Some of the President's overreach has been so out of bounds that the Supreme Court struck it down unanimously. Whether on the left, right, or center, every last Justice—even those appointed by the President—rebuked him for his overreach on recess appointments last June. Then just a couple of months ago the President rebuked himself by taking actions he had previously said many times that he lacked the legal authority to take. When he tried to suggest otherwise, a fact-checker blasted the spin and clarified that the President had been asked specifically about just the sorts of actions he was contemplating.

Last year President Obama declared that executive action was ''not an option'' because it would mean ''ignoring the law.'' ''There is a path to get this done,'' the President said, ''and that is through Congress.'' That was his view then. What changed? What changed?

The truth is, the latest power grab is not really about immigration reform. It is about making an already broken system even more broken. It is about imposing even more unfairness on immigrants who have already worked so hard and played by the rules. It is hard to understand why the President would want to impose additional unfairness on immigrants like these who just want to live their own American dream.

The question is, Do Democrats agree with the President? Well, we will soon find out. We will also find out if Democrats agree with President Obama who ignores the law when it suits him or if they agree with President Obama who made this statement just a few years ago in Miami. Here is what he said in Miami just a couple of years ago.

The President:

> Democracy is hard, but it's right. [And] changing our laws means doing the hard work of changing minds and changing votes one by one.

That is the President a couple of years ago.

So I am calling on Democrats to vote with us now to fund the Department of Homeland Security. I am calling on Democrats to join us and stand up for core democratic principles such as the rule of law and separation of powers.

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Democratic leader is recognized.

LORETTA LYNCH NOMINATION

Mr. REID. Mr. President, the record held by the Republicans dealing with Cabinet officers is not one they should be proud of. For example, during a time of the War on Terror, the Republicans held up the Defense Department's nominee for a historically long time. Never in the past had someone who was to be Defense Secretary been held up by being blocked from moving forward.

You would think that would be a lesson learned and that would be enough, but no, that is not enough. Loretta Lynch, for example, who was nominated by the President to be Attorney General, has been held up for longer than any nominee for Attorney General in the last 30 or 40 years. It is hard to comprehend that. For example, Senator LINDSEY GRAHAM said she was ''a solid choice.'' Senator ORRIN HATCH has indicated that he supports her nomination. Why, then, do we have to keep waiting and waiting? We are approaching 3 months that this good woman has been held up from a job for which she has been nominated.

I would hope the Republican leadership would move this out of the Senate as quickly as possible.

DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY FUNDING

Mr. President, I am not going to dwell very long on the matter that is before this body, and we will vote at 2:30. We have here with us the leading Democrat on the Appropriations Committee, and she will talk about homeland security. We have here on the floor today the assistant Democratic leader, who was one of the authors of a bill which we brought to the floor and which was debated for a long time and passed overwhelmingly before it was blocked by the Republicans.

We have before us a very interesting proposition. We have had terrorist attacks in Canada, in Australia, all over the European Union, including France and Belgium. Those countries, rather than talking about not funding homeland security, are talking about funding it with more money—but not the Senate led by the Republicans. They are doing everything within their power to make sure Homeland Security is held hostage to matters that do not really relate to homeland security.

If my Republican colleagues do not like something President Obama has done dealing with Presidential Executive orders—which, by the way, he has done less than any President in modern times—bring it up on the Senate floor and let's have a debate on that. Let's not do what happened previously and shut down the government. That is the direction we are headed. That is really too bad.

THE PRESIDENT'S BUDGET

Finally, Mr. President, the President has outlined a good proposal for a budget. It is nothing that is new. It is simply building upon the budget that was so successfully negotiated by Senator MURRAY and Congressman RYAN. That is what this budget he proposed is all about. It would seem to me, rather than the Republicans running out, as soon as he said a word, saying no, no, no, let's look at areas where we can compromise. Don't we need something done with the infrastructure of this country? The answer is obviously yes. Why can't we work something out in that regard? So I would hope that rather than saying no to everything the President does, that we should understand that our role, including Republican Senators, is to legislate. Legislation is the art of compromise.

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, equally divided, with Senators permitted to speak therein, with the Democrats controlling the first half and the Republicans controlling the final half.

The Senator from Maryland.

Ms. MIKULSKI. Mr. President, I ask to speak in morning business as agreed upon.

