

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Democratic leader is recognized.

BUSINESS BEFORE THE SENATE

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, as we rapidly approach the end of the session, Senators are working in earnest to finish a bipartisan government funding bill as well as an emergency Federal relief package.

Over the past several weeks, the bipartisan Gang of 8 came together to provide a framework for an agreement on emergency COVID relief. That framework has been the basis of discussions between the four congressional leaders: Speaker PELOSI, Leader MCCARTHY, Leader MCCONNELL, and myself. Secretary Mnuchin has been in our talks as well, representing the President.

Yesterday we had two very long and very productive meetings. Our final discussion stretched late into the evening.

As we race the clock to reach a final accord before the end of the year, we are close to an agreement. It is not a done deal yet, but we are very close.

Now, for Democrats, this has always been about getting the American people the relief they need in the time of an acute national crisis, of an emergency to so many Americans. This has been about delivering a lifeline to Americans who were laid off, through no fault of their own, families struggling to pay the rent and put food on the table, small businesses hanging on for dear life.

This has been about saving our schools, our healthcare system, and delivering the resources to produce and distribute the vaccine that should finally, finally help our country turn the corner and defeat this evil disease.

We are on the precipice of achieving these goals. We Democrats would have liked to go considerably further, but this won't be the last time Congress speaks on COVID relief. Right now, we must address this emergency over the short term. But make no mistake, we will work in the future to provide additional relief as the country requires, but we need to provide a platform to build on. We need to address this emergency right now.

At the end of one of the most difficult years in recent American history, a vaccine has given us all a reason for hope. Let's give the country another reason. The finish line is in sight. Everyone wants to get this done. Let's push through the few final meters and deliver the outcome that the American people very much need.

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 President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. 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 Katherine A. Crytzer, of Tennessee, to be United States District Judge for the Eastern District of Tennessee.

TECHNOLOGY

Mr. THUNE. Mr. President, yesterday afternoon, the Commerce Subcommittee on Communications, Technology, Innovation, and the Internet held our final hearing of the 116th Congress. The title of yesterday's hearing was "Betting on the Rest: Expanding American Entrepreneurship Outside Traditional Hubs," and it focused on examining where venture capital is being invested in this country and where it is not, with an eye to exploring ways to expand investment to other parts of the country.

Over the past 50 years, venture capital has come to play an essential role in advancing American entrepreneurship. Venture capitalists have provided key funding for startups that have gone on to become some of America's most profitable companies. Many of the technologies and services we rely on today would not be around if venture capitalists hadn't been willing to take a risk on innovation.

However, venture capital investment in the United States has traditionally been highly concentrated in certain areas of the country. In 2019, California-based companies received 50 percent of all venture-backed investment in the United States. Just three States—California, New York, and Massachusetts—accounted for almost 75 percent of all venture-backed investment in the country.

There are a lot of valid reasons for this investment concentration. However, this geographic imbalance also means that a majority of regions within the United States are often shut out from the kind of investment that creates jobs, revitalizes communities, and enables the pursuit of the American dream.

Without greater access to capital in underserved regions, the flow of talent,

wealth, and opportunity will continue to move to only a handful of coastal cities, and the full reach and diversity of American ingenuity will go unrealized. Fortunately, there are a lot of individuals in the private sector who are already working to address this issue and expand venture-backed investment to other areas of the United States, and we had the opportunity to hear from some of them yesterday. I was very grateful for their input. We were very pleased to have a South Dakota entrepreneur among our panelists.

I am committed to making sure that the Federal Government serves as a help, not a hindrance, to the expansion of venture capital investment. I took the reins of the Commerce Committee's Subcommittee on Communications, Technology, Innovation, and the Internet at the start of the 116th Congress, and I am very proud of the work we have done over the past 2 years. We have had a very active Congress, holding eight hearings in Washington, DC, as well as a hearing in my home State of South Dakota. These hearings have explored everything from broadband investment in rural America to the way the social media companies filter information on their platforms.

I have introduced several bills over the past 2 years that have been informed by our work at the committee, including the PACT Act, the TRACED Act, the Telecommunications Skilled Workforce Act, and the STREAMLINE Small Cell Deployment Act.

A priority of mine over the past several years has been ensuring that America stays at the head of the next wave of internet technology, which is 5G. In addition to the tremendous technological benefits that will result from 5G, staying at the forefront of the 5G revolution will bring tremendous economic investment and create a lot of great American jobs.

I spent a lot of time working on this issue when I was chairman of the Commerce Committee, and heading up the Communications, Technology, Innovation, and the Internet Subcommittee in this Congress has allowed me to continue to focus on 5G.

Last year, I introduced the STREAMLINE Small Cell Deployment Act along with the ranking member of the subcommittee, Senator SCHATZ. Our legislation would help expedite the deployment of the small cells that are a key part of 5G infrastructure.

This year, I introduced the Telecommunications Skilled Workforce Act to address another part of the 5G equation, and that is ensuring that we have the workforce in place to handle the demands of installing and maintaining 5G technology.

As a resident of a rural State, ensuring access to broadband internet in rural communities has long been a priority of mine. I introduced legislation this year to direct funds from radio spectrum auctions to expand rural broadband access. I am continuing my work to ensure that rural communities get access to 5G technology.

Now, 5G has the potential to offer tremendous benefits to rural communities, from expanded access to telehealth services to precision agriculture technologies, and I am committed to ensuring that rural communities are not left behind in the 5G revolution.

Pretty much every American has been forced to deal with annoying and illegal robocalls. These calls are a major nuisance, and too often, they are more than a nuisance. Every day, vulnerable Americans fall prey to even more sophisticated scammers and have money or their identities stolen.

