

over \$400,000. How in the world can our children have an education, a great job, own a home, and give their children the things we have benefited from by being born owing \$400,000?

It is time for things to come to a stop or to markedly change. This last week the Senate once again failed to make tough decisions about priorities. We chose to fund pork projects instead of repairing bridges. We said peace gardens, bike paths, and baseball stadiums are more important than critical infrastructure. Yesterday a new poll was released. Rightly so, it reflected less than 11 percent of Americans have confidence in this body. It is no wonder. Our priorities are wrong.

Congress for years has raided the Social Security and Medicare trust funds to hide the true size of the annual budget deficit. This practice has undermined the solvency of the programs and threatens both the retirement security of today's workers and the economic opportunities and future of our children and grandchildren. It is irresponsible to simply raise the debt limit while at the same time creating or expanding Federal programs that will result in additional borrowing from Social Security trust funds and not accepting the responsibility to make hard choices about what are our priorities. Congress has repeatedly demonstrated that it is unwilling to prioritize spending. This year multiple times the Senate has rejected amendments to cut spending while authorizing billions and billions of dollars in new spending. The Senate this year twice has rejected amendments stating that Congress has a moral obligation to offset the cost of new Government spending by getting rid of the waste, fraud, abuse, and duplication in current Federal programs.

American families don't have the luxury Congress has. They can't get a new loan or new credit cards after they have maxed out their capability to borrow. Yet instead, every day in this body we do essentially that.

The moral question is, why should we be proud of stealing from our children? There isn't a greater moral question before this country today than whether we are going to steal opportunity and freedom from the next generation.

I am putting the Senate on notice that I will not agree to a UC on the debt limit extension without a debate and full vote by each Member of this body on that debt limit and a commitment to do what is right for the future.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

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

The assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. VITTER. Mr. 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.

Mr. VITTER. Mr. President, I will speak in morning business for up to 10 minutes.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator is recognized.

DREAM ACT AMENDMENT

Mr. VITTER. Mr. President, I rise today to strongly oppose the Durbin amendment to the Defense appropriations bill. That amendment would pass the so-called DREAM Act into law.

In standing up in opposition, let me suggest this should not be called the DREAM Act. It should be called the "Amnesty Reality Act" because this is yet another attempt, another version of amnesty for a significant number of illegal aliens.

Let me say at the outset I am not standing here to criticize or to lambaste the individuals involved, undoubtedly, who came to this country with their parents to try to find a better life because of very difficult conditions in Mexico or otherwise.

The point of my opposition is not directed at them. It is directed at what is very bad and destructive policy in terms of U.S. immigration policy, repeating the mistakes of the past, making a very real problem worse and not better through a significant amnesty program.

Why is this an amnesty? Well, purely and simply, this so-called DREAM Act, which I think should be called the "Amnesty Reality Act," embodied in this Durbin amendment to the Defense appropriations bill would provide a pathway to citizenship to who knows how many folks who entered this country, and remain in this country, illegally. Specifically, it targets folks who came into this country illegally as minors, presumably with their families, with their parents. It also gives them benefits in this country that most U.S. citizens do not enjoy, specifically, in-state college tuition that U.S. citizens outside that State do not enjoy.

This is very frustrating to me. Just a few months ago, we had a major debate on the floor of this body about immigration policy. A large so-called comprehensive immigration bill was on the floor of the Senate. It received a lot of attention and a lot of focus. That was a good thing because the American people got engaged; they focused on what was going on. They understood what was being proposed, and they wrote and e-mailed and called us in record numbers.

I do not think anyone can deny the message came through loudly and clearly. The message was: We do not support an amnesty program because that will make the problem far worse and not better. The second part of the message was: Let's start with real enforcement. Let's finally get serious with border security, workplace security, to begin to address this very real illegal immigration problem in this country.

That message came through in such volume that it literally shut down the

Senate phone system on the morning of that pivotal vote which defeated that so-called comprehensive immigration bill proposed by Senator KENNEDY and Senator DURBIN, the author of this DREAM Act amendment, and others.

