

TRIBUTE TO KATHIE ALVAREZ

Mr. President, I wish to take a minute to talk about somebody whom I have worked with for 30 years in the Senate, and that is Kathie Alvarez, who has done such a great job of calculating our votes, tabulating our votes, and just being somebody who is always here.

We have had a great relationship. I know nothing about her politics. I just know something about her personality, which is warm. She has a great sense of humor, and I am going to miss her a great deal.

I wish her the very best. She has now worked in the Senate for some 30 years. For everyone who has had any dealings with her, which is everyone serving in the Senate, I am sure their experiences have been just like mine, a very pleasant experience.

Again, I wish her the very best in the future, whatever that might be, and someday if she needs a letter of recommendation or something, I would be happy to give her one.

THE ECONOMY

Mr. President, during the past 6 years of the Obama administration there have been 12 million jobs created. Remember when President Obama took office—because of the Bush administration and their activities—we were losing 800,000 jobs a month. So I think it speaks well of what has taken place over the past 6 years to be able to talk about creating 12 million private sector jobs. Not everyone has benefited from these jobs, but a lot of people have.

We in Nevada wish we were doing much better, but we are doing much better than we were. In fact, in Nevada the unemployment rate fell to its lowest level since 2008 last month, but these are private sector jobs. If we had just a little bit of help with public sector jobs, we would be back to the Clinton years. The economy would be on fire.

The Environment and Public Works Committee is the "Environment and Public Works" Committee. The senior Senator from Oklahoma has been one of the leaders on that committee for a long time. He and I disagree greatly with what he does and what he believes dealing with the environment part of that committee.

But we have significant agreement on the other part of that committee, the public sector—environment and public works. He has been out front talking about the need to do something with the highway bill, to create these jobs which are good for the economy.

I know he and Senator BOXER are working to do something with a new highway bill, and I am behind them. I hope they can work something out. It would be so important if we could do something to help the public sector, and no place is better to go than to do something with infrastructure.

We have a \$3 trillion deficit with infrastructure in this country: bridges collapsing, bridges in a state of disrepair, and of course highways. Most

highways in America get a C-minus grade at best. So there are a lot of things we can do to help the economy and do something to take all of the pressure off the private sector.

Unemployment is down 5.7 percent. The stock market, all three of them, are at alltime highs. Manufacturing is doing quite well.

The automobile industry—we struggled when the great General Motors was going bankrupt, Chrysler was going bankrupt, and Ford was hanging on. We stepped forward and said we have to do something about saving one of America's great industries; and we did that.

Quite frankly, we received so much criticism from the Republicans. They were willing to let the automobile sector go bankrupt. We started Cash for Clunkers, we did all kinds of things, and now these companies are thriving and rightfully so.

The automobile industry has rebounded, and that is an understatement. A number of economies are on the right track. I state, for the second time this morning, does that mean everyone has benefited? The answer is no, but a lot of us have benefited.

But throughout all of this, in America—this great country of ours—the rich are getting richer, the poor are getting poorer, the middle class is being squeezed, and that we have to recognize.

Let's talk about the economy, 12 million private sector jobs. Could we do better? The answer is yes. It would have been great had we not been thwarted, stopped because of a number of filibusters. We would have a minimum wage for the entire country. We weren't able to get that done. That would be great for the middle class.

It would be good if we could do something about the largest debt America has. It is not credit cards, it is student loan debt. I have admiration for the senior Senator from Illinois as to what he has done about student debt. He has spoken out that some of the things going on in our country dealing with education are absolutely wrong. But one thing that is wrong is we are placing a burden on these young men and women who are going to college and their families.

There are many things we should have done that we didn't do to help the middle class, including equal pay for equal work, but that didn't happen. We need to look at what has happened with the Republicans dealing with the economy. They are doing things that are not helping.

Look at the Politico paper today. They talk about what the Republicans are doing with these riders on the money to fund Homeland Security. At a bare minimum that would increase the debt some \$30 billion.

