

The Senator from Utah.

NOMINATION OF BRETT KAVANAUGH

Mr. HATCH. Mr. President, I appreciate the majority leader's remarks in a wide variety of ways. What a great leader he is. We all should pay very strict attention to the way he handles himself and his seriousness about our U.S. Senate.

Last night, Senate Democrats continued their smear campaign against Judge Brett Kavanaugh with a thinly sourced article that accuses Judge Kavanaugh of conduct that no eyewitness can even corroborate. Rather than having brought the matter to the attention of committee investigators, Democrats coordinated with the members of the media to drop the story in the most dramatic and damaging way possible. This continues the Senate Democrats' pattern of playing hide the ball—after having spent 6 weeks sitting on a letter regarding alleged conduct while Judge Kavanaugh was in high school—before leaking it to the press.

Senate Democrats will stop at nothing to prevent Judge Kavanaugh's confirmation. As reported by the author of last night's article, the individual in the piece came forward only because Senate Democrats "came looking." Even then, the individual went on the record only after "six days of carefully assessing her memories and consulting with her attorney"—a former Democratic elected official. The New York Times, which declined to publish the allegations when approached, reported that it had interviewed "several dozen people . . . in an attempt to corroborate the story" and could find "no one with firsthand knowledge." The Times further reported that the individual in the story had herself contacted former classmates in an effort to corroborate the story and had "told some of them that she could not be certain Mr. Kavanaugh was the one who exposed himself."

Unsurprisingly, Senate Democrats are now using last night's article as an excuse to call for further delays. This follows the same approach they have taken since Judge Kavanaugh's nomination had first been announced. No innuendo has been too low, no insinuation too dirty. Everything is an excuse for delay no matter how unsubstantiated. It does not matter that no other eyewitness can even confirm that Judge Kavanaugh was at the party in question. It does not matter that every other individual alleged to be present denies any memory of the event. The goal is to delay—nothing new to most of us. It should be clear now to all Americans that Democrats are engaged in a coordinated effort to stop Judge Kavanaugh's confirmation by any means possible.

As I have said before, every accuser deserves to be heard. Moreover, a person who has committed sexual assault should not serve on the U.S. Supreme

Court. Yet the way my Democratic colleagues have approached these allegations makes clear that the driving objective here is not the truth but is politics. Rather than having worked with Republican colleagues to investigate Dr. Ford's allegations, they sat on them for 6 weeks until the eve of Judge Kavanaugh's confirmation vote and then leaked them to the press. Rather than having brought last night's allegations to the attention of committee investigators, they back-channeled them to the media and then denied any involvement. Such underhanded tactics are not fair to Judge Kavanaugh, are not fair to the individuals in the stories, and are not fair to the American people.

Senate Democrats are demeaning both the Senate and the Supreme Court through their partisan games and transparent attempts at character assassination. As planned, we will hear and should hear from Dr. Ford on Thursday. Then we should vote, and there should be no frivolous approaches toward the U.S. Senate or toward this confirmation process.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

NATIONAL FLOOD INSURANCE PROGRAM REAUTHORIZATION

Mr. KENNEDY. Mr. President, I begin my remarks today by offering my heartfelt sympathy to those in North Carolina, South Carolina, and Virginia who were battered by Hurricane Florence over the past several weeks and who are still feeling the aftermath of that storm. Unfortunately, people in Louisiana know more than a little bit about the damage to life and property that these natural disasters can do.

The road to recovery may be long, but we have your back. That is the message that I want to give to our fellow Americans who were in the path of Hurricane Florence. Don't give up. You are going to want to. Don't. Failure is not falling down. Failure is not getting back up.

Today, I wish to talk a little bit about the National Flood Insurance Program. Weathering a hurricane is difficult enough without the added burden of having to do it without insurance. Our National Flood Insurance Program isn't doing its job if it is so expensive that people can't afford to buy it.

Unfortunately, that is precisely the case for many of our people in North and South Carolina. In spite of a robust economy—4 million new jobs in 20 months and 4.1 percent in gross domes-

tic product growth—and in spite of a booming population in our country, fewer people in the Carolinas can afford to insure their property today than in the year 2013. We should be ashamed of that.

