

dictate where and how those funds may or may not be used. If the President exceeds the limits of his Executive authority to create an illegal program such as DACA or DAPA, Congress has the power to defund such a program.

The Department of Homeland Security appropriations bill is a check on the executive branch. It is a result of the last election, and elections are supposed to have consequences. This bill is our way of showing to the American people we are carrying out a campaign promise to make sure the President doesn't act in an unconstitutional way and abuse his authority.

So I ask my colleagues to take this under serious consideration when deciding whether to vote in favor or against proceeding to this bill.

I yield the floor.

CONCLUSION OF MORNING BUSINESS

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Morning business is closed.

CLAY HUNT SUICIDE PREVENTION FOR AMERICAN VETERANS ACT

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate will proceed to the consideration of H.R. 203, which the clerk will report.

The assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

A bill (H.R. 203) to direct the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to provide for the conduct of annual evaluations of mental health care and suicide prevention programs of the Department of Veterans Affairs, to require a pilot program on loan repayment for psychiatrists who agree to serve in the Veterans Health Administration of the Department of Veterans Affairs, and for other purposes.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the time until 12 noon will be equally divided in the usual form.

The Senator from Alabama.

Mr. SESSIONS. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to speak as in morning business for up to 10 minutes.

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

DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY FUNDING

Mr. SESSIONS. Mr. President, I thank Senator GRASSLEY for his remarks. As chairman of the Judiciary Committee and a longtime vigorous leader in the U.S. Senate, I know he was here and saw the problems of the 1986 amnesty. It had bad ramifications in a lot of ways. I believe if we listened to the experience of Senator GRASSLEY and his understanding of what is at stake, we would all be in a lot better shape than we are today.

The American people want a lawful system of immigration. They want one that is fair to applicants who want to come to America. They are not for eliminating immigration to America. They want a system that allows people to apply, wait their turn, and if they are qualified, be admitted; if they don't qualify, not be admitted. They want

that enforced. They don't believe we should have open borders and open visa programs that allow people by the millions to come unlawfully into this country. The President obviously has a different view. As a result, we are in a situation in which the Constitution is at stake in a lot of ways.

We will vote after lunch on moving forward to the Department of Homeland Security bill. The Department of Homeland Security bill, passed by the House of Representatives, fully funds the Department of Homeland Security. The basic funding mechanisms and agreements and allocations of money in that legislation were approved on a bipartisan basis. The House of Representatives simply said: Mr. President, the money in the Department of Homeland Security funding mechanism will be spent for lawful purposes. That money will be spent to secure the homeland in an effective way. That money, however, will not be spent by anyone to take actions outside the lawful limitations and lawful powers of the Department of Homeland Security. But that is what the President wanted to do, and that is what he wants to do through his Executive action.

They are now leasing a new building across the river in Crystal City. They are hiring 1,000 new Federal employees. Those Federal employees will be processing the applications for up to 5 million people and they will be providing those people with photo IDs. These are people in the country unlawfully. They are not lawfully allowed to work in America. Businesses aren't allowed to hire people who are here unlawfully.

It is plain and simple. They are not eligible to qualify for Social Security or Medicare. So the President has declared he is going to set up this office. They will process these individuals, and they will provide up to 5 million photo IDs, 5 million Social Security numbers, and the right to work in America. They will be allowed to participate in Social Security and Medicare.

He says: I am entitled to do that. Well, he is not entitled to do that. As scholar after scholar and as common sense tells us, the President doesn't have that power. That is what this is about.

The House barred any spending on this unlawful activity—an activity the President asked Congress to allow him to do and which Congress rejected. This proposal was presented to Congress, and Congress refused to pass it. But he is doing it anyway. It is an arrogant overreach, a direct challenge to the historic role of Congress in our American system.

Our Democratic colleagues say they don't want controversial immigration riders on this bill—controversial immigration riders. In other words, they don't want the Congress to do what it is required to do—fund the programs it believes need to be funded and not fund programs it doesn't believe should be funded.