What is so frustrating to me is that very loud, very clear message seems to have fallen on deaf ears in terms of some Members of this body. Unfortunately, this DREAM Act amendment is proof of that. Again, it is, clearly beyond argument, another version of amnesty. It would provide a pathway to citizenship for a significant class of people, folks who came into this country illegally as minors. We do not know how many people that would be, and we have very little way of enforcing even the provisions of this amendment to keep it to the folks to whom it is supposed to be targeted.

What do I mean by that? Well, the folks are supposed to have come into this country in the last 5 years. Yet at the same time the amendment says it can apply to people up to age 30. What sort of proof do these folks have to offer with regard to when they came into this country? There is no proof requirement. It could simply be an affirmative statement by themselves, no other required proof. So this is open ended, this is unenforceable, and it is a significant amnesty.

In addition, as I mentioned a few minutes ago, it provides substantial benefits to these folks illegally in our country, benefits that the huge majority of American citizens do not enjoy. What is that? Well, the biggest is in-state college tuition that would come to folks who sign up for the DREAM Act. As soon as they sign up, they would be treated as in-state residents of that State. They would get in-state tuition, and—guess what—all other U.S. citizens, the children of all other U.S. citizens outside that particular State who would love the benefit of in-state tuition would not enjoy that same benefit.

That does not match the common-sense test that the American people want us to use. It certainly has nothing to do with the message the American people sent to us loudly and clearly during the debate on the so-called comprehensive immigration bill with its massive amnesty program. Again, that message came through loudly and clearly: No amnesty; real enforcement.

The American people are saying that not because they are mean-spirited, not because they hold anything against these individuals who are seeking a better life in this country, but because they know, because common sense tells them, this is going to make the problem worse and not better. Inadequate enforcement, with amnesty, acts as a magnet to magnify the problem, to encourage more illegals to cross the border into our country. If that does not ring true just because of common sense, history proves it.

The last time the Congress acted in this area of the law was in 1986, again

with significant immigration reform. The promise was exactly the same: We are going to get serious. We are going to get real with enforcement. We just need this amnesty one time—never again—to help solve the problem.

Well, what happened? That bill passed into law. The real enforcement never happened to an adequate extent, but, of course, the amnesty provision went into effect immediately. What happens when you combine inadequate enforcement with real amnesty? What you do is make the problem worse and not better, encourage more illegals to come into the country.

The proof of the pudding is in the eating. In this case it is in the numbers. What was then, in 1986, a problem of 3 million illegal aliens in this country, is now a problem of 12 or 13 million or more. So what did that one-time solution do? It quadrupled the problem. It proved not to be a solution at all.

I suggest we do something that some might consider novel around here. Let's listen to the common sense and wisdom of the American people. Let's say no to amnesty, as we did in June by defeating the immigration bill sponsored by Senator KENNEDY and others. Let's say yes to real enforcement both at the border and in the workplace. And let's offer that message again by defeating this very ill-conceived Durbin amendment.

To help defeat this amendment, I will be offering a second-degree amendment to the Durbin amendment. My second-degree amendment is very simple. It simply says nothing in the Durbin amendment goes into effect, goes into law, until the US-VISIT Program is fully operational. The US-VISIT Program is something that was first proposed in 1996, an entry/exit system so we know who is coming into the country, who is leaving the country—something very basic, very necessary in terms of enforcement.

Although it was proposed in 1996, it has never come close to being fully operational because Congress, folks in Washington, this administration and previous administrations, have never had the political will to get it done.

So, again, my second-degree amendment to the Durbin DREAM Act amendment is very simple. That cannot go into effect until the US-VISIT system is fully operational at our borders. I will be proposing that amendment assuming the Durbin amendment is, in fact, called up for consideration on the Senate floor.

Mr. President, with that, I yield back my time and suggest the absence of a quorum.

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

The assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. NELSON of Florida. Mr. 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.

Mr. NELSON of Florida. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to speak in morning business for up to 10 minutes.

