pat on the head, it will be our fault when the American people continue to suffer as a result of failed programs that haven't worked and call out to us through their failures for reform.

Thank you.

I yield the floor.

Mr. COCHRAN. Madam President, I urge the Senate to approve the disaster relief supplemental appropriations bill.

This bill will provide additional funding for response and recovery operations in areas devastated by recent hurricanes.

The storms this year have been severe in both strength and number. Communities in Texas, Florida, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands are struggling to recover.

Both the Disaster Relief Fund and the National Flood Insurance Program are depleted. They will soon run out of money for disaster response and to pay flood insurance claims.

The supplemental funding in this bill will ensure that first responders and Federal agencies have the necessary resources to continue their important work.

This bill also includes funding in response to the deadly wildfires that have ravaged western States. While these emergency funds are needed now, I will continue working with my colleagues to find a better way to fund wildfire suppression in the future.

This will not be the end of our efforts to respond to this year's disasters. The Appropriations Committee will continue to work with the administration and with the affected delegations to determine and provide for additional recovery needs. I am committed to doing what is necessary to get the job done.

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

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

MORNING BUSINESS

Mr. DAINES. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate be in a period of morning business, with Senators permitted to speak therein for up to 10 minutes each.

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

BANGLADESH

Mr. LEAHY. Madam President, in correspondence with officials of the Government of Bangladesh over a period of several years and in conversations with officials of our own State Department, I, like many others, have raised concerns about enforced disappearances, arbitrary arrests, unfair trials, extrajudicial executions, and other flagrant violations of the rule of law by the government of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina Wajed and particularly by the Rapid Action Battalion, RAB.

Like the inquiries and appeals of others, my concerns have been responded to by Bangladeshi officials with blanket denials, obfuscation, and even falsehoods.

Despite such attempts to deflect responsibility, it is beyond a doubt that the rule of law is often violated by Bangladeshi law enforcement agencies. This conduct has become so ingrained that it is not an overstatement to describe Prime Minister Wajed's government as one that condones state-sponsored criminality.

Of course, the government would vociferously reject such a characterization, insisting that individuals who have disappeared were kidnapped by militants or joined extremist groups or simply claiming that their whereabouts are unknown to the government. The problem is that there is often credible eyewitness testimony to the contrary or those responsible for the abductions have identified themselves as members of one of the security forces, the RAB being the most notorious.

The State Department's latest Country Reports on Human Rights describes the situation in Bangladesh as follows: "Human rights groups and media reported that multiple disappearances and kidnappings continued, some committed by security services. The government made limited efforts to prevent or investigate such acts. The United Nations Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances contacted the government on March 9 concerning the 'reportedly alarming rise of the number of cases of enforced disappearances in the country' and had 34 outstanding cases under review as of May 18, but the working group did not receive a response. Following alleged disappearances, security forces released some individuals without charge, arrested some, some were found dead, and others were never found."

The State Department also cited the practice of torture of detainees in Bangladesh: "Although the constitution and law prohibit torture and other cruel, inhumane, or degrading treatment or punishment, local and international human rights organizations and the media reported security forces, including RAB, intelligence services,

and police, employed torture and physical and psychological abuse during arrests and interrogations. Security forces reportedly used torture to gather information from alleged militants although members of political opposition parties claimed that security forces also targeted activists within their parties. Security forces reportedly used threats, beatings, kneecappings, and electric shock, and law enforcement officers sometimes committed rapes and other sexual abuses. Two prominent human rights organizations stated that security forces tortured eight persons to death in the first nine months of the year."

The situation has not improved since the State Department published that report earlier this year. Just last week, seven senior representatives of an opposition political party were arrested in Dhaka. Their whereabouts, conditions of confinement, and the evidence against them remain a mystery.

This egregious situation has been cited by the European Parliament, the United Nations, Human Rights Watch, and other reputable human rights monitors; yet the government of Prime Minister Wajed rejects such admonishments out of hand as fabrications or an infringement of sovereignty. Not only do these practices violate the rule of law, they threaten democracy itself. Bangladesh does face a serious problem of violent extremism, which must be effectively addressed, but if peaceful expression and association that challenges government policies or that condemns corruption and police misconduct are equated with terrorism and responded to with threats, arbitrary arrests, and disappearances, extremism will increase, and democracy will suffer.

Other international organizations and governmental bodies have urged the Government of Bangladesh to respond to calls regarding dozens of cases of disappearances and to permanently dismantle the RAB and suspend other law enforcement agencies that have engaged in such crimes until credible investigations of such cases are conducted and those responsible are appropriately punished. I echo those calls and do not support further U.S. assistance for such agencies until the necessary steps are taken.

UGANDA

Mr. LEAHY. Madam President, I want to speak briefly about the situation in Uganda, which should concern all Senators.

Uganda, located on the Equator in East Africa, has been a friend and partner of the United States for many years, particularly in the fight against HIV/AIDS. Twenty years ago, Uganda was the epicenter of AIDS in Africa. Thousands were dying, testing was nonexistent, condoms were outlawed, and the future was bleak. Since then, dramatic progress has been made in controlling the disease, although more remains to be done.