

We are Americans, and we will always answer the call to preserve freedom while reaching out a hand to those who are fighting to achieve it.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Alabama is recognized.

TORNADOES IN ALABAMA

Mr. JONES. Mr. President, people across the country and around the world today have seen the images of the terrible devastation left by tornadoes that touched down in Lee County, AL.

Lee County is home to Auburn University, and so many of the wonderful constituents there have suffered mightily over the last 24 hours. As of right now, we know 23 people have lost their lives—23—and as we speak, rescue teams and first responders are still out searching for others who may have been hurt. We pray that we have seen the last of the loss of life, but that is to be determined.

Already, this is one of the deadliest storms in our State's history, and Louise and I want to offer our most sincere condolences to all of those who have been affected by this horrible event. The youngest victim we know of was only 6 years old. My heart goes out to all the folks who have lost loved ones, who suffered damage to their homes and their businesses, and I ask that everyone pray for their comfort and healing.

I also thank the courageous first responders who put their lives on the line time and again to help folks in need. Our rescue crews are working around the clock, and we are so grateful to them for the work they do every day but especially on days like today and yesterday after tragedies like these strike. These are our friends and neighbors who step up in the wake of disaster to help their community, sometimes—sometimes—while struggling with the tragedy on a very personal level themselves.

Unfortunately, this is an all-too-familiar sight in Alabama. We have seen our fair share of natural disasters. On a single day in 2011, an estimated 60 tornadoes devastated so many towns and cities, including Cullman, Hackleburg, Pratt City, and Tuscaloosa, killing over 200 people. All of these have a way of being personal.

That day was especially personal for my wife, Louise, who is from Cullman. I was out of town that day attending a judicial conference and called her as she was watching on television how her town was being destroyed, debris flying everywhere, and she could barely speak. She can still barely speak about it today. As U.S. attorney, in April of 1998, I saw firsthand the devastating damage to the Oak Grove and Edgewater communities, where 32 people lost their lives. That destruction in Edgewater was especially personal to me because that is where my grandparents lived for so many years and where my parents lived when I was first born. I can remember walking

that day across the slab that was left of the little church my parents attended when I was born, walking across with President Clinton. It is unbelievable to witness that kind of damage.

Jacksonville, AL, is still rebuilding after a tornado severely damaged their city last year, including the campus of Jacksonville State University. Last fall, Hurricane Michael ravaged our farmlands in the Wiregrass in South Alabama, destroying cotton crops that were ready for harvest and 30-year-old timber. Yesterday's tornadoes touched down at a time when North Alabama is already dealing with historic flooding in Cherokee County.

I mentioned, it just seems all too often these have a personal note. As I checked in with my staff last night, I realized that two of my staffers who are with me on the floor today, Garrett and Michael, also are from that area. They also are concerned. It is a horrible situation to be this far away, knowing what is going on in your hometown and not knowing whether your loved ones are in the path of that destruction.

Alabama, however, is a resilient place, and we have an incredibly capable disaster preparedness and response agency, one that works around the clock when needed, but given all we have faced over the past year, we will still need help. While there is much yet to be done in the immediate aftermath of this storm, we know a full recovery will take a great deal of time and resources.

So I am here tonight to ask my colleagues in the Senate to stand ready to help Lee County rebuild and heal. Disasters will strike all of our communities at some point or another, and that makes it all the more important that we work together when they do.

To the folks in Lee County, AL, who have lost everything and who have lost loved ones in this disaster, I am in this with you for the long haul. I promise you that. I know things will never be the same for many folks, but I do promise that I will do everything I can to help.

I have already been working with Senators PERDUE, ISAKSON, and others to secure disaster funding for the 2018 storms that hit the Southeast last year. We are hoping that we can get an agreement on that bill very soon and get it onto the President's desk so those farmers can be ready for the next planting season that they are about to go into.

In the days ahead, I am going to be working closely with colleagues here in the Senate to secure Federal disaster funding that includes Lee County, AL, because, despite the fact that we are in the early stages, it is easy to see from the photographs and the videos of the devastation that they will need it.

We have been in touch with Governor Ivey and other local officials about how we in the Senate can best help. As the dust settles, we will be down there to try to make sure that our offices do

what is necessary to help those fine people.