WELCOMING BACK THE DEMOCRATIC LEADER

Ms. MIKULSKI. Mr. President, before the Democratic leader leaves, in the warmest and most enthusiastic way, I want to welcome him back. He looks like he has been in a big fight. I am sure he won. It is wonderful to have him back in his leadership role, here right at his duty station. We look forward to following him and to working with him to try to forge these bipartisan relationships.

DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY FUNDING

Ms. MIKULSKI. Mr. President, I come to the floor to call for a vote against the motion to proceed to H.R. 240, the House Homeland Security funding bill.

Now, this is a shock—for Senator BARBARA MIKULSKI to call for a vote against a motion to proceed on an appropriations bill. For the past 2 years, I have been on the floor speaking out, pounding the table, saying: Let's bring up bills; let's bring them up one at a time.

So now why am I on the floor asking for a vote against the motion to proceed on the Department of Homeland Security funding bill?

Well, I can tell us it is because the Homeland Security bill has two parts. One is an essential bill, the funding for the Department of Homeland Security—which I hope we get to and we get to as expeditiously as possible. But they have another component to it—poison pill riders—five riders from the House of Representatives designed to attack the President on immigration.

These riders, if passed, will guarantee the President will veto the bill, and we are going to be back to parliamentary ping-pong. We posture and pomp and vote. Send it to the President; he will veto it. We will get into more posturing, pomp, and partisan points. For what? We need to fund the Department of Homeland Security.

Yes, we do need to deal with immigration, but the Senate passed an immigration bill. Rather than attacking the President, let's attack the problems from immigration. Let's deal with the DREAMers. Let's deal with getting people into the sunshine.

This institution, both the House and the Senate under Republican control, criticized the President for not acting.

Where is leadership? Where is leadership? When the President acts, as he did on immigration, they want to punish him by adding poison pill riders to an essential—essential—national security bill.

Colleagues on the other side say: Why are you seeking to delay the funding bill?

I am not seeking to delay the funding bill. I am asking that we put in a clean bill and just vote on the money part.

All of my Democratic colleagues and I wrote a letter to Senator MCCONNELL asking him to schedule a vote on a clean Homeland Security bill. Senator JEANNE SHAHEEN, the ranking member on the Appropriations Subcommittee on Homeland Security, and I put in a clean bill the other day.

We could do it now. We could pass that funding today and reserve the debate on immigration for another day, calling upon the House to do their job. But right now I want all of the wonderful men and women who work at the Department of Homeland Security to be paid for the work they do.

We need them. We need them in cyber security. We need them searching out the lone-wolf attacks. Weren't we proud of the brilliant job our Homeland Security leadership provided to protect all the people who so enjoyed the Super Bowl?

We have a lot of work to do. In my own home State we are dependent on the Coast Guard, but so is every other State with a coastal area, protecting us in terms of search and rescue, against drug dealers.

What about our Border Patrol, which is there every single day in dangerous circumstances; don't they deserve our respect, the resources they need, and the pay they have earned?

Let's get with the program. The program is to protect America, not to protect a political party and its partisan points on immigration. Our job is to protect the homeland security of the United States of America.

I am adamant about this. We are now 4 months into the fiscal year. We could be heading for—I hope not—another continuing resolution. We need to stand for America.

Americans are in danger at home and abroad. I know my other colleagues are waiting to speak. But we do face terrorist threats. We do face cyber criminals. The Secret Service is reforming itself. We have fence jumpers at the White House, we have drones over the White House, and yet we are going to dicker, dicker, dicker, and dicker against five poison pill amendments.

Let's clean this up and vote against the motion to proceed today. Let's come back with the clean bill that Senator SHAHEEN and I introduced.

The money has been agreed upon on both sides of the aisle and both sides of the dome in the closing hours of the fiscal year 2015 debate. Working hand-in-hand with Senator DAN COATS we fashioned a bill in the Senate, and we have it agreed to over in the House. So we could do our job so that Homeland Security can do their job.

Defeat this ill-conceived motion to proceed. Let's proceed to a clean bill. Let's protect America and then get on with other important debates.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The assistant Democratic leader.

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, I am pleased to follow my leader on the Appropriations Committee, Senator MIKULSKI. She and I know what it was like on 9/11/2001 in this building. We were looking out the window down the Mall and saw black smoke billowing from the Pentagon. We didn't know what happened, but we were told immediately to evacuate this U.S. Capitol Building.

