

his company to invest and grow. If you think about it, looking at what has happened in the stock market and, more importantly, what it has done to 401(k)s and pension plans and people's savings, there is a lot of enthusiasm and newfound confidence in the American economy, and that is an unequivocally good thing. Scott sees that in his place of business. He said that it has created a lot of incentive for his company to invest and grow, and that is good for the people who will benefit from those jobs. He is looking to hand out bonuses when the company's fiscal year ends at the end of this month, and he is hoping that a new facility his company is building will create jobs for as many as 500 people. You heard me right earlier. He said 47 people work there now, and he is hoping that this new facility will create jobs for as many as 500 people.

Scott, we appreciate your story, and we are glad you took the time to share it.

Back home in Texas, we are trying to keep track of all the tax reform successes, but there are so many, sometimes it is hard to keep up.

In West Texas, El Paso Electric has just announced that homeowners will get new refunds on their electric bills due to the lower tax rate. Seniors, people on fixed incomes, will actually see their utility bills go down because of the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act. What great news.

In Helotes, which is right outside of San Antonio, my friend, Representative WILL HURD, who represents that area, tells us that Jeff and Mary Marsh, the owners of two coffee shops, are particularly thrilled. They are passing along the tax savings directly to their staff of 11 employees in the form of increased hourly wages, benefits packages, and bonus programs. They hope to upgrade their systems and equipment and expand with new locations too.

Stories like these sure don't sound like "Armageddon." That is the term House Minority Leader PELOSI used to describe the tax reforms last year, in addition to calling them "crumbs." She called them "Armageddon" and "crumbs." Well, I am not sure how those two go together, but she and other Democrats did their dead-level best to scare the living daylights out of the American people and to tell them that this would not work and that it would actually hurt them.

I heard the Democratic leader, my friend from New York, Senator SCHUMER, out here talking about how money that is being brought back from overseas isn't being invested properly here in the United States, as if it were the government's money. The whole point is that this is not the government's money, this is money earned by the people and the businesses that take the risks and that we need to succeed so that our country will succeed and we will continue to grow so that the American dream can remain alive.

It is almost as if they think that any money saved as a result of the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act is somehow stolen from the clutches of the Federal Government that knows how to spend that money better than they do. Well, I certainly have a different view.

I guess, though, our Democratic colleagues were not totally off base in mentioning Armageddon because the tax cuts did spell doom for progressive rationales and excuses for not cutting taxes and making our system more competitive globally. It really was Armageddon when you consider what it did to their outrageous arguments.

Our reforms have exploded the notion that the only way government can ensure prosperity is with higher taxes. Again, it is based on this crazy idea that the money you earn is not really yours to keep, it is the Federal Government's, and the government will only let you keep a certain amount of it, and that when we cut taxes, it actually somehow is not money that is yours in the first place. It seems like it is completely reverse logic.

The bill's well-documented effects have killed the ludicrous claims we heard before Christmas that Americans who faced stagnant wages for years wouldn't really benefit from the raises or that companies are incapable or unwilling to actually give those raises or invest in their businesses and create new jobs. I wonder what the critics have to say about all this now. They have mostly been quiet since the good news started rolling in—although I guess, listening to my friend from New York, they have not given up entirely.

I wonder what they have to say to organizations like the Health Care Service Corporation, which operates Blue Cross Blue Shield in my State. Thanks to the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act, it has announced a \$1.5 billion initiative to make health insurance more affordable. This \$1.5 billion initiative to make health insurance more affordable comes as more good news to men and women like those in my State who have struggled to pay for healthcare.

I wonder what the naysayers have to say to this one lady in particular. I am thinking about somebody from Lewisville, TX. She recently contacted me and preferred not to be identified. Originally in my remarks, I was going to mention her name, but out of respect for her privacy, let me just tell her story and leave her name out of it. She had surgery a while back and had to borrow money up front to pay for it. On top of her student loans, this stressed her out. She was pretty anxious. She was wondering: How am I going to pay these bills? Well, in her note that she sent to my office, she said that she is extremely grateful for the reduced taxes because now she brings home an additional \$125 in each paycheck—\$125. That \$125 helps her pay the bills she was so worried about.

