

The motion is agreed to.

EXECUTIVE CALENDAR

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will report the nomination.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read the nomination of Michelle Bowman, of Kansas, to be a Member of the Board of Governors of the Federal Reserve System for the unexpired term of fourteen years from February 1, 2006.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The majority whip.

SENATE ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Mr. CORNYN. Mr. President, as I return to the Nation's Capital from home, back in Austin, TX, so we can finish our work out before the end of the year, I want to relay some of the wisdom that I heard from working families and Texans back home about their verdict on what we have done so far this year and actually even last year.

I stopped by a couple of food banks—one in North Texas and one in El Paso—ahead of this year's upcoming holiday season. This is when they have the greatest demand for food by people who need either to supplement their diets or who rely on food banks to provide them with their basic sustenance.

I also had a chance to visit with a Nobel Prize winner at the MD Anderson Cancer Center, Dr. Jim Allison, to discuss his groundbreaking work in cancer treatment, much of which was funded by money we have appropriated to the National Institutes of Health, which, in turn, provides grants for basic science and other research that come up with lifesaving cures, such as Dr. Allison has come up with.

Then I met with the local leadership in the Corpus Christi area, down in the gulf coast, to discuss their Hurricane Harvey recovery process. It has been a little over a year since Hurricane Harvey hit. Of course, many of those communities and many families are continuing to recover from that devastation.

I also held a roundtable with local leaders and the drug-free communities councils to discuss how local, State, and Federal leaders can work together to fight the supply of illegal drugs coming into the country and to support those who are in recovery from addiction. It won't surprise you that people had a lot to say. Yet their stories remind me that while being back here in Washington—although Texas is a long way away, about 3 hours or so by jet—folks back home are paying attention to what we are doing here, and I know some of that gets lost in the back-and-forth of the political campaigns that have just passed.

There is one thing that we have done that I think has been well received, and that is, since the voters gave us a Republican in the White House and gave us Republican majorities in the House and the Senate, we have put our foot on the gas pedal and haven't let off since. We have delivered concrete results for the American people, and they

have continued to see gains under this administration—promises made and promises kept.

I will start with the transformation of the Federal judiciary. One of the most important jobs the U.S. Senate has under the Constitution is to provide advice and consent on executive branch nominations—in this case, to our article III courts. A historic number of judges who will interpret the law as written have been confirmed under the administration. That number is 84, and it includes the most ever appellate judges—the midlevel Federal courts—to have ever been confirmed during a President's first 2 years in office. These are principled, experienced, highly skilled lawyers and judges who respect precedent and understand their critical but limited role under our system of government. Their job is to interpret the law; they shouldn't rewrite it. That is one of the principal battles we end up fighting when Supreme Court nominations come across the well of the Senate floor. There are those who think that judges should be able to impose their views on the American people even though they don't run for election and have lifetime tenures, but that is simply not our system. In my view, that is an impermissible role to be played by a judge.

When it comes to judges, perhaps our two greatest achievements have been Neil Gorsuch and Brett Kavanaugh, both of whom were confirmed to the U.S. Supreme Court. Yet, as I say, we have confirmed a total of 84 other Federal judges, including 3 on the Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals from Texas. All of these nominees and now judges have brought great intellect, legal expertise, impartiality, and good will to bear as they make decisions with their very distinguished colleagues.

We saw the first major overhaul in the Tax Code in 31 years. It lowered rates for every tax bracket, doubled the child tax credit to help working families, and made our business tax scheme more competitive globally. All of this has allowed many of those employers to pass along benefits through bonuses and higher wages. We have also incentivized investment in economically distressed communities in every State through the Opportunity Zone Program.

Some like to shrug off the benefits of the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act by calling the savings crumbs, which is what Ms. PELOSI has called them, but they are certainly not taking into account what I am hearing from my constituents back home in Texas. The effects of tax reform are real, and they are extremely significant to every American. All employers have been able to provide additional benefits—as I said, some in the form of bonuses or in increased pay. Those who have seen their pay remain the same have seen more take-home pay because their tax obligations have been reduced.

