

hearing will likely take place next month.

In the meantime, this is a widespread power outage. It is the latest example of why so many people who were forced to leave the island after the storm haven't been able to return home, even though they want to. Yet, despite all the island's ongoing troubles, the Federal Emergency Management Agency, FEMA, said this week it is going to terminate the transitional shelter assistance for more than 1,600 families across the United States, and 600 of them are in my State of Florida. It doesn't make sense. For too many of these displaced families, the only thing keeping a roof over their head right now is the FEMA program, and it is transitional housing assistance. What that means is, they are either in hotels or motels and, in some cases, apartments, where FEMA is providing them temporary shelter because they have been displaced from their homes; in this case, the island of Puerto Rico.

Storms like Hurricane Maria did this to the island of Puerto Rico. We have a responsibility to provide them with all the assistance we can. Senator RUBIO and I sent a letter to the FEMA Administrator and to Governor Rossello, the Governor of Puerto Rico, urging them to work together to extend this vital program. At the very least, because there are so many of these families who have children in school, to extend it to the end of the school year so the family doesn't have to be uprooted while their child is still in school.

I am happy to report that Governor Rossello has made that formal request to FEMA. The deadline is tomorrow. Hopefully, FEMA is listening to the Governor and to the pleas of Senator RUBIO and me as well because students and families have had endless disruptions and need some semblance of stability so they can finish out the year.

The hard fact is this. The situation in Puerto Rico is far from over. These are our fellow U.S. American citizens, and they desperately need our help. We should be providing them with all the help we can.

Mr. President, I want to speak on another topic.

(The remarks of Senator NELSON pertaining to the introduction of S. 2720 are printed in today's RECORD under "Statements on Introduced Bills and Joint Resolutions.")

Mr. NELSON. I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. RUBIO. Madam President, we are on the nomination of Congressman BRIDENSTINE to be the new Administrator at NASA. I want to tie it into

what I will talk about in a moment because it comes down to Presidential appointments and the problems we are running into with regard to them.

I was not enthused by the nomination. It is nothing personal against Mr. BRIDENSTINE. I feel that NASA is an organization that needs to be led by a space professional. Unfortunately, a few weeks ago, the Acting Administrator resigned—or, I should say, retired. His last day on the job is the 30th. So it leaves us with the prospect of this incredibly important agency for Florida and the country with a vacancy in its top job. We are on our second Acting Administrator. If one were to do the math, even if Congressman BRIDENSTINE were to withdraw and a new vetting process were to begin for a new nominee, by the time it would work its way through the administration, the committee process, and the floor, the way things are going here, we could be into February-March, at the earliest, of next year. There is no way NASA can go 2 years and X number of months without having a permanent Administrator.

One makes these decisions always under the context that a President should have significant discretion in picking the team. Whether you like it or not, millions of Americans last year voted for the President. He was elected, and he has a right to govern. In 4 years—in less than 4 years now, in 2½ years—the American people will have the chance, once again, through our democratic process, to opine on whether or not they will want him to have a second term. Our job here is to provide advice and consent. We are to analyze these nominees and determine whether or not we want to support them.

My view of it is, as has been the tradition of the Senate for the entire existence of the Republic, that we give great deference to the President on choosing the qualifications. We want to make sure that people are qualified and that there is nothing about them that would disqualify them. It is my view that the more important the job the more discretion the President deserves. It is why, although I had significant reservations about the nomination of Secretary Tillerson, I decided to support it, because I believed the President deserved significant discretion. When you get to the subsecretaries and the like, I think that discretion diminishes.

It is what has led me to decide to support Congressman BRIDENSTINE, despite my reservations, and it is what, I hope, will lead my colleagues—at least a sufficient number—to support the nomination of Mike Pompeo to be the Secretary of State.

Let me read you some of the previous votes we have had here in the Senate. All but one of them predates my service.

Colin Powell was confirmed by a voice vote, which is almost unimaginable in a 21st century Senate, but in 2001, on January 20, by a unanimous

voice vote, he was confirmed as the Secretary of State.

A few years later, in 2005, Condoleezza Rice was confirmed as Secretary of State by a vote of 85 to 13. Now, it was still 13 noes, but, nonetheless, it was 85 yeases. I assure you that not everyone who voted for her was happy about her nomination. People didn't necessarily agree with her. One of the people who supported her, I believe, was future President Barack Obama.

