

dramatic regulatory reform that helped make that happen.

In addition to these nationwide policies, we are also delivering targeted strategies to help the specific communities that have suffered the most.

In many parts of the country, including my home State of Kentucky, the Obama-era economic lag has intertwined with another major problem: the opioid epidemic. By one estimate, in 2016, more than 2 million Americans—2 million—were addicted to opioids.

This crisis that is shattering families and communities is not an isolated medical issue. There is a reason experts describe many of these fatalities as “deaths of despair.” It is, in part, a symptom of declining opportunity and communities literally falling apart. Recent studies suggest that opioid use increased the most in precisely the communities where employment rates have fallen the most, particularly in the manufacturing sector.

Complex problems demand comprehensive solutions, and that is exactly what this Congress will continue to deliver. We are attacking this from all angles. In a strong bipartisan fashion, we passed the Comprehensive Addiction and Recovery Act and the 21st Century Cures Act to bolster prevention, treatment, and law enforcement. I recently introduced the CAREER Act to help recovering addicts find jobs and stable housing to get back on their feet, and the Senate allocated billions in resources for treatment and prevention on the frontlines.

The robust Federal response is helping our first responders and professionals combat the dangers of abuse, but, as is always the case, major challenges are rarely solved here in Washington. Congress can provide resources and support to vulnerable communities, but often we do the most good by getting government's foot off the brake and letting American innovators get back to business.

For example, I recently heard some great news from one private sector problem-solver in my home State of Kentucky. In my hometown, US WorldMeds has spent the last 15 years working to bring relief to millions of Americans touched by opioid addiction. They have been working on introducing a medicine in the United States to help ease the symptoms of withdrawal. Just last month, we got word that they have received FDA approval. US WorldMeds' CEO, Breck Jones, believes this nonnarcotic medicine can help more addicts kick the habit altogether.

I had the opportunity to visit US WorldMeds' facility last year. I was so impressed by what I saw. Now that team can scale up their efforts and begin getting their treatment into the hands of Americans whose lives it could help transform—all of it made easier when Washington offers targeted support where it is needed but mostly gets out of the way of the innovators. Talk about a winning combination.

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 to resume consideration of the following nomination, which the clerk will report.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read the nomination of Robert Earl Wier, of Kentucky, to be United States District Judge for the Eastern District of Kentucky.

Mr. MCCONNELL. 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.

RUSSIA INVESTIGATION

Mr. SCHUMER. Madam President, over the past few weeks, we have all endured the increasingly novel legal theories dreamt up by the President and his lawyers regarding the special counsel's investigation into the Russian interference in the 2016 election.

Over the weekend, we learned the President's lawyers wrote a memo that asserted unfettered authority over all Federal investigations. Rudy Giuliani actually suggested that the President could have “shot James Comey” and not been indicted or prosecuted because, according to him, “in no case can [the President] be subpoenaed or indicted.” Is that incredible?

The President himself tweeted yesterday that he had the absolute right to pardon himself and that the appointment of the special counsel was unconstitutional, despite the fact that he regularly called for a special counsel to look into Hillary Clinton during the 2016 campaign. The two-facedness, the hypocrisy of saying Hillary should have it but, no, it is unconstitutional now that it applies to him—how can the American people tolerate that kind of thinking in a President? This morning, again, President Trump faulted Attorney General Sessions for recusing himself from the probe instead of helping to end it.

The President's tweet regarding Attorney General Sessions this morning is part of a pattern where the President

admits out loud and shamelessly that he was trying to take steps to end the Russia probe. First, in a television interview, the President admitted that stopping the Russia probe was his motivation for firing Director Comey. Now he says he would never have hired Sessions if he had known he was going to recuse himself, even though recusal was required by Department of Justice rules.

This latest stunning admission is just more evidence that the President may have something to hide. If he did nothing wrong, President Trump should welcome a thorough investigation to exonerate him.

