

The Democratic whip.

SENIOR SENATOR FROM
MARYLAND

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, let me just echo the comments of our Democratic leader, Senator REID, in relation to Senator MIKULSKI. I will save a few moments perhaps next week to speak my own tribute to her and give my own reminiscences. But I didn't want to abruptly change the subject without saying I am in total agreement with Senator REID in terms of the quality of service and friendship that we have had with the senior Senator from the State of Maryland.

DACA

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, I come to the floor this morning to talk about an issue that I have raised many times from this very spot, and it is an issue relative to the undocumented young people living in America—undocumented because they are not legally in this country. They were brought here—many of them as infants, toddlers, or children—by their families. They were not aware of the family decision, other than the fact that they were in a car and moving into the United States. They didn't really appreciate where they came from. Many of them never knew where they came from. Some of them don't even speak the language of the country of their birth. They were brought here as children. They believed from the beginning they were part of America. In most, except in extraordinary circumstances, they were not even told of their immigration status at an early age.

So they grew up going to school in America. They learned English. They pledged allegiance to the only flag they had ever known. They sang the national anthem of this country believing they were part of this country. At some point, though, there was this realization and disclosure that they were not. Legally, they weren't. They were undocumented.

So these children were raised in the shadow of uncertainty—uncertain as to whether a knock on the door at any time of day or night might change their world forever; whether or not their parents might be deported from this country and they would have to go with them; or, God forbid, that something would happen to them and they would be deported. They lived with that fear for a long time.

I came to understand it when a Korean girl in Chicago who was looking for an opportunity to go to college because of her musical skills, realized she was undocumented and might not be able to do it. So she came to our office, told us of her situation, and we tried to help.

So 15 years ago I introduced a bill called the DREAM Act. The DREAM Act said that for young people brought to this country under the age of 16 and

who have lived here successfully, completed school, and have no criminal record to disqualify them, we should give them a chance—give them a chance to become legal in America and give them a chance, from my point of view, to become citizens. I introduced the bill 15 years ago. It has been debated. The word DREAMer came out of it and has now become pretty well-known across America to describe this group of young people.

A few years ago, I prevailed on the President of the United States, Barack Obama, to give them a fighting chance to stay here. So by Executive action, he created something called DACA. DACA is the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals Program. This would allow these young people, undocumented, to step forward and disclose their status, come up with a filing fee of almost \$500, and go through a process where they were submitted to a criminal background check. If they cleared all the hurdles, they would be given a temporary—underline the word temporary—right to live in the United States without fear of deportation and to work in this country.

So over the years, since the President's Executive action, 744,000 young people have come forward. Their lives are amazing. I have told their stories over and over. Imagine, if you will, that you lived in fear of being deported tomorrow or fear that your family would be broken up and how that would weigh on you as a young person. So they did something that was maybe rash in the eyes of their parents but heroic in my eyes. They stepped forward, out of the shadows, and said: If the United States of America has set legal standards for us to follow to stay here, we will comply with them. Their parents warned them and their friends warned them: You are turning yourself in. You are telling this government who you are, where you are, and where they can find you. But they did it anyway, and I encouraged them to do it, and many others did as well, saying: If you show good faith in this country, good faith in this government, I will do everything in my power to make sure it isn't used against you.

Now we have reached a new stage in our history with a new President coming who has different views on immigration than the outgoing President. My concern, and a concern shared by millions across America, is this: What is going to happen to these young kids—744,000 of them—who are currently in college, in high school, in professional schools, such as medical schools and law schools? They are doing amazing things with their lives, and yet things could happen immediately to change their status.

I have talked to a number of my colleagues on the floor on both sides of the aisle about this, and there are pretty strong emotions about helping these young people. One of the leaders on this has been my friend and ally on immigration issues—on some immigra-

tion issues—and that is LINDSEY GRAHAM of South Carolina. He and I talked about introducing legislation that would give a temporary stay so these young people could be protected until Congress does its work and comes up with an immigration bill that addresses this issue and many more.

