

Members on the other side, to support our bill.

So I object to the Cornyn bill, and I will be offering a bill on the same subject that is purer, cleaner, and more full on STEM visas than the proposal that was made by my good friend from Texas.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Objection is heard. The Senator from Texas.

Mr. CORNYN. Mr. President, I understand that the Senator from New York has objected, and of course here we go again making the perfect the enemy of the good and not moving forward on commonsense immigration reform in an area where there is a consensus.

There are several problems with the Senator's proposal. One is that it has not passed the House and this one has. It also has a 2-year sunset provision, as I understand, and there is no family unification provision. Also, it doesn't eliminate the diversity lottery visa which allows people to get green cards without regard to the qualifications that they bring to this country to create jobs and start new businesses.

I know we have the distinguished Senator from North Dakota here.

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, if I might be recognized to offer my proposal? I have let my friend from Texas respond, but I have the—

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Will the Senator from Texas yield?

Mr. CORNYN. Mr. President, we have four Senators who are prepared to speak, and I just want to make sure we have adequate time to speak. I ask that any time that is used by the distinguished Senator from New York not be added to or subtracted from our time. We have retained a total of 45 minutes.

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

Mr. CORNYN. Under those circumstances, I agree to yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from New York.

UNANIMOUS CONSENT REQUEST— S. 3553

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Judiciary Committee be discharged from further consideration of S. 3553, the BRAINS Act, and the Senate proceed to its consideration; that the bill be read a third time and passed; and that the motion to reconsider be laid upon the table, with no intervening action or debate.

I will be brief because I don't want to take away from my colleagues' time. What this bill does is provide more STEM visas than the previous bill. It provides an entrepreneurship visa which the other bill does not. It does not take away existing visas, which the Senator from Texas doesn't like, but many other people find popular, good, and necessary. The unemployment rate for those on the diversity visas coming in is much lower than that of the national average.

If we want to pass a pure STEM bill without extraneous provisions added

by people who are anti-immigration because they don't want to see any net increase in immigration, I urge the support of our bill.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

The Senator from Texas.

Mr. CORNYN. Mr. President, reserving the right to object, the problem with the Senator's proposal is that this piece of legislation he has referred to has not passed out of committee in the Senate. It has not passed the House. This bill, the STEM Act, has passed the House. There's has a 2-year sunset provision; this is permanent legislation. Also, it has no family unification provision that will allow the immediate family members of the green card holder to wait the time when they will become eligible for a green card in the United States as opposed to back in their country of origin, and it does nothing to promote merit-based immigration reform. We ought to be looking at immigration reform from the standpoint of not just how it can help the immigrant but how it can help America create jobs and entrepreneurship.

For those reasons, I object.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Objection is heard.

Mr. CORNYN. Mr. President, at this time I yield to the distinguished Senator from North Dakota and then, following that, the distinguished Senator from Iowa for any comments he cares to make.

Mr. HOEVEN. Mr. President, I thank the esteemed Senator from Texas and the Senator from Kentucky. I see the Senator from Iowa has joined us as well.

I rise to speak in support of the STEM Act but also to respond to the Senator from New York. I see the Senator has left, but I also want to respond to some of the points in support of the Senator from Texas.

The STEM Act passed the House; it was H. Res. 6429, sponsored by Congressman LAMAR SMITH. I argue that it accomplishes both of the things we are talking about today. It provides us with the opportunity to have a greater pool of employees with training in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics, which is what we need in this country. It also accomplishes the diversity that was referred to by the Senator from New York.

So what the Senators from Texas, Kentucky, Iowa, and myself are proposing is to accomplish both goals. We are saying we can have the students who have graduated with either a doctorate degree or a master's degree in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics, which is what we very much need to get our economy growing. A growing economy creates more employment. It also creates the revenue without raising taxes that we need to address our deficit and debt. So this legislation accomplishes both those goals and still provides an increase in diversity which is what the Senator from New York was talking about.

The additional point is the point that the Senator from Texas very clearly made. This legislation passed the House. The last time I checked, legislation has to pass the Senate and the House. That is a pretty important distinction.

