

of Indiana. He is joining Hoosiers to celebrate the new jobs and prosperity our Republican agenda is delivering to communities in Indiana and all over the country. After years of Democratic policies that made life harder for job creators, the United States of America is officially open for business once again.

Surveys show that since President Trump and this Republican Congress were elected, the percentage of small and independent employers feeling confident about expanding their businesses has nearly tripled. The amount that employers spend on wages, salaries, and benefits for American workers grew more in 2017 than in any calendar year of the Obama administration. The number of Americans receiving unemployment benefits is the lowest—the lowest—since 1973. Let me say that again. The number of Americans receiving unemployment benefits is the lowest it has been since 1973. Richard Nixon was in the White House back then. Republicans have focused like a laser on getting Washington out of the way. More job opportunities, higher pay, and greater prosperity are already reaching middle-class Americans.

My colleague Senator YOUNG has been sharing some of the great news that awaits the President when he gets to Indiana. He has heard from constituents like Donald from Noblesville. Donald said:

I don't consider myself rich, but applying next year's tax changes to this year's income, I'll pay over \$1,000 less in taxes next year. Everyone benefits with the new tax cuts.

A Bloomington resident named Cathy said this about her husband's tax reform bonus:

We have never had this happen. It was much appreciated.

First Farmers Bank & Trust is raising wages, writing employee bonus checks, and investing more in development for the communities it serves, with 34 branches all across Indiana.

There are stories like these being written all over the country—largely because Republicans rolled back job-killing regulations and cut taxes significantly for working families and for small businesses.

Oddly, our Democratic colleagues can't bring themselves to admit this is a good thing. Even when the facts show our growing economy is making life better for middle-class Americans, they try to shrug off the facts and fall back on the same old class warfare rhetoric. Even when people like Donald and Cathy explain how tax reform is helping them, Democrats scoff at their household finances, saying multi-thousand-dollar tax cuts are just "crumbs."

Crumbs? Maybe in New York or San Francisco, but in Kentucky, where I come from, working families don't see their tax cuts, bonuses, and pay raises as crumbs. I have a hunch it is the same in Indiana.

It is curious that only one of Indiana's Senators voted to give Hoosiers

these tax cuts and these new job opportunities. Indiana's senior Senator voted in lockstep with Democratic leaders to block tax reform from ever taking effect. Instead of working with Republicans and the President to keep the new prosperity coming, he and his colleagues have chosen to obstruct and resist on nearly every subject.

Just the other day, the Democratic leader in the House declared she plans to campaign on repealing the tax reform—that is, the Democratic leader in the U.S. House—campaign on repealing the tax reform. Tax cuts versus tax hikes, that is about as clear a contrast as you can imagine. Fortunately, for Hoosiers, Kentuckians, and all the other communities that are finally growing again after years of atrophy, Republicans will defend the American people's tax cuts and defend their new jobs.

#### RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the leadership time is reserved.

#### CONCLUSION OF MORNING BUSINESS

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Morning business is closed.

#### EXECUTIVE SESSION

#### EXECUTIVE CALENDAR

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate will proceed to executive session and resume consideration of the following nomination, which the clerk will report.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read the nomination of Michael B. Brennan, of Wisconsin, to be United States Circuit Judge for the Seventh Circuit.

Mr. McCONNELL. Madam President, I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

#### RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

The Democratic leader is recognized.

Mr. SCHUMER. Madam President, later today the Senate will vote on the confirmation of Michael Brennan to the Seventh Circuit over the objections of one of his home-State Senators, Ms. BALDWIN, who has not returned a blue slip on his nomination.

It is an abject breach of senatorial courtesy that both parties have long respected. In fact, the seat Mr. Brennan will fill on the Seventh Circuit has been held open for 6 years by the senior Senator from Wisconsin, Mr. JOHNSON,

via the same process, the blue slip. When Barack Obama was President and when PATRICK LEAHY was chairman of the Judiciary Committee, we Democrats obeyed the blue slip, and it led that seat to be vacant for 6 years. Now that the shoe is on the other foot, the Republican majority will ignore the blue-slip rights of the Democratic Senator even though it fervently believes that we ought to listen to the rights of the Republican Senator from Wisconsin. The actions of the Republican leader erode one of the few remaining customs in the Senate that forces consultation and consensus on judicial nominations.

