

Major power companies in Illinois, Maryland, and Massachusetts are already proposing plans to give their customers tens of millions of dollars in relief by lowering the rates they charge for energy. And get this: According to CNBC, a South Carolina electric and gas utility is planning to give a cash payment directly to its customers, averaging \$1,000 per household. More are following suit. In Montana, Louisiana, and Indiana, regulators are already working with utilities to determine how households will benefit from the tax savings. In my own State of Kentucky, the Public Service Commission directed a number of the electric, gas, and water companies to track their savings and make plans to cut rates for consumers.

As any mother or father who has to balance a checkbook and pay bills every month can attest, this is welcome news for middle-class families. These reductions will be especially helpful to the most vulnerable in our society.

According to data from the Department of Health and Human Services, energy costs eat up a significantly higher percentage of household income for poor families than for other families. In other words, for a software engineer in Silicon Valley, a lower heating or air conditioning bill may go unnoticed, but for workers who clean that office overnight, this relief will make a real difference.

A drop in utility bills effectively amounts to progressive tax relief. This is just another example of how the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act is rapidly proving to be a serious asset to poor and middle-class families—precisely the people whom my Democratic friends in the House and Senate loudly claimed would get nothing at all from this bill.

It has been 3 weeks—3 weeks—lower utility bills, 1 million special tax reform bonuses and pay raises, and this is only the beginning.

A Republican majority in the House and a Republican majority in the Senate and President Trump listened to the facts instead of the political spin. I am proud that we passed this historic bill and gave families across America the tax relief they have waited decades to receive.

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 President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

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

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

The Democratic leader is recognized.

FUNDING THE GOVERNMENT

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, we have barely over a week to negotiate a broad package of must-pass items, including an extension of government funding, a deal to lift the spending caps

for both defense and urgent domestic priorities, a healthcare package, disaster aid, an agreement to protect the Dreamers, and to provide additional border security.

The path forward on some of these issues is very clear. There are significant bipartisan majorities that would vote to extend CHIP, or the Children's Health Insurance Program, and community health centers. There seems to be a growing consensus on how we can pass the 702 FISA Court program.

I am also confident that we could assemble a disaster aid package that addresses the needs of all of the States and Territories—Texas, Florida, Louisiana, California, the Western States that have been plagued by fires, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands—as well as modifying what the Forest Service does so they don't spend all of their money simply fighting forest fires and not do the job they are intended to do, which is to prevent future forest fires by careful forestry programs.

Even where the path is murkier, the outlines of a deal exist. If we don't lift the spending caps in short order, the sharp ax of sequestration will fall on the military side of the budget and on the domestic side of the budget. That is a scenario everyone wants to avoid.

The majority leader continues to insist that we should raise the budget caps unequally, sparing our military but not critical domestic programs that create jobs, grow our economy, and help the middle class. We Democrats believe we absolutely must provide the resources our men and women overseas need to protect our country. We believe that strongly, but we also know that there are many important issues here at home—combating the opioid crisis, improving veterans' healthcare, shoring up pensions for millions of hard-working Americans who are approaching retirement, and dealing with rural development and rural broadband. These items are all crucial to the middle class.

The deadly scourge of opioid addiction has contributed to the first consecutive-year decline in life expectancy in the great United States of America since the early 1960s. That is an astounding and alarming fact that should rouse everyone in this Chamber to action. It is not occurring in most of our Western country allies.

Some of our veterans have been waiting in line for healthcare at veterans hospitals for over a year. These men and women served our country bravely. We have a solemn responsibility to serve them when they come home, and we are not living up to that responsibility right now.

Over a million Americans paid into pension plans with the expectation that they could retire with basic dignity. For so many of them—teamsters, miners, food workers—pensions have fallen short, and a lifetime of careful savings may be ripped away from pensioners at the last moment. We could

make progress on each of these issues through a budget that lifts the spending caps equally for defense and non-defense.

The Republican majority, which conveniently forgot its long history of opposing deficits when passing a \$1.5 trillion tax bill, cannot, in good conscience, turn around and complain about deficits here. So let's make the investments we all know are essential in both our military and in our middle class.

Even on the most challenging issue we face, the fate of the Dreamers, there appears to be a path forward. Yesterday's immigration meeting at the White House was encouraging for two reasons. First, practically everyone at the table—including some of the most conservative voices on immigration, like the Senator from Iowa—agreed that we must resolve the future of Dreamers by passing DACA protections into law. That is a very positive development.

Second, President Trump appeared to endorse a narrow deal to protect the Dreamers, leaving the thornier issues for a later debate on comprehensive immigration reform—a debate that, personally, I would welcome, the sooner the better.

But first, we have to do this narrow deal. President Trump also backed off his demand that a DACA deal include an expensive and ineffective border wall across the entire length of the southern border. Of course, the devil is in the details. We Democrats have repeated time and again that we are ready, willing, and eager to support an effective, practical border security measure in a deal that enshrines DACA into law. The President yesterday seemed to agree with that. We agree with that. For these reasons, the meeting was encouraging.

Last night, a Federal judge ruled against the Trump administration's handling of the termination of the DACA Program. Let me be very clear. The ruling last night in no way diminishes the urgency of resolving the DACA issue. On this we agree with the White House, which says the ruling doesn't do anything to reduce Congress's obligation to address this problem now. A court case, of course, is no guarantee of lasting security. A higher court can quickly overturn it. Unsurprisingly, the Department of Justice responded to the ruling last night by saying that it "will continue to vigorously defend [this] position, and looks forward to vindicating its position in further legislation." So the fact remains that the only way to guarantee the legal status for Dreamers is to pass DACA protections into law and to do it now. For that reason, a resolution to the DACA issue must be part of a global deal on the budget.

We cannot tolerate delay. Delay is a tactic employed by those who do not wish to see a deal. Let me just say, promises that maybe in the future we will do it—particularly on immigration—have vanished by the wayside.