

wages are growing faster than inflation, that is translating to a real increase in purchasing power for American consumers.

Business investment is up. Since the passage of tax reform, business investment growth has averaged 7 percent, almost twice—almost twice—what it averaged during the Obama administration.

What do all of these numbers mean? They mean more and better jobs for jobseekers. They mean more money in your paycheck to spend or save for the future. They mean more and better opportunities to advance in your career.

Thanks to tax reform, more families can afford to pay that orthodontist bill and still save some money for a family vacation. More families can afford to cover that unexpected car repair or plumber's bill. More families can afford to put a little extra away each month for the kids' education or for their retirement.

I am proud that tax reform is making life better for American families. Republicans will continue working to secure the gains that we have made for the long term and to expand opportunities for hard-working Americans even further.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.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 Democratic leader is recognized.

NOMINATION OF DAVID BERNHARDT

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, later this week the Senate will vote on the confirmation of David Bernhardt, a longtime lobbyist, to the position of Interior Secretary. An oil and gas lobbyist will be entrusted with our sacred—sacred—inheritance, the great lands of America.

I urge Senators to oppose this nomination.

The Department of the Interior is the Agency entrusted with protecting our Nation's public lands, our water supplies, our wildlife, and our energy resources. It grapples directly with some of the biggest questions our country faces: how to respond to climate change, how to protect endangered species, and how to care for our precious natural resources. Yet to lead our Interior Department, President Trump has nominated Mr. Bernhardt, an oil and gas lobbyist who has made a career harming the environment, subverting environmental protections, and helping polluters sidestep Federal regulation.

As former Secretary Zinke's deputy, he has paved the way for even more polluters to run rampant without accountability. Under his watch, the Department of the Interior has already opened a colossal 17 million acres of

Federal land for oil and gas leases, generating millions in revenue for energy companies, all while Bernhardt recklessly managed our national parks during the government shutdown.

I am especially troubled this morning because POLITICO reported that under Mr. Bernhardt's watch, the Department of the Interior might even greenlight offshore drilling off the coasts of Florida—a prospect both parties in the State say they oppose. This should be a wake-up call to my colleagues all up and down the coast—Atlantic, Pacific, and the gulf. If they can't find a reason to oppose this nominee based on the other serious and troubling issues that have been raised, maybe this is reason enough for them.

It is hard to imagine someone whose background is so at odds with the Department's mission as Bernhardt's. For all his talk of draining the swamp, President Trump wants to add yet another Washington swamp creature lobbyist to his Cabinet.

By the way, our resources—our oil and gas resources—are large. The motivation here to spoil public lands for oil and gas drilling—it is the power of the oil companies. It has nothing to do with the plan for natural resources. Bernhardt is an exemplary example of the power of these oil companies.

Gravely troubling is the long list of conflicting interests that Bernhardt brings to Trump's Cabinet. Up to 20 of his former clients have lobbied the Department of the Interior since his arrival, and the New York Times reported last week that he very likely has been less than forthcoming about when he stopped lobbying. No other Cabinet-level nominee in the Trump era has so many conflicts of interest, and that is a low bar. It is a distinction no one should be proud to hold.

Worst of all, Bernhardt is a hardened enemy of climate science. If you are a lobbyist for oil and gas companies, you would say that climate change isn't real too. The Washington Post reported he attended a session of administration officials that "debated how best to establish a group of researchers that could scrutinize recent federal climate reports." Translation: Bernhardt is actively working to set up the White House's fake panel to deny basic science.

I have already introduced legislation to prohibit any funding from going to this fake climate panel, but knowing Mr. Bernhardt's role in setting it up should send shivers down the spines of every American who is worried about the impact of our changing climate on their families, their farms, and future generations.

We cannot entrust our public lands to someone known to wage a campaign of censorship against facts and reason. Now, later today, I am going to be able to meet with Mr. Bernhardt to discuss his qualifications. I am letting him know now that I will ask him the same three questions I have asked my Republican colleagues in this Chamber.

One, does Mr. Bernhardt agree that climate change is real; two, does he agree it is a product of human action; and three, should the Federal Government have a role in combating its effects? His record suggests his answer to all these questions is no, but let's see what he says today.

