

beyond the burned-out site of the fire. Hundreds of miles downwind, air can become unhealthy and even hazardous.

I remember visiting Saskatchewan with Senator GRAHAM and seeing skies there clouded from Oregon's fires. Last month, air in the northwest took the title of "worst in the nation"—not what they were looking for—with officials recommending that residents wear masks when venturing outdoors. Children, pregnant women, and people with breathing difficulties were told to actually leave town, to leave the area.

Wildfires unleash an especially harmful air pollutant: tiny particles less than 2.5 microns in diameter. For comparison, an average human hair is around 70 microns wide. So we are talking about very small particles circulating in the air. Because they are so small, they are easily inhaled and can lodge deep in the lungs and even enter the human bloodstream. Exposure to them has been associated with asthma, heart attack, stroke, and some cancers. Emerging research even links this nasty pollutant to premature births.

A researcher at NOAA's Earth System Research Laboratory in Boulder, CO, told *Science* magazine that wildfire smoke is "one of the largest problems facing air quality and climate issues going forward." According to a 2016 study in the journal *Climatic Change*, wildfires were to blame for more than two-thirds of the bad-air days in the western U.S., with unhealthy levels of particulate matter.

Smoke and pollution from western wildfires get picked up by the jet stream and can be carried 3,000 miles across the United States, all the way to our east coast, contaminating air throughout the country with noxious particulate matter, methanol, benzene, ozone, and other toxins.

This image shows the plume of smoke from west coast fires over here spilling across the country last September. NASA reports that when airborne contaminants are drawn down to ground level, as happened in Iowa last summer, wildfires can trigger air quality warnings hundreds, even thousands, of miles away.

The scourge of these wildfires in Senator WYDEN's home State and throughout the West is one of the most dangerous symptoms of carbon pollution and climate change. His Oregon constituents see this devastation firsthand. Senator WYDEN has helped to rush additional resources to Federal firefighting agencies to step up the response to these exploding wildfires. I thank him for joining me here today as we implore our colleagues to recognize what is going on.

If you don't believe me, simply go to your own home State universities and ask them. Whether it is Alaska's, Texas's, Oklahoma's, Rhode Island's, or Oregon's universities, they will tell you. This is stuff that is so clear that it is taught in your home State universities. Yet here in the Senate, we continue to indulge the pretense that we

don't know what is going on. Well, it is climate change, plain and simple, as we careen toward what could be an irreversible shift in our climate, changing our Earth into what one recent report called a "hothouse." Yet here we are, the great Congress of the United States, stuck in dirty fossil fuel politics, fiddling under the Capitol dome while the western United States burns.

I thank my distinguished friend from the great State of Oregon for joining me here today.

I yield the floor.

## 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 legislative clerk read the nomination of A. Marvin Quattlebaum, Jr., of South Carolina, to be United States Circuit Judge for the Fourth Circuit.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The majority whip is recognized.

### REPUBLICAN ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Mr. CORNYN. Mr. President, today we will confirm two more appellate judges, bringing our total to 26 since the Trump administration began. This has been one of the hallmarks of the President and of our agenda, and it is critically important. So I thank the President, as well as all of our colleagues who have worked so hard to fill these vacancies on our Nation's courts.

There have been many accomplishments this last year and a half, but perhaps the greatest has been the new, energized state of our economy. This is a direct, tangible impact on the quality of life of all Americans. The Declaration of Independence designates, among the unalienable rights, the right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. I like to think that by getting our foot off the neck of the economy, by repealing unnecessary overregulation, and by cutting taxes and letting people keep more of what they earn, we are pursuing those unalienable rights on behalf of the American people—certainly the pursuit of happiness.

The Labor Department reported earlier this month that unemployment had fallen to 3.9 percent in July, which is close to the 18-year low that was achieved in May of this year. One of the highlights of the jobs report was that high school dropouts and others who struggled during the Obama-era recession are doing significantly better. Their unemployment rate fell to 5.1 percent, the lowest since the government started collecting data on

those without a high school diploma. Of course, this is pointed out particularly at a time when labor is in short supply; that is, there are a lot of good-paying jobs for which there are not trained workers who could qualify for those jobs. I think it makes it incumbent on us, at all levels of government—Federal, State, and local—to do more to help train workers so they qualify for these good, well-paying jobs that right now are going unfilled because of a shortage of trained workers. That is one of the imperatives, I believe, of a tight job market caused by a booming economy.

The July report showed that the economy grew by 4.1 percent in the second quarter. That is an incredible number. The economy is literally on fire, and that is a good thing for the American people. All of this positive economic news is complemented by the tax reform package I mentioned a moment ago that we passed last December, which has become perhaps the biggest game changer of all, opening doors and offering new opportunities for American workers.