I hope our friends across the aisle who opposed this bill uniformly—every single one of them voted against it—I

hope they will listen not to our claims but, rather, to the evidence and realize that this \$125 to this woman from Lewisville, TX, is not crumbs; it is the difference between living in fear that she will not be able to meet her obligations and living in peace knowing that she is going to be able to meet those responsibilities. Her story is America's story, too, and it is a snapshot of what is occurring in the economy.

Federal Reserve Chairman Jerome Powell said last week that "some of the headwinds the U.S. economy faced in previous years have [now] turned into tailwinds." The economy continues to pick up steam.

I have already mentioned that the number of people making unemployment claims is at its lowest level in the last 49 years, but when you look at consumer confidence, when you look at the stock market, when you look at businesses willing to invest in new plants and equipment and you see the benefits of employers competing for labor—you know, one of the benefits of seeing unemployment so low and the economy growing again is that employers are going to have to start bidding up for the workers they need in order to do the job. What that means is that wages, which have been stagnant for so many years, are now going to grow again. So in addition to the lower rates, people will have more take-home pay. They are going to see more take-home pay in addition because of the increased wages they are going to be able to demand for their hard work.

These are great and positive signs, but we have to keep telling the good stories because they so often get drowned out by the scare tactics and the hyperbole that comes from those who seem to be afraid—not that this will not work but, rather, that it will work and they will be proved terribly wrong.

Madam President, I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mrs. ERNST). The clerk will call the roll.

The assistant bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

FLORIDA HURRICANE DISASTER ASSISTANCE

Mr. NELSON. Madam President, it has been almost 6 months since Hurricane Irma struck Florida. It has been about a month since we passed the most recent disaster supplemental appropriations bill, which finally included the money for Florida's fisheries, citrus growers, and communities across the State that we have been fighting for since day one, since the storm passed.

Today, I spoke to the Secretary of Commerce, Wilbur Ross, and I asked him to immediately release this critical funding to help the people of our State. Florida's fishermen are still waiting for their help too.

Hurricane Irma caused extensive damage to vessels, facilities, docks, equipment, and gear, especially in the Keys. Many in the spiny lobster industry lost all of their traps. The disaster supplemental appropriations gave NOAA \$200 million for Federal fishery disasters like the one that Secretary Ross declared for Florida. Where is the money?

Let's talk about the broader impact to the oceans. Did you know that Florida's coral reef tract is the third largest barrier reef in the world? It is a reef that starts south of Key West and goes all the way up the coast, almost all the way to Fort Pierce. The coral supports the spiny lobsters and the stone crabs, which are served in restaurants around the country. This industry is important to Florida's economy.

Hurricane Irma tossed all manner of debris around. Monroe County has already spent almost \$20 million to remove over 2 million cubic yards of waste—roofs, appliances, bicycles, trailer homes, and boats. The debris was also swept into the water, which is threatening the corals, and into the canals, where it blocks transportation.

I want you to take a look at this picture. This is one of the canals in the Keys. Look at what is sitting in the canal—a whole mobile home that was lifted up from the mobile home park on this side of the canal. There it is, in the water.

Take a look at this. Do you see what is in the canal? Do you see out here? That is the ocean. This canal is coming right in. What happens is that eventually some of the debris goes into the Atlantic. It gets near the reef. Some of it submerges. The wave action is sending it back and forth.

You can imagine any one of those pieces of debris knocking constantly into delicate coral that is already diseased, that is already overheated because the rising temperature of the water. You can imagine what is happening. Whether it is a mobile home sitting in the canal or whether it is all of this junk that is sitting in the canal and that eventually goes out, this is what we need help with.

It has been over a month since we passed the disaster supplemental appropriations bill. Why isn't the money flowing? That is what I called the Secretary of Commerce about this morning. I told him: Mr. Secretary, my request is very, very simple. Just get the money out. The money is appropriated. It is there.

I said: Mr. Secretary, will you please crack the whip on NOAA so that you can get this money out and we can get this place cleaned up, as well as protect those coral reefs from the damage they have already undergone?

Then I said: What happened in this storm is, whether for lobster or stone crab, the traps were all swept away. The poor fishermen don't have any traps. They need help too. That is what this disaster appropriations bill is for. Mr. Secretary, you have to crack the whip to get them going.