As a matter of policy, Congress has not adopted and does not support what the President wants to do. In fact, it has prohibited it. It has no duty whatsoever to allow the President to spend moneys of the United States of America to advocate a program they don't approve of, or certainly one that is unlawful. That is what this is all about. Our colleagues are voting to block the bill that would fund Homeland Security at the level the President has asked for. So there is no policy change here. Every lawful activity of Homeland Security is funded.

There was a headline in the New York Times today. I am going to push back a little on my colleagues because they have been spinning this idea that somehow the Republican House, in sending this legislation over that funded Homeland Security, is disrupting the fair flow and causing controversies within our funding mechanisms of Congress. The headline from an experienced reporter's article in today's New York Times is: "Democrats Look to Protect Obama's Immigration Directives."

That is exactly what this is about, colleagues. At least seven of our Democratic colleagues have explicitly said they don't agree with the policy of the President with regard to Executive amnesty and providing work permits and Social Security to people unlawfully here. But they are now united. We are told all of them are going to stand together to protect President Obama's immigration directives.

When they were running for office during the campaign last fall, people were saying they didn't agree with him. Now, when the issue hits the floor and we have an opportunity to do the normal and rational thing and not fund an unlawful policy, they are all sticking together like a palace guard around the White House to protect Obama's immigration directives. This is a sad thing and a disappointing thing to me. The article goes on to say:

Democrats are hoping they can force the new Republican majority to drop the immigration provisions and send the \$40 billion spending bill to the President.

Congress is spending \$40 billion on homeland security. All of that money is directed to legitimate lawful policies of Homeland Security and not allowing any of it to be spent on unlawful, unapproved policies in Homeland Security—an absolute power that Congress has, a duty that it has. Congress is violating its fundamental duty if it allows the President to carry out power he is not authorized. It is absolutely violating its duty if it supports and funds actions by the President to violate the law. It has a duty to say no to the President who overreaches.

The article goes on to say:

But Democrats have decided to shut down debate on the measure altogether, fearful that it could lead to the bill's approval and could prompt negotiations with the House that would put them at a disadvantage.

Fearful that the process could lead to the bill's approval during negotiations

with the House—isn't that what legislation is all about? Isn't that what it is all about? Shouldn't our colleagues have the right, if they don't like the language that constricts the President's power to carry on this unlawful act, to offer an amendment to strip it out? They have the ability to strike that language. Why don't they do that? No, they are blocking even moving to the bill in its entirety. Then they are attempting one of the most through-the-looking-glass, down-the-rabbit-hole arguments you have ever heard. They are saying Republicans are shutting down Homeland Security when they are not passing the bill that is on the floor today and we will be voting on. They are rejecting it. All it does is fund the Department of Homeland Security at a level agreed upon on a bipartisan basis, \$40 billion.

What kind of world are we in when we do that? I would like to ask who is being protected here. The answer is clear. The New York Times said: They are protecting President Obama's political immigration directives.

I would ask this. Isn't it our duty to protect the Constitution? Isn't it our duty to protect the laws of the United States of America? Isn't it our duty to protect American workers from the decline in wages and their job prospects as a result of now legalizing 5 million people to be able to take any job whatsoever in the entire American economy, including working for the county commission, the power company, the trucking companies?

Isn't that what our duty is? Who should we be protecting here? Shouldn't we be protecting a lawful system of immigration?

But the President wants to take money. He wants Congress to appropriate money to give him at Homeland Security so he can spend it to undermine the law of the United States of America. What an unthinkable thing that is. But that is fundamentally what is happening. He wants and is demanding that this Congress not follow its promises to the American people—not follow its lawful and constitutional duty—but to give him the money so he can carry out a policy in contradiction to the laws of the United States of America and to the good policy of America. This is the way we do business in this country.