Each of the claims that I have mentioned has the same theme: That the President believes he is above the law. Of course, we know the idea that anyone in America is above the law is antithetical to the very idea of America, antithetical to the very idea of democracy, and antithetical to what millions of Americans have fought for and hundreds of thousands—millions—have died for in the course of our history. We don't have a King. We have a President, bound by the same Constitution and the same laws that govern the average American citizen.

The Founding Fathers didn't set out to create a monarchy; they set out to construct a system of government entirely distinct from the monarchies of their time. That is why they installed checks and balances and devolved power between three branches to ensure the liberty of the people and guard against the encroachment of tyranny. That was their great gift to us, and their ideas have kept American democracy alive for two and one-half centuries and the admiration of the world for an equal period of time. Trump is besmirching all of that with his recent activities.

So despite what the President and his allies may feel about his authority or his absolution from legal repercussions, the Constitution and the founding principles of our country tell us he is dead wrong. President Trump: We are not a monarchy. You are not a King. We are a constitutional democracy, so act like it.

JUDICIAL NOMINATIONS

Madam President, on another matter, this week the Senate is processing a number of judges. Some of these judges are noncontroversial. As I have said in the past, Democrats are committed to working with the majority to process these noncontroversial nominees, but there are several highly controversial nominees after this slate that bear attention.

Tomorrow, the Senate Judiciary Committee will consider the nomination of David Porter for the Third Circuit Court of Appeals, despite the fact that Senator CASEY has not returned a blue slip on Mr. Porter, who was nominated by the White House over the home State Senator's repeated objections. Mr. Porter, like so many of the nominees submitted by this President,

is far outside the judicial mainstream. Throughout his career, he has maintained affiliations with anti-LGBT organizations and expressed personal views that are contrary to the interests of American workers—the very people President Trump defends: the American working people. He appoints judges who undo their rights, their opportunities, their ladders up. This is an example. Unfortunately, the majority is, once again, bucking a century-old tradition of respecting the opposition of home State Senators and moving forward with the consideration of yet another hard-right, anti-working class ideologue.

On Thursday, the Judiciary Committee will consider the nomination of Ryan Bounds for a circuit court seat in Oregon, although neither Senator WYDEN nor Senator MERKLEY, the two Senators from Oregon, have returned a blue slip on his nomination. Recently, we learned that Mr. Bounds had some rather offensive writings that he failed to disclose to the bipartisan Federal Judicial Selection Advisory Committee established by the two Oregon Senators to recommend potential nominees. Nonetheless, of course, the Republican majority, prodded on by the hard-right ideologues, is moving ahead with his nomination, over the tradition of the blue slips, over these recent revelations.

Next week, the Senate will likely move to the pending nomination of Thomas Farr to the Eastern District of North Carolina, currently the longest vacancy in the United States. Part of the reason the State seat has remained open for so long is because Republican Senators blocked an Obama nominee, Jennifer May-Parker, for nearly 3 years. With Mr. Farr's nomination, we have another example of a vacancy that only exists because Democrats recognized and respected the blue-slip tradition—a tradition the Republicans have so unceremoniously discarded.

Not only has Mr. Farr spent his long legal career working against the rights of unions and the rights of workers to organize, Farr has demonstrated himself to be a partisan.

After challenging multiple congressional maps drawn by North Carolina's Democrats, Mr. Farr vigorously defended the most recent maps drawn by North Carolina's Republicans which, in fact, were overturned by the Supreme Court for discrimination. Mr. Farr also defended North Carolina's restrictive voter ID law passed by the Republicans, arguing that voter ID was a "minor inconvenience" for voters. Might I remind my colleagues, this is the same voter ID law that the Fourth Circuit Court of Appeals determined was passed with "discriminatory intent" and which "targeted African Americans with almost surgical precision." Those are the Fourth Circuit's words, not mine. That is whom we are putting on the bench—people who support laws that blatantly discriminate against people of color. What are we

coming to in this country? Where are our ideals when it comes to picking people for the bench? I am sure they can find conservative folks who don't have these kinds of egregious pieces of behavior.

