

my wife Sharon and our three children, to visit with him in his office in Salt Lake City. He prayed with us, encouraged us, and offered us counsel. As much as anything, we just felt honored that he would take the time to meet with us and show interest in our lives.

This is perhaps the single most consistent thread in President Monson's life. He was someone who at every step of his life, at every stage of his service, was always willing to reach out to others, to visit them even without anyone else expecting it. He was known—famous, in fact—for routinely interrupting his daily routine just to visit someone who happened to be sick, who happened to be in the hospital, who happened to be going through something difficult. President Monson didn't always know the reason why he needed to visit the person in advance; he just knew it needed to be done, and he always did.

There are lessons that we can learn here in the U.S. Senate about this type of service—this type of service that is selfless, that is eternal in its scope and in its reach, this type of service that blesses the lives of other human beings without any expectation of remuneration. He was a leader who understood how even small, seemingly insignificant acts of kindness could affect people's lives in profound, lasting ways.

He always urged his brothers and sisters within the church and elsewhere to be on the lookout for signs that God was calling them to help. "Never fail to follow a prompting of the Holy Spirit," he would say, and on a regular basis, he did just that. This could mean visiting a relative in the hospital or delivering a meal to a coworker who was mourning a loss or just checking in on a friend he hadn't seen in a while.

For President Monson, it was always about taking time for that personal connection. President Monson knew that little encounters build strong relationships—and strong saints.

In 2008, President Thomas S. Monson was called to lead the church. He proved to be a good steward of the church in a fast-moving world and in an expanding, growing faith community. Many obituaries have already noted how in 2012 he lowered the age requirement for missionaries, a decision that increased the missionary force in short order from 52,000 to almost 70,000. That is almost 20,000 more young people to spread the Gospel and daily serve in those communities around the world.

But President Monson did far more than that to strengthen the church's commitment to caring for the least in our community. Under his leadership, the church expanded its poverty and disaster relief programs. He even added "caring for the poor and needy" to the church's official mission statement.

President Monson lived in Utah almost his entire life, but his heart was with the church spreading throughout the world. During the depths of the Cold War, he helped lead the Latter-

day Saints trapped behind the Iron Curtain. Mormons in the Soviet Union were poor just like everyone else. They didn't have a temple, and their governments forbade them from traveling abroad. As a result, they didn't have access to temple ceremonies that are central to our faith. That didn't sit well with President Monson.

As he told his brothers and sisters from the pulpit during a trip to East Germany, he wanted them to share in "every blessing" of the faith. So he gave everything he had to help those people, even the shirt off his own back—quite literally. He returned from one trip to the Soviet Union in his house slippers because he had given his spare clothes to the less fortunate, a funny story that brings to mind the words of the Savior: "[For] I was a stranger, and ye took me in: [I was] naked, and ye clothed me."

Around that time, President Monson began two decades of quiet diplomacy with the Soviet authorities, including with Erich Honecker himself. His labor reaped a tremendous harvest. In a regime that was hostile to religion and to outsiders, he won approval for Mormon missionaries to come and spread the Gospel.

In 1985, he won an even bigger triumph when a temple opened behind the Iron Curtain in Freiberg, Germany. Ninety thousand East Germans attended the dedication of that temple.

He had followed a prompting of the Lord. The result was nothing less than that dramatic, impactful tear in the Iron Curtain, one that had stifled religious belief, but religious belief was facilitated by this noble servant of the Lord Jesus Christ.

These are just a few stories from President Monson's life that I have shared, and I would like to conclude with just one more. Not long ago, President Monson was asked what he wanted for his birthday, which was coming up. Here was his simple response:

Do something for someone else on that day to make his or her life better. Find someone who is having a hard time, or is ill, or lonely, and do something for them. That's all I would ask.

President Monson was always looking for little ways to help other people. That wish is as true in death as it was in life. In lieu of flowers for his funeral, the church has requested contributions be made to the church's Humanitarian Aid Fund.

President Monson's legacy will outlast his death because he chose to follow the One who conquered death, taking upon Himself the sins, the transgressions, the pains, the miseries of all mankind so that we, too, might return to live with Him.

