

the Judiciary Committee's favorable report with a majority vote here on the floor.

But our work this week is just beginning. Yesterday, the Senate also advanced four more nominees—these to serve on district courts across the country. Today, we will vote to confirm all four.

The first, Howard Nielson, has been nominated for the District of Utah. As I mentioned yesterday, Mr. Nielson has clerked for both the Fourth Circuit and the Supreme Court and has assembled an impressive record at the Department of Justice and in the private sector.

Next will come the nomination of Stephen Clark for the Eastern District of Missouri. Mr. Clark is an accomplished litigator with nearly three decades of experience in practice.

The third nominee is Carl Nichols, the President's choice to serve as district judge for the District of Columbia. You will start to detect a pattern because he, too, is a thoroughly impressive nominee—clerkships for the DC Circuit and for the Supreme Court for Justice Thomas, service at the Department of Justice, and recognized excellence in private practice.

Finally, we will vote on Kenneth Bell, nominated to serve in the Western District of North Carolina. Mr. Bell has under his belt nearly two decades of service in the Office of the U.S. Attorney—distinguished by national honors for his accomplishments as a prosecutor—as well as extensive experience in the private sector.

So if I am sounding like a broken record, it is because the White House continues to submit one extremely well-qualified and highly impressive nominee after another to sit on the Federal bench. These are men and women who are bright, talented, well-regarded, and committed to applying what the text of our laws and our Constitution actually say.

Today, we can take four more steps in that positive direction. These nominees deserve big bipartisan votes, so I hope each of my colleagues will join me in voting to confirm each of them.

DISASTER RELIEF

Mr. MCCONNELL. Madam President, now on one final matter, several of our Senate colleagues and their counterparts in the House are continuing to zero in on long-overdue legislation to deliver additional help to Americans all across the Nation who are struggling to rebuild from natural disasters. This ought to have been a fairly straightforward process. We shouldn't need to explain why the need for this relief is urgent, but just for good measure, let's remember the Americans who are counting on us.

In California, last year's string of wildfires included the deadliest and most destructive fire on record. It killed 85 people and burned more than 150,000 acres.

In the Midwest earlier this year, storm surges flooded whole swaths of States and racked up millions of dollars in damages. As one expert recently put it, "We have points in Iowa and Illinois that have been in flood stage for over 30 days"—30 days—"which hasn't occurred since we started keeping records—and some of them go back 150 years."

Across the Southeast and gulf coasts, recent hurricane seasons have left lasting scars. Hurricane Michael, which swept across Florida into South Georgia last October, has itself produced nearly 150,000 insurance claims in Florida alone.

In Alabama, more tornadoes have already been recorded in 2019 than in all of last year. One that touched down in Lee County on March 3 left 23 people dead.

Nearly 2 years after Hurricane Maria tore across Puerto Rico, too many storefronts are still shuttered, too many homes still lack roofs, and power remains too unreliable.

And the list goes on.

This is hardly the first time facts like these have been laid out here on the floor. In fact, this legislation has already taken far too long—far too long—to deliver. But now that we are in the home stretch, it is past time to put partisan politics aside, move past any tangential questions, and secure a final agreement that can become law; that is, something that can both pass the Democratic House and earn the President's signature soon. That is how to make a law in this situation.

The Senate will vote on disaster relief this week. The Members of this body will not return home for Memorial Day without taking further action to help these struggling communities, which, by the way, include a number of military installations that need assistance to recover and to rebuild.

It is my sincere hope that we will be able to vote on a negotiated, bipartisan, bicameral solution. That is how we can get to an outcome. That is what affected Americans deserve.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Without objection, it is so ordered.

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Democratic leader is recognized.

VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN ACT

Mr. SCHUMER. Madam President, it has been a frightening 2 weeks for tens of millions of Americans who support a

woman's freedom to make her own healthcare choices. Actually, if you believe the polls, there are hundreds of millions of Americans in that category.

Republican legislators across the country have passed some of the most extreme restrictions on a woman's right to choose. With breathtaking speed, they are trying to take us backward, but they have already provoked a fierce reaction among the American people.

Just yesterday, I stood with hundreds before the Supreme Court to speak on behalf of Americans everywhere who believe that women don't deserve to be treated this way by their government. Meanwhile, here in the Senate, the Republican leader is once again stalling—it seems to be his MO—on a bill to improve legal protections for women who are victims of domestic abuse, assault, and stalking. This is VAWA, or the Violence Against Women Act.

VAWA has been a landmark piece of legislation, and it has greatly reduced the abuse of women. Well, there was an improved and expanded VAWA that was passed by the House of Representatives on a bipartisan basis. It got significant Republican votes. It brings much needed updates to existing Federal law. It finally expands protections to women who are victims of violence from domestic partners or former partners, not just current or former spouses. It also says that if you are known to stalk your partner or have a restraining order against you, you shouldn't be allowed to purchase a gun. Thanks to the work of some of my colleagues in both Chambers, it also brings renewed attention to violence against Native American women who are so often overlooked.

I thank Senators SMITH, KLOBUCHAR, and CANTWELL for bringing attention to this bill later today.

Unfortunately, Leader MCCONNELL has indicated that he will not bring the House-passed VAWA bill to the floor, despite these many commonsense reforms. Why not? I hope it is not because the gun lobby reflexively opposes any restrictions on gun purchases—even for convicted stalkers. I hope that is not the impediment here, because as Senator KLOBUCHAR has pointed out, if you are abused by your husband, then, you are protected by VAWA. If you are abused by a boyfriend, you are not. What is the difference? What is the difference?