Referring back to the comments of the Senator from Kentucky, who said if we cannot do it all at once because of disagreements, let's start getting done what we can get done, here is a bill that provides us with people in the science and technology fields who can help our economy grow. These are people we need very much. It will increase diversity, just as the Senator from New York said, and it has passed the House. Common sense says let's go. Let's pass the bill.

So we want to join with the Senator from New York, the Senator from Delaware, and the other sponsors to whom he referred, but let's join on something we can actually get done, meaning a bill that passes the House as well as the Senate. I think that logic is compelling.

I look at my own State of North Dakota. We are doing amazing things in energy. As a matter of fact, we are hot on the trail of the State of Texas when it comes to oil development. I am telling you, we are after you.

So what is that going to take? It is going to take continued development of the technologies that not only helps us produce more energy, but helps us do it with good environmental stewardship. What we are talking about is when we have the engineers, scientists, technicians, and mathematicians who graduate from our great universities with doctorate and master's degrees, they can stay and help us here rather than help someone else in some other country that would then get ahead of the United States. This will help us solve the fundamental challenges we face today, which is getting this economy growing so we get people back to work and creating the revenue the right way with economic growth to help us address our deficit and debt.

With that, I yield the floor to the esteemed Senator from Texas.

Mr. CORNYN. How much time remains?

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Twenty minutes.

Mr. CORNYN. Mr. President, I yield to the distinguished Senator from Iowa for any comments he cares to make.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Iowa.

Mr. GRASSLEY. Mr. President, today, I'm proud to speak in support of the STEM Jobs Act of 2012, a bill passed by the House of Representatives last week. This bill would make available up to 55,000 green cards each year for foreign students who have received doctorates or master's degrees in science, technology, engineering, or math, also known as STEM, from a U.S. university. The bill would not increase overall immigration levels, but rather, would move our immigration

system toward one in which we reward the best and brightest of the world with the chance to remain, live, and work in this country.

Without a doubt, our immigration system is flawed. I have long argued that we need to enhance and expand legal avenues for U.S. employers to hire foreign workers. While I am a champion for rooting out fraud and abuse from many of our visa programs, I'm also supportive of finding ways to allow people to enter this country through legal channels.

It makes sense to allow foreign students who have been trained and educated on U.S. soil to remain here. These students have advanced degrees in science, technology, engineering, and math, and this bill will ensure that we keep those highly skilled and sought-after students here for employers in need.

Our economy cannot wait. We need to enact solutions today that create economic growth.

We also have no reason to wait for next year's likely debate on immigration. Attracting and retaining high-skilled workers should not be a partisan issue. The senior Senator from New York has a similar proposal to grant green cards to STEM students. I can only assume that many people on the other side of the aisle would support this bill if the majority leader gave it a chance. Nearly 30 Democrats in the House crossed the aisle to help this bill pass last week.

Finally, as we look ahead to immigration reform, it will be important to consider ways our policies benefit future generations, not just solve the problems of the day. Our immigration system should be structured in a way to recruit people with skills in STEM fields. This bill is a good first step to changing our system to a merit-based one. Enhancing our legal immigration channels should be a top priority, and I am committed to working on ways to do that for all sectors of the economy.

I hope the majority will reconsider, and allow the Senate to call up and pass the STEM Jobs Act and send it to the President. It would be a signal to the American people that we can work together to enact needed immigration reforms.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Texas.

Mr. CORNYN. Mr. President, I appreciate the remarks of the distinguished Senators from Iowa, North Dakota, and Kentucky.

I think what people find so maddening about Congress and Washington, DC, is even when we agree, we still cannot seem to get anything done. How is it that we can agree on the importance of additional STEM green cards and still not be able to get anything done? This is not about what is perfect, but this is about what is possible given what has happened in the House of Representatives.

We could do this today and send it to the President of the United States in

the next couple of days so he can sign it. The question is, How many more years will pass while we have these highly qualified students who graduate from our own colleges and universities with master's degrees and Ph.D.s in science, technology, engineering, and math before we finally address the problem?

I realize there is other legislation people would like to have considered, but this has actually passed the House of Representatives.

I remember the hearing we had in the Senate Judiciary Subcommittee on Immigration of which I am the ranking member. The Senator from New York said at that time—and this would not be a surprise to him since these are his own words, and it is consistent with what he said on the Senate floor:

If we do not enact an immigration policy that continues to attract the world's best minds, we will cease to be the world's economic leader.