I had never heard those words before. We raced out of the building, standing on the lawn outside, unaware of exactly what happened.

We knew about the tragedy in New York. We didn't know what was next. We stood there in our bewilderment, thinking what could we do. Well, what we did was protect ourselves and our Nation and come together. I remember our choral director, when we came together, Senator MIKULSKI of Maryland, led us in singing ''God Bless America'' that evening on the steps of the Capitol.

There was a feeling of bipartisanship brought about by the tragedy of that moment and the belief that we had to rise above party to do something and keep America safe.

We did. I am proud of that, and I am proud of the role the Senator from Maryland played in that.

One of the aspects that went way beyond singing was to roll up our sleeves and decide how to make government work more effectively. We had two outstanding leaders in that effort: Senator Lieberman of Connecticut and Senator COLLINS of Maine. The ranking Republican and Democratic chair of that committee came together and crafted a bill literally to create a new department in our government, the Department of Homeland Security, that brought together, I believe, 22 different agencies under one roof so that we could effectively coordinate keeping America safe.

We agreed on a bipartisan basis and created that Department, and that Department has really served us well. The current Secretary, Jeh Johnson, is an outstanding individual. They have so many areas of responsibility. Other agencies play an important role—defense, intelligence, transportation—but the Department of Homeland Security is the coordinating department for America's safety against terrorism.

That is why it is incredible to me that we have refused to provide the funds the Department of Homeland Security needs to keep America safe.

The Republicans insisted in December, in the House of Representatives, they would not pass the appropriations bill for one department, the Department of Homeland Security, because they wanted to enter into a debate with the President over immigration policy. There is nothing wrong with a debate over immigration policy. In fact, the Republicans, now in the majority control of the House and Senate, could have started that debate weeks ago. They didn't.

Instead, they attached five riders to the Department of Homeland Security appropriations bill, and they said: We will not allow that Department to be properly funded unless the President accepts these five immigration riders.

I wish to speak to one of those riders because it really tells the story of the feelings of many on the Republican side when it comes to immigration.

Fourteen years ago I introduced the DREAM Act. The DREAM Act is very basic. If you were brought to America as an infant, a toddler, a child by your parents, and you were undocumented in America, we believe you still deserve a chance.

As children, they didn't vote on the family decision to come to America, but their lives have been changed because of that decision. They have lived in America—many of these young people—undocumented, growing up, going to school, doing everything every child around them did, and then finally knowing they didn't have the necessary legal documentation to stay in this country.

Well, I introduced the DREAM Act and said for those kids—who should not be held responsible for any wrongdoing by their parents—give them a chance. Give them a chance if they have led a good life, if they have graduated from high school, if they aspire to serve in our military or go on to college. Give them a chance to be legal in America.

The DREAM Act we have never enacted into law despite 14 years of effort. But the President stepped in 2½ years ago and said by Executive order: We will not deport the DREAMers if there is no evidence of criminal wrongdoing, if they have completed high school, if they came here as infants, toddlers, and children. We will give them a chance to stay in America, to work in America, and to go to school in America.

We estimate 2 million young people would qualify, and 600,000 have gone through the process. They have paid the filing fee, gone through the process, have the protection of what we call DACA, and now don't have to fear deportation. Who are these young people? They, frankly, are some of the most inspiring stories I have met as a Member of the Senate.

The Republicans in the House of Representatives have said they want to deport the DREAMers. That is right. They will not allow the Department of Homeland Security to renew their protection from deportation, and they won't allow any others to apply for DACA protection.

That means 600,000 young people currently protected by DACA would be

facing deportation and another 1.5 million will be facing it as well.

Now, that is the answer of the Republican Party when it comes to immigration. Take these children—who came here as children to America, who have shown they want to be part of America's future—and deport them. Get rid of them.

From the Republican point of view in the House of Representatives, we have no use for these young people.

I wish to introduce one of these young people. This is Aaima Sayed. Aaima Sayed was brought to the United States from Pakistan. When she was 3 years old her parents brought her to this country. She grew up in Chicago like every other typical American kid. Aaima says:

I have no memories but those of living in the United States; I am an American in every way, except on paper.

Aaima was an outstanding student. She graduated in the top 10 percent of her high school class, where she was secretary of the Spanish club, the math team, and a member of the National Society of High School Scholars. Her dream in life is to be a doctor. This is how she explains it:

It completely breaks my heart to see thousands of children die of treatable diseases due to inadequate basic health care facilities, and I want to have the skills and ability to change that.

