

CUBA

Mr. DURBIN. On a separate topic, late last night I returned from Havana, Cuba, with Senator PATRICK LEAHY, Senator STABENOW, Senator WHITEHOUSE, Congressman VAN HOLLEN, and Congressman WELCH of Vermont. It was a whirlwind trip.

In a matter of 2 days we had a number of visits with a variety of different people in Havana. They included government officials. Bruno Rodriguez, who is the Foreign Minister of the Cuban Government; we had a lengthy meeting with him yesterday.

We had a meeting with about 10 different Ambassadors to Cuba from foreign countries. We met as well with a dozen reformers or dissidents, opponents of the current Castro regime in Cuba, and had individual meetings with ministries. This was a productive and important delegation trip, important because starting tomorrow we are going to have face-to-face negotiations in Havana between the United States and Cuba pursuant to President Obama's December 17 announcement. We are setting out to change the foreign policy of the United States as it regards Cuba. It is time for change.

For over 50 years we have been committed to a policy of exclusion, believing if we had embargoes and blockades we could force internal change in Cuba. The policy failed. The Castro brothers still reign, and life in Cuba is not what we want to see.

What the President has said is let's engage them at a different level, a constructive level where we try to find ways to open the Cuban economy and Cuban society. That, to me, is the best course. It isn't just a theory that is the best course, it has been proven.

When the Soviet Empire came to an end, what happened to the Warsaw Pact nations allied with the Soviet Union? They opened their doors to the West, they saw what they could anticipate to be part of their life in the future, and they made the conscious choice to move toward democracy, to move toward a free market economy. I think the same can happen in Cuba.

One young man came to speak to us. He had gotten in trouble because he challenged the Cuban Government. They put him back on a pig farm to work, but he was still determined to aspire to a better place in Cuba in the future. He said to us: What President Obama's announcement has done is to pull the blanket off the caged bird in Cuba. Those of us who live in Cuba are still in the cage of communism, but we can see out now about opportunities and a future. That, I believe, is part of what the President's new policy is all about.

When we were discussing our current blockade with Cuba with their leadership, we learned that powdered milk comes to Cuban citizens from New Zealand—halfway around the world—when there is an ample supply in the United States. What we are trying to do is to not only open the Cuban economy to

powdered milk but to the power of ideas, the exchange of values, the belief that if the Cuban people see a better model for their future, they will gravitate toward that model.

This negotiation which opens this week is the beginning of this conversation. The President is moving in areas of trade and travel, as we hope he will do, to expand these opportunities, but we have to do our part in Congress. As contentious and spirited as the debate may be about changing our policy in Cuba, it wasn't that long ago that we stood on the floor of the Senate and considered establishing diplomatic relations with Vietnam. There were some with fresh memories of all we had lost, over 40,000 American lives in Vietnam, who said we shouldn't have a normal relationship with what is a repressive regime in a country we just concluded a war with. Others with cooler minds prevailed, and we established diplomatic relations and I think to the betterment of both nations.

Let us move forward, not forsaking our principles, not turning our back on our belief that the Cuban society should be more open, fair, and legitimized by the voters at the polls but believing we can work with this country as we have with others around the world, even when we disagree with their form of government and their practices, to try to strive to reach that democratic ideal.

DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY

Mr. DURBIN. The last point I would like to make relates to a motion that was made this morning by the majority leader. It was related to the appropriations bill for the Department of Homeland Security. Why are we bringing up this appropriations bill at this moment? Because when we agreed last December to fund our government, the Republicans in the House insisted we carve out the Department of Homeland Security and not give it its regular budget, instead give it emergency spending, a continuing resolution.

This is not the way to run any department of government, certainly not the Department of Homeland Security. Why is it important to fund this department? One need only look to what has happened in the last few days in Paris to understand that the threat of terrorism to the world is still very real. One of our first lines of defense when it comes to terrorism is our Department of Homeland Security. There is no excuse for us to be dealing with this continuing resolution to fund this department. They should have the resources they need to keep America safe, but instead what has happened is this: The House of Representatives last week said they will only agree to fund this department properly if they can provide certain riders and changes in the law as part of it.