That is why I call this a self-inflicted wound. If we agree that American workers should get the right of first refusal, but there are not sufficient American workers with the qualifications in these important fields, why in the world would we not allow the creation of jobs and new enterprises that would come with the STEM Jobs Act that has passed the House?

I have a series of letters: one from the chancellor of the University of Texas System, Texas A&M University System, Texas Tech University System, the University of Houston System, the University of North Texas, and the Texas State University System in support of STEM legislation. I also have a letter from Rice University president David Leebron supporting this same type of legislation.

I have a letter dated June 25, 2012, addressed to President Obama, Leader REID, Leader MCCONNELL, Speaker BOEHNER and then-Leader PELOSI from the Partnership for a New American Economy signed by the presidents or chancellors of 42 public and private universities. I have a letter to Congress from the Information Technology Industry Council, Partnership for a New American Economy, and the U.S. Chamber of Commerce supporting STEM immigration reform such as this bill.

I have another letter dated November 15, 2012, to Members of Congress from the American Council on International Personnel and the Society for Human Resource Management supporting this type of STEM legislation. I have another letter dated September 19, 2012, to Speaker BOEHNER, Leader CANTOR, Whip MCCARTHY, Minority Leader PELOSI, and Minority Whip HOYER from CONNECT, a U.S. San Diego tech transfer commercialization enterprise.

I also have a letter from the president of Baylor University in support of STEM legislation.

I ask unanimous consent that the letters I just referenced be printed in the RECORD at this time.

There being no objection, the material was ordered to be printed in the RECORD, as follows:

DECEMBER 4, 2012.

STATEMENT ON VISAS FOR STEM GRADUATES
FROM TEXAS PUBLIC UNIVERSITY SYSTEM
CHANCELLORS

As chancellors of the six Texas public university systems, we recognize the important role the fields of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) play in American competitiveness.

We understand Senator John Cornyn plans to pursue legislation during the remaining days of the 112th Congress aimed at providing more visas for foreign graduates of American universities in the STEM fields. Industry and academia, particularly in Texas, face critical shortages in the availability of qualified job applicants in these fields. While we are actively engaged—through education outreach and engineering extension—in preparing Texas residents for success in the STEM fields, we recognize the need to address existing shortages in these critical fields through a pathway for international students already enrolled at our institutions in these disciplines.

The severity of this situation was highlighted in the recently published National Research Council report, *Ten Breakthrough Actions Vital to Our Nation's Prosperity and Security*. The report focuses on the role research universities play in protecting the future of America and recommends actions that should be taken separately and jointly by universities, states, and the federal government. The report specifically calls on the federal government to streamline the processes that impact the ability of international innovators to remain in our country and contribute to its prosperity.

We applaud Senator Cornyn for his leadership and focus on this issue. We urge Congress to work toward a bipartisan solution to this important component of job growth and our nation's innovation agenda.

FRANCISCO G. CIGARROA,
M.D.,

Chancellor, The University of Texas System.

MR. JOHN SHARP,
Chancellor, Texas A&M University System.

MR. LEE JACKSON,
Chancellor, University of North Texas System University System.

MR. KENT HANCE,
Chancellor, Texas Tech University.

DR. RENU KHATOR,
Chancellor, University of Houston.

DR. BRIAN MCCALL,
Chancellor, Texas State.

—
RICE UNIVERSITY,
Houston, TX, December 4, 2012.

Hon. JOHN CORNYN,
U.S. Senate, Hart Senate Office Building,
Washington, DC.

DEAR SENATOR CORNYN, I write on behalf of Rice University to support the STAR Act and all efforts to make it easier for foreign students who receive advanced degrees in the STEM fields to remain in the United States and put their educations and skills to work on behalf of the country. These students are among the best and brightest in the world and, equipped with a Rice University or other U.S. education, will have much to contribute to business and job creation and economic growth.

Rice University is proud to be based in Houston, Texas, and to educate leaders and generate research and knowledge that contribute in major ways to the vigor of our state and country. We are equally proud to have more than 10 percent of our undergraduate students and about 40 percent of our graduate students from other countries. The fact that we can attract the best and the brightest from throughout the world is a significant strength, but to lose those students after graduation because of overly restrictive immigration policies is a distinct weakness for our state and country. We should not send that education and talent away.

