

Rettig's nomination comes at a crucial time, as the Federal Government continues to implement once-in-a-generation tax reform.

Recent memory reminds us just how important it is that all Americans get a fair shake from the agency that oversees the Tax Code. This historic new law makes it all the more important that the IRS continue to modernize and improve its technological infrastructure.

So I look forward to this nominee's getting to work on behalf of the American taxpayers.

APPROPRIATIONS

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, we will then turn back to appropriations. This week we will vote to approve the conference report that will fund energy and water, military construction and the VA, and the legislative branch.

This week's bills contain \$147 billion for projects ranging from waterways infrastructure to military family housing, to nuclear security and much more. This legislation equips the Army Corps of Engineers to carry out harbor maintenance, inland waterways restoration, and critical flood damage reduction efforts. It enables the Department of Energy to support groundbreaking research in computing systems and energy efficiency and to step up the security of our Nation's nuclear arsenal.

The Military Construction and VA title funds overdue maintenance to operational facilities, as well as nearly \$2 billion in support for military family and personnel housing, and it expands resources for in-house VA medical services and broadens community options for veterans seeking vital treatment through funding of the VA MISSION Act.

These are national priorities with local impacts that will be felt in every one of our States.

In my home State of Kentucky, hundreds of millions of dollars will go toward training facilities at Fort Campbell and Fort Knox, infrastructure improvements in Appalachia, and environmental cleanup efforts in Paducah.

I know all Senators can tell similar stories for their own States. So we are looking forward to taking another step forward on regular appropriations and passing this conference report this week.

I want to thank Chairman SHELBY and Senator LEAHY for all they have done to keep this process going forward.

Thanks also to the subcommittee chairmen, Senator BOOZMAN and Senator DAINES; Senator ALEXANDER, who chaired the conference; and all of my colleagues on the Appropriations Committee.

So let's pass this legislation and keep making progress together.

OPIOID EPIDEMIC

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, on one final matter, the pain that opioid

addiction and drug abuse has inflicted on families across America is almost unfathomable. Every day, 115 more American lives are lost to overdose. Synthetic opioid deaths nationwide skyrocketed six-fold from 2014 to last year alone.

Sadly, the Commonwealth of Kentucky is all too familiar with these statistics. More than 1,500 Kentuckians died from a drug overdose in 2017, and Kentucky has ranked among the top 10 States for opioid fatalities for several years.

The tragic medical trends are only one of the ways this crisis is crippling communities all across our country. These drugs eat away at economic opportunities, they erode our labor market, and they make it even harder for distressed communities to get back on their feet.

So this is nothing short of a national emergency, and that is why Congress has already passed major legislation to address it, and very soon we will take significant new action by passing the legislation that has been shepherded by Senator ALEXANDER and his committee colleagues. This landmark package combines work from 5 different committees and 70 different Senators.

I am proud that two of my bills are included—the CAREER Act, to help individuals in recovery transition back into the workforce and access housing services, and a second provision that will step up accountability on Federal efforts to combat addiction among pregnant mothers.

These are just two pieces of this comprehensive package.

It will cut the supply of illegal drugs that pour over our borders, make it easier for communities to invest in recovery efforts, extend a helping hand to families and caregivers, and provide for the longer term medical innovation we need to put this crisis in the rear-view mirror.

I am pleased to have played a part in developing this landmark response.

I am grateful to Chairman ALEXANDER and his colleagues, and I will be proud to vote for this legislation very soon.

THE ECONOMY

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, on one final matter, it has been a rough week for our Democratic colleagues who claim that the Republican policy agenda wouldn't lay a good foundation for a strong economy, but it has been a great week for America's workers and middle-class families.

The evidence keeps piling up. Tax reform and regulatory reform have helped create the conditions for one of the best economic moments the American people have seen in recent memory, and some measures are at their best levels in decades.

Here is just a small sample:

"U.S. job growth accelerated in August and wages notched their largest annual increase in more than nine years."

Another headline reads: "Job openings hit record high."

Another: "Small business optimism surges to highest level ever."

