

Unless DACA is on a must-pass deal—a must-pass bill—in terms of a global agreement, people are rightfully skeptical that it will ever happen. Somehow, somewhere, someone will say: I can't do it.

Let's not forget that the House has been a graveyard even for immigration proposals that have had bipartisan consensus here in the Senate. So it must be on a must-pass bill. Otherwise, we are not going to get it.

Congressional negotiators and the valiant group here in the Senate led by Senators DURBIN and GRAHAM are focused on this issue right now. The meeting they had yesterday—I talked to both Senators DURBIN and GRAHAM last night and this morning—provides a clearer picture of the parameters of the deal. The iron is hot. We should strike now. Delay will snuff out the hope of getting an agreement that both sides can live with. Let us press forward. Each side is going to have to give.

I am confident, though, that both sides can come to an agreement on border security. I am convinced now both sides want to find a consensus on DACA. Some will support a deal enthusiastically, others reluctantly, but, nonetheless, an agreement is within reach. We ought to get it done through the Senate, through the House, and onto the President's desk for signature now. So let's get the job done.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Oregon.

ISSUES BEFORE THE SENATE

Mr. MERKLEY. Mr. President, here we are at the start of a new year. Last year, the Republican majority decided to dedicate the year to government by and for the powerful and the privileged, but how about this year, 2018? We pay attention to our Constitution, which starts with that vision of government, not for the powerful, not for the rich, not for the privileged, not for the well connected, not for the wealthy but for the people of the United States. It is a vision where power is distributed, and power comes up from each individual citizen to create policies for their general welfare.

Last year, we saw this complete dedication to trying to wipe out healthcare for 20 million to 30 million Americans in order to provide tax benefits for the richest. How big were those tax benefits? Well, if you add up the provisions that are dedicated to the powerful corporations and those benefits for the wealthiest 10 percent, and most of that goes to the wealthiest 1 percent, those provisions stack up to over \$2 trillion—\$2 trillion.

It is very hard to get your hands around \$2 trillion. Those are not numbers we use in ordinary conversation. Let's take that down to the amount of money per man, woman, and child—per citizen in America. Well, that is about \$6,000—\$6,000 taken from the community funds for every man, woman, and child in America to deliver to the wealthiest Americans. That was gov-

ernment by the Republican majority in 2017. It was not "We the People" but we the powerful and we the privileged.

How about we have a new year's resolution that pays attention to the vision of our Constitution, to that vision of government of, by, and for the people?

Ben Franklin once wrote in his "Poor Richard's Almanac":

Be at war with your vices,
At peace with your neighbors,
And let every New Year find you a better man.

Every new year is a chance to recreate and envision where we are headed. Certainly, it is a big vice to use this Chamber, in contravention of our Constitution, to pursue policies for the powerful and privileged rather than for the people. So let's set that vice aside and have a bipartisan year, dedicated to making a foundation for families to thrive and jobs and education and healthcare and a healthier planet.

Right now, we should have an immediate new year's checklist of things to get done, and that checklist starts with the budget. We have just 9 days until funding runs out for the Federal Government, and we all know from experience what that means—parks shut down, medical research stops, passports don't get processed, and businesses can't check in on their I-9 applications for employees. That is the type of conduct that happens in banana republics—basically, in countries that don't have a competent system of government. It should not happen in the United States of America.

We are deep into the financial year, which started on October 1. October passed. November passed. December passed. We are well into January and still the majority leadership of this body is unable to put together a process that addresses just key, fundamental issues. Why is that? Because they were so distracted by delivering trillions of dollars to the richest of Americans and trying to destroy healthcare for millions of Americans that they didn't tend to the fundamentals that need to be tended to. Let's take care of those things now.

The Children's Health Insurance Program. Here we are. It expired on September 30 of last year. Nine million children across America depend on this insurance. This insurance was crafted in a bipartisan manner. It was forged in an agreement between Senator HATCH, a Republican, and Senator KENNEDY, a Democrat, who had very different visions of America but who could agree that families who didn't qualify for Medicaid and weren't affluent enough to buy insurance for their children could still have insurance for their children. These are the working poor of America, the struggling workers of America.

It was forged in a bipartisan manner, but this year my Republican colleagues decided to make these children a bargaining chip for their effort to get more for the privileged and the powerful. That has to end.

