

with drill rigs to go explore all on ice. They do that for about 4 months during the winter, then they leave. When the spring comes, there is literally zero impact on the tundra—zero impact.

Yet some of my colleagues, particularly my colleagues on the other side of the aisle, have been coming down here for weeks talking about issues with regard to Alaska and the environment and energy. With all due respect, they are using talking points that are about 40 years old.

When we had the hearing recently, the ranking member of the ENR Committee said nothing has changed. Well, everything has changed—the technology, the high standards. The only thing that has not changed are some of the talking points the other side has been using for the last 40 years.

Let me just give you one example. On the bill the Energy and Natural Resources Committee recently put up with regard to exploration in the 1002 area—this is all of ANWR, I believe about the size of Wyoming. This is the wilderness area of ANWR. This is the 1002 area, the coastal area of ANWR that was set aside by Congress to look at the possibility of exploring a very resource-rich area of the country. This red dot—you can barely see it—is a surface area of 2,000 acres—2,000 acres. That is what the bill would say. It would limit development of this area to 2,000 acres.

For a little perspective, Dulles airport is 12,000 acres. This would be about 10 percent of Dulles airport. That is it. That is the surface footprint. Yet my colleagues on the other side of the aisle have been coming out and talking about millions and millions of acres, so it is important that we push back.

Here is the big issue for those in Congress who want to continually shut down resource development in Alaska that they never acknowledge: When you disallow investment in Alaska, which has the highest standards in the world on the environment, you don't end up protecting the environment. You just drive capital investment, exploration, and development activities to jurisdictions in the world with little to no environmental protection—countries like Nigeria, Venezuela, Iran, Russia, many of which are our geopolitical foes.

In conclusion, what we are looking to do on the Senate floor with regard to producing more energy for this country is going to help with regard to jobs, it is going to help with regard to energy security, it is going to help with regard to national security, and, yes, it is going to help with regard to protecting the global environment because we have the highest standards in the world, and we do it right in Alaska.

If we are not doing it here, there will be activities in other countries, other jurisdictions where they don't care about the environment the way we do. So we need to move forward on this important element of the energy and natural resource bill that was introduced

today in the committee. I encourage all of my colleagues to support that bill.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The majority leader.

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, I was listening carefully to the remarks of my friend from Alaska, and I am very much supportive of the effort to open up this small footprint in the Alaskan wilderness. It struck me that my friend from Alaska is right on point when he said the only talking points that haven't changed are the ones on the other side from 40 years ago. The advances in technology are truly impressive, and the opportunity not only for Alaska but for America to realize these natural resources is something very important to the country. I thank my friend for pointing that out.

EXECUTIVE CALENDAR

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate proceed to the en bloc consideration of the following nominations: Executive Calendar Nos. 373, 374, 375, 392, 393, 394, 395, 396, 440, 441, 442, 459, and 460.

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

The clerk will report the nominations en bloc.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read the nominations of Robert M. Duncan, Jr., of Kentucky, to be United States Attorney for the Eastern District of Kentucky for the term of four years; Charles E. Peeler, of Georgia, to be United States Attorney for the Middle District of Georgia for the term of four years; Bryan D. Schroder, of Alaska, to be United States Attorney for the District of Alaska for the term of four years; Scott C. Blader, of Wisconsin, to be United States Attorney for the Western District of Wisconsin for the term of four years; John R. Lausch, Jr., of Illinois, to be United States Attorney for the Northern District of Illinois for the term of four years; J. Douglas Overbey, of Tennessee, to be United States Attorney for the Eastern District of Tennessee for the term of four years; Mark A. Klaassen, of Wyoming, to be United States Attorney for the District of Wyoming for the term of four years; William C. Lamar, of Mississippi, to be United States Attorney for the Northern District of Mississippi for the term of four years; John F. Bash, of Texas, to be United States Attorney for the Western District of Texas for the term of four years; Erin Angela Nealy Cox, of Texas, to be United States Attorney for the Northern District of Texas for the term of four years; R. Andrew Murray, of North Carolina, to be United States Attorney for the Western District of North Carolina for the term of four years; Matthew G. T. Martin, of North Carolina, to be United States Attorney for the Middle District of North Carolina for the term of four years; and

Christina E. Nolan, of Vermont, to be United States Attorney for the District of Vermont for the term of four years.