Unfortunately, this is not the only issue we are facing. Florida's citrus industry suffered over \$760 million in losses from the storm. Why? Because the trees were full of fruit that was going to be picked within just a few weeks. Along came the storm; the winds were severe. In Southwest Florida, some of the citrus crops were 100 percent lost. In fact, the winds were so high that they ended up uprooting citrus trees. Further north, in Central Florida, the groves there lost 50 to 60 percent of their crops.

The citrus industry cannot survive those kinds of losses, and that is why we have a disaster appropriations bill. There were losses of over \$760 million from the storm. The rest of Florida's agriculture took a big hit, too, with an estimated \$2.5 billion in total damages.

In February, we finally came through with \$3.8 billion for the U.S. Department of Agriculture. Of that money, \$2.6 billion was supposed to go directly to farmers and ranchers. It is March, and those folks haven't seen a dime.

After I talked to the Secretary of Commerce, Wilbur Ross, I put in a call to the Secretary of Agriculture. I have called several times today. I have yet to connect with him. If any of his staff are listening, there is a bottleneck at the USDA that is preventing this money from going to the families who desperately need it. I will continue to call Secretary Perdue to ask him to do what I asked Secretary Wilbur Ross to do: Crack the whip on his organization to get the money flowing. That is why we passed supplemental emergency appropriations. Now the Federal agencies need to get the money out the door.

This is so frustrating because the administration knew that Congress was discussing a disaster supplemental bill when Hurricane Harvey hit Texas in August. Then Irma hit, and then Maria hit.

Six months later, most of the Federal agencies are just starting to dust off their pencils and figure out how they are going to allocate the funding. What is wrong with you? People are hurting. They are going bankrupt. You have to get that money out.

Can you imagine how you would feel if your family's entire citrus crop had been wiped out and you had been holding your breath waiting for disaster assistance funding, which finally came over a month ago, and then you were told by the folks at the USDA that you were going to have to wait for several more months until USDA figures out how to get you the money? It is no wonder that people are fed up with bureaucracy.

Additionally, many of our cities and counties have yet to see any reimbursements from FEMA for Hurricane Irma. In fact, many have yet to be fully reimbursed for Hurricane Matthew, which struck almost 2 years ago. Unbelievably, all those counties that were devastated had paid for the debris removal. The State of Florida missed the deadline—didn't turn it in on time.

Of course, what we had to do to cover the State of Florida's mistake was to plead with FEMA: Forget the mistake; it is the local counties and cities that need the money.

Not getting the money out is totally unacceptable. While we are still waiting for reimbursements from these storms, how can we expect these local governments to prepare for the 2018 hurricane season that will start in just a few months, right around the corner?

Let me say it again. This is unacceptable for the slow-walking—the foot-dragging—that is going on in getting the money out the door. I am going to keep pounding on this until the folks in Florida start getting the help they need and deserve.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Florida.

#### GUN VIOLENCE

Mr. NELSON. Madam President, since I see no other Senator who seeks recognition, I thought I would take the occasion to bring the Senate up to date on what is happening down in Florida in the aftermath of 17 people being gunned down at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School.

As we know, we have seen those students speak out with a boldness and clarity that is rarely seen, and they are not being intimidated at all as to what needs to be done. As a matter of fact, in the aftermath of the shooting—and while some of the funerals have still been going on—since our Florida State Legislature is in session, over the course of 2 weeks, the students have gone to the capital city of Tallahassee and have held individual meetings with State legislators. They have held a rally outside of the capital and insisted that maybe—just maybe—this might be a time that the State legislature should confront this issue head-on: that, in fact, there was something to the fact that a weapon that was originally developed for the military, an AR-15—the semiautomatic version of a military weapon—could do such damage and quickly go about killing so many people. It was 17 in the case of the high school.

Just 2 years earlier, it was 49 people in Orlando at the Pulse nightclub. In between, we saw several mass killings with high-powered, military-style assault rifles in Texas, as well as 59 people being gunned down in Las Vegas.

Last week, I talked about the assault weapon, and I have since had, over the weekend, constituents in Florida ask me to come back and speak on the floor of the Senate about the difference in the damage—the mayhem, the carnage, the slaughter—that occurs as a result of an assault rifle as compared to a handgun. You don't have to take it from this Senator. You can talk to the trauma surgeons. You can talk to the radiologist in the trauma center. As a matter of fact, several articles in the past week have been written in various publications in Florida and in the national press, along with there being