Caring for our planet and being good stewards of our natural resources are the most important responsibilities we owe to future generations, so I am gravely concerned about Bernhardt's nomination to the Department of the Interior, and I urge my colleagues to vote no on his confirmation.

One final point. It still amazes me that Donald Trump campaigns on cleaning up the swamp, and he does exactly the opposite when in office. An oil and gas lobbyist is head of the Department of the Interior? My God, that is an example of the swappiness of Washington, if there ever was one. When are Donald Trump's supporters going to understand this: that what he promised them, in so many different instances, he is not delivering. It is befuddling. It is a sign of the weakness of our democracy that someone can walk into the Presidency promising so many things and then just immediately do the opposite and still a large chunk of Americans say they support him. It is amazing to me.

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Mr. President, for months, American citizens have been reeling from natural disasters and are in desperate need of Federal aid. Parenthetically, I remind Mr. Bernhardt that a lot of these disasters, scientists believe, are because the climate is warmer, and the weather is changing, but rather than work with us to provide the much needed aid to large chunks of America, our Republican colleagues have once again decided to follow President Trump and refuse to compromise. They are so afraid of him that even when he proposes something they know is wrong and irrational, they do a 180-degree hairpin turn and support what he is doing.

Now, that would be just politics, except millions are awaiting aid and need help. Their homes, their farms, their offices, and their factories are underwater, literally, in a lot of places still.

Just yesterday, House Democrats offered a solution. We said: Let's provide disaster relief not to some Americans but to all Americans struggling to recover and rebuild from natural disasters.

Their new proposal that the House offered includes an additional \$3 billion—this is House Democrats, not Senate Democrats, by the way. Their new proposal includes an additional \$3 billion to address urgent needs following the floods in the Midwest and the tornadoes in the South. This plus-up includes \$1.5 billion for the Army Corps of Engineers to support flood risk reduction so crucial in the Missouri River Valley, \$1 billion in CDBG for long-term recovery needs, and \$500 million in agriculture funding to help

the farmers and ranchers rehabilitate farmland damaged by natural disasters and replace some of the farm animals that have been lost.

Yesterday's House bill comes in addition to the proposals Senator LEAHY and I offered last week—and it is similar to them—and in addition to the work Senator LEAHY did last month. So, again and again, Democrats presented option after option for disaster funding that helps the Midwest, helps the coasts, helps the South, and helps Puerto Rico and other territories. None of our offers are either-or, help this but not that.

Enough excuses from our Republican colleagues. We have had enough of the slow playing, but, more important, the people who need this help have had enough. The bottom line is very simple. The aid we seek is what Americans have always done. When there is a disaster, we all come together and aid those areas in a disaster because we know when a huge natural disaster hits from God, an area can't deal with it on their own. They don't have the resources or the ability, and they are, many times, in trouble because of the disaster itself.

We say: Come to the aid, but all of a sudden Donald Trump goes into the Republican lunch a week and a half ago and says: I don't want any aid for Puerto Rico. He falsely claims they have gotten \$91 billion—not true—and then all our Republican friends go along.

Well, we are not. The House will not. Senate Democrats will not. Plain and simple, we don't believe you should pick and choose. Why did President Trump single out Puerto Rico, which are American citizens like everybody else? A lot of theories, but regardless of what your theory is, that is not the way to govern as President, and, frankly, it is not the way we should govern as Senators. It is bewildering that our Republican colleagues have caved to President Trump's—what can we call it—temper tantrum, even though they are well aware of the problems and were ready to help Puerto Rico before he threw that temper tantrum.

Some say: Well, Puerto Rico is getting a little money. They are getting food stamp aid.

Well, great. Then let's just give food stamp aid to everybody else. Let's give it to everyone else. Now, what about all the farms that are underwater? What about all the homes that are flooded and needing help? If you give food stamp aid, that doesn't help them.

So let's be fair. Let's treat each area the same. Let's do what we have done in the American tradition: Come together, when there is a disaster, to help Americans. Let's not be so afraid of Donald Trump that when you know he is wrong, you just go along.