There is a case to be made for comprehensive immigration reform, but the STAR Act makes significant progress towards that goal. We would be happy to contribute our faculty expertise if you would find that helpful. Thank you for your leadership on this issue.

Sincerely,

DAVID W. LEEBRON,
President.

PARTNERSHIP FOR A NEW
AMERICAN ECONOMY,
June 25, 2012.

President BARACK OBAMA,
*The White House, 1600 Pennsylvania Ave.,
Washington, DC.*
Sen. HARRY REID,
*Senate Majority Leader, Hart Senate Office
Building, Washington, DC.*
Hon. JOHN BOEHNER,
*Speaker of the House, U.S. Capitol,
Washington, DC.*
Sen. MITCH MCCONNELL,
*Senate Republican Leader, Russell Senate Of-
fice Building, Washington, DC.*
Hon. NANCY PELOSI,
*Democratic Leader, U.S. Capitol,
Washington, DC.*

DEAR MR. PRESIDENT, MAJORITY LEADER REID, REPUBLICAN LEADER MCCONNELL, SPEAKER BOEHNER, AND DEMOCRATIC LEADER PELOSI: As leaders of universities educating the creators of tomorrow's scientific breakthroughs, we call on you to address a critical threat to America's preeminence as a global center of innovation and prosperity: our inability under current United States immigration policy to retain and benefit from many of the top minds educated at our universities.

From the industrial revolution to today's information age, the United States has led the world in creating the inventions and ideas that drive economic prosperity. America's universities are responsible for 36 percent of all research in the country, including 53 percent of all basic research, and they help keep America at the forefront of the 21st century economy. The Federal Government has recognized the importance of university research by providing roughly 60 percent of all academic R&D funding.

American academic research has benefited from the fact that the US remains a top magnet for the world's best and brightest students and graduates 16 percent of all PhDs worldwide in scientific and technical fields. In 2009, students on temporary visas were 45 percent of all graduate students in engineering, math, computer science and physical sciences—earning 43 percent of all master's degrees and 52 percent of all PhDs. New research shows that in 2011, foreign-born inventors were credited contributors on more than 75 percent of patents issued to the top 10 patent-producing universities in the United States—irrefutable proof of the important role immigrants play in American innovation. These inventions lead to new companies and new jobs for American workers, and are an enormous boon to our economy.

But after we have trained and educated these future job creators, our antiquated immigration laws turn them away to work for our competitors in other countries. Low limits on visas leave immigrants with no way to stay or facing untenable delays for a permanent visa. Top engineers from India and China face wait times of up to 9 years to get a permanent visa, and new applicants from these countries may face considerably longer waits. And while we turn away these American-educated, trained and funded scientists and engineers, there is a growing skill gap across America's industries. One quarter of US science and engineering firms already report difficulty hiring, and the problem will only worsen: the US is projected to face a shortfall of 230,000 qualified advanced-degree workers in scientific and technical fields by 2018.

The US cannot afford to wait to fix our immigration system. Even as we send away highly skilled workers trained at American universities, competing economies are welcoming these scientists and engineers with streamlined visa applications and creating dedicated visas to ensure that the foreign students who graduate from their own universities can stay and contribute to the local economy. We ask you to work together to develop a bipartisan solution that ensures our top international graduates have a clear path to a green card, so they can stay and create new American jobs. Recent polls show that there is broad, bipartisan support for this reform, and that the American people want our leaders in Washington to act. Now is the time to do so and ensure that the US remains the world's leading home for innovators.

Sincerely,

(77 SIGNATURES).

DECEMBER 4, 2012.

TO THE MEMBERS OF THE UNITED STATES CONGRESS: The Information Technology Industry Council, the Partnership for a New American Economy, and the U.S. Chamber of Commerce recently joined together to prepare a new report, released last week, "Help Wanted: The Role of Foreign Workers in the Innovation Economy". According to the report, foreign-born professionals in the fields of Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) are complementing—not displacing—their U.S. counterparts and the U.S. economy is in need of more STEM talent.

As Congress deliberates initiatives to reform our immigration system—including expanding visas for those with advanced STEM degrees earned at U.S. universities—the report provides evidence of critical labor force needs in America's innovation economy.