I think the reason our Democratic colleagues don't want to move to the bill is because they don't want to debate the substance of it. That is not a good reason. They don't want to debate the substance of it because their position is untenable. The American people understand that Congress is not shutting down the government and is not shutting down Homeland Security. Our Democratic colleagues are the ones that are refusing to pass the legislation that would fund Homeland Security. The President is backing them up and encouraging them, and apparently he has had success. He twisted arms or something because at least seven of the

Members said they didn't agree with this, and more probably would have, had they been asked. But no, not now. Now they are all standing together with Senator REID, the minority leader of the Senate, to advocate this policy.

I don't appreciate it being said time and again by so many of our Democratic colleagues and the President that somehow Congress is acting improperly and that Congress is not funding Homeland Security. This is through the looking glass. This is beyond acceptance. I think the New York Times pretty well said it correct. I don't believe the media is buying this argument. I don't think the American people are buying this argument, and Congress shouldn't buy the argument. The right thing to do, colleagues, is to get on the bill.

Let me say this to my Democratic colleagues. I know many of you are uneasy about this. Let's get on the legislation. There will be amendments. There will be a number of amendments. Perhaps things could develop in a way that you can support them. We will protect the lawful constitutional powers of Congress and fund Homeland Security. We will do it in a way that strengthens the rule of law in America and strengthens our ability to have integrity in the immigration system. It creates a system the American people rightfully have demanded, pleaded for, and prayed for, and that Congress and the politicians have failed to produce for now over 40 years. That is the problem. The American people are angry, and they are not angry at immigrants. All of us have friends and relatives and neighbors who have immigrated to America. We are not against immigrants. I think there is a growing unease out there about the willful refusal of Congress to do what it takes to fix this system.

I would just say one more thing. American wages are down. Wages fell in December 5 cents an hour—not a good event after we have been told everything is getting so much better. There is a limit, colleagues, to how many people we can bring to America to take jobs when we have a limited number of jobs and falling wages.

We have the lowest percentage of Americans in the workforce working today since the 1970s. Things aren't going good. We can't accept everybody in the whole world to take jobs here.

We just had a report produced yesterday that said we have now discovered there are another 5 million people who have been—it looks to me—admitted to work in the country unlawfully. Through the Freedom of Information Act, it was discovered that not only do we have a million people a year come to America with green cards and permanent residency, we have 700,000 guest workers that come every year. Add to that the asylees, plus the refugees and other people. What they found out was we have now—in the last 5 years under this administration—given work authorization to 5 million more

people than anybody knew. Do we think this doesn't impact people's wages, impact women to have a better job, their children to have a better job?

Somebody needs to be thinking about this. There is a limit here, and it is obvious the limits need to be discussed. We need to create a lawful system which protects American workers. We need to be less concerned about protecting President Obama's unlawful directives and more concerned with protecting the interests of the American working person.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Arizona.

Mr. MCCAIN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to speak as in morning business for such time as I may consume.

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

Mr. MCCAIN. Mr. President, today I rise to speak on the Clay Hunt Suicide Prevention for American Veterans Act, a most important piece of legislation. I would like to thank Senator ISAKSON in particular for expediting this legislation through the Veterans' Affairs Committee. I admire his leadership. I admire his commitment to the veterans of America. It has been a pleasure to know him and to serve in the Senate with an advocate for our American veterans.

I would also like to thank Senator BLUMENTHAL, whose partnership I have been with for a long period of time. Without his leadership and support, this legislation would not be coming to the floor.

Every day approximately 22 American veterans commit suicide, totaling over 8,000 veteran suicides each year. I repeat: 8,000 veteran suicides each year. It is evident by these staggering numbers that our military and veterans affairs programs are not effectively treating post-traumatic stress disorder, known as PTSD, and other mental health illnesses that can lead to suicide. There are too many disconnected and ineffective treatment programs, and as a result our service men and women are suffering from the bureaucracy.