In the face of all of these terrible tragedies, the thing that gives me hope is the strength of my fellow Alabamians. They are an amazing—amazing—citizenry. From one end of the State to the other, they are amazing people who see tragedy, but they build on that tragedy. Yet they never lose hope. Even though an event like this can be incredibly difficult, I have seen the resolve of the people of Alabama, and I know that we will be able to rise and rebuild.

Thank you.

TRIBUTE TO RICHARD C. SHELBY

Mr. President, I will conclude my remarks on that, but I would like to take one other moment.

At this point, I want to take this opportunity to congratulate my friend and my Senate colleague RICHARD SHELBY.

Yesterday, Sunday, March 2, he became the longest serving Alabama Senator in history, beating the record of the late-Senator John Sparkman, who was a Vice Presidential nominee.

Senator SHELBY's legacy in Alabama is unparalleled, beginning over in the House of Representatives, when he was first elected to this body in the election of 1986, taking office in January of 1986. He is leaving a remarkable mark on Alabama every day that he is in the U.S. Senate.

There are so many things that the people of Alabama are thankful for. I can assure you, I am both thankful and honored to be in the Senate with him and to serve alongside him.

Thank you.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Georgia is recognized.

Mr. ISAKSON. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to be recognized for 2 minutes.

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

TORNADOES IN ALABAMA AND GEORGIA

Mr. ISAKSON. Mr. President, I am from Georgia. Last night in Georgia, Alabama, and throughout the Southeast, one of the worst tornadoes went through that has ever gone through in history.

Twenty-three Alabamians were killed last night; a number of homes in Georgia were wiped out and ruined. I don't think we had a death, but they had 23 in Alabama. The tragedies we are having in the Southeast continue to rise.

In a few weeks, we are going to ask the Senate to pass a disaster bill to reinstate some of the agricultural money for the last 2 years for our pecan crop, our blueberry crop, and others.

On behalf of the people of Georgia, I just want to say that we are having a tough time. Our agricultural community is in the most difficult time it could possibly be. We are going to ask the Senate to work with us to find appropriations that would make sense to bring back those pecan and blueberry farmers in Georgia, Alabama, and

South Carolina and to deal with the agricultural emergency we have had.

We also say a prayer of thanksgiving for the great opportunity we have to live in the Southeast but also recognize that we are now ground zero for tornadoes and those types of death-defying acts that are taking place. We want all of the people in Georgia and Alabama to know that our prayers go out to them. We will do everything we can to make them right.

Thank you.

I yield back my time.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

Mr. ISAKSON. Mr. President, I yield back the remainder of our time and call the previous question.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Pursuant to rule XXII, the Chair lays before the Senate the pending cloture motion, which the clerk will state.

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 nomination of Allison Jones Rushing, of North Carolina, to be United States Circuit Judge for the Fourth Circuit.

Mitch McConnell, David Perdue, Mike Crapo, Johnny Isakson, John Cornyn, Pat Roberts, James M. Inhofe, Thom Tillis, Roger F. Wicker, Lindsey Graham, Roy Blunt, John Thune, John Boozman, John Barrasso, James E. Risch, Richard Burr, John Hoeven.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. By unanimous consent, the mandatory quorum call has been waived.

The question is, Is it the sense of the Senate that the debate on the nomination of Allison Jones Rushing, of North Carolina, to be United States Circuit Judge for the Fourth Circuit, shall be brought to a close?

The yeas and nays are mandatory under the rule.

The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk called the roll.

Mr. THUNE. The following Senator is necessarily absent: the Senator from Alaska (Ms. MURKOWSKI).

Mr. DURBIN. I announce that the Senator from Ohio (Mr. BROWN), the Senator from New Mexico (Mr. HEINRICH), the Senator from Vermont (Mr. SANDERS), and the Senator from Arizona (Ms. SINEMA) are necessarily absent.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Are there any other Senators in the Chamber desiring to vote?

The yeas and nays resulted—yeas 52, nays 43, as follows:

[Rollcall Vote No. 34 Ex.]