There is universal agreement that reforming U.S. education and job training to encourage more U.S. students to enter STEM occupations is essential to a strong economy. Yet these fixes will take years to yield results, and many of the talented STEM workers who could fill the gaps in our labor force are already here training in American universities. Reforming American immigration laws to allow foreign-born STEM students who earn advanced degrees from U.S. universities to stay and work in jobs where there are no available qualified American workers will fill an immediate need and promote economic growth and job creation.

Our report analyzes data from the U.S. Census and the U.S. Department of Education Integrated Post-Secondary Education Data System (WEDS) to examine employment in the STEM fields. The report confirms that:

There is full employment for U.S. STEM workers with advanced degrees: While the current national unemployment rate hovers

around 8 percent, the unemployment rate for United States citizens with PhDs in STEM fields is just 3.15 percent, and 3.4 percent for those with master's degrees in STEM fields. Given that the U.S. government has defined "full-employment" to be 4 percent, this suggests a skills shortage of STEM professionals with advanced degrees.

In many STEM occupations, unemployment is virtually non-existent: Unemployment is particularly low in STEM occupations such as Petroleum Engineers (0.1 percent), Computer Network Architects (0.4 percent), Nuclear Engineers (0.5 percent), Environmental Scientists and Geoscientists (1.2 percent), Database Administrators (1.3 percent), Statisticians (1.6 percent), Engineering Managers (1.6 percent), and Aerospace Engineers (1.9 percent).

STEM fields employ a far higher proportion of foreign workers than non-STEM fields: In STEM fields, 26.1 percent of workers with PhDs are foreign born, as are 17.7 percent of workers with master's degrees. In comparison, in non-STEM fields, just 6.4 percent of doctoral workers and 5.2 percent of master's workers are foreign born.

STEM fields with high percentages of foreign STEM workers have low unemployment rates for US workers: Although nearly 25 percent of medical scientists are foreign born, United States medical scientists enjoy an unemployment rate of just 3.4 percent, fully five percentage points lower than the non-STEM unemployment rate (8.4 percent). Similar stories exist for STEM occupations such as physical scientists and computer software designers, where immigrants make up more than 20 percent of the field and unemployment is just 4 percent. Unemployment across all STEM occupations is just 4.3 percent, and the unemployment rate is even lower in 10 of the 11 STEM occupations with the largest proportion of foreign workers.

Foreign-born STEM workers are paid on par with US STEM workers: There is no verifiable evidence that foreign-born STEM workers adversely affect the wages of American workers by providing a less expensive source of labor. The average STEM worker actually makes slightly more than his or her United States counterpart, earning on average \$61 more per week.

These findings reaffirm a December 2011 report, "Immigration and American Jobs," released by the American Enterprise Institute and the Partnership for a New American Economy, which found that every foreign graduate with an advanced degree from a U.S. university who stays and works in a STEM field, creates an average of 2.62 new jobs for American workers.

We are committed to reforming our immigration system in ways that advance U.S. competitiveness, innovation, and job creation, and look forward to working with you to achieve this important goal.

Sincerely,

INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY INDUSTRY
COUNCIL,
PARTNERSHIP FOR A NEW AMERICAN ECONOMY,
U.S. CHAMBER OF COMMERCE.

AMERICAN COUNCIL ON INTERNATIONAL PERSONNEL AND SOCIETY
FOR HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

November 15, 2012.

DEAR MEMBER OF CONGRESS: As you consider measures in the lame-duck congressional session to restore America's fiscal health and put our economy back on track, the American Council on International Personnel (ACIP) and the Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM) urge you to act on a key high-skilled legal immigration reform that has bipartisan support and the

backing of the U.S. business community, and that will help jumpstart U.S. growth and job creation: making green cards available for foreign-born holders of U.S. STEM advanced degrees who have a job offer.

Highly educated, foreign-born professionals have a long history of making great contributions to our economy, and this legislation will help U.S. employers to more easily recruit, hire and retain these job creators and innovators. The visas would be immediately available to these professionals, helping them avoid the decades-long green card backlog that currently plagues top talent trying to contribute to our country. This legislation will help reenergize America's competitiveness at an extremely critical time.

