is what Senator ERNST articulated so well last night. And if the President is willing to put the veto threats away and the designed-to-fail talking points aside, we can still cooperate to get some smart things done for the people we represent.

RECOGNITION OF THE ACTING MINORITY LEADER

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The assistant Democratic leader is recognized.

PROGRESS FOR THE MIDDLE CLASS

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, last night the President talked about the economy and the progress we have made. The United States grew 2.6 percent last year, and in the third quarter alone our economy grew by 5 percent. Nearly 3 million jobs were created—the best year for the U.S. labor market since the height of the economic boom under President Bill Clinton. Lower gasoline prices are providing relief to many families and consumer confidence is up. The deficit has been cut in half.

Yet we know that while the economy is growing and unemployment is declining, sadly, much of the benefit is going to those at the very top of the ladder. The top 1 percent of American wage earners saw 49 percent of the decline in incomes during the recession, but they have seen 95 percent of the income gained since the recovery started. Let me repeat that. The top 1 percent of wage earners have seen 95 percent of the gains since our economy has recovered.

The gap between wages for low-income and middle-income families and those at the top is staggering. Forty-seven people in America own more than 160 million Americans combined. That has to change.

This isn't just a Democratic observation. Even Republicans have publicly agreed with us that working families are falling behind. Let me quote a few. Former Florida Governor Jeb Bush, a potential candidate for President, said: ''Here's reality: If you're fortunate enough to count yourself among the privileged, much of the rest of the Nation is drowning.'' Jeb Bush said that.

Mitt Romney, a former Republican candidate for President and perhaps a Republican candidate for President again—here is what he said last week as he has rekindled his dream for the Presidency: ''. . . the rich have gotten richer, income inequality has gotten worse, and there are more people in poverty than ever before.''

Even Speaker JOHN BOEHNER said this in an interview:

> The top third of America are doing pretty good. The bottom two-thirds are really being squeezed.

So how do we address these challenges? Our parties look at it differently.

The Republican majority in this Chamber had to pick the first bill they would bring to the floor of the Senate once they reached the majority. There were a lot of initiatives they could have considered. We know what they chose—the Keystone XL Pipeline—a pipeline owned by a Canadian company. That is the No. 1 priority of the Republicans in the Senate, bar none. When they wanted to respond to President Obama's State of the Union Address with Senator ERNST of Iowa, they focused on the Keystone XL Pipeline. What a limited vision of the future—one pipeline.

Then we took two votes yesterday on this pipeline, and it started to become clear what this pipeline is all about. It is moving Canadian tar sands from Canada, through the United States, and to a refinery in Texas. We learned yesterday the Republicans will not even support the proposition that the refined oil products coming out of this refinery will help America.

We had a simple amendment Senator MARKEY of Massachusetts offered which said that at the end of the pipeline, the refinery's oil products will be sold in America. The Republicans defeated that amendment. So all this argument about how this oil out of this pipeline is going to help our economy in the future? Nope, don't expect it to happen. Yesterday's overwhelming Republican vote made it clear.

There was a second part that was considered yesterday. This bill—the No. 1 priority of the Senate Republican majority—is going to build a pipeline, that is for sure. We said, good, if it is going to be built, use American steel in building the pipeline. That is not an outrageous suggestion. If this is such a priority for the Republicans, wouldn't they want to put Americans to work to make the steel to build the pipeline? We offered that as an amendment yesterday. Senator FRANKEN offered that amendment and the Republicans rejected it. The Republicans rejected the premise that the steel that goes into the most important pipeline in the history of America, from their point of view, should actually come from America. That is the second amendment we considered.

This special interest project, the Keystone XL Canadian-owned pipeline, is going to continue to be the No. 1 dominant issue in the Senate for days to come.

Republicans plan to do everything they can to help build a pipeline, but they want to deny millions of Americans access to health care. That is what the House Republicans have come up with. They want to come up with a plan that will literally take away the coverage of health care from Americans. Is there anyone in this country who thinks that is the right thing for our future? We are trying to reduce the number of uninsured. The Republican changes to the Affordable Care Act would increase the number of uninsured and increase the number of Americans dependent on government-sponsored health care. It doesn't sound like a Republican idea to me, but it is. That is what is coming from the House of Representatives.