Experts estimate that fewer than 10 percent of the households affected by Hurricane Florence have flood insurance at all. So 90 percent do not. Making matters worse, in North Carolina today there are 3.6 percent fewer NFIP policies in place than there were in 2013. Over that same period of time, North Carolina's population has increased by 620,000 people.

South Carolina tells a similar story. Today, there are 1.2 percent fewer policies than in 2013, despite South Carolina having 350,000 more people. This is the exact same story—the exact same story—that we saw in Texas last year, where 80 percent of homeowners in the eight hardest hit counties had absolutely no flood insurance. That is four out of every five people.

Why don't people have flood insurance? There are a variety of reasons, but because the costs are out of control and middle-class families have little choice but to just roll the dice is the main reason. Why is that? Because Congress keeps playing games, and people don't have faith that the NFIP will be around to pay off. It is also because some people want to get a sound bite more than they want to help ordinary Americans protect one of their most valuable possessions—and, in most cases, their most valuable possession—their home. If those people want to reform the program because they want to save the government money, which is a laudable goal—and some do—they are going about it the wrong way.

The reality is that the National Flood Insurance Program is the only place—the only place—where people can turn to insure their home and their belongings.

Now, 98.5 percent of all NFIP policies are in counties or parishes with a median household income below \$100,000. So this argument we often hear that the National Flood Insurance Program is just a subsidy for wealthy people and their beach homes is nonsense. It is nonsense on a stick. And 62 percent of all of the people enrolled in the NFIP program are in counties or parishes with a median household income below the national average of \$53,889. Last year, many folks saw the premiums for their homes and businesses increase between 8 and 25 percent.

Floods are the most common and, unfortunately, the most costly natural disaster. If your home takes on water, your homeowner's insurance is not going to help you. Let me say that again. If your home floods and you have homeowner's insurance, you will not be covered. Homeowner's insurance does not cover the cost of a flood. If you don't have insurance, FEMA's disaster dollars aren't going to foot the bill for a full recovery. They aren't.

Even if you are eligible for Federal disaster assistance—for example, a

loan or a grant—it will be years before you will see those funds. What are flood victims supposed to do in the meantime? They can't just simply sit on an empty lot and wait. Life goes on.

Hurricane Florence is just one in a long line of storms that have devastated Americans families. I am not just talking about massive hurricanes such as Katrina, Rita, and Sandy. Unnamed floods in the spring and summer of 2016 ravaged 56 of the 64 parishes or counties in my State. In parts of my State in 2016, we had folks who endured 20 inches of rain in 2 days. I don't care if you live on Pikes Peak. If you get 20 inches of rain in 2 days, you are going to flood, even if you are not near a body of water. That is just a fact.

In the wake of Hurricanes Harvey, Irma, and Maria last year, I thought my colleagues might have seen the light and might have come to the table to discuss a long-term sustainable and reasonable bill to reform the NFIP, but, unfortunately, that couldn't be further from reality.

Congress has not only refused to debate comprehensive National Flood Insurance Program reform, but the program nearly lapsed. Congress has had well over a year to lay out a plan. Yet it still refuses to do so because one or two Members want to hold up progress. Unfortunately, it is ordinary people like the good people of North Carolina, South Carolina, Virginia, Louisiana, and Texas who are feeling the pain of those politics.

Recovering from a natural disaster is more than just putting up drywall. It is about communities coming back safer, stronger, and better prepared. The NFIP is an indispensable part of that effort to rebuild, but a flood insurance program isn't useful if it is too complicated to understand or if it allows bad actors to take from hard-working families.

We need rules for the flood insurance program that make sense. We need government websites that a normal person can navigate. We need quicker decisions by bureaucrats, and a faster process to get disaster dollars to the people who need them. Most importantly, though, people need to be able to afford the flood insurance.

I understand the National Flood Insurance Program is running a deficit. As you can see, we have had an extraordinary number of storms, and I understand that it needs to be put back into sound, fiscal shape. But raising the price of the product so high so that people can't afford the insurance is not going to achieve that. It is going to undermine the entire purpose of the flood insurance program.