I have long argued that we should judge our judges on three metrics: excellence, moderation, and diversity. By dint of his legal career in defense of partisan Republican issues, Mr. Farr clearly lacks moderation and is even willing to defend the most strident attempts by North Carolina Republicans to game the congressional maps and make it more difficult for minorities to vote.

I will strongly—strongly—oppose his nomination, and I urge my colleagues to do the same.

THE ECONOMY

Finally, Madam President, on the economy, during the 8 years of President Obama's term, Democrats worked to turn the economy around, to dig our country out of the recession, and get back to growing the economy and the middle class. Now that Republicans are in charge, their policies are almost the reverse.

Instead of focusing on the middle class and those struggling to get there, Republicans have elected to turn over the keys to big corporations and the superwealthy—their benefactors. Instead of trying to bring down the cost of everyday items, Republican economic policies have driven up the costs of things like healthcare and gasoline. By sabotaging our current healthcare system, President Trump and Republicans have caused insurance rates to increase by double digits across several States. Yesterday, insurers in the States of Washington and New York both announced an average rate increase of about 20 percent, similar to double-digit increases in Virginia and Maryland. Americans were already struggling with the high cost of healthcare before these increases. Republican policies have only made these problems worse.

What about gas prices? By pulling out of the Iran deal and failing to get tough with OPEC, President Trump has contributed to the increase in gas prices. He hangs out and seems to be friendly with the Crown Prince, head of the UAE, even President Putin. Why isn't he jawboning them, his so-called friends, to help the average American family not have to pay increases in the high price of gas?

President Trump was quick to blame President Obama when gas prices went up. Well, what is good for the goose is good for the gander. American families are now paying over \$3 for a gallon of gas in many places, and prices are expected to continue to rise over the summer.

Meanwhile, as costs go up for the middle class, in many, many cases far outweighing any break they got on the tax bill, corporations and the rich are reaping a windfall from the Republican tax bill. Listen to this. So far, in 2018,

corporations have announced plans to spend more than \$450 billion in corporate stock buybacks, a maneuver that directs profits into the pockets of wealthy executives and shareholders but does little for workers. Even Republican Senator MARCO RUBIO has said that "there's no evidence whatsoever" that the corporate tax cut Republicans passed last year is overwhelmingly benefiting workers."

In a nutshell, this is the new Republican economy: a bonanza for the corporations and the rich, higher costs for everybody else. In November, the American people will get to decide if they want a government that works on their behalf or more of the same top-down, trickle-down policies that have failed time and again—and are failing once again.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The majority whip.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS OF THE REPUBLICAN-LED CONGRESS

Mr. CORNYN. Madam President, I want to take just a few minutes to talk about the last 18 months and what a Republican-led Congress has done during the first 500 days of the Trump administration.

I heard my friend the Democratic leader call this a Republican economy, and I am proud to embrace that for the reasons I will mention here in just a moment and contrast that to life in America postrecession, in 2008, where slow economic growth, high unemployment, and a disproportionate number of people not even seeking work were accepted as the new norm.

The American people understand they don't have to accept that as the new normal—that we can aspire to better, and we can do better, and that is exactly what we have seen manifested in the American economy. The rank-and-file American worker, every American family, and everybody in this country—regardless of race, ethnicity, whatever identity you might want to talk about—have benefited.

There have been many accomplishments, but perhaps the greatest, as I said, is the new energized state of the economy. There is a sense of hope and optimism once again. We can see that reflected in people's retirement accounts mainly invested in the stock market. The stock market has boomed since the Trump election, and that is not just for the big corporations. That is for the teachers, the pension funds, the firefighters, the first responders—for average Americans who invest their retirement savings in mutual funds or in the stock market—and they have benefited.

The unemployment rate has reached a 48-year low—a 48-year low—and 14 States have hit record low unemployment as well.

My friend from New York talked about gasoline prices. Oil output jumped to the highest on record in March, including a 4-percent increase in production in my home State. In