YEAS—52

Alexander	Fischer	Portman
Barrasso	Gardner	Risch
Blackburn	Graham	Roberts
Blunt	Grassley	Romney
Boozman	Hawley	Rounds
Braun	Hoeven	Rubio
Burr	Hyde-Smith	Sasse
Capito	Inhofe	Scott (FL)
Cassidy	Isakson	Scott (SC)
Collins	Johnson	Shelby
Cornyn	Kennedy	Sullivan
Cotton	Lankford	Thune
Cramer	Lee	Tillis
Crapo	McConnell	Toomey
Cruz	McSally	Wicker
Daines	Moran	Young
Enzi	Paul	
Ernst	Perdue	

NAYS—43

Baldwin	Hassan	Rosen
Bennet	Hirono	Schatz
Blumenthal	Jones	Schumer
Booker	Kaine	Shaheen
Cantwell	King	Smith
Cardin	Klobuchar	Stabenow
Carper	Leahy	Tester
Casey	Manchin	Udall
Coons	Markey	Van Hollen
Cortez Masto	Menendez	Warner
Duckworth	Merkley	Warren
Durbin	Murphy	Whitehouse
Feinstein	Murray	Wyden
Gillibrand	Peters	
Harris	Reed	

NOT VOTING—5

Brown	Murkowski	Sinema
Heinrich	Sanders	

The PRESIDING OFFICER. On this vote, the yeas are 52, the nays are 43.

The motion is agreed to.

ORDER OF BUSINESS

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that notwithstanding the provisions of rule XXII, all postclosure time on the Rushing nomination be considered expired at 4 p.m. on Tuesday, March 5; further, that if confirmed, the motion to reconsider be considered made and laid upon the table and the President be immediately notified of the Senate's action.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. SULLIVAN). Without objection, it is so ordered.

LEGISLATIVE SESSION

MORNING BUSINESS

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate proceed to legislative session for a period of morning business, with Senators permitted to speak therein for up to 10 minutes each.

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

REMEMBERING BERTA CACERES

Mr. LEAHY. Mr. President, 3 years ago yesterday, Berta Caceres, an indigenous rights activist in Honduras who had been a vocal opponent of the construction of a hydroelectric dam that threatened the territory of the Lenka people, was murdered in her home.

That cowardly crime, about which I have spoken many times, was the culmination of years of harassment and threats against her life, and it was by

no means an isolated case. At the time, it was only the latest of scores of assassinations of social activists who protested against the confiscation of land, forced evictions, and infrastructure development involving corrupt payoffs to circumvent environmental and social safeguards, and against abuses by Honduran security forces. Nobody has been punished for any of those other, similar, crimes.

I did not know Berta Caceres, but I knew of her. I remember when she was awarded the prestigious Goldman Environmental Prize. I remember the disgust and outrage I felt when I learned that she had been murdered.

I remember thinking that whoever would murder Berta Caceres, a charismatic leader who was recognized not only in her native country but around the world, must have been confident that they would never see the inside of a jail cell, because in Honduras only a small fraction of homicides, not to mention other violent crimes, ever results in conviction. Impunity and the corruption that enables it is a way of life there.

It was no surprise that in the days and weeks after Berta Caceres was murdered, the Honduran police tried to cover it up. It was only because of international pressure, including by the U.S. Embassy, that the fraudulent "investigation" did not end there, as so often happens in Honduras when the victim is not someone of notoriety.

Eventually, last November, after what seemed like interminable foot dragging, a trial resulted in the conviction of seven of those involved. That was a significant achievement, considering that absent international pressure Berta Caceres's case would have faded from memory like all the others. That trial also implicated top officials of the hydroelectric company DESA, one of whom is still awaiting trial 3 years later.

I was a prosecutor before I became a Senator. I prosecuted many murder cases. While premeditated murder is a horrific crime, it is often relatively easy to prove. In Berta Caceres's case, there was a lot of evidence. So to those who ask why, 3 years later, we are still waiting for justice, I think the answer is obvious. There are powerful forces within the Honduran Government who are beyond the reach of the Honduran justice system, and the attorney general recognizes that.

So today, 3 years later, there are some who conceived of, or knew of, the plan to murder Berta Caceres who have not been charged. The question, 3 years later, is when will they be charged? When will they be brought to justice?

Neither I nor the world have forgotten Berta Caceres. Our desire to see justice done in her case is as strong today as it was 3 years ago not only because of the importance it has for her family and her community, but for the larger cause of justice in Honduras. Impunity is a powerful, evil force, but I believe the whole truth about this crime will eventually be known.