

my Democratic colleagues to convince everyone that this growing tide of new prosperity is somehow a bad thing.

In the last few weeks alone, the percentage of Americans who are unemployed, underemployed, or who have given up finding a job has dropped to a 17-year low. Recently, new jobless claims reached their lowest level since 1969, and the total number of Americans who are receiving unemployment benefits is as small as it has been since—listen to this—1973.

Let me put that another way. Notwithstanding 45 years of population growth, there are fewer total Americans receiving unemployment benefits under President Trump and this Republican Congress than at any other point under Presidents Ford, Carter, Reagan, Bush, Clinton, Bush, or Obama. We all know economic indicators can be volatile, and Washington is far from the only force behind them. In fact, getting the Federal Government out of the way is often the solution. The headwinds that blew in the face of American entrepreneurs and small business owners for 8 years have died down. Now the wind is at their backs.

In December 2017, after just 1 year of Republican policies, optimism among American manufacturers hit the highest level ever recorded. In large part, that is because Washington had gotten out of their way. Back in 2013, more than 75 percent of manufacturers said an unfavorable business climate from taxes and regulations was a top concern. Now fewer than 19 percent have that worry. This is a real-life experiment in two different governing philosophies.

For 8 years, Democrats operated from the leftwing premise that businesses need to lose in order for workers to win. So they raised taxes, passed mammoth new regulations like Dodd-Frank and ObamaCare, and let runaway agencies like the EPA run roughshod over American businesses. That is what got us such lackluster results, year after year.

Fortunately, Republicans have taken a different approach—one that doesn't assume that Washington bureaucrats know best. We know that American workers can only thrive if thriving American businesses are creating jobs and raising wages. We have worked to enact an inclusive opportunity agenda to bring greater prosperity to everyone, and that is exactly what is beginning to happen.

From Florida to Indiana, Fifth Third Bank is raising its minimum wage for employees. Kroger is planning to hire 600 new associates across my home State of Kentucky. Nationwide data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics show that the amount employers spend on salaries and benefits grew more in 2017 than in any calendar year under President Obama—two different philosophies, and just 16 months in, two very different outcomes for American workers and middle-class families.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The majority whip.

NOMINATION OF GINA HASPEL

Mr. CORNYN. Mr. President, when I was a kid, I used to like to read the comics in the newspaper every day. Usually, it was some interesting caricature of real life that was particularly funny. Yet the sorts of caricatures we have been seeing in the past few days about the President's nominee to the CIA are not funny and are not comical at all. What we have seen is a gross caricature of this woman's distinguished 33-year career. I am talking about Gina Haspel at the CIA.

Our Democratic colleagues are stuck in the past. They are trying to, really, tag her with some of the more controversial episodes during the aftermath of 9/11. The fact is, that is a caricature of her three decades of hard work and service in spanning the globe while working in the intelligence community and trying to keep America safe. They, of course, need to get their facts straight regarding the episodes they complain about. The fact is that they have all been investigated, and Gina Haspel has been exonerated. They are wrong to ignore everything else she has done in her career, as well as the fact that she will be the first woman Director of the Central Intelligence Agency—someone enormously popular with the rank and file in her having come from within their ranks.

The particular episodes that we will hear talked about tomorrow at the open hearing before the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence involve enhanced interrogation techniques that were used in isolated instances in the days immediately following 9/11. These programs were, of course, vetted by all appropriate legal advisors and were depended upon in good faith by intelligence officers and the Department of Defense. Congressional leaders were briefed on them and had no objection because the threat immediately after 9/11 was that al-Qaida had been meeting with some Pakistani nuclear scientists, perhaps with the objective of getting a nuclear device that they could use to kill more Americans and more innocent people. This was, truly, an emergency situation, and policymakers were demanding that our military and intelligence community do everything they could to prevent another 9/11 attack.

It is fundamentally unfair for some to want to change the rules after the fact now that we are feeling safe and secure, and it is obscene to hold intelligence officials responsible for policy decisions that they did not make but which they were charged with executing. We expected them to be executed—"we" being the policymakers in the executive and legislative branches.