When children do not have insurance, they don't get that dental benefit to take care of those cavities. They don't get that medical exam. They don't get those inoculations, those vaccinations. They don't get treatment when they are injured because their parents can't afford to take them to the doctor. They don't get treatment when they are sick for the same reason. Let's take care of children's healthcare.

This is not a partisan issue. It was forged in a bipartisan manner, and it should be so today.

What also expired on September 30 of last year was the legislation authorizing support for our community health clinics. Community health clinics are the front door to healthcare for millions of Americans. It is that friendly place in your rural community, in your urban neighborhood, where you can go through the front door and get assistance.

Talking about millions of Americans who go through those front doors, there are more than 1,400 clinics across the country. These are popular in rural areas. They are popular in urban areas. They are popular in red States. They are popular in blue States. There is nothing partisan about it, but the leadership of this body has no interest, has seen no urgency in reauthorizing the ability for those health centers to stay open.

In Oregon we saw, as a result of the Affordable Care Act, 30 more health clinics established. We saw a lot more resources go into both mental illness and into drug abuse during a period in which the opioid crisis joined the meth crisis and afflicted both rural and urban areas. Lots of folks come to this floor and say: We have to take on opioids. It is not just on the left-hand side of the aisle, but it is also on the right-hand side of the aisle. People base virtually their entire campaigns on taking on opioids. Yet the Republican leadership says this isn't important. Let me tell you, this is important, and we need to get it done.

Then let's turn to the Dream Act. Dreamers are those children raised in our communities, now 16 through their midtwenties. They are productive members of our communities. They have gone through our high schools or are in high school now. They are in college. They are working. They are contributing. They know no other country than ours.

Across both sides of the aisle we hear folks say: We want to take care of them and establish a structure for this, a legal structure for the Dreamers.

The President yesterday hosted a bipartisan conversation at the White House to say: Let's get this done. He expressed his support. In fact, everyone in the room expressed support for getting this done.

Each one of these—the budget, the children's healthcare, the health centers, the Dream Act—are bipartisan efforts. These are things that should have been addressed long ago if my Republican colleagues instead weren't so

obsessed with decimating healthcare for millions of Americans and ripping off the National Treasury to deliver benefits to the wealthiest Americans.

Let's get this done for our Dreamers. More than 100 a day are losing their status, which means they can no longer legally work in our country. It matters. It is urgent. It is productive for our communities. It is bipartisan. Let's get it done.

How about disaster relief? We certainly saw a powerful punch against our States from the raging forest fires in the West to the hurricanes in the South and Southeast. Hurricanes have hit Texas and Florida and Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands—massive destruction. Fires have scourged States from Montana to Idaho, to Washington, to Oregon, to California. Those fires burned well into the winter months of November and December.

These afflictions hit Democrats and Republicans, red States and blue States. Why don't we get this done? These are basic, bipartisan, let's-get-it-done agendas. Let's get it done now.

Let's make sure, when we are addressing the impact of those storms in the South and those hurricanes—Harvey, Irma, and Maria—we simultaneously recognize the destructive impact forest fires have had that have been scourging the West. They have destroyed a lot of the infrastructure in the forest that needs to be replaced. They have affected a lot of communities that need economic help recovering.

Certainly, it made us recognize that we have millions of acres of forests that can become much more fire resilient if they are thinned, if we get rid of the fuel buildup on the floor of the forests. When they become more resilient, they stop the forest fires.

Thinning is a win-win. It produces a steady supply of sawlogs for the mill and stops forest fires when they are raging. There was a forest fire headed right for Sisters, OR, and it hit an area that had been thinned. Guess what. It stopped. The trees were farther apart. The fuels were removed from the floor of the forest.

Now we have created a real fire hazard with our clear-cut strategy of years past—the forestry grows very close together, often replanted. Trees are all the same height. It is very easy for the fire to get into the canopy, and once in the canopy, every tree is touching the next tree. It rages on, and there is no break.

But a natural forest is very different. We can more effectively replicate the fire-resistant nature of a natural forest by thinning these overgrown, second-growth forests. We can then create that supply of saw logs, keep our mills open, keep our people working, and strengthen our economies in rural America. We can do it by funding this reduction, these thinning programs in acreage that has already gone through the environmental process. In Oregon, we have 1.6 million acres already ap-

proved for thinning, if we can pass the funds to get it done.