VAWA is yet another example of how Leader MCCONNELL has turned this Chamber into a legislative graveyard. Even the most commonsense bills, with broad support from one end of America to the other, that are passed by the House—here, a bill protecting women from violence—meet the grim fate at the hands of the Senate's self-proclaimed Grim Reaper.

What a shame. The Violence Against Women Act is precisely the kind of legislation the American people expect the Senate to consider. During a difficult few weeks for women across

America, the Senate could have sent a strong, positive signal by moving forward on the Violence Against Women Act. Instead, Leader McConnell carved out another tombstone for his legislative graveyard—another popular bipartisan bill buried with no action by the Senate and tied by the leader in partisan gridlock.

CLIMATE CHANGE

Mr. SCHUMER. Madam President, earlier this month, a report from Hawaii's Mauna Loa Observatory found that carbon dioxide levels in our atmosphere have now reached the highest level in human history—in human history. It was a chilling reminder that the threat from climate change is real, immediate, and existential. Almost everyone accepts this science and the gravity of the threat it portends. The only group of folks that still seem skeptical of climate science are Republicans and the Trump administration.

Yesterday the New York Times reported that the Trump EPA is planning to rewrite the established benchmarks for unsafe levels of air pollution. You heard that right. They are planning to use dubious math to obscure the real and long-known health risks of air pollution. These new formulations would result in fewer predicted deaths than what the experts have long agreed to. People will still die. The numbers will just be wrong about the effect.

Why, might you ask, would anyone want to obscure the full health risks of air pollution? Because then the Trump administration could use the fake math to justify further rollbacks to clean air rules at a time when global warming is increasing and when Americans know the danger. This Trump administration and the Republican majority are rolling the clock back—more carbon, more coal, more oil, and more gas, when we need less. We all know that.

What kind of Orwellian nonsense is this? The Environmental Protection Agency making it easier to pollute the environment? It is a textbook definition of “dystopian.”

As my colleague Senator WHITEHOUSE so often points out, dark money lurks behind so much of what the Trump administration does. Big Oil, Big Gas, and big polluters everywhere are the only possible boosters of this decision. It is their money, funneled to political organizations and politicians without a trace of disclosure, that motivates folks in the Trump administration to make it easier to release more pollution into the air.

We should be using the Senate to debate climate policies in search of common ground, but Leader McConnell has decided to bring forward his version of the Green New Deal just so his party could vote against it. We know what Leader McConnell and the Republicans are against. What are they for in dealing with climate change? So far, nada, zero, nothing—they haven't

put a single thing on the floor. The American people see the effects of climate change in their lives, and they know Congress must act. Only the Republican majority stands in the way.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the leadership time is reserved.

CONCLUSION OF MORNING BUSINESS

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Morning business is closed.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

EXECUTIVE CALENDAR

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate will proceed to executive session to resume consideration of the following nomination, which the clerk will report.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read the nomination of Howard C. Nielson, of Utah, to be United States District Judge for the District of Utah.

MEMORIAL DAY

Mr. THUNE. Mr. President, Monday is Memorial Day. It is the day our Nation pauses to remember all those who laid down their lives in defense of our country, from Saratoga to Yorktown, to Iraq and Afghanistan.

We enjoy tremendous freedoms as Americans, tremendous privileges, but we do not enjoy these privileges by chance. They are hard-fought gains secured for us again and again by each new generation of American soldiers who lay down their lives in the cause of the free. It is important that we do not take what they have secured for us lightly, that we remember our freedoms have been paid for in blood.

Near the end of the film “Saving Private Ryan,” the dying Captain Miller tells Private Ryan of the sacrifice that has been made on his behalf. He says: “Earn this . . . earn it.”

I am not sure we can ever fully earn the gift that has been given to us by those who have laid down their lives in our defense, but we can attempt to live lives worthy of their sacrifice and to defend the cause for which they gave the last full measure of devotion.

When we remember the fallen on Memorial Day, there is one other group we should remember, and that is their

families. Our Nation's Gold Star families may not have laid down their own lives for our country, but they gave their loved ones, their fathers and brothers, daughters and sisters. For the sake of our freedoms, they live with empty spaces at Thanksgivings and birthdays, at weddings and graduations, at their dinner tables and Little League practices. We owe them a debt also that we can never repay.

I have been privileged to visit more than one veterans cemetery, such as our own Black Hills National Cemetery in South Dakota—which we recently expanded to ensure that our soldiers will have a resting place for generations to come—Arlington National Cemetery, and the American Cemetery at Normandy. There is a special hallowedness to the ground at these places. Valor and sacrifice still linger in the air, and a deep peace abounds—the peace of the warrior who has fought the good fight and found rest from his labors.

General George S. Patton once said:

It is foolish and wrong to mourn the men who died. Rather, we should thank God that such men lived.

I might disagree with General Patton on the first part, as it is right and proper that we should mourn our dead, but with General Patton, I say: Let us thank God that such men and women lived.

May the memory of our honored dead be eternal.

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

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

HEALTHCARE

Mr. BARRASSO. Mr. President, I come to the floor again today to discuss Washington Democrats' one-size-fits-all healthcare scheme. Every American needs to know about this very radical plan.

Democrats essentially want Washington, DC, to take over all of healthcare in this country and to abolish private health insurance that 180 million Americans get through their jobs. Incredibly, this proposal offered by Senator BERNIE SANDERS has the backing of many leading Democrats running for President and 109 Democratic Members of the House of Representatives.

So I want to continue the debate today by focusing on the terrible impact this radical scheme will have on all of the fine men and women who provide healthcare to people across the country. Of course, the impact on them will impact the patients for whom they provide care and services.

I am talking about the Nation's dedicated medical professionals, especially