In order to make the rates of taxation in America competitive globally, we lowered the corporate rate from 35 to 21 percent. This is something that Democrats, like President Obama, as well as Republicans, have supported in the past, recognizing that we were chasing investment overseas and any earnings on investments overseas were not coming back to the United States to be invested here in workers and infrastructure. This was a self-inflicted wound that we have now cured. We also were successful in helping working families by doubling the child tax credit.

One of the tangible benefits of the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act is that more than 700 companies have used the tax savings to benefit their employees as well as their customers. They have announced pay raises and 401(k) retirement match increases. Utility bills have been cut for seniors and those on fixed incomes, because when investor-owned utilities got their tax rates lowered, they had to lower rates that they charge on utility bills.

This legislation has resulted in bonuses and other benefits for American workers, perhaps too numerous to mention, but it is worth mentioning because, unfortunately, in the fog that represents the news coverage that comes out of Washington, DC, sometimes these tangible benefits are overlooked. It is important for us to demonstrate that we are keeping faith with the American people—the people who sent us here—and we are doing the work of governing in a way that directly and tangibly benefits each of them—something, again, that gets lost in the fog that emanates here in Washington.

But it is not just the economy that deserves mentioning. The judiciary is the third and coequal branch of government. I believe the confirmation of

Federal judges is one of the most important things that we do here in the Senate. It is not something the House of Representatives has any role in. Under the Constitution, it is our responsibility to provide advice and consent on Federal judges, and who gets selected as a Federal judge and the judicial philosophy they have is one of the reasons why I believe President Trump won the election over Hillary Clinton. People understood, based on a list that the President made public before he was elected, the type of people he would be looking at to fill these judicial vacancies—judges who would faithfully interpret the Constitution and would say what the law is, not what their personal policy preferences might be or what they wish the law to be. That is our job, and that is the reason we run for election in the political branches of government—the executive and legislative branches.

Judges were, in the words of Alexander Hamilton in the Federalist papers, called the least dangerous branch. By that he meant that their job was to figuratively call balls and strikes. In other words, they were not seen as policymakers, or else they never would have given judges lifetime tenure. They are insulated from politics. It is precisely because they are insulated from politics that they should perform the critical but limited role of interpreting the Constitution and laws as written.

Of course, the most notable example of a judicial confirmation we have had during the last year and a half was the confirmation of Neil Gorsuch to fill the seat left by Justice Scalia. But now, on September 4, Chairman GRASSLEY on the Judiciary Committee has announced that we will begin the hearings on the nomination of Brett Kavanaugh to succeed Justice Anthony Kennedy on the Supreme Court.

But it is not just the Supreme Court that is important. It is the courts below the Supreme Court that do the day-to-day work of the Federal judiciary, including the 26 appellate judges that I mentioned earlier. That includes Texans like Don Willett, Jim Ho, and Andy Oldham, all of whom now serve on the Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals.

Of course, we should mention the very talented district court judges whom we have confirmed as well—three of them from Texas. Karen Scholer, David Counts, and Fernando Rodriguez are three of those talented district court judges whom we have confirmed.

Overall, we have confirmed more than 50 of President Trump's judicial nominations. Again, I believe this is one of the most important jobs we perform here in the Senate.

Third on my list of accomplishments that I want to talk about today I alluded to a moment ago when I talked about the economy taking off. One of the most important things we have done since we have been here during the Trump administration is repealing

overly burdensome, Obama-era regulations through something called the Congressional Review Act. We have used this device 16 times to eliminate agency rules that were sometimes snuck in during the waning hours of the Obama administration.

On top of that, we repealed the Independent Payment Advisory Board, or the IPAB, under ObamaCare. This will allow senior citizens and their families to take better control and greater control of their own healthcare decisions without being subjected to the whims of unelected bureaucrats. Also, we made ObamaCare voluntary by eliminating the individual mandate, which is a tax on middle-income and low-income people who couldn't afford to purchase the ObamaCare policies.

ObamaCare's main problem was that it represented perhaps the most intrusive government mandate into the lives of the American people by saying: You don't have any choices anymore when it comes to your healthcare. You must buy this government-approved healthcare policy, and, by the way, it doesn't make any difference if it has coverage that you don't want or can't afford. You have to buy it. If you don't buy it, we are going to fine you.

We have repealed that tax on low-income and middle-income Americans, and we truly have made healthcare more available by allowing a market to be created where people have choices. Kudos to our Secretary of Labor, Mr. Acosta, who worked with the administration to provide for access to healthcare policies across State lines, and the administration, the Health and Human Services Secretary, recently announced that people can buy policies on an annual basis that are subject to renewal that provide them greater choice and flexibility.