So let's take this on in 2018. Let's dedicate 2018 to that vision in our Constitution of "we the people." Let's stop passing legislation targeted specifically to help out the richest at the expense of everyone else in America. Let's turn over a new leaf from campaigns and policies and legislation by and for the privileged and the powerful to honor the vision of our Constitution, the vision of our Nation, a Nation of laws which distributes power that produces policies by and for the people of the United States of America, for making families stronger, for building those foundations of jobs and healthcare and education and a healthy planet.

Thank you, Mr. President.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The majority win.

FUNDING OUR MILITARY

Mr. CORNYN. Mr. President, I admit I wasn't here during the entirety of the comments from our friend, and I saw his to-do list. The only thing missing from that to-do list was to fund our military—or at least I didn't see it on there. In all fairness, maybe he mentioned that in his comments.

We now have 9 days to reach an agreement to keep the government funded, to keep the lights on, to keep paying the salaries of our government employees, and, of course, to fund our military, which ought to be our No. 1 priority. If we think about things that government must do, funding our national defense is the only thing that we can do and that government can do. There are a lot of other things that government does that are optional or maybe things we would like to do, but funding our military is the No. 1 priority—or should be.

As the Senate majority leader mentioned earlier this week, our Democratic colleagues persist in the notion that we should only increase defense spending if we increase nondefense spending by the same amount. The parity that the minority leader and the other Democrats call for doesn't make any sense, though. It is apples and oranges. They act as though all government spending is exactly alike and enjoys or should enjoy the same priority, and that is just not true. We know that from our own family budgets or from a small business. There are things we must do, things we want to do, and things we will do if there is money left over. But our friends across the aisle, who are obstructing our ability to get to negotiated budget caps and fund our military, act as though all of that is the same, that must do, want to do, and what you will do if you have money left over—that those are all exactly the same, and that is just not the case. It is not the case in our family budgets, in our small business budgets, nor is it the case for the Federal budget. Not everything is a priority. But we do know that the No. 1 priority must be the safety and security of the Amer-

ican people by making sure our military is adequately funded.

The Budget Control Act signed into law in 2011 was what I would call a necessary evil. The Budget Control Act provided that we would have a bipartisan, bicameral negotiation and try to come up with a grand bargain.

That was what President Obama liked to talk about a lot—the grand bargain. But some people suggested that was kind of like a unicorn, something that people describe but no one has ever seen—a grand bargain. I wish it weren't true.

The Budget Control Act said that in the absence of a grand bargain, we would have budget caps or sequestration imposed on discretionary spending above certain levels. It proposed separate budget caps for defense and non-defense, and if the budget caps are exceeded, there is an automatic enforcement mechanism called sequestration which imposes across-the-board cuts, which I mentioned a moment ago.

The purpose of this sequestration—or these across-the-board cuts—is to do something in the absence of us doing what we should do; in other words, we should take it upon ourselves to figure out what the appropriate spending levels should be for defense and non-defense, and then we should act to appropriate that money. But this is basically a fail-safe mechanism, which operates as a result of our failure to deal with this in a proactive way, and it has hit our defense spending much, much harder than domestic spending.

As we know, neither our defense spending nor tax cuts are the cause of our deficits and debt. It is the 70 percent of spending that happens in the Federal Government on autopilot. It is the entitlements that have been going up well in excess of 5 percent a year and are causing instability and unpredictability in those important programs, such as Medicare and Social Security, but at the same time racking up huge deficits and debt that future generations are going to have to pay back. Somebody is going to have to pay it back, and it won't be the present generation because we won't be around then. It is simply immoral to continue to see this happen without trying to deal with it.

But back on the matter of the Pentagon, as one op-ed writer put it in the Washington Post last month—he said:

The Pentagon and the welfare state have been locked in brutal combat for decades, and the Pentagon has gotten clobbered. . . . Welfare programs—Social Security, Medicare, food stamps and other benefits—dwarf defense spending.

In the 1950s and 1960s, defense spending was roughly 8 to 10 percent of our economy. In 2016, it was just 3 percent. That is a huge change.

James Clapper, the former Director of National Intelligence, said that in his 50 years in the intelligence community, he had never seen a more diverse array of threats confronting the United States around the world—never in his