Thereupon, the Senate proceeded to consider the nominations en bloc.

Mr. McCONNELL. I ask unanimous consent that the Senate vote on the nominations en bloc with no intervening action or debate; that if confirmed, the motions to reconsider be considered made and laid upon the table en bloc; that the President be immediately notified of the Senate's action; that no further motions be in order; and that any statements relating to the nominations be printed in the RECORD.

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

The question is, Will the Senate advise and consent to the Duncan, Peeler, Schroder, Blader, Lausch, Overbey, Klaassen, Lamar, Bash, Nealy Cox, Murray, Martin, and Nolan nominations en bloc?

The nominations were confirmed en bloc.

EXECUTIVE CALENDAR

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate proceed to the consideration of the following nomination: Executive Calendar No. 412.

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

The clerk will report the nomination.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read the nomination of Peter Hoekstra, of Michigan, to be Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the United States of America to the Kingdom of the Netherlands.

Thereupon, the Senate proceeded to consider the nomination.

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate vote on the nomination with no intervening action or debate; that if confirmed, the motion to reconsider be considered made and laid upon the table; that the President be immediately notified of the Senate's action; that no further motions be in order; and that any statements relating to the nomination be printed in the RECORD.

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

The question is, Will the Senate advise and consent to the Hoekstra nomination?

The nomination was confirmed.

LEGISLATIVE SESSION

MORNING BUSINESS

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate proceed to legislative session for 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.

REPUBLICAN TAX PLAN

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, on Monday, I was in Crystal Lake, IL, in the 6th Congressional District. I was joined by realtors and local elected officials to talk about how the GOP tax plan would hurt families in my home State of Illinois. The families in the 6th Congressional District would be hit especially hard since they are in the 12th highest district in terms of the benefit received from the State and local tax deduction—a deduction that is gutted in the Republican House tax plan.

Republicans released this plan last Thursday, have been marking it up in committee this week, with the plan to have it on the House floor next week.

It is already clear that this partisan plan does nothing more than double-down on some of the most damaging ideas from the framework congressional Republicans and the White House released in September—and the bill gets worse the closer you look.

The House Republican bill would bankroll massive tax cuts for the wealthy few and the largest corporations on the backs of hard-working families in Illinois and across the country.

The bill eliminates some of the most vital tax breaks for people in Illinois—making it so that struggling seniors no longer will be able to deduct costly out-of-pocket medical expenses and that the 1.5 million Illinoisans with Federal student loan debt will no longer be able to deduct the interest paid on those loans.

Congressional Republicans didn't stop at eliminating deductions for medical expenses and student loan interest.

Republicans want to take away one of the most valuable deductions for working families in this State—the State and local tax deduction.

Eliminating this deduction to fund a massive tax cuts for corporations and the ultrawealthy was a centerpiece of the Framework Republicans released earlier this year—a move that would raise taxes on one-third of all taxpayers.

After strong opposition within their ranks for eliminating the State and local tax deduction, the House Republican plan released last week proposes a “compromise” to obtain the support of congressional Republicans that represent States like Illinois.

This so-called compromise eliminates the tax deduction for State and local income taxes, and caps the deduction for property taxes, so instead of eliminating the deduction altogether, they just gut it. If you ask me, that is no compromise at all.

The result is still the same: middle-income families would still be double taxed when it comes to income, sales, and some property taxes—once by the Federal Government and again by the State.

This would make it more expensive for families to fund services at the local level like the local schools, police

and fire departments, and local roads and bridges.

Make no mistake, in Illinois—the State with the fifth highest number of taxpayers claiming the State and local tax deduction—would be hit especially hard. Nearly 2 million Illinoisans—roughly one-third of taxpayers in the State—claimed more than \$24 billion in State and local tax deductions in 2015 alone.