Senator GRAHAM and I discussed it again this morning, and we even hope to have this bill ready before we leave next week—a bipartisan effort to say to the new President: Give these young people a fighting chance. At least protect them until we have had a chance to act on the larger immigration issues before us. I hope that colleagues on both sides will join us.

There has been a lot of talk about what the next Congress will look like and what we will do, how we will tackle the biggest issues of our time. The Affordable Care Act, for example, which I was proud to support, is clearly controversial. There wasn't a single Republican Senator who voted for it. Some want to repeal it and replace it. Some are suggesting we will repeal it, but do it with 2 years in advance.

So 2 years from now there might be a new Affordable Care Act. That puts us in a responsible position of coming up with an alternative in that period of time. I don't know if that is how this conversation will end, but I would suggest the same logic could apply when it comes to immigration: At least give us the time to come up with an alternative on immigration, and during that period of time, let us protect these youngest people.

The stories I have told on the floor say more about this issue than any words I can express, and I want to tell another one of those stories this morning. This is about a young man from Illinois. His name is Asael Reyes. Here is his picture. He has his University of Illinois at Chicago T-shirt on. He is an interesting young man.

He came to the United States at the age of 5, brought here from Mexico. He grew up on the North Side of Chicago. He is a bright young man, but he learned he was undocumented early in life. He really got despondent over the thought that he could lose everything and have to be forced to leave America. His classes were a challenge to him, and with this fear in his mind he started doing very poorly. In fact, he dropped out of high school. He said it weighed heavily on his mind that he might have to leave.

He said:

I felt that because of my status, I had no future. As a result, my grades and attendance plummeted and I struggled to do anything productive.

Then, in 2012, President Obama announced DACA, and everything changed for Asael Reyes. Here is how he explains it:

DACA meant that I had a future worth fighting for, and because of that I returned to school and reignited my passion for study. Because of DACA, I want to do whatever I can to contribute to my country.

When Asael says “my country,” he means the United States of America—the only country he has ever known.

In his senior year in high school, this young man turned his life around because of DACA. He improved his grades, he was active in his community, he was head of his school’s fund raising committee, he volunteered in a mentoring program, and he worked full time to support himself and his family. You see, young people like him—undocumented—don’t qualify for any Federal assistance to go to college. If you want to go to college, you have to pay for it. For most of them, it means working pretty hard to come up with the money to do it.

Today Asael is in his sophomore year in the Honors College—the Honors College—at the University of Illinois at Chicago. He is a double major in psychology and political science, and he has a perfect 4.0 grade point average. Talk about a turnaround. He is involved with student government, leads a recreational bike club called College of Cycling. Every week he delivers food from the college dining halls on bike to a local homeless shelter. This effort has inspired other student groups to start similar initiatives. He mentors middle school students, and he is the youngest board member of the Erie Neighborhood House—a place I have visited many times—a social service agency that provides assistance to low-income families in the city of Chicago. In addition to all this, he works part time as a security guard at local events like Cubs baseball games and Bears football games.

Asael dreams of working in Chicago’s city government someday. He says: “I have a passion for my city, and I feel an obligation to do whatever I can to make it great by serving its communities.” This is one story—one story out of 744,000.

Will America be better if Asael Reyes is given his chance to stay here to make this a better nation? Of course, it will. At an early age, this young man was able to do a turnaround just on the hope that someday he might be able to live in this country legally.

There are so many stories just like his. In that same city of Chicago, at Loyola University School of Medicine, there are 28 students who are undocumented. The school opened up competition, and some of the brightest kids around America for the first time saw a chance for an undocumented student to be a doctor.

They have to sign up, incidentally—borrowing the money from the State of Illinois for their education—to serve a year of their lives as doctors in underserved areas of Illinois, in rural areas, and in the inner city, for each year they go to medical school. They willingly do it. They are prepared to give back. Asael is prepared to give back. The question is, Will we give them a chance?

I am not an expert in the area of social media, but yesterday we tweeted a

short message about this DACA challenge and what is going to happen to these 744,000 young people across America. The hashtag “save DACA” went out. My staff reports to me—and they are expert on this, I am not—in the span of 2 hours, we were trending across the United States of America. Six million people saw this hashtag over 10 million times. Think of that, 6 million people in 2 hours. It touched them what can happen to this young man and so many others.