In January 2012, Aaima graduated from Rutgers University magna cum laude with a major in psychology. She was on the dean's list six times and had a grade point average of 3.75 out of 4.0. She was a research assistant at the Rutgers Department of Psychology and interned with a local cardiologist. Aaima took the Medical College Admission Test, the MCAT, after graduating magna cum laude from Rutgers.

She scored in the 90th percentile. Her score was better than 90 percent of those who took the test. Shortly after she graduated from Rutgers, she was told that President Obama had an Executive order that gave her a chance to stay in America. It was called DACA. She applied for it, and she was accepted.

For Aaima, it meant that now, for the first time, she could honestly think about going to go medical school. She has never received any government assistance, incidentally. As an undocumented person in America, she doesn't qualify. So when she goes to college, it is at considerable challenge and hardship beyond those who had help from the government. She never did.

Aaima sent a letter to me about DACA and its impact on her. She said:

I went from feeling hopeless and full of uncertainty regarding my future to feeling confident and optimistic that I will one day get the opportunity to help my community and people in other poverty-stricken areas.

Then something amazing happened. Loyola University in Chicago, after the President's Executive order on DACA, decided they would create 10 spots in their medical school for DACA students around America such as Aaima. She applied.

I went to Loyola the day they started classes and met 10 of them. Aaima is an amazing young woman. This was an extraordinary academic achievement in her life, and she was surrounded by those just like her who were ''undocumented,'' protected by President Obama's Executive order.

The 10 were accepted to Loyola in this special program in their medical school on one condition; that is that when they finished and became doctors, they had to agree to serve in underserved areas where the poor people live in America and don't have doctors. They gladly agreed to do it.

They are not going to medical school to get rich. They are going to medical school for the enrichment of a profession where they can help so many deserving people. That is where Aaima is today, at Loyola's medical school. I thank Loyola University for giving her a chance and giving nine others a chance. I thank them as well for giving Aaima the opportunity to serve those in America—in cities and rural areas—who have no doctors.

The House Republicans want to deport this young woman. That is what they have said: We want to deport her. We don't believe she should stay in America. After all she has accomplished in her life, after all she promises to bring to our great country, the Republicans have said: No, we don't need you. We don't want you. Leave.

That is what the rider says on the Department of Homeland Security. I come to this floor virtually every day and tell another story, such as the story of Aaima, the story of what she has been through and the promise she holds for the future of this country. I cannot understand the mentality of some on the other side of the aisle who are so hateful when it comes to these young, idealistic, amazing young people. Some of the things they have said about these DREAMers are very sad. I have had a chance to meet them, and I am going to continue to work for them.

So let us do this. Let us pass a clean Department of Homeland Security bill. What does that mean? Take off the riders, take off the politically extraneous things. Let us pass the bill to fund the Department that keeps America safe and then turn to the majority party—the Republican majority party—and say: Now accept your responsibility. If you want to debate immigration, bring it to the floor of the Senate, bring it to the floor of the House. It is within your power to do it. Don't hold the Department of Homeland Security hostage. Please, when you consider the future of immigration in America, don't forget we are a nation of immigrants, and that immigrant stock has made this the greatest country on Earth, if I can say. Let us continue that tradition.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Vermont.

Mr. LEAHY. Mr. President, later today, the Senate will vote on whether it should proceed to a bill that attempts to link two critical yet independent debates: the day-to-day operations of one of the Nation's key national security agencies, and addressing our broken immigration system. Now, in doing that, it appears that leadership wants to hold hostage the operations of the Department of Homeland Security, an office charged with protecting our national security. And frankly, that is simply irresponsible.

Sometimes the sense of history around here is whatever was the last sound bite heard on television, but let's take an honest look at the real history and how we got here: It has been well over a year and a half since a strong, bipartisan majority, Democrats and Republicans, came together in the Senate and approved a package of comprehensive immigration reforms. We did this after the Senate Judiciary Committee had held hundreds of hours of hearings and debate in markup. We passed it here overwhelmingly. The Republican House leadership refused to allow a vote on that measure even though most of it would have passed the House of Representatives. Now, because they wouldn't act at all, and left a void, the President acted. The President acted when he had waited for a couple of years to see if Congress would act—waited for the House of Representatives to take up the bill we passed. He had to act. This is almost like ''Alice in Wonderland.'' The Republican leadership refuses to act on the immigration bill and then they get mad because the President, who has to take responsibility for this country, acts. They now want to put at risk the very operations of the agency charged with enforcing the immigration laws in question and blame it on the President because they failed to act. This is ''Alice in Wonderland.''