There are pretty clear differences in how we help working families. For the Senate Republicans, it is to build a Canadian pipeline. Don't use American steel, don't keep the oil in America, but build this pipeline—No. 1 priority. The House Republicans take away health insurance coverage for hundreds of thousands of Americans at a time when we know that leaves people in a precarious position.

Here is what the President said last night: We want to make certain we focus on projects and programs and new ideas that can leave our children a better world and our grandchildren as well. Do we want an economy where everyone has an opportunity to climb that economic ladder or do we want a world where those who are born into lives of luxury set the rules and always come out ahead? Do we want an economy that rewards those who work hard and play by the rules or an economy where corporations rig the game so it is tails you lose, heads I win?

We know that an economy with a strong middle class is key to growing America. Yet it is becoming harder and harder for families to even reach the middle class. Working families aren't looking for a handout—not in my State. They just want a chance for a better life for their kids.

There is a way we can do this. It is called the earned-income tax credit. This is an idea supported by Republican Presidents in the past. Historically both parties have supported it. The earned-income tax credit is designed to encourage work by providing a tax credit to working families.

The President's proposal, similar to one that SHERROD BROWN and I have introduced, would expand the credit to help the only group that our Tax Code pushes into poverty: childless workers. What a difference this would make for millions of working families, the difference between paying a heating bill or putting it off, the difference between getting a prescription filled or waiting. A small refundable tax credit for these workers can make a bigger difference than many U.S. Senators would ever realize.

The President also proposed making 2 years of community college free for responsible students and giving motivated students a path to a solid educational foundation without debt. This is not a Democratic idea. The President acknowledged last night that this idea came from a Republican Governor in Tennessee. I might add that a Democratic mayor, Rahm Emanuel of Chicago, has a similar program, but the President went to Tennessee to acknowledge that the Republican legislature and the Republican Governor had come up with a good idea. So to argue this is somehow a partisan idea, it sure isn't in Tennessee. If it is partisan, it is a Republican partisan idea.

The President understands that in the 20th century, maybe K–12 was just enough to make it. In the 21st century it is not enough. K–14, most of us understand, is the ticket to a good-paying job.

I called in to some of the media this morning from Illinois, and they said, oh, this community college free tuition idea—another Federal mandate. Well, let me disabuse you of this idea. This is voluntary. It is original. States decide if they want to be part of it, but I think those States that want to be part of free community college tuition for good, achieving, hard-working students are on the right track, and those who ignore it may fall behind.

The jobs of this century will require more training and education than ever. I think this notion is a good one. Have we ever gone wrong in the history of the United States by investing in education, investing in our students, investing in our future? That is what the President's proposal does. It has been dismissed out of hand by the Republicans, even though it had a Republican origin. That is a mistake. We should count on our community colleges, the affordable alternative for higher education for 40 percent of America's college students. And thank goodness it steers these kids away from these Godforsaken for-profit colleges and universities which too often exploit these young people, these young men and women, sink them deep in debt and, if they are lucky, hand them a worthless diploma at the end of the day. Community colleges are the affordable ticket in Kentucky, in Illinois, and across America.

The President reminded us last night that we live in a great country and our economy is recovering. But while the wealthiest Americans are doing fine, more American families are spending hours at the kitchen table trying to figure out how to make ends meet. Let's help those families. Let's agree to help those families. One Canadian-owned pipeline is not the answer. We need to think about education, we need to think about a Federal transportation bill, and we need to think about investing in America and its future.

DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY FUNDING

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, in the aftermath of the recent terror attacks in France, it is tough to know what the House of Representatives is thinking. Last week, the U.S. House of Representatives threatened to shut down the Department of Homeland Security. That is the government agency responsible for protecting America from the threat of terrorism.

Why are we debating full funding for the Department of Homeland Security? Every other government agency, I might add, has been properly funded through the omnibus bill. But the Republicans insisted on not funding the Department of Homeland Security, which fights terrorism in the regular orderly appropriations process. They insisted this Department be funded only through the end of February. Does that mean that America is safe from terrorism? I wish it were true. But we know that we are only one terrorist away from a terrible incident in America.