Against this backdrop, I wish to highlight the story of Clay Hunt, for whom this proposed legislation is named. Clay enlisted in the Marine Corps in May of 2005, deployed to Al Anbar Province near Fallujah in January 2007.

During that deployment Clay Hunt was shot in the wrist by a sniper's bullet that barely missed his head, a wound for which he received a Purple Heart. Despite having been wounded, Clay Hunt volunteered and graduated from Marine Corps Scout Sniper School in March 2008.

After another deployment to Afghanistan, Clay was honorably discharged from the marines in April 2009. After returning home, Clay suffered from the effects of PTSD for many years and struggled with inadequate care at his

local VA hospital. Subsequently, Clay took his own life in March 2011 at the age of 28. Clay is only one example of veterans who are trying to make their way in our country today, but who suffer, more so than they have to, because of Department of Defense and Department of Veterans Affairs mismanagement of resources for suicide prevention and mental health treatment.

This bipartisan bill will lay the foundation for improved mental health care and better suicide prevention resources for our American servicemembers. Specifically, this bill would require an independent evaluation of existing suicide prevention programs at the DOD and VA, gauge their effectiveness, and make recommendations for consolidation, elimination, or improvement.

Additionally, this legislation would establish a new single Web site that provides information for veterans regarding available mental health care services, create a pilot loan repayment program to recruit more psychiatrists to treat veterans at the VA, improve the exchange of training best practices and other resources among the VA and nonprofit mental health organizations, create a community outreach pilot program to assist with and mitigate the stressors of servicemembers transitioning to civilian life, and provide a 1-year extension for certain combat veterans to enroll in the VA.

Our Nation has a moral obligation to identify, resource, and make available to our veterans effective forms of treatment to help eliminate suicide resulting from severe combat-related psychological trauma. This bill is an important step to improve the care we provide to the men and women who have sacrificed for all of us and to whom we are forever indebted. We owe it to these brave men and women to act now.

Obviously I urge my colleagues to vote in favor of this legislation.

THE PRESIDENT'S BUDGET

Mr. President, I would like to briefly discuss the President's budget request for fiscal year 2016 as it relates to the Veterans' Administration. In this year's budget request, the President has stated he will submit legislation to reallocate part of the funding for the Veterans Access, Choice and Accountability Act of 2014, legislation he signed into law just last August, to other programs within the VA.

In other words, he wants to take money from the Veterans Access, Choice and Accountability Act and put it into other programs within the VA—a bill we just passed last August. It clearly suggests that the President of the United States is disconnected from the needs of our veterans and he may be more solicitous about supporting a bloated, demonstrably dysfunctional bureaucracy than ensuring that quality care is available to our veterans.

Our veterans have suffered long enough with wait times and scheduling delays at the VA, and deserve to have the right to choose where and when

they get their health care. Taking funding away from this legislation, especially the choice card, shows a complete disregard for our veterans' well-being and the service they provide to our country.

If or when this legislative proposal comes to the Hill, I would urge my colleagues to vote against it—in fact, not even consider it.

I want to thank my colleagues. I am sure we will have an overwhelming vote today. I think it is an important step forward.

I would like to thank all of the veterans organizations and veterans advocates who have made the Clay Hunt Suicide Prevention Act for American Veterans a reality. But I would also like to urge my colleagues to understand that this problem, this serious problem, of 8,000 veteran suicides each year is not going away anytime soon. So do not believe the passage of this legislation will somehow be a cure-all. That can only come through long and persistent efforts and care and concern for our veterans who have given so much to their country. So I am very honored to be a part of this legislation.

Again, I want to thank the chairman of the Veterans' Affairs Committee and the ranking member, Senator SANDERS. I would like to thank Senator BURR, who was ranking member previously.

My friends, we have a long way to go. We have a lot of young men who have not been able to come all the way home. It is our job and our obligation to do everything we possibly can not only to honor them but to see that they have a safe and secure future, and one in which the thought of suicide would never be any consideration.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

Mrs. FEINSTEIN. Mr. President, I rise today to express my strong support for the Clay Hunt Suicide Prevention for American Veterans—SAV—Act, of which I am a cosponsor.

