

of 86. Those of us who served with Zell knew him as a kind and honorable man and a committed public servant.

He rose from a childhood without electricity and running water well into his school years to serve the State of Georgia as Governor and later as Senator. Zell Miller did so with grit and determination, never afraid to buck partisanship in favor of his principles.

Also, this past Thursday, Senator Daniel Akaka, our former colleague from Hawaii, passed away at the age of 93. He worked closely with Senator Inouye and others to advocate for his State. As the Senator himself once put it, he always preferred being a workhorse to a show horse.

The Senate offers our condolences to their families.

WELCOMING SENATOR HYDE-SMITH

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, on an entirely different matter, we just welcomed a new colleague to this Chamber today. Senator CINDY HYDE-SMITH was sworn in. She became the 51st Senator and the first woman to represent Mississippi here in the Senate. Senator HYDE-SMITH brings experience as a State legislator and as the Mississippi commissioner of agriculture and commerce.

I know I speak for all Senators on both sides of the aisle in welcoming our new colleague. We look forward to working together and continuing this record of accomplishment for the American people.

NOMINATIONS

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, on another matter, this week the Senate will turn to one of its most important constitutional responsibilities, the personnel business. We have a number of nominees to consider in the next several days.

First is Claria Horn Boom, President Trump's pick to serve as a Federal district judge for both the Eastern and Western Districts of Kentucky. Through her work in both the public and private sectors, Ms. Boom has distinguished herself as a problem-solver, a trusted adviser to clients and her community.

Letters in support of her nomination share a theme: She has the skills and experiences to excel as a district judge. "High standards, ample preparation, and a fears intellect"; "unfailingly thoughtful, gracious, and diligent"—these are just some of the ways Ms. Boom is described by those she served and worked with in Kentucky. The Judiciary Committee came to the same conclusion, advancing her nomination on a voice vote.

Later today the full Senate will vote to advance this talented and non-controversial nominee, and then I hope we will be able to quickly confirm her.

Then, in the coming days, we will consider several more judges and im-

portant nominees for the Department of Labor, the EPA, and the National Labor Relations Board. These and many other positions remain vacant nearly a year and a half into the Trump administration.

Qualified nominees stand ready, but Senate Democrats are using the procedural playbook to obstruct and delay. In many cases, for example, they are insisting that the Senate exhaust postcloture time even on unobjectionable district court nominees who have gone on to overwhelming confirmation—for examples, Walter Counts, who was confirmed 96 to 0, or Karen Gren Scholer, who was confirmed 95 to 0.

I will have more to say on these partisan tactics in the coming days. For now, let me make one thing clear. The Senate's workweek will not end—will not end—until all of these amply qualified nominees are confirmed.

TAX REFORM

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, now on one final matter, there is just one more week until the deadline for Americans to file our 2017 tax returns. It is not exactly a national holiday, but this year there is a silver lining. This April is the last time Americans will file taxes under the old, outdated Tax Code that is on its way out, thanks to historic tax reform.

A year from now, families will be filing under a simpler and fairer tax code that lets them keep more of what they have earned and send less to the IRS. They will benefit from a doubled standard deduction, from major expansions in key provisions like the child tax credit, and, of course, from significantly lower tax rates.

All told, the average family of four earning a median income of around \$70,000 could see a tax cut of over \$2,000. But let's remember, the American people do not need to wait until next year to start seeing the fruits of once-in-a-generation tax reform.

Job creators are already implementing plans to hire, expand, and invest in their American workers. Millions of workers have already received word of a tax reform bonus, permanent raise, or other new benefits, such as paid family leave policies or expanded retirement assistance. That includes thousands of employees of Southwire, a wire manufacturer that employs hundreds of Kentuckians at its location in Hawesville. For hard-working men and women at Southwire, tax reform means bonuses and expanded educational opportunities.

The benefits of our new 21st century Tax Code are certainly no secret. As Americans put the finishing touches on their tax returns under the old, outdated system for the last time, there is good news to look forward to, and there is good news that is actually already here.

MEASURES PLACED ON THE CALENDAR—S. 2629 AND H.R. 5247

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, I understand there are two bills at the desk due for a second reading en bloc.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The leader is correct.