So will Congress rise to this challenge? Will Democrats and Republicans come to the rescue of these young people who are asking for just a chance—brought to this country not by their decision but the decision of their parents—asking for a chance now to have a life? I hope we will. It will be good for them. It will sure be good for America.

TRIBUTE TO MARK KIRK

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, on January 3, there will be a new Senate sworn in. Members come down this aisle, to be sworn in over here by the Vice President of the United States, to become Members of the U.S. Senate. It will be the passing of the Senate seat in our State from Senator MARK KIRK to Senator-elect TAMMY DUCKWORTH. I would like to say a few words about my colleague MARK KIRK.

For the last 6 years, MARK and I have had a very positive professional relationship. The night he won the election, I was standing with his opponent Alexi Giannoulias when Alexi made the call to MARK KIRK to congratulate him. MARK asked that I take the phone, and I did.

He said: I want to work with you. I know we just competed against one another in the election, but we now have a responsibility together to represent the State of Illinois, and we started a positive working relationship—a relationship based on mutual respect. One of the things we did was to continue a tradition.

Since 1985, my mentor and colleague in the House, and my predecessor in the Senate, Paul Simon of Illinois, started a Thursday morning breakfast, inviting people from Illinois who were in Washington and those who wish they were from Illinois, to come in for free coffee and donuts at no taxpayer expense. It was an hour-long public meeting so we could talk about what was happening in the Senate and then answer any questions and pose for pictures if they wanted them. I asked MARK KIRK to continue this, even though we were of opposite political faith, and we did, for a long time. We worked together to make sure the people of Illinois felt welcomed. We often took differing views on issues—that is understandable—but we did it in a civil way. People said they thought it was one of the highlights of their trip to see two Senators from two different parties working together. We did—and not just on those Thursday mornings. We found reasons to do it on the floor.

In the vast majority of cases, when it came to filling Federal judicial vacancies, MARK KIRK and I worked together to agree. Rarely did we disagree on those who needed to be chosen. As a result, we have had a pretty good record of filling vacancies in the State of Illinois.

Then, of course, it was in 2012 that a disaster struck and MARK KIRK suffered a stroke. It was almost a life-ending experience. He is lucky—lucky—to be alive today. He knows it, and we all know it too. I primarily kept in touch with his staff, and with him, during the course of his rehabilitation after that stroke. It was a calendar year he had to give to rehabilitation, to learn how to walk again and speak again and do the basic things we take for granted. It was an extraordinary show of courage and determination on his part.

Finally, before he could return to the Senate, I visited with him and saw him some 10 months after the stroke and realized the devastation he weathered and how much he had managed to recover because of his sheer determination. The one thing he told me, though, was that he was determined to come back to the United States Senate and walk up those steps right into the Senate Chamber. He was working every single day on treadmills and with rehab experts to reach that day when he could get out of a car and walk up those steps. He asked me if I would ask other Senators to join him—especially his close friend JOE MANCHIN, a Democratic Senator from West Virginia, and we did. That day came and it was an amazing day. He started at the bottom of those steps and worked his way up, all the way into the Senate Chamber, to the applause of his colleagues—Democrats and Republicans—all the way up those steps. We realized what an amazing recovery he had made.

Our colleague Tim Johnson of the State of South Dakota had gone through a similar devastating experience. MARK KIRK said many times, when he was about to give up, he thought, Tim Johnson got back to the Senate. I can get back there if I work hard enough. He did just that.

He was an exceptional colleague of mine in the Senate. There were a lot of things we agreed on. One of them was Lake Michigan. As a Congressman from the 10th Congressional District, which is on the shores of Lake Michigan, he was always committed to that lake.

After the election, when the results didn’t come out as he wished, I sat down with him and said: MARK, what do you want me to do in memory of your commitment to public service?

He said: Do everything you can to protect Lake Michigan. And I am going to. I asked his successor TAMMY DUCKWORTH to join me in that effort, and we will in his name and in his memory.

I thank him for the service he has given to our State, the service he has given our Nation as an officer in the