If Republicans are successful in eliminating or gutting this deduction, it will mean a tax hike for working families across Illinois.

If completely eliminated, a family of four living in a place like Crystal Lake making around \$76,000 per year would pay more than \$1,400 more in taxes each year.

And what do Republicans do with the money from raising taxes on one-third of middle-income families in Illinois? They give the ultrawealthy and the largest corporations a tax cut.

That is just plain wrong.

I urge House Republicans to oppose any tax plan that would raise taxes on middle-income families by gutting the State and local tax deduction in order to give cuts to the largest corporations and richest 1 percent.

TRIBUTE TO ANN CLAIRE WILLIAMS

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, I want to take a few minutes to thank Judge Ann Claire Williams for her extraordinary service to our country. After serving nearly two decades on the Seventh U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals in Chicago, Judge Williams announced she would be retiring from the judiciary later this year.

Ann Claire Williams is a trailblazer. She is the first African American to serve on the Seventh U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals—an accomplishment that one judge called: “the desegregation of the 7th Circuit.” This was just another in a series of firsts for Judge Williams. She was one of the first two African-American women to clerk for judges on the Seventh Circuit. In 1985, Judge Williams became the first African American woman to become a U.S. District Court judge for the Northern District of Illinois. She served as chair of the Court Administration and Case Management Committee of the United States Judicial Conference—making her the first African American chair of a Judicial Conference committee. Judge Williams also became the first African American president of the Federal Judges Association. Simply put, almost every step of her career has broken new ground.

Born in Detroit, MI, Ann Claire Williams began her career as a third grade music teacher after graduating from Wayne State University with a bachelor's degree in elementary education and master's degree from the University of Michigan in guidance and counseling. Inspired by the television show “Perry Mason” the only lawyer she

knew growing up—and a competitive spirit, Ann decided to attend law school. She chose the University of Notre Dame and the rest is history—or more appropriately, the rest of her career made history.

Judge Williams has been the recipient of numerous honors and awards. Here are just a few: Chicago Lawyer 2000 Person of the Year; the Arabella Babb Mansfield Award from the National Association of Women Lawyers; the National Bar Association's Gertrude E. Rush Award; the American Bar Association's Margaret Brent Women Lawyers of Achievement Award; Chicago Inn of Court's Joel M. Flaum Award; American Judicature Society's Edward J. Devitt Distinguished Service to Justice Award; the Black Women Lawyers' Association of Greater Chicago's Pioneer Award; the Leadership Institute for Women of Color Attorneys, Inc.'s Breaking the Glass Ceiling Award; and was recognized by Newsweek Daily Beast as one of 2012's 150 Fearless Women in the World.

Judge Williams has always been proud of breaking barriers and her history of firsts, but she doesn't want to be the last. Throughout her career, she has been committed to training young lawyers. As a founding member of the Black Women Lawyers in Chicago, Judge Williams uses her story to inspire the next generation—and makes clear through her experiences that young women today can follow the path she paved to reach the top of their fields. She also serves as chairwoman of the Just The Beginning Foundation to help guide more minority law students into the legal profession. Under Judge Williams' leadership, the organization has grown to include programs for students in high school and middle school across the country. For all her achievements, it is her commitment to the future that is truly inspiring.

Recently, Judge Williams said.

You want to be nourished by people that understand your story and your experience. But once you're nourished that means you have to go out and deal with the broader world.

Well, Judge Williams has done just that. She serves on the board of Equal Justice Works, a nonprofit dedicated to creating a just society by training lawyers committed to working in the public interest, and despite her busy schedule, she has made time to travel to Ghana, Rwanda, Liberia, and Uganda to train judges and attorneys.

Judge Williams' career is groundbreaking, and she is a role model for countless young women of color—and an inspiration to the rest of us. I am proud to call her a friend.

I want to congratulate Judge Williams on an outstanding career and thank her for all she has done—and all she will continue to do. The country is grateful for her service. I wish her and her family all the best in her next chapter.