

of great consequence for millions of workers across our country, and they deserve someone much better than Peter Robb.

Mr. Robb has spent his career defending management and employers from workers fighting to form a union, unionized workers on strike, and workers who brought forward discrimination and disability claims. You don't have to take my word for it. Mr. Robb's biography on his own law firm's website tells the story clearly:

[His] extensive experience includes advising on mergers/acquisitions, plant closings, labor contract negotiations (both large and small), managing lockouts and strikes, securing labor injunctions, discrimination issues and disability claims.

His litigation includes defending employers from unfair labor practice charges, age and sex discrimination charges, class action age claims, and wage/hour claims as well as bringing suits against labor organizations. With such vast experience and a no-nonsense approach, Peter's clients look to him for sharp advice, rigorous representation and powerful litigation.

That is a description on his own law firm's website.

Mr. Robb cut his teeth busting unions and retaliating against workers as lead counsel at the NLRB in the early 1980s when President Reagan decertified the air traffic controllers union, fired 11,000 air traffic controllers, and barred them from Federal service. More recently, he represented Dominion Energy's successful attempt to defeat a union organizing campaign at a power station in Connecticut.

Management and corporations have a right to hire lawyers like Mr. Robb who will vigorously represent their interests, but Mr. Robb is certainly not the right person to lead an agency whose mission is to protect workers' rights, not to go after those rights tooth and nail. Mr. Robb's record clearly demonstrates that he will side with powerful corporations and special interests over workers who lack the resources to defend themselves.

Unions built the middle class in Hawaii and across our country. Instead of confirming another management protector at the NLRB, we should be working together to protect workers and make it fairer for them to form and to join a union, which is their right.

I urge my colleagues to join me in opposing this nominee.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Washington.

AFFORDABLE HOUSING

Ms. CANTWELL. Mr. President, I rise to talk about the affordable housing crisis that is gripping our Nation. When I say "crisis," I mean I know that people here are on the precipice of talking about what we are going to do in response to Hurricanes Harvey and Irma and Maria, and I would like to say, the housing crisis that will exist in the aftermath of those hurricanes is real, but there are also even greater implications from the housing crisis

that exist today without those hurricanes, and it is only going to continue to grow and get worse until we deal with it.

This past February, more than 2,000 families packed into the New Holly Gathering Hall in South Seattle. Each family was hoping to hear its name called. It wasn't a contest. It wasn't a game. It wasn't the lottery. It was a lottery to see if families could get affordable homes.

The Mercy Othello Plaza would soon open 108 affordable housing units. That is hardly a match for the more than 2,000 families who were interested in trying to get into one of those affordable units. Based on the numbers alone, their chance of getting an affordable home was lower than an applicant's chance of getting into Harvard.

Ninety-five percent of the families attending that night left disappointed, continuing to search for affordable housing. This is just one story of how the affordable housing crisis is gripping our Nation. I am sure every one of my colleagues in the Senate could talk about a story they have heard in their State because this crisis impacts every State. It impacts every community, both urban and rural alike.

As I have traveled across the State of Washington, I have seen some of the most hard-hit areas for affordable housing. I even have veterans returning home not being able to find affordable housing. I have seen an aging population living longer and also not having the resources when looking for affordable housing. I have seen young workers who want to be close to where their employment is and yet having to drive so far away because that is the only place they could find affordable housing. We have seen homelessness in numbers that harken back to previous days when we had a true recession.

The most damning part of the housing crisis is, we know how to solve it. We just need the courage to act.

For decades, the housing growth was the most stimulative part of our economy. Throughout the 1980s, housing was 18 percent of GDP. Today that number has dropped to just 15 percent. When people discuss tax reform and GDP growth, housing is still one of the ways that economists will tell us that we can grow GDP.

In the sixties, seventies, and eighties, if somebody asked, How do we stimulate our economy, usually a cheer would go up for housing, but since the economic downturn, we haven't heard that cheer. In fact, it is almost as if we have forgotten how stimulative housing is to our economy.

The total number of houses built between 2007 and 2016 total just 8.9 million units, which is far below the 15 million-plus average for every 10-year period through the seventies and nineties. We are off the pace of what it takes to provide affordable housing. As a result, the vacancy rates and inventories of homes for sale have also fallen. The national vacancy rate—which

is the number of homes for sale—has receded to the 2000 level, erasing all the runup we saw in the housing boom. Moreover, homeownership in the United States is now at its lowest rate since the 1960s.

