

spending. That is Social Security, Medicare, veterans benefits, other mandatory spending. It also includes revenue which means that your books ultimately balance and you have a balance in your economy.

The Budget Committee's job is to arrive at that, working with the House. They then give us, the appropriators, something called a 302(a). It is a section in the Budget Act. That Budget Committee tells us, the appropriators, the cap that we can spend. The appropriators are neither free spenders nor freeloaders. We get a cap, a 302(a).

I have 12 subcommittees. Those 12 subcommittees, we divide them up in terms of what we think are the important investments that the country should make; that is into the 12 committees. Then they work with their Republican members to arrive at the subcommittees, and we bring them to the floor.

I have not had a top line. I have not had my cap, because she cannot go to conference. Remember those conferences everybody likes to have? So, had Senator MURRAY gone to a conference we would have had that number. But in the absence of that, I did something really bold. I took the Senate for its word.

This spring when the Budget Committee passed their 302(a) allocation, it would have been \$1.058 trillion. That is how we Senate appropriators, we Democrats, marked up our 12 bills. Some might say that is a lot of money. It sure is a lot of money, and we did a good job with it. We had smart public investments and every one of my subcommittees had the inspector general at their hearings so we could identify duplicative, dated or dysfunctional programs.

We are ready to cut. We know how to cut. We are ready to go, and every one of my subcommittees is ready to go. Am I ready to go to conference? You bet. But to go to conference without that continuing funding resolution is, again, a hollow action that once again wastes time and wastes opportunity.

It is not just those in our country who watch C-SPAN. The world watches C-SPAN. The world is watching us. This is the United States of America. They are watching our parliamentary system, which was once the greatest in the world. We have gone from being the greatest deliberative body to the greatest delaying body, and we delay through hollow gestures back and forth.

I want to do everything I can—working on a bipartisan basis—to maintain the greatness of America, but in order to do that, the greatness of America needs to work tonight. We need to come to our senses, come to an agreement, come to closure, and keep the government open. I am happy to go to the conference, but I would like a date certain. My preference is November 16. Keep the government open. Keep us in not only our job but keep America working.

I yield the floor.

Mr. DURBIN. I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, so ordered.

IRAQ SPECIAL IMMIGRATION VISA EXTENSION

Mr. REID. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate proceed to S. 1566, the Iraq special immigration visa extension.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will report the bill by title.

The legislative clerk read as follows:

A bill (S. 1566) to extend the period during which Iraqis who were employed by the United States Government in Iraq may be granted special immigrant status and to temporarily increase the fee or surcharge for processing machine-readable nonimmigrant visas.

There being no objection, the Senate proceeded to the bill.

IRAQ SPECIAL IMMIGRANT VISA PROGRAM

Mrs. SHAHEEN. Madam President, I rise today to discuss a small, but critical program that represents a test for this body and for this country: The Iraq Special Immigrant Visa program. It is a test of whether we stand behind our commitments abroad. It is a test of whether we help those who help us. And for others out there who might consider assisting the U.S., it is a test to see if we follow through on our promises. If we don't act now, the Iraq Special Immigrant Visa program will expire along with our obligation to thousands of Iraqis who risked their lives to help U.S. troops at war.

The latest version of the Iraq Special Immigrant Visa program was initiated by Congress in the fiscal year 2008 National Defense Authorization Act. It was originally designed to allow for certain foreign nationals in Iraq who served alongside U.S. forces to receive special visas to come live and work in the United States. The visa program was created to help secure a path out of harm's way for those Iraqis and their families that provided important skills to Americans, like translation services, and are now targeted because of their affiliation with us.

The Iraq visa program is currently set to expire today on September 30, 2013. Without action by the Congress to extend this program, thousands of Iraqi applicants, already under threat due to their faithful assistance and valuable service to the U.S. Government, will see consular work on their cases stopped and their dream of escaping the daily threat of violence will be suspended.

Even if we eventually decide to reauthorize the program at a later date, the

stoppage will result in delays of months or even years for these applicants as they completely restart an already long and overly arduous process. Many of these interpreters and assistants who risked their lives for Americans are now in hiding running from place to place to escape retribution attacks against them and their families, any delays could mean their lives.