I would tell you that the change that has been proposed by the House of Rep-

resentatives is unacceptable. The President has said he is going to veto it if it is sent to his desk, and I totally support his position.

Here is what they have come up with in the House of Representatives. If you are familiar with the DREAM Act, which I introduced in Congress 14 years ago, it says: If a young person is brought to the United States at an early age, parents making the decision to come to this country, and that young person grows up in the United States, finishes high school, no serious criminal problems, willing to go forward to higher education or to the military, we will give them a chance of becoming legal in America. That is the DREAM Act. It has been considered and passed on the floor of the Senate, considered and passed on the floor of the House but never in the same session, and so it is not the law of the land.

President Obama, a little over 2 years ago, came out with an Executive order program known as DACA. DACA said to these young people who would qualify under this law: If you will come forward and register with our government, if you will pay the filing fee, if you will allow us to do the background check, we will allow you to stay, go to school, and work in America and not be deported. Six hundred thousand young people have come forward. We estimate there are some 2 million eligible, and 600,000 have come forward. Thirty thousand are from my State of Illinois. Who are these young people?

Let me introduce you to one of them, Oscar Vazquez. Oscar Vazquez grew up in Phoenix, AZ. His mother and father brought him to that city from Mexico, and he was undocumented. He attended Carl Hayden High School in Phoenix. He was a member of the Junior ROTC. His goal was to serve in the U.S. Army.

When he went to the recruiter to sign up, the recruiter said: I need your birth certificate.

Oscar said: Come on. We are fighting a war. Can't you look the other way and just let me join?

He said: No, young man. You don't have the proper documents. You can't enlist in the U.S. Army.

He was despondent because that was his goal. He went home and got engaged in another project which is the subject of a new movie called "Spare Parts," which George Lopez produced, directed, and starred in, which I saw last week. I will not give away the whole story, but I can tell you this: Oscar Vazquez and three other students at Carl Hayden High School entered into an underwater robotics competition. They competed with colleges such as MIT and they won. Their high school team won the underwater robotics competition.

The talented young man, Oscar, said: I am going to Arizona State University. Without any government assistance, he graduated with a degree in mechanical engineering. After he got his degree and a wife and a baby, he

said: Now I have to get right with America. I have to resolve this issue of being undocumented.

That means Oscar decided to move back to Mexico. He was living in Mexico—the law required him to stay there for 10 years. That is how the law is written. He petitioned the United States for a chance to come back in. Eventually he was given a waiver. Oscar Vazquez came back, became a citizen of the United States of America, and the first thing he did was enlist in the U.S. Army. He went into combat in Afghanistan, and he came home after having served our Nation honorably and now is working for a major railroad in the State of Montana, with his wife and children.

That is the story of one DREAMer, one DREAMer who was given a chance and has made a difference in America. He not only served in our military, but he had a degree in mechanical engineering. He is going to be a job creator, a job builder himself.

So what do the House Republicans want to do to people such as Oscar Vazquez? Deport them. That is exactly what they called for. They are dream killers. That isn't right. We ought to give Oscar, young men and women just like him a chance to succeed and a chance to make America better.

I have stood on this floor over 50 times with color photographs such as this one by my side and told the stories of DREAMers. This last weekend I was in Chicago and six of them came forward and told their stories. Each and every one of them had a compelling reason for us to defeat this mean-spirited amendment that came out of the House of Representatives.

The President will veto it if it gets to his desk, but I hope we will do better in the Senate. I hope there are enough Senators on both sides of the aisle, 60-plus, who will stand up for the DREAMers of America. This is a test. It is a test as to whether we believe in fairness and justice and the value that immigrants such as Oscar Vazquez bring to the future of America.

The House of Representatives just doesn't see it. They are blinded by their hatred for these immigrants, and they continue to pass these mean-spirited amendments. We can do better. We must do better as a nation. Let us stand up for the DREAMers, and let us all be dedicated to passing comprehensive immigration reform. Our immigration laws are broken. Our system is broken. It is time for us to accept our responsibility and repair it.

We passed a bill a year and a half ago on the floor of the Senate with 68 votes—14 Republicans—Republicans and Democrats voted for it and sent it over to the House of Representatives and it languished for a year and a half. They refused to even call it or consider it. Our immigration system is still broken. Withholding money from the Department of Homeland Security, threatening with these riders that are dream killers for so many young people in America, that is unacceptable.