I mentioned the declassified 2011 Michael Morell memo yesterday, which exonerates Ms. Haspel from this allegation that she somehow played a part in destroying videotapes of enhanced interrogation. In the memo, Morell, who was then the Acting Director of the CIA, found no fault with Ms. Haspel's

performance and indicated that she acted appropriately in her role as it related to carrying out her supervisor's orders. Again, she was not the one who actually destroyed the tapes but, rather, acted on her supervisor's instructions to draft a cable that she expected to be vetted with the appropriate authorities and policymakers within the CIA structure.

Mr. Morell himself added a statement following the memo's release that Ms. Haspel did not destroy the videotapes of the enhanced interrogation techniques that were used on post-9/11 detainees. He said that she did not oversee their destruction either, and she did not order their destruction.

Nevertheless, I will bet one is going to hear a lot about this at tomorrow's hearing before the Senate Intelligence Committee. It is unfair to focus on an isolated event in an attempt to try to suggest that she acted inappropriately when her supervisors, including the Acting Director of the CIA, found no fault with her actions, and any allegations that she bore personal responsibility for destroying the videotapes have been affirmatively disproven.

We know from her career timeline that was produced by the CIA that Ms. Haspel spoke French and Spanish prior to joining the CIA and learned Turkish and Russian. That is interesting because, in fact, we can't know a lot in a public setting of some of her classified activities as a member of the Central Intelligence Agency. That is the nature of the work, that being that intelligence officers willingly accept the responsibility to keep classified information secret so as not to expose sources and methods that would endanger lives and undermine our ability to get intelligence to our policymakers so they can make good decisions.

Clearly, she is a student of languages and cultures around the world—exactly the kind of person you would want to lead an agency that operates internationally, like the Central Intelligence Agency. We know from declassified documents that she had field assignments in Africa and Europe in the late eighties and nineties and then went on to become station chief at multiple locations before becoming the Deputy Director of the CIA. When she worked abroad in the eighties, she encountered none other than Mother Teresa and helped arrange a phone call between Mother Teresa and President Reagan. Then she visited a local orphanage with the famous nun.

Of course, as I said, we can't talk about all of the details of her invaluable years of service here on the Senate floor because much of that information remains classified. Indeed, tomorrow, we will have an open, declassified setting, followed by a closed, classified setting so members of the committee can get answers to their questions. Yet we do know about some of the successes that the CIA and the U.S. Government achieved during the 30-plus years she served, and some of those are worth mentioning here.

I am talking, first and foremost, about killing al-Qaida's key leaders and undermining the terrorist group's operations. We, of course, remember the raid that killed Osama bin Laden 7 years ago, which was the culmination of many years of advanced intelligence operations by people just like Gina Haspel. The CIA is responsible for collecting the dots and then connecting the dots so that policymakers can make important decisions, as in President Obama's decision to take out Osama bin Laden once he had been located. The CIA and Gina Haspel deserve tremendous credit for the indispensable role she and they played.

There are also things like the disruption of Najibullah Zazi's plot to bomb the subway in New York in 2009—another major intelligence and law enforcement success. An al-Qaida recruit, Zazi trained with the group in Pakistan and returned to the United States to build explosives for what could have been a devastating attack. According to news reports, it was through our intelligence collection efforts that we identified Zazi and that he was eventually arrested and convicted. The CIA is involved in far more than just counterterrorism operations. It deserves credit for all other equally important work, as well, some of which Ms. Haspel and her colleagues, undoubtedly, participated in.

We know the intelligence community targets all aspects of international criminal organizations, for example, and, of course, there are many more successes that will never see the light of day because those wins must be kept secret so that ongoing operations and sources that supply information and tactical methods are protected so they can remain useful in the future.

As Jane Harman—a 9-term former Democratic Member of the House of Representatives—wrote not long ago:

The [Intelligence Community] has been the tip of America's spear for decades. Selfless men and women have put their lives on the line—often doing work their families are unaware of—to keep us safe, and they have. Yes, there have been some tragic failures, but far more impressive successes.

That is from one of our former Democratic colleagues. Her words, of course, apply to Ms. Haspel's career as much as they do to any other intelligence professional's.

Ms. Haspel has put her life on the line to keep us safe, not for the glory, because most of what she has done has happened undercover in a way that does not reveal important sources and methods or expose other people to retaliation or attack. When we consider her nomination this week, we must see it in the light of all of the CIA's successes, not as a caricature and misrepresentation of a couple of events that occurred post-9/11. Men and women like her do what they do not because of the notoriety. It is just the opposite. They do it because they love their country and want to prevent it from harm. Ms. Haspel is no exception,

and she is deserving of our profound appreciation. To demonstrate that appreciation, we need to get her confirmed.