This bill addresses a true public health crisis facing our Nation's military members and veterans: suicide. You see, an estimated 22 veterans commit suicide every day. According to data from the Department of Veterans Affairs, VA, young veterans are particularly at risk, dying by suicide more often than both Active-Duty troops and civilians. In fact, the Department of Defense, DOD, reports that in 2012 and 2013 more veterans died by committing suicide than died in the Iraq and Afghanistan wars. This is a serious problem that must be addressed.

The legislation being considered today is named for a marine who served in Iraq and Afghanistan and who committed suicide in 2011. He was 28.

After being honorably discharged from the Marine Corps, Clay Hunt sought VA medical care for post-traumatic stress disorder. He constantly voiced concerns about the care he was receiving, both in terms of scheduling and the treatment received, which consisted solely of medication.

Clay decided to move closer to his family but had to wait months to see a psychiatrist at the VA medical center. After the appointment, Clay called his mother on his way home and told her that the VA is way too stressful of a place and that he can't go back. Two weeks later, Clay took his own life. Despite Clay Hunt's proactive and open approach to seeking care to address his injuries, the VA system did not adequately address his needs.

Unfortunately, this story is far too common. In 2014, Jeremy Sears, a Camp Pendleton, CA, marine who survived several tours in Iraq and Afghanistan, also took his own life after struggling to receive adequate care from the San Diego VA Medical Center. It took the VA 16 months to respond to Jeremy's disability claim. After the long wait, Jeremy received a letter that he had been denied all disability payments, despite reporting symptoms of traumatic brain injury and hearing loss from his military service. The 35-year-old former Camp Pendleton marine tragically took his own life almost 2 years after being discharged from service.

These tragedies are unacceptable, and it is our moral duty to ensure that the men and women who bravely serve our country have access to the mental health care needed to address serious mental health conditions like depression and post-traumatic stress disorder.

What does this bill do? The SAV Act is an important bill that will improve the delivery of mental health care to veterans and will address obstacles in the VA and DOD health care systems.

Under this bill, special care and attention will be given to service personnel transitioning from Active-Duty to veteran status through community outreach and peer support groups. The legislation also calls for a one-stop Web site with suicide prevention resources for veterans. In addition, to make recruitment of mental health professionals easier, the bill creates new incentives for psychiatrists who agree to serve at the VA. Both Department of Defense and VA suicide-prevention programs will also be required to be evaluated each year to increase accountability and improve care. Lastly, this bill empowers the VA to collaborate with Veteran Service Organizations and nonprofit mental health organizations to combat veteran suicide.

Suicide is a deadly epidemic for veterans that the Federal Government must address. This bill will be a starting point, by requiring the VA to prioritize suicide prevention. However, Congress must continue to work to address this critical public health issue,

and I hope this will be one of many steps we will take to prevent veteran and military suicides.

I urge all of my colleagues to support the passage of the Clay Hunt Suicide Prevention for American Veterans, SAV, Act.

Mr. INHOFE. Mr. President, I remain strongly committed to our veterans and their families. When America sends our men and women to war, we vow to care for them when they return. However, throughout the Nation, we have seen reports of our veterans enduring long wait times, substandard quality of care, and a lack of transparency at the Department of Veterans Affairs.

In my great State of Oklahoma, we have a large population of veterans at roughly 340,000. From 2005–2012, there was an increase of 34 percent in the annual veteran suicide rate in Oklahoma, totaling 1,018 veteran suicide deaths. An average of 127 deaths per year is not acceptable. We must help our veterans get access to the best mental health and suicide prevention programs.