This economy is literally flying through all-time records faster than I can come to the floor and discuss them. Many of these numbers are unprecedented. They are exactly the opposite of what some gloom-and-doom Democrats insisted would happen if this unified Republican government put our opportunity agenda into effect.

Fortunately, my Republican colleagues and I know that getting Washington, DC, out of the way helps make good things happen for the American people, and that is exactly what we will continue to do.

ENERGY AND WATER, LEGISLATIVE BRANCH, AND MILITARY CONSTRUCTION AND VETERANS AFFAIRS APPROPRIATIONS ACT, 2019—CONFERENCE REPORT

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, I ask that the Chair lay before the Senate the conference report to accompany H.R. 5895.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Chair lays before the Senate the conference report to accompany H.R. 5895, which will be stated by title.

The legislative clerk read as follows:

The committee of conference on the disagreeing votes of the two Houses on the amendment of the Senate to the bill (H.R. 5895), making appropriations for the energy and water development and related agencies for the fiscal year ending September 30, 2019, and for other purposes, having met, after full and free conference, have agreed to their respective Houses:

That the House recede from its disagreement to the amendment of the Senate and agree to the same with an amendment, and the Senate agree to the same, signed by a majority of the conferees on the part of both Houses.

Thereupon, the Senate proceeded to consider the conference report.

(The conference report is printed in the House proceedings of the RECORD of September 10, 2018.)

CLOTURE MOTION

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, I send a cloture motion to the desk for the conference report.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The cloture motion having been presented under rule XXII, the Chair directs the clerk to read the motion.

The legislative clerk read as follows:

CLOTURE MOTION

We, the undersigned Senators, in accordance with the provisions of rule XXII of the Standing Rules of the Senate, do hereby move to bring to a close debate on the conference report to accompany H.R. 5895, an act making appropriations for energy and water development and related agencies for the fiscal year ending September 30, 2019, and for other purposes.

Mitch McConnell, John Thune, Thom Tillis, Lisa Murkowski, Mike Rounds, Jon Kyl, Lamar Alexander, Orrin G. Hatch, John Barrasso, Mike Crapo, Bill Cassidy, Roger F. Wicker, Pat Roberts, Ben Sasse, Lindsey Graham, Chuck Grassley, John Cornyn.

Mr. McCONNELL. I ask unanimous consent that the mandatory quorum call be waived.

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

CONCLUSION OF MORNING BUSINESS

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, 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 Charles P. Rettig, of California, to be Commissioner of Internal Revenue for the term expiring November 12, 2022.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Wyoming.

REPUBLICAN AGENDA AND NOMINATION OF BRETT KAVANAUGH

Mr. BARRASSO. Mr. President, the Senate recently completed what was easily the most productive August in memory. We passed six appropriations bills with full debate on the Senate floor. We passed the John S. McCain National Defense Authorization Act. We confirmed 25 appointees to important jobs in the administration. We confirmed 17 Federal judges to the bench, and we set up votes for another 8 earlier this month.

When I was home in Wyoming, I talked to a number of people around the State, and they were pleased to see how much we are actually getting done. I can state that they absolutely think we should keep up this pace.

Maybe the most important thing that people expect us to deal with quickly is confirming Judge Brett Kavanaugh to the Supreme Court. I believe we are off to a good start with confirmation hearings for Judge Kavanaugh, which were held last week in the Judiciary Committee.

What people who watched the hearings learned was that Judge Kavanaugh is well respected, mainstream, and a highly qualified individual for this important job. What people also saw is that some Members of the opposite party—the Democrats in the Senate—are totally unwilling to give him fair consideration.

Senators have been given access to more than 500,000 pages of records from his time as a judge and throughout his career in public service. That is three times the amount of information that any other Supreme Court nominee has ever produced. For some nominees of the Supreme Court, these kinds of documents are very important. They can tell us a lot about how a nominee thinks and about how he or she might approach the job of being a Justice. It is especially important when that person under consideration has never

served as a judge before, and sometimes that is all we have to look at. But that is not the case with Judge Kavanaugh.