Now, since I started working on this special immigrant visa issue, I have come across countless stories of bravery demonstrated by Iraqi interpreters who stand shoulder to shoulder fighting with our military men and women. My office has also heard directly from retired military officers who served alongside these Iraqis and are now fighting to get them out of Iraq to the safety of the United States. I would like to just briefly read a few excerpts from these tremendously inspiring stories:

From one retired Marine Corps captain:

I am a retired member of the U.S. Marine Corps, who served proudly in Iraq between 2004-2005. Among our tasks was conducting nightly kill and capture raids in Anbar Province . . . Our interpreter was our lifeline to the local population . . . He became an invaluable member of our team, and our close friend . . . Because of his nearly four years of service to U.S. forces in Iraq, he was left imperiled and at risk of death at the hands of Iraqi militia . . . We came to trust him and treat him as one of our own.

From a Marine Corps infantry officer who did two tours in Iraq:

I owe my life and the lives of my Marines to [my translator] . . . During high intensity combat operations throughout the second Battle of Fallujah, [he] constantly put his life in danger to protect Marines and civilians . . . Over the course of that deployment, [he] not only served heroically alongside Marines, but he also became a second father and a close friend.

From that same marine:

I have had the opportunity to meet many other Iraqi refugees. They represent the best of our Nation. They chose to put themselves in harm's way because they have always believed in what our country is supposed to stand for . . . They are eager to share in the American dream and to contribute in meaningful ways on the home front as they did overseas. They've earned that opportunity.

I could not agree more. But, unfortunately, thousands of Iraqis who have earned the chance to come to the United States might not make it, and simply because we failed to act. That is unacceptable.

Now, a number of Members on both sides of the aisle, including myself, have been working hard for the last 6 months to find a way to extend this critical program. Senators MCCAIN, LEAHY, GRAHAM, LEVIN, DURBIN, and others have been champions of this effort. We have extensions of this program in the comprehensive immigration bill, the current version of the National Defense Authorization Act, and in the annual State Department appropriations bill. Unfortunately, none of these will be signed into law by the deadline.

I was hoping that the House of Representatives would include an extension in their original continuing resolution legislation, but, unfortunately, they did not, leaving the Senate with few procedural opportunities to include it. However, we may have a second chance here in the hours ahead, and I would urge my colleagues in the House and Senate to find a way to extend this program.

Now, there is no doubt that the administration needs to do more to actually process the visa applications. The stories we are hearing about the backlog are entirely inexcusable. Applicants ought to be able to cut through the redtape and bureaucratic nightmare to get their visas processed quickly and more efficiently, while still ensuring proper vetting and background checks. However, we have no hopes of improving the program if we don't extend it.

We have a responsibility to fulfill our obligation to the thousands of civilians who risked their lives to help our country during a time of war. The contributions that Iraqi and Afghan civilians made to our military efforts have been tremendous. Those who served as translators were an invaluable resource and ally to our men and women in uniform. We can't turn our back on them now, particularly as terrorist organizations target these civilians for retribution. We made a promise to Iraqi civilians and now we must honor it.

Mr. REID. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent the bill be read three times and passed and the motion to reconsider be laid upon the table, with no intervening action or debate.

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

The bill (S. 1566) was ordered to be engrossed for a third reading, was read the third time and passed, as follows:

S. 1566

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,

SECTION 1. SHORT-TERM EXTENSION OF SPECIAL IMMIGRANT PROGRAM.

Section 1244(c)(3) of the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2008 (8 U.S.C. 1157 note) is amended by adding at the end the following:

“(C) FISCAL YEAR 2014.—

“(i) IN GENERAL.—Except as provided in clauses (ii) and (iii), the total number of principal aliens who may be provided special immigrant status under this section during the first 3 months of fiscal year 2014 shall be the sum of—

“(I) the number of aliens described in subsection (b) whose application for special immigrant status under this section is pending on September 30, 2013; and

“(II) 2,000.

“(ii) EMPLOYMENT PERIOD.—The 1-year period during which the principal alien is required to have been employed by or on behalf of the United States Government in Iraq under subsection (b)(1)(B) shall begin on or after March 20, 2003, and end on or before September 30, 2013.

“(iii) APPLICATION DEADLINE.—The principal alien seeking special immigrant status under this subparagraph shall apply to the Chief of Mission in accordance with sub-

section (b)(4) not later than December 31, 2013.”.

SEC. 2. TEMPORARY FEE INCREASE FOR CERTAIN CONSULAR SERVICES.