Our organizations, now strategic affiliates, represent thousands of employers across the country working hard to grow America's economy. While there is much to be done in the next session, this small step now will pay big dividends in keeping our economy on the right track until more comprehensive reforms can be enacted.

We encourage Congress to start building the necessary consensus needed for future immigration legislation by sending this bipartisan reform to the president for enactment before year's end.

Sincerely,

LYNN SHOTWELL,
Executive Director,
ACIP.

MICHAEL P. AITKEN,
Vice President, Government Affairs,
SHRM.

CONNECT,
September 19, 2012.

Speaker JOHN BOEHNER,
Majority Leader ERIC CANTOR,
Majority Whip KEVIN MCCARTHY,
Minority Leader NANCY PELOSI,
Minority Whip STENY HOYER,
House of Representatives,
Washington, DC.

DEAR LEADERS OF THE U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES, As a leading voice for tech start-up and emerging companies, CONNECT applauds you for your efforts to address a critical innovation policy issue by bringing to a vote the STEM Jobs Act of 2012, H.R. 6429. This important legislation will spark innovation across the U.S. and assist start-up company growth, which remains America's best job-creating engine.

CONNECT was birthed out of the University of California—San Diego over twenty-five years ago with the mission to propel creative ideas and emerging technologies to the marketplace by training entrepreneurs and connecting them to the comprehensive resources they need to sustain viability and business vibrancy. Since 1985, CONNECT has assisted in the formation and development of over 3,000 companies and is recognized as one of the world's most successful regional innovation development programs. In 2010, CONNECT won the Innovation in Economic Development Award in the Regional Innovation Clusters category presented by the U.S. Department of Commerce's Economic Development Administration.

Although much of the discussion regarding STEM visa reform centers around the benefits that will accrue to larger companies in the tech sector, it should not be overlooked that a STEM visa reform proposal like H.R. 6429 will facilitate new STEM grads to also be hired by startup and emerging companies. As both the Small Business Administration and the Kauffman Foundation have confirmed, the vast majority of America's net job growth in recent years has come from startup and emerging companies. Allowing

foreign-born STEM graduates to stay in the U.S. to work in startup and emerging companies will help keep America at the edge of the frontier of global competitiveness. However, that edge is being aggressively trimmed by our foreign competitors. Thus, it is imperative we retain U.S.-educated, foreign-born STEM talent instead of forcing them to find jobs overseas with global competitors.

There is much talk in Washington about helping start-up businesses, but the STEM Jobs Act takes tangible action toward achieving that goal. We commend you for advancing this solution that will have real-world benefits for America's entrepreneurs and innovators.

In CONNECT's "Innovation Agenda for the 112th Congress" and "Seven Innovation Policy Ideas to Spark an American Recovery," we endorsed STEM visa reform. Continuing that long-term commitment in support of the issue, we encourage the House to pass the bill and we stand ready to assist the Senate in this consideration of H.R. 6429.

Sincerely,

TIMOTHY TARDIBONO, M.A., J.D.,
Vice President of Public Policy, CONNECT.

BAYLOR UNIVERSITY,
Waco, TX, December 5, 2012.

Senator JOHN CORNYN,
Hart Senate Office Building,
Washington, DC.

DEAR SENATOR CORNYN: Since 1845, Baylor University has promoted academic excellence and Christian service, and its achievements have been recognized around the world. As a nationally ranked research institution, Baylor is also dedicated to scientific discovery and training the inventors and entrepreneurs who will create the jobs of the future. We now have more than 70 masters and doctoral degree programs, including eleven science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) programs. Of the Masters and PhD students enrolled in our STEM programs, 13 percent are foreign nationals. Many of these students are listed as co-inventors in patent applications filed by Baylor research teams.

Unfortunately, our innovation efforts are being undermined by U.S. immigration laws. Many of our STEM Masters and PhD students may not be able to obtain an appropriate work visa in industry because of the low cap on the number of such new visas that can be issued. They would have to return to their home country after graduation or obtain a visa in an occupation that is unrelated to their education. The House-passed STEM Jobs Act would create 55,000 additional visas for foreign nationals with an advanced STEM degree from a U.S. research institution. It represents an important step in fixing America's broken immigration system.