PRISON REFORM

Mr. President, one other thing on my mind today is prison reform.

Last week, my colleagues Congressmen COLLINS and JEFFRIES announced they had reached a bipartisan deal that will be marked up tomorrow in the House Judiciary Committee. I filed the same revised bill in the Senate yesterday with Senator WHITEHOUSE, our Democratic colleague from Rhode Island. I have been focused on this issue of prison reform for some time, along with a number of our colleagues on both sides of the aisle, and now it has gotten some real traction thanks to President Trump and a roundtable he hosted at the White House earlier this year.

More than 11 million people go to jail each year in the United States, and there are currently 2.3 million people in confinement. Conservatives should be concerned by those statistics for multiple reasons. For starters, the vast majority of people who end up in prison, of course, eventually reenter society. That is something we should be concerned about no matter where we stand on the ideological spectrum because people in prison will typically get out of prison. The question is: Will they be prepared for a life of crime or will they be prepared to enter a lawful society and contribute as law-abiding members?

For too long, our prisons have simply been warehouses. They have just warehoused people and not prepared or helped them to reenter society by teaching them the skills and giving them the training they need to become productive. These people leave prison and often return to a life of crime. Many have drug or alcohol addictions. Many of them lack the basic education or skills they need in order to get jobs in a lawful society.

We believe that the revolving door of recidivism—going to prison, getting out of prison, ending up back in prison—must end. Incarceration is expensive and separates offenders from their families. In other words, there is more than just the person behind bars who pays the price when someone goes to prison. We need to consider the families who are separated from their loved ones who suffer as well. This, of course, adds stresses that we can only imagine—single parenthood for those left behind and the heightened challenges of raising children as single parents in individual households.

States like Texas and others across the country have used prison reform to tackle their recidivism rates and have improved lives, lowered crime rates, and saved money too. I am glad that the legislation the House will mark up this week mirrors Texas reforms.

Among its other provisions, the bill will increase the number of good time credits for good behavior in prison—a good incentive for people to cooperate

and behave while in prison. It will limit the use of restraints on pregnant prisoners, which seems entirely appropriate, and it will improve audits to reduce or eliminate prison rape. Prison guards will be required to receive so-called de-escalation training, and the Federal Prison Industries will be able to sell products to private nonprofit organizations much more easily so that inmates will be able to learn skills they can use productively while they are still in prison and that they can use once they leave prison.

In conclusion, I look forward to a bill that will have broad bipartisan and bicameral support not only by the House but by the Senate and accomplish this important goal.

Some of the sentencing reform legislation that I and others have previously supported has proved to be so controversial that we have been unable to get it passed here in the U.S. Senate because of there being a lack of support for that combination of sentencing reform and prison reform. What we have tried to do in a way that, I believe, is entirely pragmatic and appropriate is to take the first step on prison reform and get that passed by both Houses and signed by the President. Then we can continue our work on other aspects of criminal justice reform following that success.

I yield the floor.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from Oregon.

REMEMBERING MICHAEL BEAVER

Mr. MERKLEY. Mr. President, we have all heard the sad news. While we were back in our districts last week, our Assistant Parliamentarian, Michael Phillip Beaver, passed away unexpectedly at the very young age of 39. Family and friends gathered this morning to celebrate his life.

Born in Mount Pleasant, he was the son of Linda Susan Beaver and William R. Beaver. He was a graduate of Saint Vincent College, where he studied political science with a minor in graphic design, and he earned his juris doctorate from the Ohio State University Moritz College of Law. He was a member of the Ohio and the California State Bar Associations.

Most recently, he served here in this Chamber as the Assistant Parliamentarian. Prior to that, he served as the deputy legislative counsel for the State of California. Aside from being a brilliant attorney, Michael was passionate about hockey and music. He was a talented cook, an avid gardener, and a gifted artist.

He was a loving husband to his wife, Gilda, and was a caring, fun, and patient father to his two young boys, Bradley Dastan Beaver, age 3, and Connor Milad Beaver, age 2.

It is hard to believe that an unexpected medical condition could end his life so soon at the age of 39. He was contributing so much to the United States and so much to his family. We will greatly miss him here as I know he will be missed by a very wide expanse of family and friends and community.