One of the Departments with the major responsibility of protecting us is the Department of Homeland Security. So why did the Republicans decide they wanted to make the funding of this Department uncertain and contingent?

Well, the reason was they are so angry with President Obama's Executive order on immigration that they are putting America at risk by failing to properly fund the Department of Homeland Security. Then last week, the bill the House passed made the appropriation for this Department contingent on five riders. A rider is an addition. It is language that doesn't relate to a budget or appropriation, and it relates to the Executive orders that were established by the President.

The House bill passed last week would defund President Obama's immigration policies, including the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals Program, known as DACA, which has been in place for over 2 years.

What does DACA do? By the President's Executive order, it puts on hold the deportations of immigrant students who grew up in America. It allows these young people to continue to live and work in this country on a temporary basis. They are known, in shorthand, as the DREAMers.

I know a little bit about this because I introduced the first DREAM Act 14 years ago in the U.S. Senate. It has become a very familiar term, but when I first started, no one had ever heard of it. What I found was there were young people brought to the United States by their parents at a very early age who had, obviously, no voice in the decision, raised in America, undocumented, went through our schools, were successful, had no criminal problems, and wanted a future.

They couldn't get a future under American law. The DREAM Act would give them that opportunity to move to legal status. We have already invested in these young people, in their education, so why would we want to give up on their talents by deporting them after they are educated? That is exactly what the U.S. House of Representatives has proposed.

In 2010, I joined with Republican Senator Richard Lugar. We wrote a letter to President Obama. It said: Why would we deport these young DREAMers? They offer so much potential for America.

A year later, 22 Senators joined me in sending a followup letter to the President, and he issued his Executive order called DACA.

Six hundred thousand eligible DREAMers have signed up for DACA, which means for these 600,000, they can live and work in America without the fear of deportation. It makes a big difference. Thirty thousand of them live in Illinois. We estimate there are another 1.5 million eligible.

The Center for American Progress says these young people aren't just taking up space, they are going to add to the economy because of their talents. They estimate that these DREAMers will add $329 billion to our economy and create 1.4 million new jobs by 2030. That is a pretty tall prediction to think that these young people could have that impact on our economy.

Let me tell you the story of one of the DREAMers whom the House Republicans would deport, and you may understand why this estimate of the profound, important impact of these DREAMers on our economy is realistic.

As I mentioned, I introduced the DREAM Act 14 years ago. I have come to the floor over 50 times to tell stories of these DREAMers who, frankly, make the case for passing the DREAM Act and for defeating this hate-filled provision that was passed by the U.S. House. I am going to continue to update these stories about these DREAMers so you can understand why giving up on these DREAMers is giving up on the future of this country.

I want to tell you the story about Carlos Martinez. Here is a picture of him. Carlos is holding his DACA card under the President's Executive order. Carlos and his brother were brought to the United States in 1991. Carlos was 9 years old. He came to this country and didn't speak one word of English, and his father told him, ''Estudien para que no batallen en la vida como yo.'' What it means in English is: Study so you don't have to struggle in life like I have.

Carlos took his father's advice to heart. At high school in Tucson, AZ, Carlos graduated ninth in his class. Then he enrolled at the University of Arizona. He was undocumented at the time. He had never owned a computer, but he loved math and he dreamed about being a computer engineer.

Four years later, in 2003, Carlos Martinez graduated with a bachelor of science degree in computer engineering and a minor in computer science, electrical engineering, and math. He was named the top Hispanic graduate in his class.

For the record, Carlos Martinez did not qualify for 1 penny of Federal assistance to go to college, and you can imagine in Arizona probably not 1 penny of State assistance. But he made it through, graduating as the top Hispanic in his class from the University of Arizona. But after he graduated, reality set in. He received job offers from Intel, IBM, and a host of tech companies, but then they found out he was undocumented. He couldn't be hired.

He didn't give up. He enrolled in the master's program for software systems engineering at the University of Arizona. He completed a 2½ year program in a year and a half.