Judge Kavanaugh has served on the circuit court of appeals for 12 years, and he has written opinions in over 300 cases. If anyone wants to know what he will act like as a judge, then they can just look at how he has already acted as a judge for the past dozen years.

These documents, these opinions he wrote in the 300 cases on the court in which he is serving, are the documents that matter. They are the ones that tell us how he approaches being a judge. Senators have had access to these court opinions since the day Judge Kavanaugh was nominated 8 weeks ago. If Democrats would just take the time to read through these opinions, they would see that Judge Kavanaugh is extremely thoughtful and is independent. He is absolutely devoted to preserving the rule of law and protecting the separation of powers that is the basis of our Constitution. If Democrats don't want to read through all these documents and these decisions, well, they can focus on the 13 cases where the Supreme Court adopted Judge Kavanaugh's reasoning. That is how much respect other judges and Justices have for the careful and compelling decisions he has written.

One case dealt with a regulation put out by the Environmental Protection Agency. Judge Kavanaugh found that the Agency had exceeded its authority under the law when they wrote the regulation. Judge Kavanaugh wrote that "it is not our job to make the policy choices and set the statutory boundaries, but it is emphatically our job to carefully but firmly enforce the statutory boundaries."

The Supreme Court agreed with Judge Kavanaugh's reasoning.

One constitutional scholar pointed out that "Judge Kavanaugh commands wide and deep respect among scholars, lawyers, judges, and justices."

Another legal scholar said that Judge Kavanaugh is "one of the most learned judges in America on a variety of issues, ranging from theories of statutory interpretation to separation of powers."

A third law professor agreed. He called Judge Kavanaugh "a true intellectual—a leading thinker and writer on the subjects of statutory interpretation and federal courts."

Finally, if it is even too much for some Democratic Senators to read through all the glowing reviews of Judge Kavanaugh's career, they could just look at what he has actually said. Look at his own simple, straightforward summary of his judging philosophy. In a speech last year, he made it very clear. He said: "The judge's job is to interpret the law, not to make the law or make policy."

This view—that the judge's job is to interpret the law, not to make the law or make policy—and every example I have seen from Judge Kavanaugh's

record is squarely in the mainstream of America's thinking today.

Despite all of this information being available, some Democrats are trying to say that they still want even more documents. They are hoping against hope that if they request another 500,000 pages, they can delay things a little longer. Well, let me assure you, it is not going to happen.

I think that most Democrats who have been making the most noise really don't want more documents. That is because so many of the Democrats complaining the loudest are the same ones who said that they have already made up their minds and made announcements that they are planning to vote against the nominee. Some were saying it before the nomination was even announced.

From the very beginning, liberal activists called on Senator SCHUMER to do everything in his power to keep this seat empty for as long as possible. There are several Senators on the other side of the aisle who have gladly taken up this challenge from the far left corners of their base.

I hope that more reasonable Democrats will reject the calls for needless delays and dangerous obstruction. I hope there are Democrats in the Senate who are willing to listen to what Judge Kavanaugh actually said during his hearing. I hope there are Democrats who are willing to read some of the hundreds of thousands of pages of documents. I hope there are some Democrats who are willing to listen to the experts who are describing Judge Kavanaugh as "one of the most learned judges" in our country.

It is clear that Judge Kavanaugh has the right approach to being a judge. It is clear that he is a person of solid character and that he has a strong intellect. It is clear that America needs Judge Kavanaugh on the Supreme Court and that it is time for Democrats to give up this pointless obstruction.

Thank you.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Montana.

CONFERENCE REPORT TO H.R. 5895

Mr. DAINES. Mr. President, the conference report that we are considering today is good news for our country. Along with providing funding for our veterans and supporting critical energy and infrastructure projects, it also includes \$4.8 billion for the agencies in the legislative branch.

The legislative branch portion of the conference report allocates funding in an appropriate manner. It promotes government transparency, as well as increasing security here at the Capitol Complex. This is very important.

In support of good government, this agreement includes a provision known as e-file, requiring U.S. Senate candidates to file campaign finance reports electronically, directly with the Federal Election Commission, as every other Federal candidate must do. Not