

Of course, confirming Mr. Bernhardt will be just the latest in a series of many Executive Calendar accomplishments. Following on the heels of last week's turn back toward the Senate's historic tradition concerning nominations, we have been able to approve a number of the President's nominees at a much more reasonable pace in the last several days.

I have noted, with particular interest that, for all the breathless warnings my Democratic colleagues issued about the kinds of people we would be confirming, these unobjectionable nominees have actually mostly coasted through on a bipartisan basis.

We saw support from both sides of the aisle for Roy Altman to the U.S. District Court for the Southern District of Florida, and for Daniel Domenico to the District of Colorado.

We saw an overwhelming bipartisan vote in favor of confirming GEN John Abizaid to serve as Ambassador to Saudi Arabia and a voice-voted confirmation for Jeffrey Kessler to serve as Assistant Secretary of Commerce.

These are not lightning-rod people whom my Democratic colleagues would have eagerly debated and investigated for an additional 30 hours. They are the kind of thoroughly qualified public servants who used to sail briskly through the Senate without opposition.

Now, even as my Democratic colleagues continue to require us to file cloture on individuals whom they actually go on to support, we are able to fill out the President's team at a more reasonable clip. There are still many empty seats left to fill, but this week's progress marks a great new beginning not just for the administration that needs its personnel but for the health of this institution.

#### TAX REFORM

Madam President, on another matter, over the past year or so, I have dedicated a large part of my time on the floor to discussing the performance of the U.S. economy, and at no point have I struggled to find things to say.

Seemingly every day, we have been greeted by headlines that tell the same story: Under the political policies of a pro-growth, pro-opportunity Republican agenda, Americans are experiencing a remarkable economic moment.

More than 1 year ago, I mentioned on the floor that weekly jobless claims had reached their lowest level since 1969. Last week, the Labor Department reported that by this measure, the U.S. economy has set yet another new record. What was already a nearly 49-year low has now dipped further to a nearly 50-year low.

My colleagues and I have been busy highlighting the American stories behind these numbers—stories of recovery and prosperity being written in all sorts of communities, in all corners of our country.

More than 1 year since a generational overhaul of the Federal Tax Code lifted burdens from American job creators,

entrepreneurs, and working families, the headlines are continuing to pour in.

With Tax Day just around the corner, millions of working families have filed for the first time under a law that has allowed, according to nonpartisan analysts, the vast majority of Americans to keep more of their money. They have pocketed higher take-home pay, wage increases, and special bonuses, and they benefited from the booming job market these policies have helped ignite.

But old habits die hard. The Washington Democrats who were content to watch as the Obama era piled up 75 percent of new jobs and 90 percent of population growth to the biggest metropolitan areas are back to their same old tricks.

In recent months, we have seen a steady drip of leftist daydreams making their way into press conferences, resolutions, and out on the 2020 campaign trail: a massive rewrite of American election laws and a power grab on an individual's right to exercise political speech, a mandatory, one-size-fits-all government-run replacement for private healthcare for over 180 million Americans, and an estimated \$93 trillion in taxpayers' money to be spent testing out new Federal social planning schemes and abolishing the affordable energy sources American families rely on. Tax Day seems like an especially fitting day to tell Washington Democrats no thanks—no thanks.

The Kentuckians I represent prefer to keep more of their own hard-earned money. They prefer to make their own decisions about their own families instead of ceding more power to bureaucrats.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Iowa.

H.R. 268

Mr. GRASSLEY. Madam President, Members of the Senate, if you look at the poster I just put up, you know what I am going to talk about—the devastating floods in Iowa and the Midwest.

In Western Iowa, we still have areas underwater from flooding on the Missouri river and its tributaries. In the east, we are dealing with the Mississippi River and tributary flooding. Unfortunately, the weather isn't cooperating with additional storms and rain throughout the Upper Midwest, as I speak, that could exacerbate flooding and hinder cleanup and repairs.

This flooding is still a very active event, but as we move to recovery, we know the original damage estimates in Iowa are increasing. I can say that for Nebraska as well. Many roads are still closed; levy damage is extensive; towns are devastated; and many individuals lost their homes and businesses.

