

We know that we have a challenge at the top. We need as the person to head this Agency a person of integrity who will stand up for what science tells us we need to do in protecting air quality. I would argue that Mr. Wehrum is not that person.

Let me go over some of the challenges we face.

For example, in January of 2017, the EPA issued itself a 6-month extension to respond to Maryland's Good Neighbor petition. The petition alleges that 36 powerplants in five neighboring States are preventing Maryland from meeting its own obligations under the Clean Air Act. That deadline expired with no EPA action on the petition.

On September 27, 2017, Maryland filed suit against the EPA.

On October 5 of this year, the Chesapeake Bay Foundation filed a similar lawsuit because pollution from powerplants is a source of nitrogen pollution in the Chesapeake Bay.

On October 27, 2017, the EPA denied a separate Maryland petition asking the EPA to add nine States to the Ozone Transport Region, alleging that these States contribute to the violation of the 2008 ozone national ambient air quality standards.

In its response to the petition, the EPA determined that expanding the Ozone Transport Region is "not appropriate at this time" because existing rules will achieve reductions in emissions. The EPA's response states that "better-targeted approaches, such as those under the Clean Air Act's good neighbor provision, would be more effective in addressing the 2008 ozone targets."

The EPA's reasoning to deny the Ozone Transport Region petition—that existing rules will adequately address transported pollution—is predicated on the sincere implementation of those rules. In fact, Maryland did utilize—we did utilize—a "better targeted approach." Maryland filed a Good Neighbor petition last November that was ignored for 1 year, prompting the lawsuit against the EPA.

Based on his professional history and testimony, I do not have reason to believe that Mr. Wehrum will ensure that existing rules will adequately address air pollution. While he worked at the EPA during the George W. Bush administration, Mr. Wehrum attempted to direct the Agency's air requirements to favor markets, earning praise from industry groups he would later represent in private practice. How can we ask Mr. Wehrum to objectively administer the Clean Air Act after a career spent on one side?

Mr. Wehrum has 20-plus years working for the industry as a lobbyist. He has a record of ignoring science in the recommendations that he made. There are examples of where he absolutely disagreed with expert groups—just to give one example, the Academy of American Pediatricians' assessment on mercury and air toxins submissions. Mr. Wehrum took issue and disagreed with their findings.

He was seen as an unacceptable choice in 2007 when he was nominated to lead the same Agency by President Bush, and his nomination was withdrawn over Democratic opposition. So this is not the first time we have had a chance to deal with Mr. Wehrum for this position. In the interim, he has only continued his work to advance industry by advocating for weakening the Clean Air Act.

I will continue to stand up for the rights of Marylanders and all Americans to air that is safe to breathe and a climate that is livable, and all of us can help in that regard by rejecting this nominee.

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

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

TAX REFORM

Mr. BARRASSO. Mr. President, 1 year ago, the American people went to the polls. The American people demanded a change. They demanded a change from 8 years of too little economic growth and too much government control and regulations. The effect was immediate, and the effect was incredible.

In the past year, we have gotten a lot of very good news about the American economy. Right after the election, businesses became much more optimistic about the direction of our country and they started hiring. Last Friday, we learned that in the United States we have created more than 2 million jobs since election day 2016. Someone said to me: Well, you shouldn't count it from election day. You should count it from Inauguration Day. Certainly, in my home State of Wyoming, on election day there was a confidence, an optimism, a positive feeling that started just at the moment it was announced that Donald Trump had been elected President of the United States.

Right now we have the lowest rate of unemployment since the year 2002. We have seen the economy grow at more than 3 percent for the past 2 quarters. Consumer confidence just reached the highest level in almost 17 years. All of this is happening since President Trump was elected, and this is very good news for America.

We can't stop now. We have to do all we can to keep on this path toward a more prosperous country. Americans are optimistic because they know that President Trump is focused on easing the regulations that have held back our economy for the last 8 years. We know that government can create opportunity or crush opportunity based on a combination of regulations, mandates, and taxes. We are now in the

land of opportunity, eliminating the regulations and pulling back on taxes to helping our economy grow.

The President has signed legislation that we passed in this Congress repealing one after another of the Obama administration's rules, regulations, and restrictions. President Trump has issued Executive orders cutting back on excessive redtape. President Trump has appointed very good people to important jobs who are committed to reining in Washington's out-of-control bureaucracy. All of these things are important and critical to keeping our economy growing.

Another big part is what we are trying to do now in terms of cutting taxes for the American people. People want to keep more of their hard-earned money in their own pockets.