I suggest that what we have to do is to strike a balance between fiscal stability and longevity of the program and affordability for the people who are supposed to be served by it. We have no choice but to get the program fiscally stable, but also we have no choice but to get premiums under control, and reform is the only path forward. The status quo is not working.

When Congress established the NFIP, we made a promise. We promised 5 million Americans—that is how many policyholders we have—including half a million people in my State and 350,000 people in North and South Carolina, that we would be there to help should disaster strike, and it is high time that the Congress show people that we meant it.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

NATIONAL RICE MONTH

Mr. BOOZMAN. Mr. President, September is National Rice Month. In Arkansas, this is certainly reason to celebrate. My home State has the proud distinction of being the Nation's leader in rice production, producing about half of the U.S. rice crop in America. Arkansas rice producers not only provide a safe, reliable food source that helps feed the world but also helps drive the State's economy.

Arkansas rice farmers support nearly 15,000 jobs and, on average, contribute \$2.3 billion to the State's economic output. Rice milling operations and forward market linkages in Arkansas account for more than \$3 billion in total output of goods and services.

These are impressive numbers for an integral component to Arkansas' economy and part of the reason why the industry was recognized by Gov. Asa Hutchinson, who signed the Rice Month proclamation in early September. As a leader in production, Arkansas rice farmers have a unique role in the industry and in the ongoing research to support its continued success in the State.

The University of Arkansas System Division of Agriculture is a leading research entity on rice production. Its Rice Research and Extension Center is recognized worldwide for developing solutions to the challenges facing producers, establishing techniques and best practices that help advance the rice industry.

The strong partnership between education and industry is crucial to leveraging the investment made in rice research. This cooperation helps improve the rice crop and increase farmers' yields, as well as makes rice production more efficient.

This collaboration is also seen in conservation efforts. Rice farmers are leaders in sustainability. Over the last two decades, rice producers have been able to increase their yields by more than 50 percent, with improved quality, while reducing land use by 35 percent, energy use by 38 percent, and water use by 53 percent.

In addition to being good stewards of the environment, rice farmers provide

critical habitat for ducks and other waterfowl. Organizations like Ducks Unlimited have formed a relationship with rice farmers through the Rice Stewardship to improve conservation practices that help shape the habitat for waterfowl. Flooded rice fields have become great locations for hunters. When these outdoorsmen visit Arkansas to take advantage of our natural resources, they pump money into our local economies.

As a duck hunting destination, it is critically important that we protect waterfowl habitats in Arkansas so we can continue to attract sports men and women to our State.

Congress can help our rice farmers continue these good practices by passing a farm bill that includes our robust conservation title.

During my annual ag tour in Arkansas last month, I visited with rice farmers, researchers, and rice industry leaders. They shared with me how the farm bill can work better for them. We can improve crop insurance to make the policy work better for our rice farmers. They need a strong farm safety net, and they asked that Washington protect the markets they have and work to open new markets like trade with Cuba.

I am proud to craft and promote policies that help our rice farmers, and I will continue to be an advocate for the industry. This month is the perfect time to celebrate the rice industry and the many positive contributions it makes to Arkansas.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mrs. ERNST). The clerk will call the roll.

The bill 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 PRESIDING OFFICER. The Democratic leader is recognized.

NOMINATION OF BRETT KAVANAUGH

Mr. SCHUMER. Madam President, in the confirmation of any Supreme Court nominee, it is the Senate's job to carefully and thoroughly review the nominee's credentials, beliefs, background, and suitability for the position. Once confirmed, a Supreme Court Justice is not subject to review or to term limits. It is a lifetime appointment with immense responsibilities and powers. We have to examine any Supreme Court nominee in light of those facts.

Dr. Christina Blasey Ford has come forward with a credible allegation that Judge Kavanaugh is guilty of sexual misconduct. I believe her, but regardless of what you believe, she deserves to be heard in a deliberate and impartial manner, in a way that is dignified