In just 6 of our 99 counties in Iowa, 416,000 acres of cropland was flooded. Much of that cropland is still underwater. These farmers are facing the challenge of not being able to plant this year. Unfortunately, many of

these farmers' fields were just recovering from previous years of major flooding. In this area of Iowa, that would have been in 2011.

This is compounded by many losing their previous harvest through having their on-the-farm storage bins destroyed, as you can see here.

Throughout the Midwest area that had severe flooding, 832 on-farm storage bins have been identified as being like these, destroyed. We don't have a complete estimate of that, but I think 832 on-the-farm storage bins would be at least a figure up to a certain date.

These bins hold an estimated 5 to 10 million bushels of corn or soybeans, so, collectively, that would be a loss of worth between \$17 million and \$34 million.

There is an existing program that goes by the acronym WHIP in the Department of Agriculture that is designed to address agricultural losses not covered by crop insurance and other programs. I reached out to the U.S. Department of Agriculture to see if this program could be used for losses such as those seen here, particularly in Iowa and Nebraska, for corn and soybeans.

I was told because the WHIP program was designed for other commodities affected by hurricanes and wildfires, they needed a few words added to the law to extend the same help to these problems we now have in the Midwest. I asked what those words were, and I spoke to Senator SHELBY, who manages this bill on the floor of the Senate, and to Senator PERDUE, who has a great deal of interest in the bill because of agricultural losses in Georgia. These two Senators agreed to work with me. These two Senators agreed to work with me. So I filed a shorter amendment of a disaster bill along with Senator ERNST and several of my colleagues from the Midwest to make sure that devastation like this is covered. I am optimistic that this simple fix, which will mean so much to farmers facing such unusual catastrophic losses, can be included as the disaster bill moves forward through the Senate.

Yesterday, as another way of helping more than just this type of farmer but, generally, other disaster victims, I joined Senators FISCHER, ERNST, and SASSE in introducing a tax bill that goes by the title of the Disaster Tax Relief Act of 2019. This bill includes a series of disaster tax relief provisions that will help American families and businesses recover from the terrible disasters that have occurred so far in 2019, including the Midwest flooding.

On February 28 I introduced a bipartisan bill with Senator WYDEN that included the same tax relief provisions that would assist the victims of disasters that occurred in 2018. So I view the Fischer bill and the Grassley-Wyden bill as complementary, providing disaster tax relief with respect to the disasters that occurred last year, as well as this year. The bill that I introduced in February also includes extensions of

a series of tax provisions that almost every Member of this Senate would like to see passed. These are the tax provisions that expired in 2017 and 2018. We labeled all 25 or 26 of these as tax extenders. These are things that, over the last two decades, have been extended almost automatically after they have sunset, and we need to get those provisions enacted, just like the disaster tax relief provisions.

I encourage the House Democrats to send the Senate a bill that addresses both tax extenders and disaster tax relief provisions. When I say House Democrats, people listening are going to say: He is being partisan.

No, I am being constitutional. The Constitution says that all tax bills have to start in the House of Representatives. The House of Representatives is controlled by the Democrat majority. So that is why I am saying to the House Democrats: Get these bills over here to us so we can help not only the people that benefit from what we call tax extenders but, more importantly, those who with the urgency of the disaster that we are facing.

The importance of passing these bills is because Americans need certainty as they file their taxes in 2018, and they need the tax relief as they recover from these natural disasters. They really need the House Democrats, under the Constitution, to pass a tax bill because we can't act on these tax bills before. The custom around here is that the Constitution says that all tax bills have to start in the House of Representatives. If we pass even a simple tax bill—let's say we pass it as part of an appropriations bill—and we send it over to the House, they don't accept it. That has been the tradition around here for centuries. That is why I am calling on the House Democrats to move that bill.

The disaster relief provisions included in the bill that we have introduced reduce penalties and make it easier to access retirement funds so individuals and families can get back up on their feet and rebuild their lives. In other words, these are retirement funds that people have set aside and that the law doesn't allow them to access for disasters. It is just a simple thing. If somebody is hurt by this disaster and wants to go to their retirement fund and borrow on it for a certain period of time to help them get relief, it is a pretty simple thing. Maybe, momentarily you could say it costs the Federal Government something, but they are still going to owe these taxes regardless of whenever they start drawing for retirement.