Here in the Senate we now have a once-in-a-generation opportunity to cut taxes in a way that will actually help American families. We can help families directly by raising their incomes, and we can help them indirectly by growing the economy. Here is how we can do both, because that needs to be our goal.

The first thing we can do is to give people a raise by doubling the standard deduction. If we raise the deduction, people keep more of their hard-earned money, and it makes taxes simpler. Right now, the standard deduction for a married couple is \$12,000. Two-thirds of Americans take this deduction. If we roughly double it, people will not pay any Federal income tax at all on the first \$24,000 they earn. That is a big cut. It means that a lot more people will decide to take this deduction instead of having to go through the painstaking process of itemizing their deductions on their tax return. It saves them a lot of time, it saves them a lot of headaches, and it saves them the cost of accountants and lawyers who have to help figure out the very complicated tax system in this country. Millions of families will be better off just from this one tax cut alone.

A second thing Republicans are looking to do is to reduce the tax rate for small businesses, the people who are creating jobs all across the country. If someone owns a small business in my home State of Wyoming, she probably ends up paying the taxes on her personal tax return rather than on a separate business tax return. If we cut her tax bill, that is money she can then use to give her workers a raise, to hire more people, and to create more jobs in our community. She can put money back into the business to help grow the economy as well.

When you leave more money in people's pockets, they get to decide how to use that money—what they decide to spend, what they decide to save, and what they decide to invest. People are much better watching their own money than the government ever was, giving people value for that money.

So we want to make sure that tax reform includes a break for small businesses. Around here, they use the

words “tax reform.” To me, it is about tax reduction, tax relief, and tax cuts. Republicans also want to bring down the rates that Washington charges other businesses. If we can cut the rate businesses pay from 35 percent down to 20 percent, that could be an enormous boost to the economy. Economists who look at this say it is like giving the average American family a \$4,000 a year raise. That is how much the average household’s income would go up, because workers actually bear most of the burden of taxes that businesses pay.

Now, Democrats actually think the money belongs to Washington. It doesn’t. It belongs to the people at home who earn it. Democrats often think that if you give Americans even a single dollar in tax cuts, you are taking away Washington’s money. It is not Washington’s money. The money belongs to the people at home.

We know the exact opposite of what the Democrats believe to be true. Republicans know that giving Americans a tax cut is the same as giving them a raise. Every dollar a family doesn’t have to send to Washington in taxes is a dollar they can use for something better. It is a dollar they can use for food, for shelter, for kids, for education, for things that matter to their family. It is another dollar a small business can use to pay its workers more or reinvest in the business to help grow the economy in that community. Tax cuts mean that people decide how to spend their own money; Washington doesn’t decide. Families know how to use money much better than Washington ever will.

As we debate these issues and ideas with regard to tax relief, we have an exciting opportunity to give the American people a raise and to give the American economy a boost. This is something a lot of people have been working on for a long time in the Senate. Over the past 6 years, the Finance Committee has held 70 hearings on how to make our Tax Code better for all Americans.

Republicans are working, and we are listening to make sure that we get the tax reform right that the American people and families need. When it comes to tax cuts, I believe the more the better. The more people who get a tax cut, the better. The more we grow our economy, the better. It is our job. It is about paychecks. It is about jobs. It is about prosperity. It is about a strong and healthy economy for America. That is what we as Republicans are committed to. We cannot let this opportunity pass.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Vermont.

Mr. SANDERS. Mr. President, whether one is a progressive, a Democrat, a conservative, a Republican, or somewhere in between, there is a deep understanding in this country that we are living in a rigged economy, and people are increasingly angry and frustrated

about the growing inequality and unfairness they see all about them.

It is hard to believe, but in the United States of America today, the top one-tenth of 1 percent now owns almost as much wealth as the bottom 90 percent—one-tenth of 1 percent, bottom 90 percent. A study came out fairly recently indicating that in the United States of America today, the three wealthiest people in our country—Bill Gates, Jeff Bezos, and Warren Buffett—now own more wealth than the bottom half of the American people. Three people own more wealth than the bottom half of the American people.

Meanwhile, while the very, very rich get richer, some 40 million Americans are living in poverty. These are people who are struggling today to figure out how they put food on the table for their kids, how they put gas in the car in order to go to work, how they pay their electric bills, how they deal with childcare. There are 40 million people living in poverty. The middle class is disappearing. People are working two or three jobs. For the first time in the modern history of this country, young people may well have a standard of living lower than their parents’.

On top of all of that, we remain the only major country on Earth that doesn’t guarantee healthcare to all of our people. Twenty-eight million people today have no health insurance. Many more are underinsured. And if our Republican colleagues get their way, they are going to throw another 20 or 30 million people off of their health insurance.