I encourage the Senate to pass this legislation.

Sincerely,

KENNETH WINSTON STARR.

Mr. CORNYN. Mr. President, I think the record should be clear that our side of the aisle believes we should act today and not wait and not delay further this important STEM Jobs Act for the very reason I said earlier, which is that it will help job creators and entrepreneurs.

The reason STEM visas are particularly powerful is because these individuals with special expertise in math, technology, engineering, and the like are uniquely qualified to be able to start up new enterprises and to attract and create jobs for other people. In other words, there is a multiplier ef-

fect. For every 1 of the 55,000 green cards that would be created by this act, there are hundreds of thousands of people who would enjoy jobs as a result of the economic activity in this country.

I hope we don't sacrifice another crop of science, technology, and engineering graduates in the hope that we can get the perfect immigration bill. In fact, we know this is a difficult area in which to legislate, and both sides of the aisle know we need to deal with all of the different facets of our broken immigration system. But this bill has passed the House. It is here and now. We could pass it today by unanimous consent but for the objection of our friends across the aisle and the objection, amazingly enough, of the President of the United States who himself has claimed for at least the last 4 years that he is in favor of immigration reform.

It is also an important confidence builder in terms of the acceptance of this legislation by the American people. The American people are justifiably skeptical of Congress passing another omnibus or comprehensive piece of legislation. We tried that before, and we found out that even if people have read bills going into the thousands of pages in length, many times there are unintended consequences.

So I believe it is very important that we start with this important STEM Jobs Act, that we demonstrate we are worthy of the confidence and trust of the American people when it comes to addressing our broken immigration system, in an area where we have consensus such as the STEM jobs field. I tell my colleagues they have my personal commitment that I will be there to work with them to deal with other parts of our broken immigration system as we go forward.

The best way to do that, in my opinion, is to start here. If we can't pass this legislation—and I am skeptical based upon the objection we have heard today—I wonder if we will ever be able to pass immigration reform. If we can't do this consensus bill, tell me one other piece of legislation we could pass in this field by agreement of the political parties and send it on to the President. Indeed, I think there is room to wonder whether some people in this Chamber would prefer to have this an issue they can wield in the next election rather than to join together on a bipartisan basis and to solve what is broken in our immigration system.

Let's start here. Let's build on this. We can do it today if we can just somehow avoid the objections and pass this legislation that has been passed by the House. It passes the STEM visa bill, it keeps families together, and it represents values I would think both sides of the aisle would applaud.

With that, I yield the floor and suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. UDALL of New Mexico). Without objection, it is so ordered.

MIDDLE-CLASS TAX CUTS

Mrs. MURRAY. Mr. President, middle-class families in our country today are paying very close attention to what we are doing here in Washington, DC. They really understand what is at stake. They know the impact our decisions will have on their lives, and they keep hoping their elected officials will finally come together around a budget deal that works for them.

Less than a month ago, we concluded an election season that engaged our Nation in a conversation about this very issue. Candidates for the Presidency and for the Senate on down all laid out their positions on some of the key questions we are now hoping to answer. Should the middle-class tax cuts be extended? Should the Bush tax cuts on the rich end? Should we end the Medicare guarantee for our seniors and the next generation?

Well, those big questions were discussed, argued, and clear positions were taken, and voters went to polling places on election day to render their verdict. The outcome was clear. Candidates who stood for the middle class won. Candidates who advocated for our seniors came out ahead. And in exit polls across the country, voters made very clear that they strongly supported the idea that the wealthy should pay higher tax rates and their fair share.

And everyone—Democrat, Republican, Independent; wealthy, low income, middle class; students, workers, retirees; older, younger, and in between—everyone supports extending the tax cuts for the middle class. Nobody thinks the taxes should go up for 98 percent of our workers and 97 percent of our small business owners.

This ought to be easy. The American people just weighed in supporting a continuation of the Bush tax cuts for the middle class. It is a policy Democrats and Republicans agree on, and it would cushion millions of middle-class families across the country from a significant portion of the upcoming so-called fiscal cliff.

So why isn't it already in law? Why aren't middle-class families already able to feel confident in their taxes not going up? Well, for one reason, and one reason alone. House Republicans continue to hold the middle class hostage in a desperate and deeply misguided attempt to buck the will of the people, ignore the results of this election, and protect the wealthiest Americans from paying their fair share. That is all there is to it.