These bills also make it easier for disaster victims to claim personal casualty losses, and they suspend certain limitations on charitable contributions to encourage more donations for this disaster relief. For businesses affected by these disasters, this tax relief is available to help them retain employees while businesses get back up and running.

Let's continue the bipartisan tradition of helping our fellow Americans with disasters. When these disasters strike, we ought to do it by enacting this tax relief for both 2018 and 2019, so that disaster victims don't have to wait any longer to access this important assistance and continue to get back on their feet.

It may sound like I am talking about something new. I don't know whether this just started with Hurricane Katrina in 2005 or before, but I remember being chairman of the Finance Committee then. We passed similar legislation to help the victims of hurricanes. So this is really nothing new. Since it is nothing new and we have done it before, what is wrong with doing it now?

The Democrats in the House of Representatives can get this bill over to us so we can get it enacted over here and get it to the President. We want to provide the certainty that taxpayers deserve by enacting extensions of not only those disasters but also the expired tax provisions. I encourage the House Democrats to move swiftly. The Senate and the American people are waiting.

On another point about flooding, generally, not just dealing with this flood, this flood brings to attention something we have to deal with, with the Army Corps of Engineers.

Next week the Environment and Public Works Committee is holding a field hearing in Southwest Iowa to provide oversight on the Army Corps of Engineers management of the 2019 Missouri River flooding. Senator ERNST, my colleague from Iowa, will be chairing this hearing, and I am going to be participating.

Flood control should be the No. 1 priority of the Corps in its management of the Missouri River. I hope that tomorrow, when I get to travel with Vice President PENCE as he views the same area that I viewed 2 weeks ago—the same area covered here—we have the Army Corps of Engineers there so that we can talk to them about the issue of the Missouri River Master Manual authorizing eight purposes as they control the water up and down the Missouri River. They do that through the dams on the Missouri River.

It happens that seven of these can be at cross purposes with the eighth one—flood control. I hope flood control is No. 1 and not No. 8. We need to discuss with them how to prevent massive flooding and how to act to ensure that folks in Nebraska, Iowa, Missouri, and Kansas are not faced with devastation every few years. Eventually, this water ends up in the Gulf of Mexico. So States below Missouri are going to eventually be affected by it.

I appreciate the stamina and determination of Iowans whom I have seen out there, not only in this flood of 2019 but in the flood of 2011. The one of 2019 was much more devastating. I think we have great resiliency. We will come back and pull together to get the job

done, but there is a very long recovery ahead of all of these Iowans affected by it and Nebraskans and, maybe to some extent, Kansas and quite a bit in Missouri.

I will continue to do everything I can at the Federal level to help the State of Iowa, Iowa communities, and, more importantly, in fact, as individual Iowans are affected, I am going to help them to recover and to rebuild.

Thank you.

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. GARDNER. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

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

#### NOMINATION OF DAVID BERNHARDT

Mr. GARDNER. Madam President, it is an exciting day for Colorado. I have known David Bernhardt, our nominee for Secretary of the Interior—and the seventh Secretary of the Interior from Colorado should he be confirmed today—personally and professionally for over two decades. His roots are deep on both sides of Colorado—in the High Plains and on the Western Slope.

We share a lot of common interests in rural development and in saving our small towns. My experience stems from growing up in the agricultural community of Yuma, CO, in the Eastern Plains, and Mr. Bernhardt's formative years were spent on the Western Slope of Colorado—an area that is a microcosm of all of the things that we cherish about our great public lands. We both began our public service only 1 year apart when we worked for Colorado State Representative Russell George, who would later go on to become speaker of the Colorado House. That is when I first met David. Mr. Bernhardt worked with Jaime, my wife, at the Department of the Interior during the George W. Bush administration under another Colorado Secretary of the Interior.

His personal background and public and private sector professional experiences prove he is a strong voice for the West and is extremely well-qualified for the nomination to be the Secretary. In fact, there are few others who have the kind of experience that he has that enables him to be qualified to be Secretary. Which Secretary of the Interior has had more experience than David Bernhardt or has been more qualified to become the Secretary of the Interior? He has extensive insight on Western water policy, natural resources policy, and on Indian affairs, just to name a few.

Those who have worked with Mr. Bernhardt commend him for his integrity and wealth of knowledge on the issues under the Department of the Interior's jurisdiction.

In 2008, after the Department of the Interior reached the largest Indian