It is not only the reality of grotesque levels of inequality that is making the American people despondent and angry; it is the reality that the people on top, with their wealth and power, can access lawyers and accountants who are able to manipulate the system to benefit themselves at the expense of everyone else. That is the essence of what a rigged economy is about and what I want to say a few words about today.

In my view, one of the great crises facing our world—and we are in a world of many crises—is the rapid movement toward international oligarchy in which a handful of billionaires own and control not just a significant part of the American economy but a significant part of the world economy. Needless to say, this is an issue that does not get a whole lot of discussion because, in general, the more important the issues are, the less discussion they get within the corporate media or within the political world that we live in here in the Congress.

Let me reiterate. One of the great crises that we face is that a handful of billionaires are moving this entire planet toward an oligarchic society in which the people on top not only have incredible wealth but incredible political power as well.

This last Sunday, a group of investigative journalists released over 13

million files known as the Paradise Papers exposing just how horrific this situation has become. These papers show how a handful of oligarchs in the United States and throughout the world get richer by hiding their wealth and their profits offshore to avoid paying their fair share of taxes. The list of individuals implicated in the Paradise Papers include billionaires such as the Koch brothers, Sheldon Adelson, Carl Icahn, and Robert Mercer. It includes large financial institutions such as Wells Fargo, Citigroup, and Bank of America. It includes large multinational corporations such as Apple, Nike, and ExxonMobil. It includes members of the Trump administration, such as Secretary of State Rex Tillerson, Commerce Secretary Wilbur Ross, chief economic adviser Gary Cohn, and Treasury Secretary Steve Mnuchin.

Let’s be clear. Offshore tax evasion is a major problem not just for the United States but for governments throughout the world. This is really quite unbelievable. In the year 2012, the Tax Justice Network estimated that at least \$21 trillion—\$21 trillion, a number almost beyond comprehension—is being stashed in offshore tax havens around the world. Imagine that. There is \$21 trillion flowing into tax havens in the Cayman Islands, Bermuda, Luxembourg—all these places around the world where the billionaire class and large corporations are stashing their money not only to avoid taxes in the United States but to avoid taxes in Great Britain, France, Germany, et cetera.

There is a funny thing about these guys. All of these billionaires love veterans, and they love the military. They want to see us rebuild the infrastructure, and they want to see our kids get a good education. But you know what, they don’t want to pay taxes to make that happen. They want ordinary people to pay the taxes. Republicans here want to increase military spending by \$50, \$60 billion. It is not the billionaires who are going to pay the taxes on that—they have their money in the Cayman Islands. It is the working class, the middle class, upper middle class who will pay, not the billionaires. They love America—except when it comes to accepting their fair share to make sure that we continue to provide the services our men, women, and children need.

The situation has become so absurd—and this is really how crazy it is—that one five-story office building in the Cayman Islands is now the home of nearly 20,000 corporations. This particular building in the Cayman Islands is called the Ugland House. It is five stories. I know that you can squeeze people into a building—sometimes three or four people live in a room—but I think it is a little bit hard to understand how 20,000 corporations function in a five-story building. Of course the answer is that 20,000 corporations do not function in this five-story building.

It is all a fraud. It is simply a mailbox address for 20,000 corporations that are in this building in order to avoid paying their taxes. They are stashing their profits and their wealth in corporations that use this building as a mailing address.

I know we are busy talking about so-called tax reform here, but in the United States alone, offshore tax evasion costs our government about \$166 billion in lost revenue each and every year. That is a lot of money that could be used to rebuild our crumbling infrastructure—our roads, our bridges, our water systems. One trillion dollars—that is 8 or 9 years of that \$166 billion—could create up to 15 million good-paying jobs. That is money that could be used to provide universal pre-K for our children so that when kids get ready to go to school, they will be prepared to do the work there. But instead of cracking down on offshore tax schemes, President Trump and my Republican colleagues in Congress are working overtime to pass legislation that would make this absurd situation even worse.

At a time when corporations are making recordbreaking profits, my Republican colleagues want to slash taxes for companies that are shifting American jobs to China and American profits to the Cayman Islands. At a time of massive wealth and income inequality, President Trump and the Republicans in Congress want to cut taxes for billionaires by repealing the estate tax on families who inherit over \$5.5 million. I think the American people grasp the unfairness and the absurdity of the Republican tax proposal.