The clerk will read the bills by title for the second time.

The legislative clerk read as follows:

A bill (S. 2629) to improve postal operations, service, and transparency.

A bill (H.R. 5247) to authorize the use of eligible investigational drugs by eligible patients who have been diagnosed with a stage of a disease or condition in which there is reasonable likelihood that death will occur within a matter of months, or with another eligible illness, and for other purposes.

Mr. MCCONNELL. In order to place the bills on the calendar under the provisions of rule XIV, I object to further proceedings en bloc.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Objection having been heard, the bills will be placed on the calendar.

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Democratic leader is recognized.

WELCOMING SENATOR HYDE-SMITH

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, first, let me welcome back my fellow Senators after a productive State work period. Let me welcome our newest Senator, CINDY HYDE-SMITH, the junior Senator from Mississippi. She is the first woman to represent the State of Mississippi, and I welcome her warmly to this Chamber.

REMEMBERING DANNY AKAKA

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, over the past weeks, as we have been away, we have heard of the passing of two of our Senators: Zell Miller and Danny Akaka.

I would like to say a few words about Danny Akaka, who was a good friend of mine. In everything he did, he was a soldier, a teacher, and a statesman. He embodied the spirit of Hawaii. He was so sincere in his beliefs and such a kind and gentle man that Senators went out of their way to help him and, of course, he fought so hard for his State. He taught us so much in his modesty, in his persistence, and in his love of his constituents.

So for all he taught us, for his service and for his friendship, we say "mahalo" one final time.

CONGRATULATING SENATOR DUCKWORTH

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, it was TAMMY DUCKWORTH who first informed me of Senator Akaka's passing, and it shows God's rhythms of life, the passing of Danny Akaka, after a long service and wonderful life, and now we have

just learned of the birth of TAMMY DUCKWORTH's child. It is a milestone. TAMMY DUCKWORTH, a few hours ago, became the first Senator to give birth while in office. We are very glad to hear that she and her newborn daughter are happy and healthy.

COMMONSENSE VALUES

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, like all of my colleagues, I spent the past few weeks crisscrossing my State meeting with constituents. I am always struck by their commonsense values. Folks want to be able to afford quality healthcare. That is probably their greatest worry. They know healthcare is so vital to them and for families. They know costs keep going up. They are worried about premiums, especially after the Republican Congress has done so much to sabotage our healthcare system; talking about tearing down the healthcare system but never building it up in any way.

Folks also want a good job with decent benefits and higher wages, but they are not seeing much of that in the wake of the Republican tax bill. In fact, many of them are disappointed that they are not receiving more. They are seeing corporations buy back a lot of their stock, which boosts compensation for executives and shareholders, but they don't see that much of a bump in their paychecks. The bottom line is, they are asking: Why are the wealthy getting so much more money in the tax break than we are? I have heard that from one end of my State to the other.

Another problem: folks want to be able to send their kids to school and know they will be safe. I talked to one mom whose daughter just doesn't want to go to school after what happened in Parkland. She is afraid. She is 7 years old.

A few weeks ago, I marched with hundreds of thousands of New Yorkers in the March For Our Lives. Their energy and optimism and dedication give me hope that finally the time has come for Congress to take meaningful action on gun safety.

Another example where our Republican colleagues who run this Senate haven't done enough—not close to enough—is on the issue of gun safety. On these issues and more, the Republican majority has done very little. What they have done has been on behalf of entrenched special interests: tax cuts for corporations and the super-wealthy, gutting healthcare to pay for more tax cuts, and holding back on commonsense gun safety laws like universal gun safety checks because the NRA opposes it.

The American people are fed up with large, special, and powerful interests getting their way, while average folks get left behind. That is what I heard while traveling my State.

In November, the American people will have a chance to move this country in a dramatically different direction, away from the corporate special

interest-driven politics, away from the swamp—I will talk more about that later, but President Trump has made it worse, despite claims that he is making it better—and toward politics that work for the middle class and those struggling to get there. The enthusiasm among so many Americans—not just core Democrats but others—of going to the polls and making their voices heard because they want a change in direction in this country was heartening and strengthening to me. The Democratic Senate minority is working to get away from those special interest politics. That is what a Democratic majority will deliver if elected in November.