I believe the Clay Hunt Suicide Prevention for Americans bill will provide opportunities for the VA to work collaboratively with local community organizations and require an evaluation of the various mental health care programs to identify the efficiencies or lack thereof. It will also allow the VA to compete in recruiting the necessary staff for the mental health care and suicide prevention programs. We cannot allow VA psychiatry positions to remain open for long periods of time, and the education loan repayment pilot program will assist the VA in attracting the much needed psychiatrists to support those currently employed with the abundant workload. With this bill, Congress will exercise its constitutional right to oversight of the VA while requiring the Department to use the resources it already has.

Freedom is not free. Many of our veterans and their families have paid and continue to pay the price for us and our great Nation. It is our duty to honor the promises made to them in return for their sacrifices.

Mr. SANDERS. Mr. President, I have spoken repeatedly on this floor about the cost of war. In doing so, I have tried to remind the American people and my colleagues that the cost of war does not end when the last shots are fired and the last missiles launched. The cost of war is very, very expensive not just in dollars and cents but in terms of human life and human suffering.

The cost of war in Iraq and Afghanistan is almost 7,000 dead. Nearly 52,000 servicemembers have returned with physical wounds; however, more than 200,000 service men and women are seeking treatment for post-traumatic stress disorder or traumatic brain injury.

The cost of war is nearly 1,600 servicemembers who face amputations, to include a number of with multiple amputations.

The cost of war is veterans returning home unable to find jobs and get their feet back on the ground financially.

The cost of war is high divorce rates and the impact that family stress has on children.

The cost of war is mothers losing their children to suicide.

Late last session the Veterans' Affairs Committee heard from two mothers—Valerie Pallotta from Vermont and Susan Selke from Texas—whose lives have been forever changed because of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

The experience these two mothers shared with the committee goes well beyond anything I can put into words. They shared powerful stories about their own cost of war—the tragic suicides of their sons following their return from combat. They talked about their sons' struggles with post-traumatic stress disorder and efforts to seek help from the Department of Veterans Affairs. It is with the stories shared by these mothers in mind that I come to the floor today.

As chairman of the Veterans' Affairs Committee, I worked hard to listen to and address concerns brought to my attention by veterans, their family members and advocates within the military and veterans' community.

The ideas in the bill under consideration—which will be voted on shortly—are the result of the work of the families and friends of those who have committed suicide, advocates, and countless others who continue to search and fight for solutions to address the staggering rate of suicide among veterans.

This bill is a good start. Everyone needs to be thanked for their efforts, especially the mothers who came before our committee and shared their thoughts on mental health and suicide.

But, we can never do too much in the area of veterans' mental health and suicide. That is why I intend to pursue additional enhancements at another time. I do not want to slow down the bill we will be voting on today—but I want my colleagues to recognize that much, much more needs to be done to assist veterans and families struggling with either their own mental health conditions or a loved ones' mental health condition. We can never do enough.

Briefly, let me tell you what additional provisions I will be pursuing at a later time.

Currently, returning veterans have 5 years from their date of discharge to enroll in the VA health care system and receive free health care for their medical conditions resulting from their service.

The bill we are voting on today would provide an additional 1-year window during which VA can provide health care for veterans whose eligibility for the initial 5-year period has lapsed.

Now, is that exactly what I wanted? No. I think the period of eligibility for health care at VA following separation from service should be 10 years.

We hear time and time again that for many veterans, problems do not necessarily manifest until years after they have returned from war. Then it might take some time before they actually seek assistance at VA. However, recognizing the importance of getting this legislation to the President's desk as soon as possible, I intend to pursue that provision at another time.

During her testimony before this committee last session, Valerie Pallotta, the mother of a veteran who succumbed to suicide, talked about her desire to see complementary and alternative medicine opportunities expanded at VA.

While VA has made significant strides in providing complementary and alternative medicine at VA medical centers, access to such services is not standardized across VA. I commend VA's current efforts, but more must be done.

I will pursue expanding access to complementary and alternative medicine at another time, so that we can increase the likelihood that veterans will get the care that not only meets their needs, but their personal preferences, as well.