(a) IN GENERAL.—Notwithstanding any other provision of law, the Secretary of State, not later than January 1, 2014, shall increase the fee or surcharge authorized under section 140(a) of the Foreign Relations Authorization Act, Fiscal Years 1994 and 1995 (Public Law 103-236; 8 U.S.C. 1351 note) by \$1 for processing machine-readable non-immigrant visas and machine-readable combined border crossing identification cards and nonimmigrant visas.

(b) DEPOSIT OF AMOUNTS.—Notwithstanding section 140(a)(2) of the Foreign Relations Authorization Act, Fiscal Years 1994 and 1995 (Public Law 103-236; 8 U.S.C. 1351 note), the additional amount collected pursuant to the fee increase authorized under subsection (a) shall be deposited in the general fund of the Treasury.

(c) SUNSET PROVISION.—The fee increase authorized under subsection (a) shall terminate on the date that is 2 years after the first date on which such increased fee is collected.

Mr. REID. Madam President, this is so important. People who worked with our military in Iraq as interpreters and doing other things that were essential are now targets in the civil war that is going on in Iraq. Some of them have been wanting to leave for 2 years, and this will allow them to do that. I am so glad we are able to extend this.

Every day these people who helped us are subject to arrest, being killed, as are their families. It is so important we did this.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Vermont.

CONTINUING APPROPRIATIONS

Mr. SANDERS. Madam President, I wish to say a few words to try to reflect what I think tens of millions of Americans are feeling at 11:25 tonight with the threat of a government shutdown in 35 minutes.

What I want to say is that this discussion is not about ObamaCare at all. What this discussion, debate, and conflict is about is that our Republican friends in the House are trying to annul the elections that took place last November. Some of them were shocked that Obama won and that he won by 5 million votes. They haven't gotten over it. They were shocked they lost two seats in the Senate. They haven't gotten over that. They were shocked they lost some seats in the House.

What they are saying to the American people tonight is: Maybe we lost the Presidential election. Maybe we lost seats in the Senate and in the House. It doesn't matter. We can now bring the government to a shutdown, throw some 800,000 hard-working Americans out on the street, and we are going to get our way no matter what.

I think that is a horrendous precedent to be established for this body. Let's be clear. If we surrendered to that hostage-taking tonight, without a shadow of a doubt these guys would be back 2 weeks from today. At that point they would say to us: Here is our laun-

dry list of demands. If you don't give us what we want, we are going to bring down the financial system of the United States of America, bring down the world financial system, and if it leads to a worldwide recession, well, that is the way it goes. But what is most important is we get our way and we don't care about the repercussions.

Next year I can see these same guys coming to the floor of the House and saying: You know what. We want to abolish Social Security. We think Social Security is a bad idea, and if you don't allow us to do that, we are going to stop the government again. And on and on it goes.

Ultimately, what we are dealing with tonight is an extraordinarily antidemocratic act. Every Member of the Senate has strong feelings. Sometimes we win, sometimes we lose. But when they are in the minority—they do not control the White House, they do not control the Senate—they cannot force the American people to give them what they want.

The irony is that because we have folks in the Republican Party in the House who believe we should abolish Social Security, end Medicare as we know it, privatize the VA, eliminate the Environmental Protection Agency—they do not believe that the function of government is to protect the interests of the vast majority of the people. So these guys are sitting and saying: My God. The government may shut down. What a great idea.

If you don't believe the EPA should protect us from pollution, then isn't it a good idea that we not have an EPA starting tomorrow? If you don't believe in veterans health care, isn't it a good idea that we should slow down the processing of veterans' claims?

So for these guys who do not believe that in a democratic, civilized society we should have a government which represents the people, then from their point of view what is happening is, in fact, quite good.

What particularly angers me, and why the American people have such contempt for what we are doing in Washington is as we speak—everybody knows this—the middle class in this country is disappearing. The Census Bureau study came out last week—if you can believe this—median family income, that family right in the middle of American society, is earning less money today than it earned 24 years ago. All of the increases in technology and productivity doesn't mean anything.

Poverty is at 46.5 million, and that is highest on record. Youth unemployment is 20 percent. Real unemployment is 14 percent. What do the American people want us to be doing? Everybody knows what they want us to do. Every poll gives us the answer.

They want us to start creating the millions of jobs this economy desperately needs. They want us to raise the minimum wage because they know millions of people in this country cannot make it on \$8 or \$9 an hour. They