I have worked on this issue for years, and in 2019 I introduced the Telephone Robocall Abuse Criminal Enforcement and Deterrence Act, or the TRACED Act, along with Senator MARKEY. While this legislation won't stop every robocall, the TRACED Act provides tools to discourage illegal robocalls, protect consumers, and crack down on offenders. I am very proud that last December, the President signed our legislation into law.

More and more, Americans get news and information from social media sites, and particularly during this past election cycle, a lot of questions have arisen about the ways that social media platforms are filtering the information that we see. Internet platforms have actively cultivated the notion that they are merely providing the technology for people to communicate and to share their thoughts and ideas, but the reality is somewhat different. Sites like Facebook and Twitter make use of sophisticated content-moderation tools, algorithms, and recommendation engines to shape the content that we see on these platforms.

Now, content moderation can certainly improve the user experience. Most of us would prefer that YouTube recommend videos that match our interest. The problem is, the content moderation has been and largely continues to be a black box, with consumers having little or no idea how the information they see has been shaped by the sites they are visiting.

Last year, I chaired a subcommittee hearing on this issue, and the information we gathered helped inform two pieces of bipartisan legislation that I introduced this Congress—the Filter Bubble Transparency Act and the Platform Accountability and Consumer Transparency Act, or the PACT Act. Both of these bills would increase transparency around the content-moderation process so that users have a better sense of how the information presented to them is being filtered. The Filter Bubble Transparency Act and the PACT Act go a long way toward making social media and other sites more accountable to consumers, and I will continue to work to advance these legislative efforts here in the Senate.

I am grateful to have had the opportunity to chair this subcommittee over the past Congress and for the opportunity it has given me to work on the important issues and the legislation

that I have mentioned. I want to thank the subcommittee's ranking member, Senator SCHATZ, for all the work he has done to make our committee so effective. I look forward to continuing to work with all my subcommittee colleagues to advance the 5G revolution, address the challenges presented by the internet age, and to make life better for the American people.

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.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. SASSE). The Senator from Oregon.

UNANIMOUS CONSENT REQUEST—S. 2828

Mr. WYDEN. Mr. President, in a moment, I am going to make a unanimous consent request on a piece of legislation on which my Eastern Oregon constituents have done an extraordinary job with respect to building a coalition that brings people together on a contentious issue. It deserves enormous credit, and I will describe their efforts here shortly.

I also want to thank, as we begin, Senator BARRASSO. Senator BARRASSO will be taking on a new role in January on the Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources. He and I have worked together often, and I have appreciated his talking with me on this matter as he begins to look to his new duties in January.

Mr. President, as in legislative session, I ask unanimous consent that the Energy and Natural Resources Committee be discharged from further consideration of S. 2828, the Malheur Community Empowerment for the Owyhee Act, and the Senate proceed to its immediate consideration; further, that the bill be considered read a third time and passed; and that the motion to reconsider be considered made and laid upon the table with no intervening action or debate.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

The Senator from Wyoming.

Mr. BARRASSO. Mr. President, reserving the right to object, I do appreciate the work the Senator from Oregon has done on this public lands bill. I know the amount of effort that has gone into this legislation is significant. Locally driven public lands bills take an incredible amount of time to get right.

This legislation has gone through intensive local stakeholder involvement, very similar to what we have done in Wyoming with the Wyoming Public Lands Initiative in my home State. The Wyoming Public Lands Initiative was spearheaded by our Wyoming County Commissioners Association. This initiative was started in order to resolve, through local negotiations, the status of so-called “temporary” wilderness study areas in Wyoming that have now, seemingly, become permanent.

I recognize and understand that public lands negotiations often result in

compromise. This give-and-take is a good thing, for it lets people closest to the issue have a significant voice. So I appreciate the efforts the stakeholders on the ground in Oregon have made to get this bill to where it is today. However, I believe additional work is still needed.

I would let my friend from Oregon know that I will work with him and any other Senators with public lands issues before the Committee on Energy and Natural Resources. We may not always agree on a given outcome, but I am committed to having those discussions with Members of this body.

For this reason, I object.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Objection is heard.

The Senator from Oregon.

Mr. WYDEN. Mr. President, I know my colleague does have other business that he has to get to, but before he attends to that, I just want to thank him for spending time with me already on this issue. I am going to outline the extraordinary effort that was made by my constituents.

I think we all know—and I am going to discuss it—that in the West, very often, citizens feel nobody is listening to them, that nobody cares about them. The Senator and I have talked about this. This is kind of a question of, How do you empower them with a framework that can help them but also serve as a model for the country?

So a big thanks to my colleague, and I am looking forward to working with him on this and other matters next year.

What Senator BARRASSO and I are discussing is the Malheur Community Empowerment for the Owyhee Act, known in our part of the county as the Malheur CEO Act. The bill has been in the works since late 2018. Back then, when a group of ranchers and business people who live in Malheur County, OR, came to see me, they came to talk about this incredible part of Oregon they call home. It is wide open country, and not many people live there, but those who do want to make sure they have a say in how it is going to be preserved and managed for the future.

When I say this bill has been in the works since 2018, that is not the whole story, because the fact is that the groundwork for this bill has been in the making for decades, and it is only recently that an incredible coalition of Oregonians from across the political spectrum has come together to make it possible for us to propose this legislation.

As I touched on with Senator BARRASSO, in rural areas of the West, like Malheur County, there is often a feeling that people from thousands of miles away, particularly in DC, think that they somehow know better than rural citizens about what is good for those rural communities. I guess I would sum it up as: In rural areas, there is the sense that somehow, often, elites just look down on them; that nobody is listening; that people in power