This is part of creating a market, which is the best regulator of all, as opposed to government. People wonder why conservatives believe Big Government is a bad thing sometimes, and it is precisely because when government gets bigger, our freedoms shrink in proportion to that growth in the flow of the Federal Government.

That is pretty important, repealing those regulations and eliminating the individual mandate. The fourth major accomplishment, I believe, is providing relief to America's community and midsized banks and credit unions, which have been hit hardest by some of the one-size-fits-all rulemaking approaches under the Dodd-Frank bill.

Again, one of the problems about legislating and regulating in Washington, DC, is we live in a big and diverse country, and one-size-fits-all doesn't work or, if it does, it often has collateral damage. In this case, while we were aiming at the excesses of Wall Street, small banks and credit unions were the collateral damage. What that meant is, consumers didn't get access to the credit they needed, small businesses didn't get access to the loans they needed in order to start a business or to grow a business.

The next thing I want to mention, in terms of the accomplishments of the last year and a half, has to do with our commitments to servicemembers and our military as well as veterans. We have restored America's defense with the greatest investment in the military in decades, including the largest troop pay raise in nearly 10 years.

If you think about all the things the Federal Government does, not all of them are equal. Some are more important than others. I would put at the top of the list providing for our common defense because it is that defense of our freedom and our liberty and our way of life that makes possible all of the other things we enjoy, the blessings of liberty we enjoy as Americans. Making sure our military is properly funded and that we take care of the troops who wear the uniform of the U.S. military is the most important job of the Federal Government.

Then, it is important to keep our commitment to our veterans when they take off that uniform. We did that this year in passing the VA MISSION Act, which makes significant reforms to the Department of Veterans Affairs, strengthening the healthcare and community care options that are available to America's veterans.

We are all aware of some of the scandals in the VA system, where veterans have had to travel hundreds of miles or wait months to get access to care. We have addressed that with the VA MISSION Act, which reinforces Veterans Choice. In other words, if you would rather go see a healthcare provider in your local community, if the wait is too long to be seen at a dedicated VA facility, or, if you have to go too far to get to a VA facility, you can get access to a local healthcare provider in your community, and the VA will pay for it. To me, that is a really important element of our veterans' healthcare system.

Last, but certainly not least, is our sixth achievement of this last year and a half during the Trump administration and Republican majorities in both Houses. We have taken steps to rebuild and protect our local communities. We passed nearly \$147 billion in disaster relief for storms like Hurricane Harvey, which devastated Texas 1 year ago this month.

On top of that, we have enacted the Stop Enabling Sex Trafficking Act, which provided resources to fight the rape kit backlog and improve school safety by a bill I sponsored called Fix NICS to make sure people who are illegally disqualified from purchasing or possessing firearms are prosecuted to the fullest extent of the law and prevented, if possible, from getting access to those firearms.

These are just a handful of ways we are doing what we told the American people we would do if they would entrust us with the great privilege of being stewards of that public trust. We put money back in Americans' pockets. We have rolled back regulations that

have made their lives easier. We strengthened the military. We have given healthcare flexibility to our veterans. We have protected our communities from harm.

Of course, there is more work that needs to be done. Just before the State work period concluded this last week, the Senate voted to proceed to a conference on the farm bill. This bill is of great importance to the people of my State. City dwellers may not fully appreciate it, but according to the 2012 census, agriculture employs one out of every seven working Texans. With 28 million Texans, that is a huge number of farmers and ranchers directly affected by what we do in the farm bill.

What people don't realize, however, is that nutrition programs—not agriculture funding—account for almost 80 percent of the cost of the farm bill. This includes the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, formerly known as food stamps.

Although I was proud to support the Senate's version of the legislation, I was somewhat disappointed it did not include stronger reforms to some of these nutrition programs, including work requirements for people who are able-bodied or training requirements for people who need additional training or community service for people who can't work or don't want the training but at least provide some service to their local communities.

I appreciate what the House has done to provide for those work requirements in the bill that my friend Chairman CONAWAY included in the House version. These reforms are not last-minute additions. There was a long, thorough process leading to the introduction of the House farm bill. Chairman CONAWAY held more than 20 hearings on these nutrition programs, including some during the Congress, and afterward he put together some very commonsense work requirements that were based on broad stakeholder input.