President Monson will be missed. President Monson, God be with you until we meet again.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. CASIDY). The majority whip.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS OF THE CONGRESS

Mr. CORNYN. Mr. President, I know we are back, fresh from the holidays, at the start of a new year, and all of us are already thinking a lot and working hard on the tasks we have at hand. We have a lot to do, especially before the next continuing resolution expires on January 19.

But I don't want to make the mistake of failing to recount the good work we were able to accomplish on behalf of the American people in 2017 because, sometimes, in the hustle and bustle of life, we fail to acknowledge those things that we have actually been able to do, for which we ought to be grateful, and that our constituents need to know about. I would like to take just a few minutes to do exactly that because, unfortunately, in the hyperpolitical and hyperpolarized political environment we live in today—especially with the advent of social media—there are always some naysayers and pundits who want to offer their comments. One of the things I have noticed most about many of those naysayers and pundits when they comment on what is happening here in Washington is how little they know about the facts. The facts matter, and I want to offer those for the public's consideration now.

In January of last year, the Nation was quickly called to order following the inauguration of President Trump. One of his first actions was to nominate Neil Gorsuch to the U.S. Supreme Court. I think most of us were astonished at the quality of this selection, many of us not being familiar with the Tenth Circuit Court of Appeals on which Justice Gorsuch served in Denver, CO.

Justice Gorsuch was quickly confirmed in April, and then we moved on to fill other judicial vacancies, which, of course, are the prerogative of the President to make that nomination and to then be confirmed with the advice and consent of the Senate. We, like the President, have made filling these judicial vacancies a priority.

The fact is, though, that the Senate is in the personnel business. In other words, our friends in the House of Representatives don't have to vote on confirmation of judges and other Presidential nominees, but we in the Senate have that responsibility. All told, we have confirmed 19 men and women to the Federal bench in 2017, setting a record for appellate judges confirmed during a President's first year in office. Two of them, Jim Ho and Don Willett, I am pleased to say, will serve from Texas on the Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals that sits in New Orleans. These are exceptionally qualified nominees—and typical in that description of the types of people that President Trump has selected to serve in the Federal judiciary.

But our work wasn't just confined to confirming the President's nominees. After 8 years of overreach, hundreds of burdensome rules passed during the

previous administration—many in the waning hours of President Obama's Presidency—were rolled back or suspended. I am glad Congress did its part, using the Congressional Review Act to roll back 15 harmful regulations last year. As much as anything, I think that has contributed to the soaring stock market, the increase in consumer confidence, and the extraordinary rebound of our economy.

As last summer began, we passed a bill funding Texas priorities. It funded things like the National Space Administration programs at Houston's Johnson Space Center, which will advance missions, hopefully back to the moon and eventually to Mars. We allowed through that funding to make sure that the Department of Homeland Security had what they needed to hire additional Border Patrol and agents at ports of entry to improve those checkpoints and to add immigration court judges too.

I remember thinking about Hurricane Harvey. A friend of mine years ago asked the rhetorical question: Do you know what makes God laugh? Then he answered: When we make plans.

Hurricane Harvey is perhaps an example of that, because we were making other plans when we got this natural disaster known as Hurricane Harvey.

Texas was pummeled with the most extreme rain event in the history of the United States, devastating more than 28,000 square miles along the coast. I, along with the entire Texas congressional delegation, helped secure roughly \$30 billion for recovery efforts, but the thing I am most proud of is the way ordinary Texans responded to their neighbors in need. They weren't waiting around for Washington to act first. They wanted to act to help their neighbors, their community, and their State.

Recognizing we have the Presiding Officer from Louisiana, I just want to make special note of the Cajun Navy that came over from Louisiana to help rescue people off of their rooftops. That is part of what makes not only Texas and Louisiana great, but it is what makes America great, too, when people will come to the aid of their fellow Americans.

As Texans tore out sheetrock and molded carpet in their living rooms, Federal resources helped piece together the lives disrupted. Now we have to make sure we complete the task by delivering additional relief not only to Texas but to Florida, Puerto Rico, and the Virgin Islands, as well as to those States devastated by the wildfires out West. The House having passed a substantial disaster relief bill and sent it over to us, I am hopeful that is something we will take up and pass very soon, perhaps as soon as January 19.