One of the taxpayers I heard from in Texas was a gentleman by the name of

David Tong from Arlington, TX, which is halfway between Fort Worth and Dallas. Dave wrote to me to say that the company at which he is employed has increased the number of hours people are able to work. He said Christmas bonuses have been promised, too, and that the company has hired more people, has bought more new machinery based on the accelerated depreciation provided for under the bill, and has made long overdue repairs to their working place. Now, with the tax law changes in place, David says the guys down on the shop floor are taking home a little more in their paychecks each week. He said all of this adds up and makes a huge difference in the lives of the guys on the shop floor.

We have heard similar stories from around the country because more than 700 companies, including many that are based in Texas, have used the tax savings to benefit their employees and their customers. They have announced pay raises, as I said, and 401(k) match increases.

We have actually seen seniors and people on fixed incomes have a decrease in their utility bills, when their electricity is provided by investor-owned utilities, because of the reduction in taxes to be paid by those investor-owned utilities. So there are lower utility rates for seniors and those on fixed incomes.

These developments are part of the reason the economy is thriving. Since tax reform was signed into law, the economy has added more than 2 million jobs, and unemployment has been at its lowest rate since 1969. My State has a population that is roughly 38 to 40 percent Hispanic; yet Hispanic unemployment sits at the record low of 4.4 percent. That is a big deal to my constituents back home. Joblessness for African Americans has fallen to its lowest level ever—the lowest level ever—under this administration.

Then, of course, with more demand—with more money in people's pockets, more money to spend—there is more demand for goods and services. So in October alone, the economy has added another 250,000 jobs, exceeding all expectations. As a matter of fact, the biggest concern I hear from employers now is that they are looking for qualified employees who are able to perform the jobs that are now available, and many of these are very well-paying jobs.

So people are back to work. They are earning more. They are investing, and the economy is moving at full throttle.

But it wasn't just the work of the tax bill. That was just part of it. Part of it has to do with the increased confidence and optimism that people feel about their future as a result of the improvement of their economic circumstances. We saw that with the passage of the bipartisan Dodd-Frank reform. We have also provided additional relief to our community banks and credit unions so they are able to spend less money on redtape and have more money invested

in their local communities and in their small businesses.

We also know that regulation is important, but overregulation is a job killer. We have rolled back overregulation that was stifling job creation, and we are creating an environment that fosters job growth. Our reforms have created a savings of at least \$50 billion for small businesses and entrepreneurs. That is why the economy is on fire.

We have also done important things to help improve access to healthcare. We have repealed the Independent Payment Advisory Board provisions of ObamaCare and repealed the costly individual mandate, which essentially was a tax on poor people and middle-income people when they couldn't afford to buy the ObamaCare policies with all of the coverage that they didn't necessarily even want or need, but it added to the cost of the policy. When they couldn't afford the policy, they were taxed by their own government and punished through the individual mandate.

What we have done is to try to restore the authority and the power of citizens themselves to make healthcare decisions for themselves and their families that they want and that they can afford by starting to recreate an individual market. To me, that is the best way for us to offer choice and to keep prices down—to create an individual market, not for government to mandate a one-size-fits-all approach, which is what ObamaCare did. It forced many young people to pay a lot more for their insurance to subsidize others who were covered by ObamaCare.

We also addressed the public health challenges we face in this country in another significant way. The Nation's drug addiction epidemic killed roughly 72,000 Americans last year. Some 72,000 Americans lost their lives to drug overdoses. Nearly 50,000 of those were related to opioids, whether a prescription drug or heroin or fentanyl. It has left many families in disarray and overwhelmed medical professionals and emergency personnel in many communities.

Through the collaboration of about 70 bipartisan proposals—people say nothing bipartisan happens here, but thanks to 70 bipartisan proposals—that were included in this landmark opioids bill, we are not only addressing stemming the tide of drugs coming across our border but also supporting those who are trying to recover from a drug addiction.

Among other reforms, the law requires screening of packages being mailed from overseas for substances like fentanyl. It increases access to treatment for people with substance disorders. It expands research into non-addictive painkillers, and it provides more money for enforcement and interdiction.

But healthy communities are also safe communities. In addition to the opioids bill, we took further steps to enhance the safety of our communities

and to help victims. With three new laws, we aimed to reduce the backlog of untested rape kits in forensic labs so that perpetrators of sexual assault can be identified with near certainty and those wrongly charged can be exonerated.