Hillary Clinton was nominated and confirmed in the Senate by a vote of 94 to 2, and I promise you that a significant number of the Members on my side of the aisle may have respected Secretary Clinton but strongly disagreed with her and her views on a number of issues, but, nonetheless, they felt the President deserved to have his nominee.

When she resigned, her replacement was then-Senator Kerry, who was the chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee, with whom I had significant policy disagreements in the Senate and during his time as Secretary of State. Yet I, along with 93 other Members of the Senate, supported his nomination, and he was confirmed.

NOMINATION OF MIKE POMPEO

Madam President, we now have the Director of the Central Intelligence Agency—a man who is clearly qualified. He is a graduate of the U.S. Military Academy, a person who has served this country in uniform, who has served his country in Congress, who has been successful in the private sector, and who has served as the Director of the Central Intelligence Agency.

We have learned over the last couple of days that the President has significant trust in him, so much so that he was willing to send him privately to begin setting the stage for, perhaps, the most important short-term diplomatic engagement this country will have with North Korea. By the way, one of the most important things you want in a Secretary of State is for the President to have confidence in him. You have to have someone who, when he goes abroad and meets with people, the people know he has the President's ear and speaks for the administration. Mike Pompeo clearly has that. Yet we face the prospect of significant opposition to the point at which there are questions about whether it will pass in the committee. Although, I think it will pass on the floor.

I hope people will recalibrate their thinking. I don't think you have to agree with Mike Pompeo. You most certainly don't have to feel that he is the person you would have picked had you been President. You need to recognize that you are not the President, and none of us here are the President. The President deserves to have a team of people whom he trusts and can work with and who are qualified. I do not believe anyone could argue that Mike Pompeo is not qualified. He is certainly as qualified—in fact, I would argue

more qualified—as the person whom he would replace in terms of experience in his field. I hope people understand that and are willing to be a little bit flexible about this.

I understand the interest groups are ginning up. Listen, we have the same thing on our side of the aisle. In full disclosure and candor, when President Obama was the President, there were interest groups on the right of center who constantly pressured Congress to oppose everything, not just legislation but also nominees. I assure you that I did not get a lot of love mail when I decided to support Senator Kerry at the time. But it was the right thing to do because he was clearly qualified, and that is who the President wanted. I hope that that is what we will do in this case in confirming Mike Pompeo, because this Nation faces some very significant challenges in foreign policy that need to be immediately addressed, and we simply cannot do that without a Secretary of State.

For me, that became quite apparent this weekend. I happened to travel to Lima, Peru, for the Summit of the Americas. The Vice President attended on the President's behalf because of the situation in Syria, and the Deputy Secretary of State, Mr. SULLIVAN, was there and did a good job, but there is no replacement for a Secretary of State. We had no Secretary of State at the summit. The key issue—one that, I think, Director Pompeo, if confirmed as Secretary, could help with—is the situation in Venezuela.

VENEZUELA

Madam President, I understand that the headlines are dominated by events in the Middle East and by the geopolitical and economic and trade conflict between the United States and China, but I do want to take a moment to talk about something that I have been speaking about on the floor of the Senate for the better part of 4½ years. It is one that I know that Director Pompeo knows well, as we have talked about it extensively, and that is the growing catastrophe that is Venezuela.

To begin, I want to say clearly that we should care about it simply because that catastrophe has become a threat to the United States and to the region.

What do I mean by that?

First, the regime in control, Nicolas Maduro's, is a state sponsor of drug trafficking. It is very simple. What I mean by that is this: Drug trafficking networks enjoy the protection of the Venezuelan Government. In fact, one of the concessions—literally, one of the contracts—that the Maduro regime gives its cronies and loyalists is drug trafficking networks.

A drug trafficker who wants to move coca out through Colombia, into Venezuela, and then into the Caribbean or Europe will find the right general or the right individual in the Maduro government, and that individual will ensure that his plane is not shot down and that, in fact, the military and the government organisms of the Govern-

ment of Venezuela—of the Government of Maduro—protect him, facilitate him. The people who are supposed to be stopping him are helping him. It is a racket. It resembles organized crime. That is what Maduro does.