I spoke about natural disasters, but now let me turn to a manmade disaster. After the hurricane, Texas was dealt a second blow just 2 months later, when a man opened fire at a church in Sutherland Springs, TX.

With multiple convictions for domestic violence, a felony conviction, and a history of mental illness, this individual should never have been able to legally purchase a firearm because, under existing law, those conditions disqualify you from being able to purchase a firearm, if you are a convicted felon, convicted of domestic violence, or have a history of mental illness.

That is why, following this terrible disaster where 26 people were killed, I introduced the bipartisan Fix NICS Act—that is, Fix the National Instant Criminal Background Check System Act—to ensure existing laws are enforced and convicted felons don't exploit our background check system by lying and buying. I am going to continue to urge the passage of this important piece of legislation, which is, as I say, bipartisan, as it should be.

The fall of 2017 gave way to winter and soon came the flurries of snow not only here in Washington but back home in Texas. The week before Christmas, we completed comprehensive tax reform—a historic overhaul of the Tax Code and the first in more than three decades.

We said originally that our goals were threefold: One was to make the Tax Code simpler; the second was to make sure everybody in every tax bracket saw a decrease in their tax liability; and third was to make the American Tax Code competitive in the global economy. Until that point, we had the highest tax rate in the industrialized world, which caused companies to move or invest offshore and create jobs in other countries rather than the United States because we had the most burdensome tax in the industrialized world.

As I said, this bill—now law—reduces taxes in all income brackets and boosts the standard deduction and child tax credit. This means that only 1 out of 10 taxpayers will likely choose to itemize because they will actually benefit more from the standard deduction along with the child tax credit. It will allow businesses to add jobs, raise wages, and reinvest in the United States from overseas. For example, a family of four making the median income will see their taxes drop by more than \$2,000—a reduction of nearly 58 percent.

Tax reform complements an economy that has already been truly unleashed under this administration. Just since January, the economy has added 1.7 million new jobs, and over the last two quarters, our economy has grown at more than 3 percent—as compared to an average of only 1.9 percent under the previous administration.

While not historic in the sense that the tax bill was historic, there is other legislation we passed with little fanfare but significant impact that I would like to mention.

One is a bill I championed called the PROTECT Our Children Act, which reauthorizes task forces to combat child exploitation online. The second I would like to mention is a bill that tackled

elder abuse. A third, called the SAFER Act—which was signed today by the President—reauthorizes rape kit audits and prioritizes the training of pediatric nurses handling sexual assault cases.

I was shocked and chagrined a year or so ago to learn there could be as many as 400,000 untested rape kits either sitting in evidence lockers or in laboratories untested. Now, thanks to the Debbie Smith Act—named after a heroic woman who has championed the funding of Federal efforts to identify and test this backlog of rape kits—that number is far smaller today, but reauthorization of the SAFER Act is important to keep our commitment to victims of sexual assault that we will do everything in our power to help them identify their assailant and bring them to justice, and, at the same time, exonerate people who may be falsely accused because there is no DNA match.

Finally, other legislation I filed and has now been signed into law assists police departments in hiring military veterans. We know our police departments are always in need of good, highly qualified applicants for those important first responder jobs. Once signed by the President, it will streamline the process that Active-Duty personnel and reservist members go through to apply for their commercial driver's license.

We know it is a long and arduous process to apply for a commercial driver's license, so why not take our Active-Duty military who are soon to retire or our veterans and expedite their ability to qualify for a commercial driver's license when they leave the military?

As I said, these bills don't grab big headlines, but they chip away at problems and were passed on a bipartisan basis—which I think puts the lie to the canard that nothing ever gets done in Washington.

The job of men and women in Congress is to serve the people who elected us. This last year we made important strides, but our work is just beginning. As I said at the outset, there is much that lies ahead. Many Americans and many Texans are still knocking at the door of greater prosperity. I hope we will make it our New Year's resolution to open that door a little wider in 2018.

I yield the floor.

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

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

RESCINDING THE COLE MEMO

Mr. BOOKER. Mr. President, I rise today because earlier on this day, the Trump administration and Attorney General Jeff Sessions rescinded the Justice Department's policy known as the Cole memo.

The Cole memo is a policy issued under the Obama administration instructing prosecutors to shift away