We can say that for each DREAMer—there is about 600,000 of them—the Republicans want to deport every one of these DREAMers. The average cost of deporting these people is \$10,000 each.

Do the math—\$10,000 times 600,000, that would all go toward increasing the debt.

So shutting down the Department of Homeland Security is where we are headed, and it is such a shame—or having a continuing resolution. Each of these would be a disaster for our economy. If Republicans refuse to fund Homeland Security, tens of thousands of employees that Secretary Johnson is in charge of would have to be furloughed. He says up to 30,000. Others would be ordered to come to work and not be paid.

The Republicans are saying, well, we may not close down. We may fund it, but we may do it at last year's levels, which would be a disaster for the States. There are programs Secretary Johnson funds that are so important to States: Terrorism centers; there is a great big one in Arizona that is waiting to be funded. If we have a CR, a continuing resolution, it will not be funded. We have programs relating to K9 units within police departments that are so important to local governments, State governments, and they would not be funded.

Secretary Johnson laid out on all the TV shows this past weekend about what would happen if we didn't fund the Department of Homeland Security or what would happen if we had to go with a continuing resolution.

SAFER grants, even with firefighters, are so tremendously important for States such as Nevada and around the rest of the country.

So, my Republican colleagues, who now have a huge majority here in Congress, why don't you work to improve the economy, not hurt the economy? Let's pass a clean bill and send it to the President. America deserves a safe homeland. Even conservative newspapers such as the Wall Street Journal criticized the Republicans yesterday about what they are doing with homeland security and what they failed to do with immigration. They have been so critical of the Republicans. The Republicans have a huge majority, and as the Wall Street Journal said yesterday, why don't they use it to the advantage of the American people, which they haven't done.

Would the Chair announce the business of the day.

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 until 12:30 p.m., with Senators permitted to speak therein for up to 10 minutes each, with the first hour equally divided, and with the Democrats controlling the first half and the Republicans controlling the final half.

The assistant Democratic leader.

DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND
SECURITY FUNDING

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, it is only 17 days until the Department of Homeland Security of the United States of America runs out of funding—the Department of Homeland Security.

This is the Department we created after 9/11. We said: America needs to be safer. We have to put in place safeguards to make sure 9/11 never happens again. We created a new department, and it was done on a bipartisan basis. Joe Lieberman, a Democrat from Connecticut serving in the Senate, joined with SUSAN COLLINS, the Republican from Maine, on our side of the rotunda with like-minded people on the other side, and they crafted this new Department. They brought together 22 different agencies. They tried their best to achieve efficiency, to eliminate duplication, to save money but have a mission that would be accomplished in keeping America safe.

If you think about the departments of government, of course the Department of Defense comes to mind immediately when it comes to our safety, but not far behind is the Department of Homeland Security. So it was December when the Republicans of the House of Representatives, given a choice of funding the government for this year, decided they would pick out one department and not fund it on a regular basis. They decided that one department would be funded on what they call a continuing resolution, which means kind of grabbing last year's budget and trying to make it work this year. Now, what was that one department the Republicans decided needed to be handled differently and not properly funded? The Department of Homeland Security. That Department, in 17 days, will run out of money again.

What are they thinking? What is happening in those closed-door meetings when Speaker BOEHNER and the House Republicans or Majority Leader MCCONNELL and the Senate Republicans sit down and plot their strategy? Is there anyone in that room who says: You know, I think we may have picked the wrong department not to fund.

The Department of Homeland Security is one we think about instantly when we see the terrible things done by ISIS, these terrorists of extremism, and pray to God they are never visited on the United States and that this awful group comes to an untimely ending as quickly as possible. Yet this Department, Homeland Security, has been the target of the Republicans to really execute a political ploy, a political strategy. Here is what they said: The way to get the President's attention on immigration is to refuse to fund the Department of Homeland Security. Well, they not only have the President's attention, but they have the attention of the United States of America. People are asking: What are the congressional Republicans thinking?