We have seen an incredible surge in coca production in Colombia to historic levels over the last couple of years, and it is headed here, to a nation that is already struggling with an opioid crisis. We are about to be flooded with cheap cocaine once again, and a significant amount of it will be trafficked into this country with the aid, the assistance, and the support of the dictator in Venezuela. That is a threat to the United States and to the region.

No. 2, he is a threat to the United States and to the region because he has triggered a migratory crisis that is destabilizing all of Venezuela's neighbors, primarily Colombia, which each day is absorbing tens of thousands of people fleeing starvation and rampant disease, unlike anything we have ever seen, absent a natural disaster in this hemisphere. It is destabilizing countries that are already struggling.

Colombia is already struggling to try to deal with drug trafficking groups that are, in many parts of that country, more powerful than the government in some areas and the demobilization of the FARC and another terrorist group called the ELN. We have invested, along with our Colombian partners, millions and millions of American taxpayer dollars to help Colombia, which, just a decade and a half ago, was on the verge of being a failed state. We helped them to succeed. They are among our best allies in the world and, certainly, if not our best, one of the best, top-of-the-list allies in the Western Hemisphere. They are being destabilized because they are absorbing tens of thousands of migrants a day who are fleeing not just political oppression but starvation.

Healthcare experts are telling us that children in Venezuela will not fully develop physically to their full potential because they are malnourished today. Infants, newborns are dying in cribs and in hospitals because of a lack of medicine and because of a lack of food. These are images that we are used to seeing in other parts of the world, and it breaks our hearts when it happens somewhere else. This is happening in our hemisphere, and it is all man-made in one of the richest countries in the hemisphere—the most oil-rich country on the planet that just a few years ago was one of the most prosperous economies in the entire region.

People are starving, and they are starving because of a man-made crisis. The Maduro regime uses food as a weapon. No. 1, one of the other concessions it gives the cronies around Maduro is that if they are loyalists, he puts them in charge of food distribution. What does that mean? That means you can siphon the food into the black market where you can make an exorbitant profit. You obviously are

going to take some for yourself so that your family gets to eat.

Then they have the sick process where, in order for you to get food from the government, you have to show up with your government-issued ID in Venezuela. They know who the government supporters are, and they know who isn't. They know who turns out to vote, and they know who doesn't. It is a fraudulent election, by the way, because ultimately they will manipulate it as they have done before. So imagine that they know you didn't vote for them. They know how you voted because they monitor the machines. If you support the government, you get food, and if you don't, you don't get food. That is why he doesn't want food coming in.

The third is that we are engaged in what, I believe, is global competition or a battle between authoritarianism and democracy. There is a rise in the threat of authoritarianism in Turkey, in the Philippines, obviously in China and Russia, and in this hemisphere it is Venezuela. Venezuela is openly attacking the regional democratic order. They have basically canceled their Constitution. They have tried to replace the democratically elected national assembly. They have removed the legitimate judiciary branch and replaced it with loyalists of their own.

Fourth, there is a growing body of evidence that the Maduro regime provides a platform for the enemies of the security of the United States, including Russia and Hezbollah.

The spillover effects are undermining our efforts and the efforts of our regional partners to promote democracy, human rights, and stability in our own backyard in our hemisphere. That was apparent last week at the Summit of the Americas, where a growing number of countries—Argentina, Brazil, Peru—are making incredible strides and continue to build upon the democratic structures they have in place. The Peruvian President recently had to resign after a previous President resigned because the rule of law is working. In Brazil, it is the same thing. They are going to have elections this year in Mexico, in Brazil, in Colombia. These will be legitimate elections. They may elect someone who agrees with us 50 percent of the time, and they may elect someone who agrees with us 90 percent of the time, but they will elect someone. Yet, in stark contrast to that, is basically a coup d'état that has occurred in Venezuela, where a small group of people have canceled the democratic order or at least they have tried to.

In all of this, there is great news; that is, for the first time in recent memory, the democracies of the region have come together to act on this. It began with the so-called Lima Group, which is a collection of countries that make up the overwhelming majority of the economic power and the population size of the hemisphere. They have long banded together to criticize the democratic order. We are not even officially