Twenty million American families, including 11 million renters, are now spending more than half of their income on housing. That means less money for other essentials like food and healthcare and gas.

The National Low Income Housing Coalition tells us that 7.4 million more available affordable homes are needed because we have seen an increase of 60 percent since the year 2000 in the need for affordable housing.

So the United States has become a rent-burdened economy. If we don't address this crisis, the problem is only going to get worse. In fact, one study found that if we don't address this crisis, we are going to see another 25-percent increase in the number of Americans spending more than half of their income in rent.

I know my colleagues on the other side of the aisle in the House of Representatives are talking about what they want to do in tax reform. I would say they should look at this data as it relates to where we are with homeownership and housing and things that would eliminate the private activity bonds—one of the key drivers of affordable housing production. It would be a big mistake if they got rid of that. Obviously, there are units of affordable housing that are being planned and built right now. In fact, one estimate is that over 1,000,000 units wouldn't be completed just because of the House provision.

Obviously, limiting the mortgage interest deduction for new homeowners could potentially increase taxes on homeowners and thereby limit the number of people who could afford a home. Almost one-third of taxpayers nationally claim the property tax deductions. They could also see an impact to that. I hope our House colleagues and our Senate colleagues will see, in light of the housing crisis, what a terrible idea those things are.

How did we get to this crisis as it exists now? Part of the issue was demand. For starters, the 2007 housing crash pushed millions of families into the rental market and reduced wages on working families. The demand for rental housing skyrocketed.

Over 7 million Americans lost their homes to foreclosure, and they demanded more affordable places to live. Today the homeownership rate is the lowest in our Nation since the 1960s. The last 10 years have seen the largest gain of renters on record. The demand for rental housing shows no sign of slowing down.

Millennials, like many of the young people we see who want to be close to jobs in our burgeoning economy, are forced to rent instead of own. They are seeing that challenged, in big numbers, by the fact that there is not enough supply.

At the same time demand was going up from returning veterans, from aging seniors, from workplace needs, from many more people needing affordable housing after being pushed out of the homeownership market—at the same time demand was going up, supply failed to keep pace. Affordable housing stock is being, and was being, converted to market rate-based units. That means they got taken out of the affordability framework.

A new report found that the number of apartments being deemed affordable for low-income families dropped 60 percent over the last 6 years.

With all this pressure and demand of people falling out of home and back into the market and pushing things down, we saw so many units that were affordable units get transferred over to market-based rates and thereby losing supply.

The new production of affordable housing has not filled the gap, and production of affordable housing is at its lowest 10-year production rate on record since 1974. It, too, has played a role in this problem.

The combination of increased demand and lack of production has caused the explosion in our affordable housing crisis. The number of Americans facing extreme unaffordability—that means they are paying more than 50 percent—has gone from 7 million Americans to 11.2 million Americans. That is a 60-percent increase in the number of people in the United States who are in this area of extremely unaffordable rates for housing.

While I know we are going to discuss natural disasters and helping communities recover—everywhere from the families who have been impacted in Florida, in Texas, and various places—we also have to look at the issue of affordable housing everywhere from Seattle and Portland and San Francisco to all the way across the country, to Philadelphia and Miami and many other places.

In the aftermath of Katrina, Congress passed an expansion of the low-income housing tax credit, and it built 28,000 affordable units on the gulf. I know my colleagues will want to do something similar for Texas and the Gulf States to make sure we are doing something, but we need to understand that at the time of Katrina, there was a need due to more than 275,000 homes destroyed by that hurricane. Building 28,000 units was barely a blip.

The low-income housing tax credit helped rebuild some units, but it came nowhere close to solving the housing crisis in New Orleans. Market rates in New Orleans are 35 percent higher after the storm, and 37 percent of households are paying more than half of their income in housing. Now, 12 years later, another disaster has hit, and we are going to try to address this crisis, but the housing burden for extremely low-income families in Texas and the major metro areas of Texas is among some of the worst in the Nation. That was be-

fore the crisis. Before the actual impact of hurricanes, Texas was already at a crisis point.