I will stand on this floor as long as it takes to defend this DREAM Act and people such as Oscar Vazquez, who contribute to America and make it a better nation. I hope we will have bipartisan support for defeating the House of Representatives' riders that have been branded by the President as unacceptable and he will veto.

I yield floor.

RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the leadership time is reserved.

MORNING BUSINESS

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate will be in a period of morning business for 1 hour, with Senators permitted to speak therein for up to 10 minutes each, with the Democrats controlling the first half and the Republicans controlling the final half.

The Senator from Missouri.

REMEMBERING PAT GRAY

Mrs. McCASKILL. Mr. President, people who work in politics sometimes suffer a bad image. People who run for office, obviously, sometimes suffer a bad image. But sometimes even worse is the image that what we call the political handlers have—those people who have made a career of professionally helping people get elected. They are seen as ruthless, as hired guns, as aggressive, even soulless, unprincipled. I am here to talk about one of those political operatives, but this political operative was special. This political operative was my friend. He was principled, he was brave, but most of all he was a patriot. Pat Gray passed away very recently and he will be missed.

Pat grew up in Oklahoma. After serving 4 years in the Navy, he moved to Kansas City where he took a job with the Kansas City Power and Light Company. He also became very active in the Jaycees. He found that work as part of the Jaycee organization was exhilarating. He had his first taste of working on campaigns to improve the community and he was hooked.

Very quickly he moved into advertising. That advertising job then morphed into working on political campaigns. Pat made his bones in 1982 as a political consultant when he took on the city incumbent county executive in Jackson County, MO. Jackson County is the county where the person who used to have this desk is from, Harry Truman. Jackson County is the county that contains Kansas City.

It was then and still is a place where Democrats do well. So for Pat Gray to take on a candidate to be a sitting incumbent county executive was quite brave because, as I am sure the Presiding Officer understands, politics is rough locally. When someone takes on

a powerful person in the predominating party in a community, there is usually a price to pay, but Pat was not deterred. His candidate, Bill Waris, beat that sitting county executive, Dale Baumgardner, in 1982.

The following year Pat was hired in an important mayoral campaign where he was also successful, electing the Kansas City mayor. Pat was low key, but he was aggressive. Pat had little ego but lots of laser-like strategy. He was very easy going, but he was very hard on his opponents. As one Kansas Citian put it after Pat had passed away: Pat slid into second with his spikes in the air. So you either had to make a very good throw or get out of the way.

That was his style, very hands-on. He wanted to win badly. Pat was instrumental in electing the first woman as Jackson County executive, the first woman as Jackson County prosecutor—my campaign for that office in 1992—and the first woman as mayor of Kansas City.

He helped to elect mayors, legislators, city council members, too many for me to name, too many campaigns, too many candidates. Nine out of ten times he was successful. He helped me throughout my career. I remember vividly in 1990, when I was running for the county legislature, his coming to my home in Coleman Highlands with a camera and shooting a commercial with me sitting on my living room couch, just the two of us. He became a trusted advisor and my dear friend until his death.

As I stand at the very desk Harry Truman used in the Senate, I stand here in part because of his help and his loyalty. I will be reaching for the phone to call Pat Gray countless times in the coming years. While he helped many candidates, including me, it was on community issues that his record was particularly impressive. The e-tax renewal in Kansas City, which many thought had no chance, Pat successfully steered; the renewal and invigoration of our sports complex in Kansas City, the home of the division champion Kansas City Royals and our Kansas City Chiefs. Pat Gray strategized a brilliant campaign to revitalize downtown Kansas City through the building of a major sports arena, which has now resulted in blocks and blocks of revitalization. In fact, real estate in Kansas City—residential real estate in downtown Kansas City—is now a hot ticket in large part because of Pat Gray; the very first area transportation tax, which gave a lifeline to thousands of Kansas Citians in the urban center, allowing them to find that way to get to work; a property tax for indigent care at Truman Medical Center.

Can you imagine anything that might be more difficult to pass? Asking people to pay more property taxes to help care for the poor who were turning up in the emergency room at our major local hospital, Pat Gray did that; additional tax moneys for both police and