I know Republicans object to the President's Executive action. We spent hours hearing their complaints last week as the Senate Judiciary Committee was supposed to be considering the qualifications of Loretta Lynch to be Attorney General. It had nothing to do with her but they wanted to vent for the cameras. It went on until the cameras were turned off. I would say that instead of complaining about what they failed to do and complaining about what the President does to protect this country, why don't they offer some meaningful solutions for fixing our broken immigration system. A good place to start would be the comprehensive immigration bill we passed last Congress by a vote of 68–32. There was plenty in that bill I did not like but it included meaningful reforms to all aspects of our immigration system that was negotiated and improved through the full committee process and that is what made it a real compromise.

Now, instead of voting on that bipartisan compromise or other alternative solutions, all we see are attempts to

undermine any efforts at comprehensive reform. By blocking all alternatives, the Republicans are keeping us locked in a status quo that hurts our economy, makes us less safe and pulls families apart.

The President's Executive action is a positive step to toward keeping our communities safe because it requires DHS to prioritize the deportation of dangerous criminals. And it encourages those immigrants with longstanding ties to our communities who do not pose a danger to register with the government and come out of the shadows.

Law enforcement officers and victims' advocates tell us the President's Executive action will make our communities and families safer because people will not hesitate to call the police for fear of being deported themselves.

Business leaders, economists and labor leaders tell us it will grow our economy and increase wages for all workers. It will level the playing field for American workers and raise revenues by more than $22.6 billion over 5 years.

Immigration and constitutional law experts have concluded that it is constitutional and the President acted within his authority.

Mayors from 33 major cities across the country who work every day to make our communities safe and our businesses flourish, have said the Executive action will fuel growth in local economies, increase public safety, and facilitate the integration of immigrants. These are not political partisans. They are frontline leaders who understand the daily problems posed by our broken immigration system. They are telling us that we must act. And until we do, they are supportive of the temporary steps the President has taken.

House Republicans have said their proposal will bolster border security in a way the President's Executive actions did not but those claims ignore reality. Border security has become a game of who can develop the most outlandish, unrealistic proposals. Round-the-clock drone surveillance. Doubling the border patrol. Waiving all environmental laws. Requiring DHS to prevent every last undocumented person from crossing the southern border. These proposals are not serious. They never worked in the past. They are not going to work now. We are not at war with Mexico and Canada. We cannot seal our borders. Nor should we.

We already have devoted an enormous amount of resources to border security. The overall budget for CBP and ICE has nearly doubled in the past 10 years. Hundreds of miles of border fencing has been constructed. We have more than 21,000 border patrol agents. And, the Department has deployed advanced technologies and airborne assets. The most effective border security measure would be approving the comprehensive immigration reforms passed by the Senate last Congress that reduce the number of people trying to come here in the first place.

The Senate has a choice. We can set aside politics and act like grownups or we can waste days debating the legislation sent to us by the House, which the President has made clear he will veto.

What I suggest is that we respond to the American people and act like grownups—consider legislation introduced last week by Senator SHAHEEN and Senator MIKULSKI. That bill, negotiated last year by Senate and House members, Democrats and Republicans alike, would ensure that the Department of Homeland Security has the critical resources it needs to protect our national interests. That bill will raise DHS funding by $400 million, and fund the largest operation force of border patrol agents and CBP officers in history. It will provide resources to respond quickly when natural disasters devastate our states and communities. It will provide funding for the essential services provided by the Coast Guard and Secret Service. It will invest in FEMA's State and Local Grants Program, which also helps all of our states—including rural, border ones like Vermont. And it will support our state and local law enforcement, fire departments and first responder emergency services. It replaces rhetoric with reality. I think the American people are tired of rhetoric. They'd like some reality.