The idea that Puerto Rico should be treated differently from the rest of America is insulting. It is against our American values and a betrayal of the promise to look after all American citizens, not because of their politics

and not because of what their last names might sound like; as American citizens, we come together during times of need.

Democrats will not yield in our responsibility to all American citizens, and I tell that to all my friends from the farm States, even those who voted against aid to New York when we had our hurricane. I never even considered not voting for aid to any other place in the country. I always have.

I say to my friends: Let's treat everyone fairly, and we can get the much needed disaster aid out there quickly.

NOMINATIONS

Mr. President, finally, on chaos. Over the past 12 days, the President has sought to fix his broken policies by breaking down his administration piece by piece. Even in an administration where we have become used to seeing extremism and illogic rule the day, a government of whim, a government of erraticism, a government of temper tantrums, the last few days has reached a new low in dysfunction, and all of this has a simple root cause. Every time President Trump faces a new challenge, he just keeps pointing his fingers and blaming others—blame her, blame him, fire this one, and fire that one.

Mr. President—President Trump, you are not a TV host. You are the President. Work to fix it. Don't keep firing. Don't keep changing policies from one day to the next and then abandoning them. Roll up your sleeves, bring in the experts, and work to fix it. You are the President—but the President seems to much more enjoy blaming people, whether they are in his own administration, people of our political party, and everyone else in between, than actually solving the problems.

He says he wants to keep Americans safe, but President Trump fires the DHS Secretary and Secret Service Director on a whim and provokes shutdowns that cripple our airports and our ports of entry. The President says he wants to strengthen America's standing in the world. Yet no President has done more to undermine the work of diplomacy and the State Department than Donald Trump. He says Republicans will be the party of healthcare. Yet he sues to devastate our healthcare system, with no plans to replace it.

In this administration, chaos reigns, and the source of the chaos comes only from one place, the President of the United States and his erratic, vacillating, often vindictive attitudes toward personnel and policies. When will President Trump learn that the biggest problem is not the personnel executing his agenda; it is the extreme irrational policies that are abhorrent to American values and sometimes against the law, but he insists on it. Every day that President Trump treats the most consequential job in the world like it is some kind of reality TV show is another day that America's security, stability, and long-term prosperity is further in peril.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. SASSE). The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

DEBBIE SMITH ACT

Mr. CORNYN. Mr. President, I would like to start by sharing a story about one of my personal heroes, Debbie Smith. Debbie Smith is living proof that one person can change the world if they have the courage to tell their story and fight for justice.

In 1989, Debbie was at home doing laundry. Her husband Rob, a police officer, was asleep upstairs after working a night shift.

Suddenly a masked man entered her home and threatened to kill her if she screamed. He blindfolded and abducted Debbie and took her outside to a wooded area behind her home, where he robbed and repeatedly raped her. The man threatened her over and over, saying: Remember, I know where you live, and I will come back to kill you if you tell anyone.

After he finally left, Debbie ran upstairs to tell her husband. She begged him not to make her go to the police. But he, as a police officer, insisted that she report the crime and go to the emergency room for a sexual assault forensic exam, sometimes called a rape kit exam.

Debbie did go for that examination and did report the crime. But for Debbie and millions of other survivors there are no immediate answers. Because of the nationwide backlog of untested rape kits, it would be years before she was able to identify her assailant and find any sort of peace.

Although the exact numbers are hard to estimate, experts believe that hundreds of thousands of rape kits remain untested in the United States, and, of course, each one of them represents a unique story of a sexual assault victim and holds the key to apprehending a violent criminal.

Waiting for that evidence to be tested can be excruciating. Debbie said that fear took over her life. She was haunted by the man's voice threatening to kill her. She was terrified for herself and her family, and she even became suicidal for a time.

It wasn't until 6½ years later that Debbie finally got the answer she had been looking for when a DNA cold hit revealed the identity of her rapist. She later said in an interview that DNA gave her back her life.

Debbie chose to harness her pain and to use it to save others from living through years of uncertainty as she did. She has become the fiercest advocate in the Nation for eliminating the rape kit backlog. She has devoted her life to making a difference for victims of sexual violence.