In fact, the latest inquiry, just referred to by the Democratic leader, was an editorial yesterday in—of all things—the Wall Street Journal. The article is entitled: “Can the GOP Change?” It basically challenges the whole strategy of jeopardizing the funding for the Department of Homeland Security in order to make the point that they disagree with the President on immigration.

What we have offered, what the Wall Street Journal suggests is to have a debate on immigration but not at the expense of funding the Department of Homeland Security. That is what they have called for.

Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the February 9, 2015, Wall Street Journal article be printed in the RECORD at the conclusion of these remarks.

So what are these immigration provisions that have the Republicans in such a rage that they are willing to jeopardize the funding of the Department of Homeland Security? One of them relates to a bill I introduced 14 years ago—the DREAM Act. Over the span of 14 years, though, this has not become the law of the land. It has become shorthand for a challenge we have with our broken immigration system. Here is the challenge: There were infants, toddlers, and small children brought to the United States by their parents many years ago. They were not documented. They grew up in this country, and they went to school in this country. They speak English. They have dreams about what they will do with their future, but being undocumented they are unable to realize those dreams.

The DREAM Act said if they have a clean criminal record, have graduated from high school, are willing to serve in our military or go on to college, we will give them a path to legalization in America. These are young people who know no other country. These are young people raised in America, educated in our educational system—at the expense of our taxpayers, I might add. They have been successful in life and want to continue to be a part of America. They only know one flag—the one they pledge allegiance to every morning in their classroom, which is the same one we on the Senate Floor. They only know one national anthem. Yet they are being told by the Republicans they should leave.

How many are there? We estimate 2 million across our country. There are 600,000 who have signed up for President Obama's protection program, called DACA, which says that on a 2-year basis they will not be deported. What the Republicans have said is: We want to deport these DREAMers—2 million of them—and let's start with the 600,000 who have stepped up for protection from deportation. So they are risking funding the Department of Homeland Security in order to make their point that DREAMers have to go.

Well, let's at least take a look at one of these DREAMers and understand the

kind of people we are talking about. This is Johana Mejias. Johana was brought to the United States from Venezuela when she was a child. She grew up in Boulder, CO. She played on her high school softball team. She played viola in the orchestra and dreamed of becoming a doctor. Here is what Johana said about her childhood:

I've become a Boulderite in all aspects of that word. That town, with those beautiful mountains, is truly my home.

In 2011 Johana graduated from the University of Colorado at Boulder with a double major. I am going to try to describe her major, but as a liberal arts lawyer I may get lost in some of these scientific terms. Here was Johana's major at the University of Colorado: molecular, cellular, and developmental biology, and psychology-neuroscience.

Johana finished at the University of Colorado without any government assistance because she is undocumented. She made it through these challenging majors, graduating with this double major. Her dream? To become a doctor. It was a dream she thought might never come to be because she is undocumented. She literally has no country. Then something happened. In 2012 President Barack Obama signed an Executive order called DACA, and Johana heard there was actually a medical school that was willing to admit students who qualified under this DACA protection—Loyola University Stritch College of Medicine in the city of Chicago. She couldn't believe it, and she applied quickly. Johana was accepted because she is an extraordinarily bright and promising young medical student.

Like many States across the country, my home State of Illinois faces a shortage of physicians in some communities. Loyola University decided if a DACA-protected young graduate is willing to come here and qualifies in the competitive field of admissions to medical school, they can come to Loyola medical school if they promise to give 1 year of service after they are doctors for every year of medical school, and if they promise to go to an underserved area in the inner city or rural areas where there are not enough doctors. Johana signed up for that. She said it was worth it. She would give 1 year of her life for each year of medical school if she was just given a chance to become a doctor.

This DACA loan program we have created is one that allows these students to receive the loans they need to finish at Loyola medical school. Last fall Johana began medical school at Loyola. I was there on one of her first days, and I met her. She is even more impressive than anything I could say in this speech. After she graduates, she has agreed to stay in my State of Illinois to help people who need a doctor.

Here is what she wrote to me in a letter about her life experience:

When the year 2012 came along, my life changed. My dreams of becoming a doctor became a possibility again because of DACA.