We all know our current immigration system needs comprehensive reform. That's why I held hundreds of hours of hearings and markups in the Judiciary Committee and why this Senate, Republicans and Democrats, came together last Congress and passed a comprehensive immigration bill. And I'm so sorry that the House Republican leadership refused to bring it up even though there were the votes to pass it. So the President took the first step. Now, Congress must act. But this appropriations bill is not the place for that debate. Have a real debate on immigration. We cannot send the message that we are more willing to play politics than promote and protect national security. That posturing is beneath the Senate. We should pass a clean funding bill for the Department of Homeland Security, and renew our efforts to enact meaningful, comprehensive immigration reforms such as those passed by the Senate in 2013.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from New Jersey.

Mr. BOOKER. Mr. President, I stand to discuss what has been discussed by the previous two Senators, the urgent need for a clean bill to fund our Department of Homeland Security.

I wasn't part of this body during the 9/11 attacks. I was living in Newark, NJ, and watched, as many in my city did, with a view clearly to the World Trade Center and saw that attack. What moved me afterward was the incredible unity of our country. There was no partisan politics. People pulled together. First responders from New Jersey, all over New York, and all over the country came together.

What we did after that as a nation was we began to prepare to ensure we could prevent those attacks and have better systems in place should emergencies, crises, disasters or attacks happen again. What happened from that unity is evidenced by this body joining together not just to sing patriotic songs on the Capitol steps but to work in unison to create the Department of Homeland Security.

That agency is tasked with the urgent need to prepare our country to meet crises if they come. This is not a partisan issue and should not fall prey to political fights between congressional Republicans and the President of the United States over immigration. There is way too much at stake.

Let me cite a few examples. Something we have learned from past attacks is the urgency of coordinating between different layers of law enforcement and first responders. If we do not pass a clean DHS bill, resources for that coordination, getting everyone working together, will be put at risk.

Let me cite another example. It is critical in this day and age that we stay on the cutting edge of technology, one step ahead of those people who seek to do us harm. We see clearly if we do not get a clean bill passed, we will not be able to stay on that technological edge. We see that in many areas. One great example is at our ports. New Jersey has one of the third busiest ports in America, and we need that critical technological equipment for upgrades that can help us to detect nuclear devices or harmful materials coming into our country. Without a clean bill, we will not have those resources.

We also see the headlines from just the past few months about cyber attack after cyber attack. A critical agency that must be funded appropriately to protect our businesses and our infrastructure and our first-responding capabilities against cyber attack is coordinated and led from the DHS. Not to fund this agency adequately so they can prepare for those attacks is unacceptable.

We are Americans and this idea of unifying together is our strength. We stand united against attacks. If we do it right, as we have learned not just throughout our country's history but in every aspect of our society—my college—high school coach used to talk about the five Ps: Proper preparation prevents poor performance. This, unfortunately, will so undermine our ability to secure ourselves, it is almost an insult that it will not even give proper funding to meet the weaknesses to the Secret Service, as we have seen their weaknesses exposed. As we go into a Presidential election, we must provide adequate security and protection for the next potential President.

This also harms our businesses as well. Take for example the E-Verify

system. This makes sure people who are hired by our companies do not have things in their background that would undermine our security. Those systems are harmed as well.

This is an example where petty politics and recklessness is being placed above people, policy, and reason. We as a nation have stood in unity after the most horrifying of attacks. We live in a world where we have seen diseases such as Ebola, where we have experienced cyber attacks, and where we have had to recover from vicious weather events such as Sandy. We live in a world where people seek to do us harm, and we should do nothing to weaken our ability to respond, to prepare, to make ourselves more resilient for any such occurrences. The urgency is upon us. We cannot be a reactive nation unified after the fact. We must be a proactive nation, working together, above politics, to do what is right for the strength and the security of our country.

I call for a clean bill in the critical, most important part, of our government to provide for the common defense. This is a time that should bring us together, not have us fall prey to every bit of Washington that people have grown tired and sick of. Let us pass a clean bill, as a bipartisan group of former Secretaries of Homeland Security has called for. This is not a time for recklessness; it is a time for reason. It is not a time for petty politics; it is time to put people first.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from South Dakota.

THE PRESIDENT'S BUDGET

Mr. THUNE. Mr. President, yesterday the President of the United States released his budget. Unfortunately, it looks like the same old failed, top-down policies of the past. It is a government-knows-best approach that clings to more taxes, more spending, and bigger government. And it is exactly what the American people don't need.

If the past 6 years have demonstrated anything, it is that big government doesn't work. Six years of big-government policies have left the American people struggling.

Even the Vice President of the United States admits it. Speaking at the House Democrats' retreat last week, Vice President BIDEN said:

> To state the obvious, the past six years have been really, really hard for this country.