We have also heard that families, who are caring for loved ones with mental health conditions, are highly stressed and looking for resources to help their loved ones. At the moment, VA has only limited capacity to offer support and education to family members and caregivers of veterans with mental health conditions. This is an issue I will pursue in the near future.

We could never do too much to help veterans and their family members after these veterans return from war. As I said earlier, this bill is a good start—but we have much more to do.

Mr. ISAKSON. Mr. President, I know we are close to a vote on the Clay Hunt suicide prevention bill. As chairman of the Veterans' Affairs Committee, who has just left the Veterans' Administration this morning after a 3-hour meeting with employees, I want to tell all of the Members of the Senate how much I appreciate their commitment to this bill, how much I would appreciate their vote in favor of this bill.

Every day in America, 22 veterans commit suicide. Every year in America, 8,000 veterans commit suicide. Eight thousand is more than all who have lost their lives in Iraq and Afghanistan over the last 13 years. Suicide is a critical problem in the VA. The Clay Hunt bill focuses and targets on what we need: more psychiatric care, more accountability in the VA, and an investment in the future of our soldiers who have come home after defending our country for ourselves.

As chairman of the committee, I want to thank Senator MCCAIN, Senator BLUMENTHAL, Senator BOOZMAN, and Senator BURR for their tremendous effort and work to bring this about. I want to thank the members of the committee who unanimously passed

this out, including the Presiding Officer, in the very first meeting of the Veterans' Affairs Committee.

I encourage every Member of the Senate to vote for the Clay Hunt suicide prevention bill and make an investment in the future of the lives we will save of our veterans who return with mental health problems.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Connecticut.

Mr. BLUMENTHAL. Mr. President, I want to begin by thanking Chairman ISAKSON for giving the Clay Hunt Suicide Prevention for American Veterans Act the priority it needs and deserves. I know the Presiding Officer, as a veteran, understands and supports the vital mission of this legislation.

I also want to thank the veterans service organizations, particularly the IAVA, for the critical role they have played in heightening awareness and educating the American public about the scourge that veteran suicide reflects in our society, the unacceptable 22 veterans who commit suicide every day in the greatest, strongest Nation in the history of the world.

Our veterans all too often succumb to the invisible wounds and inner demons that come home with them. They lack the mental health care they need and deserve because the VA lacks the resources to provide that health care.

I know the VA is committed to do better. Senator ISAKSON and I have just returned from 3 hours at the VA, where we heard the Secretary, as well as his top-ranking staff, commit to using this act as a means of enhancing and increasing the quality and quantity of mental health care our veterans deserve. Far too many of our veterans have succumbed to suicide, including a friend of mine, Justin Eldridge, whose widow Joanna was my guest at the State of the Union.

She has struggled in the wake of his death with their children to survive this tragedy. Her courage and strength mirror those same qualities of bravery and fortitude demonstrated by Susan Selke who testified before our committee about her son Clay Hunt, for whom this bill is named. My hope is we can continue this bipartisan work together.

I thank Senator MCCAIN, the cosponsor of this bill, and hope we keep faith with all of our veterans and make the VA the pioneer and champion of mental health care so we end the scourge of veteran suicide in this great Nation.

I urge my colleagues to vote in favor of this measure.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. ISAKSON. I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

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

Mr. ISAKSON. Mr. President, I ask for a vote to be called, and I ask that it be a rollcall vote on the Clay Hunt Suicide Prevention for American Veterans Act.

I ask for the yeas and nays.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there a sufficient second?

There appears to be a sufficient second.

The bill was ordered to a third reading and was read the third time.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The bill having been read the third time, the question is, Shall the bill pass?

The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk called the roll.

Mr. CORNYN. The following Senator is necessarily absent: the Senator from Illinois (Mr. KIRK).

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. CRUZ). Are there any other Senators in the Chamber desiring to vote?

The result was announced—yeas 99, nays 0, as follows:

[Rollcall Vote No. 50 Leg.]