The top one-tenth of 1 percent own almost as much wealth as the bottom 90 percent. The very, very rich are getting richer while the middle class is shrinking, and the Republican response is to give massive tax breaks to the top two-tenths of 1 percent—two-tenths of 1 percent. These are families like the Walton family, the wealthiest family in America, who owns Walmart, who would get up to a \$50 billion tax break; and the Koch brothers, who have enough money to spend hundreds of millions of dollars trying to elect rightwing candidates to Congress.

There are massive tax breaks for billionaires and at the same time, an effort to throw up to 30 million people off of the health insurance they have, massive cuts in education, in nutrition, and in the programs that working families desperately need.

Instead of providing even more tax breaks to very profitable corporations and to billionaires and President Trump's Cabinet, maybe—just maybe—it might be a good idea to close offshore tax loopholes and demand a fair, transparent, and progressive tax system.

I hope the American people are catching on—as I believe they are—to what a fraud the Republican tax proposal is. Today, one out of five major, profitable corporations already pays zero in Federal income tax. You can't

do much better than paying zero in Federal income tax and be a profitable corporation, but that is what is going on. Republicans want to make that even worse, and then they want millions of middle-class people, by the end of the decade, to be paying more in taxes. That is absurd, and I hope the American people stand up and demand that we do not go forward with that proposal.

HEALTHCARE

Mr. President, on another issue, I want to mention that there is a crisis in primary healthcare, and unless Congress acts immediately, that crisis is likely to become much worse. Millions of Americans are at risk of losing their access to healthcare because Congress has still not renewed funding for the community health center program, which expired on September 30.

Our Nation's community health centers provide affordable, high-quality healthcare to more than 27 million people. What community health centers do is not only provide high-quality primary healthcare but also dental care, mental health counseling, and low-cost prescription drugs. Community health centers not only save lives, they also end up saving money. What they do is keep people out of emergency rooms and keep people out of hospitals because people can now go to the doctor when they should. The savings are also, really, quite significant. Investing in community health centers keeps people healthier, keeps people alive, and saves taxpayers' money.

Not only do we have to renew funding for the Community Health Center Program, but we must also improve and expand the National Health Service Corps, one of the, really, very positive health programs that the Federal Government runs. What this program understands is that for a variety of reasons, including the fact that many young people leave medical school being \$300,000, \$400,000 in debt, it is very hard to get young doctors, dentists, nurses, and nurse practitioners to underserved areas in rural America or in urban America. What this program does is provide debt forgiveness and sometimes scholarships for young graduates of medical school or nursing school or dental school and says: If you are prepared to practice in an underserved area, we will forgive your loans. That is a big deal in attracting providers to areas in which we desperately need them.

The bad news is that, as every American knows, this Congress and this country are very politically divided. That is no great secret. The good news and the truth is that in terms of community health centers—Senator Ted Kennedy was one of the founders, who worked with Republicans—from the inception of the program, there has been a widespread understanding on both sides of the aisle that communities all over America in every State in our country are benefiting from community health centers whether they are in

rural areas or whether they are in urban areas or anywhere else in between.

What I am very happy to note is that there is excellent legislation—bipartisan legislation—here in the Senate, introduced by Senator ROY BLUNT and Senator DEBBIE STABENOW, that would reauthorize these successful programs for 5 years and provide modest increases in their funding. This program not only has the support of virtually, perhaps, every Democrat or every Member of the Democratic Caucus, but I think it has at least 9 or 10 Republican cosponsors. I believe, if that bill were to be brought to the floor of the Senate, it would pass with overwhelming support because every Senator here knows of the excellent work that is done by community health centers from one end of this country to the other.

I hope that this issue will get the attention it deserves. It should have been funded at the end of the fiscal year. It wasn't. I just talked to a physician in Burlington, VT, who works for a community health center. They are worried, and doctors and nurses all across this country are worried, as are patients, about the lack of reauthorization of this very important bill.

I hope that this bill will get moved very quickly along with the CHIP program. There is bipartisan support for it, and I hope that we can get it to the floor and get it passed as quickly as possible.

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

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

VETERANS DAY

Mr. BLUNT. Mr. President, this coming week will mark Veterans Day. It is an important time for us to reflect on what veterans do for us and what their families do for us. The sacrifices of both those who serve and those who support those who serve are incredibly important.

We have half a million Missouri veterans, and one of the great privileges of this job is to get to represent them, their values, and the commitment to freedom in our country that they stand for.

A couple of weeks ago I had the opportunity to welcome a group of southwest Missouri veterans who came to Washington with the Honor Flight program. I think the Presiding Officer also does this, but every time I get a chance, if there is an Honor Flight from our State, I try to get down there because it is a great time to see and to talk to and to thank those who have served us.

When the Honor Flights started 20 years ago or so, there were still some