NOMINATION OF ANDREW WHEELER

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, this week the Senate will consider several nominations, including the nomination of Andrew Wheeler to be Deputy Administrator at the Environmental Protection Agency. Mr. Wheeler—not atypical of this administration, not atypical of the dense swamp that they have made a whole lot worse—is, what else, an industry lobbyist who has worked on behalf of big polluters and climate change deniers. He spent years working to undermine or lobby against environmental protections he may soon oversee. As a lobbyist, he helped raise money for a few Republican Senators who sit on the committee that recently approved his nomination. Swamp, President Trump? You are creating it; you are making it a lot worse.

Wheeler's nomination fits the pattern in the Trump administration of nominating industry lobbyists to lead agencies that are supposed to be a watchdog over those very industries. The nerve it takes for President Trump and his allies to preach “drain the swamp” after all the President has done to fill the swamp since coming to Washington. His Cabinet is filled with multimillionaires, hedge fund managers, corporate executives, and former lobbyists with sprawling conflicts of interest. Mr. Wheeler is only the latest in a long line of swamp nominees. I will be opposing his nomination.

EPA ADMINISTRATOR PRUITT

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, the Wheeler nomination sheds even more light on the current storm surrounding EPA Administrator Scott Pruitt. If there was ever somebody who characterizes the swamp, it is Scott Pruitt, and all Americans should believe that, regardless of your views on the environment or whether wind or solar or natural gas or oil or coal is the right form of energy.

What Pruitt is doing is just incredible. In a relatively brief tenure at EPA, he has amassed an embarrassing list of scandals. He has ordered the construction of an expensive soundproof office at the EPA for reasons un-

known, when none of his predecessors, Democratic or Republican, saw any need for such a facility. He has typically flown coach when paying for travel out of his own pocket but elected to fly first class when the taxpayers foot the bill. After moving to Washington, Administrator Pruitt rented an apartment for a cutrate price from—guess who—an energy lobbyist and former campaign donor who represents multiple clients with businesses before the EPA during Pruitt's tenure.

The level of hypocrisy in this administration is staggering. President Trump says he is going to drain the swamp. Pruitt characterizes the swamp in just about all of his actions, and Trump sticks by him. If you want to drain the swamp, Mr. President, get rid of Mr. Pruitt.

Unfortunately, President Trump has stood by Pruitt, despite obvious abuses of the taxpayers' money and trust. Why? Well, he likes what he is doing to unwind critical environmental protections on behalf of powerful industries.

The bottom line is simple. President Trump is so beholden to the special interests that supported Administrator Pruitt and his extreme, anti-green, industry-driven agenda that he is willing to turn a blind eye to serious ethical problems. If Big Oil and Big Gas are happy with EPA Administrator Pruitt, so, it seems, is President Trump.

In supporting Administrator Pruitt, President Trump is lowering the bar of government ethics and accountability to the floor. What abuse of the American people's trust will President Trump not tolerate if Administrator Pruitt is allowed to continue in his position despite flagrant graft? How can the President, with a straight face, say he aims to drain the swamp when he allows a man like Pruitt to stay? How much will President Trump let the standards for ethical conduct in his administration deteriorate?

I say to President Trump: The corruption and incompetence of this administration has reached a fever pitch.

President Trump, if you truly mean to drain the swamp—and it doesn't seem that you do—you ought to fire Administrator Pruitt immediately. Accept his resignation. Let him leave, which alone will clean up Washington in a way that Pruitt has not cleaned up our environment.

CBO REPORT

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, now, on the CBO report.

Today CBO came out with a report that revised its projections of the deficit, saying they have “increased markedly” since the Republican tax bill added about \$1.9 trillion to the deficit. By 2020, the annual deficit will surpass \$1 trillion.

It is a reminder of just how wrong the predictions were that the Republican tax bill would somehow pay for itself. It is also a reminder of how unconcerned the current Republican Party is about deficits.