That is the truth. The recession officially ended more than 5 years ago, but the recovery has been weak and sluggish. Economic growth has lagged far behind the pace of other recoveries.

By this point in the Reagan recovery, the economy had created a staggering 11.8 million more private sector jobs than we have created since the recession ended.

Wage growth has remained stagnant under the Obama administration, while prices have risen. The average family health insurance premium has increased by over $3,000 since the President's health care law was passed. Household income has declined by more than $2,000 over the past 6 years. And too many Americans are unemployed or trapped in part-time jobs because they can't find full-time employment.

Over the past 6 years, middle-class families have had to work harder and harder just to stay in place. Getting ahead has started to seem like an impossible dream.

Republicans are committed to changing that. Providing relief to the middle class is the priority of America's new Congress. We intend to do it by eliminating the top-down, big-government policies of the past few years and replacing them with a new path focused on growing the economy from the ground up.

If big government programs tend to assume one thing, it is that government knows best. The government decides what it thinks you need, and then it makes you pay for it.

Well, Republicans don't believe government knows best. We believe the American people know best. And our goal is to get government off the backs of American families. We want to eliminate burdensome government programs and regulations and allow Americans to keep more of their hard-earned dollars. We want to leave Americans free to make the best decisions for their families about health care, about housing, and about everything in between. We want to make sure Americans live in an economy that provides the resources and opportunities they need to support their families and achieve their dreams. That is what we mean by fighting for people, not government, and we have already gotten started.

Senate Republicans just passed legislation to approve the Keystone XL Pipeline. This project is a win-win for Americans. It would support 42,000 jobs during construction. It would invest billions in the economy. It would bring in millions in revenue to State and local governments.

In my home State of South Dakota alone, the pipeline would bring in $20 million in tax revenue. That is a lot of funding for local priorities such as schools and teachers, law enforcement, roads, and bridges.

Finally, the Keystone Pipeline would substantially reduce our reliance on oil from unstable countries such as Russia, Venezuela, and Iran. That would be good news for American families' energy bills.

In addition to legislation to approve Keystone, Republicans have a number of other job-creating bills on the agenda.

The House of Representatives has already taken up legislation to make it easier for employers to hire veterans by exempting new veteran hires from ObamaCare's burdensome employer mandate. House Republicans have also taken up legislation to fix ObamaCare's 30-hour workweek rule, which is currently cutting workers' hours and wages by making it more difficult for employers to create or maintain full-time positions.

Republicans will also be releasing our own budget in the next few weeks, and it will be very different from President Obama's. First of all, our budget is going to balance. The President's budget never balances—ever—and that is not a sustainable path for our country. Families have to balance their budgets. They don't have a choice. The Federal Government should be no different.

The President tends to act as if the Federal Government is different, as if the fact that his new government programs have good intentions means he can somehow ignore the fact that the country can't afford them. But the Federal Government is just like any family or business or organization. If its budget isn't balanced, bad things happen.

Right now, the Federal Government is in debt to the tune of $18.1 trillion. That number is so large that it is practically unfathomable.

To put it in perspective, 18.1 trillion people are more than 2,540 times the total population of the Earth; 18.1 trillion miles is the distance to the Moon and back—almost 38 million times.

Needless to say, a debt that big is not a good thing—and the President's budget would keep adding to it. In fact, it would add another $8.5 trillion to the debt. That is not good news for future generations who will have to pay down the bills our generation is racking up.

Republicans' budget will balance. It will take aim at out-of-control Federal spending and address our massive Federal debt. Our budget will also cut waste to make the government more efficient, effective, and accountable to the American people. There is no excuse for wasting Americans' money on ineffective and duplicative programs.

The President's budget is about the past. Republicans' budget will be about the future. The American people sent a clear message in November that they were tired of the status quo in Washington. They were tired of gridlock. They were tired of the same old top-down, government-knows-best approach to governing.

Well, Republicans heard them. And since we took control of Congress a month ago, we have focused on living up to the trust the American people placed in us. We have gotten Washington working again.

In just 1 month, we have held more amendment votes than Democrats held in an entire year. Committees are back up and running, and Republicans and Democrats are getting the chance to make their constituents' voices heard.

We have passed job-creating legislation, and we are going to keep passing more. We are going to put forward the kind of budget the American people are looking for: a budget that balances, a