YEAS—99

Alexander	Fischer	Murray
Ayotte	Flake	Nelson
Baldwin	Franken	Paul
Barrasso	Gardner	Perdue
Bennet	Gillibrand	Peters
Blumenthal	Graham	Portman
Blunt	Grassley	Reed
Booker	Hatch	Reid
Boozman	Heinrich	Risch
Boxer	Heitkamp	Roberts
Brown	Heller	Rounds
Burr	Hirono	Rubio
Cantwell	Hoeven	Sanders
Capito	Inhofe	Sasse
Cardin	Isakson	Schatz
Carper	Johnson	Schumer
Casey	Kaine	Scott
Cassidy	King	Sessions
Coats	Klobuchar	Shaheen
Cochran	Lankford	Shelby
Collins	Leahy	Stabenow
Coons	Lee	Sullivan
Corker	Manchin	Tester
Cornyn	Markey	Thune
Cotton	McCain	Tillis
Crapo	McCaskill	Toomey
Cruz	McConnell	Udall
Daines	Menendez	Vitter
Donnelly	Merkley	Warner
Durbin	Mikulski	Warren
Enzi	Moran	Whitehouse
Ernst	Murkowski	Wicker
Feinstein	Murphy	Wyden

NOT VOTING—1

Kirk

The bill (H.R. 203) was passed.

RECESS

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate stands in recess until 2:15 p.m.

Thereupon, the Senate, at 12:32 p.m., recessed until 2:15 p.m. and reassembled when called to order by the Presiding Officer (Mr. PORTMAN).

DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY APPROPRIATIONS ACT, 2015—MOTION TO PROCEED—Continued

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from New Hampshire.

Mrs. SHAHEEN. Mr. President, as we begin this debate on funding for the Department of Homeland Security, we

face some fundamental questions: Are we going to prioritize the safety and security of the American people? Or are we going to put the country at risk because of an ideological disagreement?

That is the choice I believe we face with this bill. We can either pass a clean bill that makes critical investments in our Nation's security or we can put this country at risk by playing politics with the funding for the Department of Homeland Security.

We all know these are dangerous times that we live in. Every day, new threats emerge that endanger our citizens at home and our allies abroad. The Department of Homeland Security's role in protecting our country from these threats cannot be overstated, and its funding should not be controversial.

Right now, the U.S. law enforcement community is on high alert for terror threats after attacks in Sydney, Australia, and Ottawa, Canada, and in Paris. Just 2 weeks ago, an Ohio man was arrested when authorities discovered he was plotting to blow up the U.S. Capitol in an ISIS-inspired plan. I believe, as the Presiding Officer understands, the man was from Ohio.

ISIS has thousands of foreign fighters, including Americans, among their ranks who seek to return to their home countries to do harm—not to mention the barbarity of ISIS today in killing the Jordanian pilot whom they had in their custody.

These are very real threats—a clear and present danger to the homeland—and because they are so real, we need our counterterrorism intelligence community operating at full strength. We need the entire Department of Homeland Security fully engaged in keeping our Nation safe.

Last week, President Bush's two Homeland Security Secretaries, Tom Ridge and Michael Chertoff, joined former DHS Secretary Janet Napolitano in a letter to Congress. The three of them wrote:

The national security role that the Department of Homeland Security plays . . . is critical to ensuring that our nation is safe from harm. . . . It is imperative that we ensure that DHS is ready, willing, and able to protect the American people . . . we urge you not to risk funding for the operations that protect every American and pass a clean DHS funding bill.

All three former Secretaries—two of whom served under a Republican President and one under a Democratic President—are warning us that the safety and security of our Nation are at risk if we hold up funding for Homeland Security operations.

Anything short of passing a clean funding bill will endanger important security operations and could very well put our citizens at risk. But because of the anti-immigration riders that have been attached by House Republicans, the bill we are about to vote on cannot become law. Senate Democrats are not going to support it. The President has already said he will veto it. And, furthermore, according to the nonpartisan