During this record of low unemployment across the Nation, it is not unreasonable to try to use this opportunity, which comes only once every 5 years, to take a look and ensure our Federal dollars are being spent wisely, that able-bodied adults are getting the training they need in order to earn good pay, and that Federal assistance is only used to provide for those who are unable to provide for themselves.

A scholar from the American Enterprise Institute, Michael Strain, wrote about this recently. He wrote that the question of "[w]hether there should be a mandatory work component in public policies designed to assist low-income households is in part a question of . . . economics," but it is also moral and philosophical as well.

Whom should we expect to work in our society? Should a healthy person in the prime of their life who doesn't have young children at home be working—yes or no? In other words, does that person owe some share of his or her energy, ability, and intelligence to the

rest of society from which we all benefit, including them? Some think it is nobody's business but the individual's whether they work or not and still receive these benefits, but I disagree with that.

When the question involves Federal benefits that are paid for by all taxpayers, whether to work or not is no longer just a private, personal decision. We as a country have decided that part of our social contract with each other will be providing a safety net where needed, and that is important. The flip side is, to benefit from that safety net, there also ought to be certain obligations. In other words, you can't have rights without responsibilities. One of them should be to work, if you are able to do so.

While I wish the members of the conference committee my best as they try to reach consensus on the farm bill, I encourage them to take another look at Chairman CONAWAY's ideas on work requirements. I hope my colleagues will be willing to revisit this issue in the conference committee on the farm bill.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Hawaii.

REAFFIRMING THE VITAL AND INDISPENSABLE  
ROLE THE FREE PRESS SERVES

Mr. SCHATZ. Mr. President, we swore an oath to support and defend the Constitution of the United States, including its First Amendment, which says, in part, "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment, or religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press."

We can't let statements by the President declaring the press is the enemy of the people go unchallenged. Both parties complain about the media, but who can argue with Thomas Jefferson, who wrote that "our liberty depends on the freedom of the press, and that cannot be limited without being lost," or with James Madison, who said that "the freedom of the press is one of the great bulwarks of liberty, and can never be restrained but by despotic governments," or with President Reagan, who said that "freedom of the press is one of our most important freedoms and also one of our oldest," or with Justice Kennedy, who wrote that "the First Amendment is often inconvenient. But that is beside the point. Inconvenience does not absolve the government of its obligation to tolerate speech."

These words of past leaders should inspire us to act, to send a message that we support the First Amendment, and we support the freedom of the press.

Senators SCHUMER, BLUMENTHAL, and I have introduced a resolution that does just that. It affirms that the press is not the enemy of the people, and it reaffirms the vital and indispensable role of the free press, serving to inform the electorate, uncover the truth, act as a check on the inherent power of the

government, further discourse and debate and advance our most basic and cherished democratic norms and freedoms.

This resolution also condemns attacks on the institution of the free press and views efforts to systematically undermine the credibility of the press as a whole as an attack on our democratic institutions.

As if in legislative session, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate proceed to the immediate consideration of S. Res. 607, submitted earlier today.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will report the resolution by title.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

A resolution (S. Res. 607) reaffirming the vital and indispensable role the free press serves.

There being no objection, the Senate proceeded to consider the resolution.

Mr. SCHATZ. I further ask unanimous consent that the resolution be agreed to, the preamble be agreed to, and the motions to reconsider be considered made and laid upon the table with no intervening action or debate.

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

The resolution (S. Res. 607) was agreed to.

The preamble was agreed to.

(The resolution, with its preamble, is printed in today's RECORD under "Submitted Resolutions.")

Mr. SCHATZ. Mr. President, I yield the floor.

NOMINATION OF A. MARVIN QUATTLEBAUM, JR.

Mr. VAN HOLLEN. Mr. President, I rise to express my disappointment that my Republican colleagues are not making better use of our legislative days in August. We could be working together to pass strong bipartisan bills that secure our elections and punish foreign nations and companies that hurt our national security. We could be working on healthcare and protecting people with preexisting health conditions and reducing the cost of prescription drugs. We could be working on legislation to strengthen our Nation's guns laws. My colleague, Senator NELSON, introduced emergency legislation to prevent the Trump Administration from allowing 3-D gun plans to be posted on the internet. We spoke on the floor and asked unanimous consent to have a vote on his bill, and Republicans blocked that effort.

Instead, we are here, voting on Judge Quattlebaum's nomination to the Fourth Circuit. Judge Quattlebaum was confirmed to his present seat, as judge on the district court a mere 6 months earlier. Republicans think it is more important to promote a novice judge than to work on legislation to secure our elections, protect our national security, or prevent dangerous people from accessing guns.

I urge Senator MCCONNELL to reconsider the August legislative agenda and bring substantive bills to the floor for a vote.