In the grand scheme of things, the vote may seem to some of my colleagues on the other side like a small one—one judge for one circuit court. But in truth, the vote on Mr. Brennan is a death by a thousand cuts of the grand tradition of bipartisanship and comity in the U.S. Senate. I know all too well that there is plenty of blame to go around on both sides of the aisle, but if we don't take a step back now, the Senate will soon become a rubberstamp or graveyard for Presidential nominees, rendering our advice and consent nearly meaningless.

I understand the pressure on the leader from the hard right. They want judges who are not bipartisan. They wanted a judge in this case who did not go through a bipartisan judicial panel, composed of both Democrats and Republicans, who have always sent us judges from Wisconsin. Two were sent, but, instead, Brennan, who couldn't get through the panel, was sent.

This is so wrong. This goes beyond what we have seen done before. When Leader McCONNELL changed the rules on the Supreme Court—which we didn't—many on the other side, I understand, said: Well, that is tit for tat because Democrats changed the rules on the lower courts. But the blue-slip tradition has always been obeyed. We didn't change that. We could have. We could have stuffed through our nominees with no Republican support, but we didn't.

I hope for the sake of comity that one or two of my Republican colleagues will stand up and vote against Mr. Brennan's nomination, not because of his beliefs—which they may agree with, for all I know—but for the sake of the Senate, for the grand tradition of the Senate, for the right afforded to every Senator to consult on judges from their State, minority or majority, and most of all, for the traditions that have held this body together for more than two centuries and separated it from the more partisan Chamber on the other end of the Capitol.

#### RELEASE OF AMERICAN HOSTAGES IN NORTH KOREA

Madam President, on another matter—North Korea—early this morning, the three American hostages who were being held in North Korea were returned home. It was great to see them come home, back in America, back with their families.

It is a wonderful thing, but the exultation by the President and others of the greatness of North Korea doing this evades me. We can't be fooled into giving the North Korean regime credit for returning Americans who never should have been detained in the first place. American citizens are not diplomatic bargaining chips. While we celebrate the return of the three Americans, for the sake of their freedom and their families, we should not feel as if we need to give Kim Jong Un anything in return.

It is troubling to hear President Trump say that Kim Jong Un treated the Americans excellently. Kim Jong Un is a dictator. He capriciously detained American citizens, robbed them of their freedom, and didn't let them go home to their families. Their release should not be exalted; it should be expected. It is no great accomplishment of Kim Jong Un to do this.

When the President does this, he weakens American foreign policy and puts Americans at risk around the world. If our adversaries look at what the President has said in reaction to Kim Jong Un, why shouldn't they detain American citizens and get a huge pat on the back when they release them?

It is like so many of the President's foreign policy actions—quick, not thought through, related to show and to ego. If our adversaries from Iran to China who already wrongfully hold Americans think they can get something—praise, standing, diplomatic concessions—by unlawfully detaining Americans in their country, you can bet they will try. These are bad people, the leaders of these dictatorships like Iran.

So I caution the administration. We are all rooting for diplomacy to succeed on the Korean Peninsula, but we cannot sacrifice the safety of American citizens around the world in exchange for an illusory veneer of peace. I worry that this President, in his eagerness to get acclaim and a photo op, will strike a quick and bad deal, not a strong and lasting one. President Trump and Secretary Pompeo must seek strong, verifiable, enduring commitments from North Korea to disarm.

#### NUCLEAR DEAL WITH IRAN

Madam President, now on oil prices and Iran, earlier this week the President exited the Iran deal. We all know that. Even as someone who opposed the deal—which I did because I thought it was flawed; I thought President Obama and Secretary Kerry should have waited longer and given more time for the sanctions to bite, and we would have gotten a stronger and better deal. I still believe that. But once the deal is in place, it seems to me that we should not be focused on undoing this deal. We don't want a nuclear Iran. That is one of the reasons I opposed the deal. But there is no report from anybody, including our own intelligence, that Iran is violating that part of the deal.