If Republicans truly cared about keeping taxes low for the middle class, they can do it right now. The Senate passed a bill that would extend the tax cuts for 98 percent of families and 97

percent of workers. President Obama said he would sign it into law. He even showed us the pen. All the House has to do is let this bill come up for a vote and pass it and middle-class families can go into these holidays with the certainty they deserve.

I want to be very clear about something because some of my Republican colleagues seem intent on confusing the issue. Republicans do not have to support taxes going up on the rich in order to vote for our bill to keep taxes low on the middle class. Let me repeat that. Republicans can believe that the Bush tax cuts for the rich should be extended, they can remain committed to fighting for that misguided policy, in my opinion, and they can still vote on the portion of the tax cuts we all agree should be extended for the middle class. Then middle-class families would win, we would have worked together to extend tax cuts for 98 percent of workers and 97 percent of small business owners. Then when the middle class is taken care of, I would be happy to engage my Republican colleagues in a debate about extending the Bush tax cuts for the top 2 percent.

But the first step, the most obvious step, is for the Republican House to take the 98 percent both sides agree on, pass our Senate bill, and send it to the President for his signature.

Recently there have been some cracks in the Republican rhetorical armor that has held fast against compromise for years. More and more Republicans have begun to accept in their rhetoric what Democrats—and, frankly, every bipartisan group that has examined this issue—have known all along: A deficit deal is going to have to be balanced. It is going to have to include new revenue from the wealthiest Americans.

Grover Norquist calls these “impure thoughts,” but to most Americans it is common sense. Now the onus is on Republicans—and especially their leadership—to follow this encouraging rhetoric with some action. So far that has been lacking.

The lengths to which Republicans are now going in order to protect the rich from paying higher rates would be comical if it were not so detrimental. They say they have accepted that revenue needs to be on the table, but then the proposal that Speaker BOEHNER made to the President would actually cut rates for the rich. It lacks any details about where that claimed revenue would come from. And just as independent analysts confirmed about the Ryan plan, and just as we saw in the Romney plan, when you are talking about simply closing loopholes and ending deductions, either the math does not add up or the middle class ends up bearing the entire burden.

Republicans are tying themselves in knots to avoid the obvious: The easiest way to raise revenue from the wealthiest Americans is simply to allow the Bush tax cuts for the top 2 percent to expire as scheduled. That is what the

Democrats want, it is what the American people support, and it would move us a long way toward the balanced and bipartisan deal we are all working to get to.

My colleague in the House of Representatives, Minority Leader PELOSI, is circulating a discharge petition to bring the Senate bill to the House floor. I strongly support this move, and I urge House Republicans to sign on and allow this legislation to come to the floor for a vote.

Democrats have proven we are willing to make the tough compromises that a balanced and bipartisan deal will require. And we have been very clear we will not allow Republicans to push through a bad deal that forces seniors and the middle class to bear this burden all alone.

I am hopeful Speaker BOEHNER and House Republicans will decide to stop holding the middle class hostage, allow the Senate bill to come to the floor, put it up for a vote, and give our middle-class families the tax cuts on which we all agree.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

MALI

Mr. COONS. Mr. President, I rise today to address a challenging situation in Mali. Mali is a west African country, a country of nearly ½ million square miles, a vast country that stretches from the Sahara Desert to the Niger River area and is home to roughly 15 million people. Yet it is not at the top of the list of concerns for many Americans.

This spring, back in March, a rogue element in Mali's security forces launched a coup and forcefully overthrew a longstanding, democratically elected government in the nation of Mali, our ally. This may seem inconsequential to the average American, but it could have big implications for our security, as well that of our regional and global allies, because in the power vacuum created in that spring coup, al-Qaida saw an opportunity, and they stepped in. Three different extremist groups, all linked to or controlled by al-Qaida in the Islamic Mahgreb, or AQIM, now control an area the size of Texas in the northern part of Mali. They succeeded in fracturing a formerly stable democracy and contributing to broad security, political, and humanitarian crises that I believe have grave implications for the Sahel region and for America's interests. To put it simply, this matters.

Mali, a relatively strong democracy for more than two decades and an ally