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

LEGISLATIVE QUAGMIRE

Mr. NELSON of Florida. Mr. President, I wish to speak about Iraq and about this amendatory process and this legislative quagmire in which we find ourselves.

The American people are having difficulty understanding why the Senate can't get anything done. It is because we have a rule that says we can't pass something here without 60 votes out of 100 Senators. We need 60 votes to close off debate on a motion for cloture. That is a fancy term for closing the debate. We have to have 60 votes. With a Senate that is so partisan, and so split ideologically, it is hard to get those 60 votes. We see this on the amendments that have already attempted to be brought, either on a motion just to proceed, which takes 60 votes, or a motion to close off debate to get to the subject matter of the amendment. We can't get the votes. Thus, the American people are increasingly frustrated, as are the Senators, that we can't get more unanimity when, in fact, most of us know in this country what has to be done.

Now, what is that? What needs to be done to make the best of a very bad situation? Now, I am not talking about why we got there; that is a debate in itself which we have had innumerable times here on the floor. We are where we are. We are there.

What is the goal? The goal in the best interests of the United States is to stabilize Iraq, but there is not a soul who has testified in any of these innumerable hearings who says that you can get to that goal of stability in Iraq without political reconciliation between the Sunnis and the Shiites. The difficulty there is they have been at it for 1,327 years, ever since the Battle of Karbala in 680 A.D. It is very difficult for them, with all of that history, all of that hatred, to be able to reconcile into some kind of stability so that a government can, in fact, function in Iraq.

So given those circumstances, what is the very best we can do? I can't tell my colleagues that I have the complete answer, but the best answer I have is the plan that was laid out unanimously last December by the Iraq Study Commission consisting of very prominent people who know the defense business and who know the foreign relations business. They unanimously recommended a gradual withdrawal and to keep enough U.S. troops there to do three things: to train the Iraqi Army, to go after al-Qaida, and to provide force protection for the Americans who are there and, at the same time, they said, have a very aggressive diplomatic effort with the other nations of the

world, and especially with the nations in the region, including Syria and Iran, to try to get a political settlement and then to have that political settlement stick.

Now, what should that political settlement be? Well, I am not sure anybody within the U.S. Government can tell us, but the best plan I know of is going to be offered by the Senator from Delaware, Mr. BIDEN, which is to have a shared power arrangement under the Iraqi Constitution of an autonomous region—three in Iraq—with the Kurds in the north, Sunnis in the center, and Shiites in the south. Now, no one has been able to come up with a better idea as to how we can have a political solution where we ultimately get to the goal of political stability with reconciliation between Sunnis and Shiites.

Part of it is functioning right now in the north of Iraq. The Kurds virtually have their own self-government. Isn't it interesting that not one American troop has been killed in that region called Kurdistan? They have a measure of stability there. They have their own self-government. Isn't it interesting—in an area almost exclusively Sunnis in western Iraq called Al Anbar Province is where our surge with the marines has, in fact, helped because it has turned the Sunni tribal chieftains into helping us to go after al-Qaida. We have had success.

Where we have not had success with the surge is in the center part, in the Baghdad region, where the Sunnis and the Shiites are going at each other. Thus, what is happening is they are voting with their feet as they are voluntarily separating, since they can't get along.

I think a solution such as Senator BIDEN's, which he will offer as an amendment and which I will support, is the best that has come up where there would be three autonomous regions. Then there would be the national government that would represent the country in its foreign relations but at the same time would have the ability, under an Iraq oil law, to distribute the oil revenues according to the percentage of the population. I don't know anybody who has a better plan. If they do, I want to hear it.

But what we need to do is to come together, Republicans and Democrats together, and get over this threshold that has us in a political and legislative and procedural straitjacket, that we can't get anything done in this Senate because we can't get 60 votes because we can't get Democrats and Republicans together to start charting the course. It is clear that the White House isn't going to do it. They have their mindset and what they want to do, but that is not ultimately going to get us to the solution. Even General Petraeus has recommended—or has testified that a year from now, we are still likely to have 140,000 troops there, with no plan of any of this political success, even though everybody who testified says