In the meantime, Iran is doing some very bad things. It is not a country we

should admire or respect in any way—the leadership, anyway. They are trying to develop an ICBM. They are creating havoc with the Houthis in Yemen. Worst of all, in my opinion, the greatest immediate danger is that there are Iranian Revolutionary Guard troops in Syria, right near Israel's border, and hundreds, if not thousands, of deadly rockets that Iran gives to Hezbollah, a militant terrorist organization. They placed them in Lebanon where they have hegemony in certain areas. That is the greatest danger to Israel. That is the greatest danger to peace in the Middle East. Down the road, it will be the greatest danger to the United States, at least in the next several years.

What we should be doing is not undoing this deal right now but creating new sanctions and telling Iran that if they continue giving missiles to Hezbollah, if they continue sending troops to Iran, if they continue their activities with the Houthis and the placing of additional missiles, we will put on additional sanctions. That is the smartest thing to do, and that is what is most in need now, given America's and the world's security needs. But we need our allies to do it.

Sanctions don't work when they are unilateral. We learned that in South Africa years ago with apartheid. Only when the sanctions became broad and enacted by many nations did they have an effect. It is the same situation here.

The United States, by pulling out of the agreement and getting our European allies' noses way out of joint, makes it far harder to enact new sanctions on what I perceive to be the greatest dangers we face.

There is one other thing Americans should realize about pulling out of the Iran deal, and that is it affects gasoline prices across the country. According to the U.S. Energy Information Administration, gas prices will rise over the summer, and the average American family can expect to pay \$200 more this driving season than last. The Iran deal is certainly some part of that. For middle-class families, \$200 this summer is more than the tax break they will get, if they get one at all.

When President Trump makes rash decisions without consideration of the consequences and no coherent strategy, which is what has happened with Iran, the American people pay the price in many different ways: security, the declining ability to find and go after the greatest dangers we face with Iran, and money out of our own pocketbooks with an increase in gasoline prices. One of the ways Americans will pay for President Trump's unthought-out decision to exit the Iran deal will be at the gas pump this summer.

So again, to repeat, I didn't think the deal was a good deal; still, I am proud I voted no. But at this time, in this place, and for so many reasons, pulling out precipitously without our allies involved does not achieve anything, does not achieve the goals we need to

achieve, and hurts Americans in different ways.

#### PRESCRIPTION DRUG PRICES

Madam President, finally, on prescription drugs, tomorrow the President will give a speech on another important topic in American healthcare: the high cost of prescription drug prices. He is right to give that speech. Americans suffer from the highest prescription drug costs in the developed world. On average, Americans pay over \$850 a year on prescription drugs, compared to an average of \$400 across 19 other industrialized nations. Remember, that is on average.

If you are sick and need one specific new drug on the market for your condition, you could be paying in the tens of thousands of dollars per month for that drug. Sometimes that new drug isn't much different from one already on the market and hasn't been proven to be more effective. Sometimes pharmaceutical companies intentionally corner the market on the drug and raise prices by absurd percentages. We saw that with Mr. Shkreli, and there is no cop on the beat to stop the Shkrelis of the world. It is outrageous, venal, and hurts seniors, the infirm, and regular middle-class families every day.

We ought to do something about it. That is why Democrats make lowering the cost of prescription drugs a central pillar of our Better Deal agenda. We propose that there should be greater transparency from companies when they are proposing to increase the prices of their drugs. We propose allowing the government to negotiate for lower drug prices and to establish an office that would go after the most egregious companies and actors who are raising prices on drugs for no reason—price-gouging enforcement. If we were in the majority, these policies would be our top priorities.

Hopefully, President Trump will get on board. In fact, I agree with a lot of what President Trump has already said on the issue. He said that the drug companies are "getting away with murder" and in the State of the Union Address he said:

One of my greatest priorities is to reduce the price of prescription drugs. Prices will come down.

President Trump's rhetoric focuses on a problem that we have to address, and we hope sincerely that tomorrow he will follow through on that rhetoric with a tough and detailed plan to achieve what we both wish to achieve. But so far, President Trump has taken little action to downgrade the price of prescription drugs. He installed a former top executive of a pharmaceutical company, Alex Azar, to be the Secretary of Health and Human Services. Now, 6 months before the election, without consulting Democrats or Republicans on the Hill, he will give a speech tomorrow on his plan to bring down the cost of prescription drugs.

We welcome the newfound attention. We sincerely hope the President outlines a clear, strong plan in detail