Texas has only 29 affordable units for every 100 low-income households looking for those options. Houston is the third worst in the country for housing availability for extremely low-income people. Now families from Florida to Puerto Rico are going to also be finding a very difficult situation.

Expanding the tax credit could help, but we have to do more than just expand the tax credit for those disaster States. We need a very big systematic investment in affordable housing all across the United States, and expanding the low-income housing tax credit is one way to do that. The good news is, we have good bipartisan support for the low-income housing tax credit enacted in 1986. It helped build 3 million rental units across this country over the last 30 years. If you want to make a dent in this crisis, both in response to the hurricanes and the crisis that already existed, we need to begin filling that gap by increasing the credit.

That is why I joined Senator HATCH in introducing the Affordable Housing Tax Credit Improvement Act, something that would help us build hundreds of thousands of new units in the next 10 years. I am glad Senators WYDEN, PORTMAN, SULLIVAN, MERKLEY, SCOTT, BENNET, COLLINS, KAIN, HELLER, LEAHY, SHAHEEN, MURRAY, SCHUMER, MURKOWSKI, YOUNG, GRAHAM, SCHATZ, BOOKER, HASSAN, ISAKSON, and SANDERS are all supporters.

We have good, bipartisan support from people who understand that this crisis is real and that it is only going to grow. But we also know that the additional tax credit would create almost 450,000 new jobs over the next 10 years. That is because housing is stimulative to the economy. Construction alone supports over 2 million jobs. And it helps by making sure that the economic impact to GDP is realized now through this investment.

It also helps us save money as an economy and a country by putting a roof over people's heads. One of the reasons I was so excited to work with Senator HATCH on this was because in his home State of Utah, they made such great progress in dealing with their homeless veteran population. The community decided that by putting a roof over someone's head, they actually helped lower overall costs. One study found that placing people in affordable housing lowered Federal Medicaid expenditures by an average of 12 percent, and a University of Pennsylvania study found that taxpayers could save \$16,000 per homeless person who was placed in affordable housing.

So we need to act. We need to realize that housing provides an investment in job creation and has historically contributed between 2 to 4 percent of GDP growth since the 1980s; that it is an underpinning of our economy; and that we need to make sure that our Tax Code works and make sure that people

are purchasing homes as well as finding affordable housing.

As our colleagues deal with the end-of-the-year policy issues and deal with our response to these storms, I hope we will realize that this underlying crisis also needs attention. We have worked on a bipartisan basis in the past to address it, and we can work on a bipartisan basis in the future to both stimulate our economy and solve these problems.

Ninety percent of the affordable housing units being built in the country use these tax credits, so it is only by extending the tax credits, putting a roof over people's heads, that we are going to be able to deal with this crisis. The good news is, it helps us save money and it helps us with GDP growth.

I thank the Chair.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. MORAN). The Senator from Maryland.

NOMINATION OF WILLIAM WEHRUM

Mr. CARDIN. Mr. President, later today we will start the process of voting on the confirmation of William Wehrum for Assistant Administrator for the Environmental Protection Agency's Office of Air and Radiation. I take this time to urge my colleagues to reject this nominee and vote against his confirmation.

The EPA Assistant Administrator for the Office of Air and Radiation supervises national programs and policies for regulating air pollution and radiation exposure. Notably, this office administers the Clean Air Act.

As a member of the Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works, I once again find myself using my voice to say that science and public health, not partisan politics, should drive the confirmation process.

If confirmed, Mr. Wehrum is expected to play a leading role in dismantling climate change regulations. Since the Supreme Court decision in *Massachusetts v. EPA* in 2007 ruled that carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases are dangerous air pollutants, OAR is the office that accepted the endangerment finding and developed the Clean Power Plan to address carbon pollution.

Given the Trump administration's own admission—or lack of suppression—in the latest update to the National Climate Assessment “that it is extremely likely that human activities, especially emissions of greenhouse gases, are the dominant cause of the observed warming since the mid-20th century,” it should be common sense to nominate and confirm Administrators who care about our environment and our future, including acting on climate change. It is inexcusable to confirm those who disagree with that. I am not convinced that Mr. Wehrum will act on carbon pollution or any other air pollutant.

It would take an extraordinarily independent Assistant Administrator to resist the current course at the EPA under EPA Administrator Scott Pruitt.