We also have assisted our law enforcement in prosecuting cold cases and eradicating the scourge of online sex trafficking. We didn't stop there, though. We kept communities' needs in mind and turned toward fixing our Nation's outdated infrastructure.

In October, we passed a major water infrastructure bill that helps to keep our communities safe by providing dams and levees and addressing the need for drinking water—clean, safe drinking water—and addressing the underdevelopment of wastewater systems across the country.

But our work on infrastructure extended far beyond public water systems. It also included passing the Federal Aviation Administration Reauthorization Act, which modernizes airport infrastructure, increases safety, and boosts industry innovation.

We also helped to support our men and women in uniform, past and present. By passing a Defense authorization bill, we gave our troops the largest pay raise in nearly 10 years and began to restore military readiness in an increasingly dangerous world.

The National Defense Authorization Act, named after our former chairman of the Armed Services Committee, John McCain, ensures that our troops have the resources, the equipment, and the training they need to defend our country and keep Americans safe.

For our veterans, we passed the VA Mission Act—again, a bipartisan piece of legislation. Access to healthcare had become a nightmare for many who sacrificed so much for our country. We saw them being met with difficulty getting appointments because they were backlogged so much, or they had to drive great distances to get access to basic healthcare. So we passed the VA Mission Act with an eye toward providing more efficient access to care in local communities.

Beyond that, we did the basic work of funding the Federal Government on time and through regular order. We haven't finished that job yet. We have until December 7 to finish the job, and I hope we do. It is not a particularly flashy topic, but it is one of the most fundamental duties of the Congress.

So our record is clear, and the voters responded by rewarding the majority with an even greater Senate majority in the next Congress. But we need to finish out the rest of this year strong. We are adding to our list of accomplishments this week by passing a bipartisan bill to provide critical funding for the Coast Guard. Our Coast Guard is made up of men and women who risk their lives to save others and to protect our ports and to stop illegal drugs from reaching our country. This bill ensures that they can continue that

work with the predictability they deserve.

Moving forward, we have a significant to-do list before we break for Christmas. We need to finalize the farm bill. We need to reauthorize a number of other bills, and despite the large number of nominations we were able to get done before we recessed, there is still a huge backlog of many executive branch nominations. For some reason, after the 2016 election, our Democratic colleagues decided they were going to obstruct or delay as many Trump nominations to executive agencies on the bench as they could. Unfortunately, they have been too successful in doing so, but I am confident that the Senate Majority Leader, Senator McCONNELL, will use the leverage of people wanting to get home at Christmastime and Thanksgiving to ensure that we get a maximum number of these noncontroversial nominees supported. These are people who will enjoy broad bipartisan support if we can just get our Democratic colleagues to quit the obstruction.

We have just a short time left to finish this Congress strong, but the past 2 years have been an unmitigated success for the country. We have delivered on promises we have made. We have put money back in the pockets of hard-working families. We enhanced community safety and fought for victims. We have modernized infrastructure and supported our men and women in uniform. I hope we can continue this momentum into the 116th Congress that begins in January.

I yield the floor.

THE PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Washington.

COAST GUARD REAUTHORIZATION BILL

Ms. CANTWELL. Mr. President, I come to the floor this afternoon to speak about the Coast Guard reauthorization legislation that just passed the Senate today. I thank my colleagues for all of their hard work on this important measure that literally has taken years to piece together. I thank Chairman THUNE and Ranking Member NELSON for working on this legislation and for incorporating many of the things that the people of Washington were interested in seeing as part of this comprehensive bill. I certainly want to thank Senator CARPER and the EPW staff for working on major provisions of this bill relating to ballast water and the solutions they put forward. This bill includes many provisions important to our Coast Guard, our environment, and to our shipbuilding community. It represents a true bipartisan effort to find solutions and to put those solutions into action.

Our State of Washington is rich in its maritime heritage. The Coast Guard is a large part of that. With so much coastline, and so many rivers and streams, the Coast Guard is so important. Our State is home to fishermen, shipbuilders, Tribes, trade operators, and a thriving tourism economy. So for places from Cape Disappointment and