

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 President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. SASSE). Without objection, it is so ordered.

TAX REFORM BILL AND WORK BEFORE THE SENATE

Mr. CORNYN. Mr. President, many recall that Christmas came a little early this year—or, I should say, last month—as we delivered comprehensive tax reform to the American people—a historic overhaul of our Nation's Tax Code and the first since 1986, more than three decades. Since that time, the President has now signed the bill into law, and we have already begun to see signs of how tax reform is transforming the economic landscape across the country and making life better for American citizens.

The New York Times reports that job creators are eager for the tax cuts to take effect and that a wave of optimism is surging among them. That is their quote, the New York Times. They report that businesses are ready to create jobs and raise wages. They will invest in new plants and equipment that will bolster economic growth, grow the economy, and help to create more jobs and improve take-home pay.

It is not just the New York Times that sees optimism spreading. There are plenty of real-world examples that illustrate that as well. One healthcare and home products company announced that in response to the tax bill, it would award all employees a \$100 bonus for each year they have worked for the company. So if an employee has been at the company for 8 years, the average tenure, that would be an extra \$800 in his or her pocket to fix their car, repair a water heater, or replace carpets in their living room.

Two telecom giants recently announced even larger bonuses for hundreds of thousands of their employees, raises of \$1,000 each. Now, it may be that these companies are getting ahead of the game, because in a tight labor market, where unemployment rates are relatively low and where economic activity goes up, we know there is going to be more and more competition for good workers, and that means that employers are going to be required to pay more for those workers in that competition for workforce and labor. So it may be that these companies are a little bit ahead of the game, but I expect to see, whether it is done as these companies have done it or not, in a low unemployment rate scenario where there is more competition for workers because more economic activity is occurring, that more jobs are being created and that we are going to see all workers' take-home pay increase as a result.

These companies have also said that they plan to increase capital spending in response to the tax reform we passed last month. Some banks have said they will raise their minimum wage to \$15

an hour and donate as much as \$400 million to community and nonprofit organizations.

One major airline in my home State of Texas announced that it will give all full-time and part-time employees a \$1,000 cash bonus and make \$5 million in additional charitable donations. They have also said—because they believe there is going to be an increased number of people flying—that they are going to buy more jets, more planes to accommodate that increase in air travel. This is all good stuff when we are looking at getting the economy growing again and creating more jobs and better wages.

Finally, German economists recently released a study finding that the U.S. corporate tax rate will now sharply improve incentives for foreigners to invest in America—exactly what we wanted to happen. Of course, this will come at the expense of high-tax countries in Europe. So just think of it as their loss is our gain, but that is exactly why we felt it was necessary on a bipartisan basis to reduce what was effectively the highest business tax rate in the world, at 35 percent. That is why people like Barack Obama in 2011 called for us on a bipartisan basis to reduce that rate and to make it more competitive, and the Democratic leader, Senator SCHUMER, and others, and Republicans on our side of the aisle all agreed that this was the right policy. Well, now we are beginning to see that policy pay off as a result of the bill we passed in December, which was signed into law on December 22.

I would say that all these examples are pretty telltale signs that the optimism reported by the New York Times isn't fake news. It is real. Tax reform is changing the economic landscape, paychecks are growing, and job creators are responding in all sorts of positive ways. I think that is a terrific way for us to begin 2018.

Now, for all of us who worry about what is going to happen to our individual paycheck, the good news is that the IRS is now working hard to update its withholding guidance documents and, once it does, Texans and Americans, in general, will begin seeing larger paychecks, more take-home pay hopefully as early as February.

Well, that is the good news. That is what we were able to accomplish at the end of last year that will hopefully continue to pay dividends in terms of economic growth and take-home pay and more jobs, but we still have a lot of work to do.

Over the next few weeks, we have a very, very full plate. First and foremost is funding the Federal Government and avoiding a shutdown come January 19, when our stopgap continuing resolution expires. It is crucial that both sides come together to ensure that critical government functions are not held hostage to other demands. High on my list is to make sure that we continue to fund our national security and the Department of De-

fense and continue to pay our warfighters and make sure that they receive the training and equipment they need in order to keep our Nation safe. That is just one of the items, but it is my highest priority.

The second is close to it, and that is making sure we provide natural disaster relief. This last year, we saw what seemed to be an unprecedented array of natural disasters—from wildfires out West to historic rain events like Hurricane Harvey in Texas and Louisiana, and hurricanes in Florida, the Virgin Islands and, of course, Puerto Rico. I commend the House for passing the \$81 billion disaster relief package last month, but with so many record-setting disasters this last year—first and foremost in my mind is Hurricane Harvey in Texas—we, in the Senate, need to take a little extra time to make sure that all of the varied competing interests are accommodated. In the coming weeks, I am going to continue to work with my colleagues to ensure that Texans whose homes, schools, roads, and workplaces were affected by the storm receive the help they deserve and so desperately need. We are not asking to be treated any better than anybody else, but we are not going to accept being treated worse.

We look forward to working together with our fellow Americans in Puerto Rico, in Florida, out West, and, of course, in Texas and Louisiana to make sure that we do our job and treat everybody exactly the same. The House bill is a useful starting point, but it is my hope that we can improve upon it and make sure Texas can fully recover and rebuild.

Third on my list of to-dos is an important national security program that most people may not have heard much about, which allows the Federal Government to obtain communications of foreign intelligence targets, which is set to expire on January 19. One of the technical advantages that the United States has over any other country in the world is our ability to listen to foreign actors and gather intelligence that will forearm our first responders and our national security apparatus, as well as others, to keep our Nation safe.

This particular law, which has been called the crown jewel of our national security by the Director of the FBI, is known as section 702 of the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act Amendments Act, an essential safeguard against terrorism and a valuable tool for gathering foreign intelligence, as I have said. We need to work quickly to ensure that it is reauthorized for a long term.

The fourth item on our to-do list is addressing the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals Program, or DACA. You will recall that back a few years ago now, President Obama decided to try to unilaterally issue an order providing work permits and legal status to roughly 800,000 children, now adults, who came with their parents illegally

to the United States. While these are certainly the most sympathetic group of people whom we need to address—and I think we can, and we will in a compassionate and honest sort of way—I am grateful to President Trump for returning the fate of this program where it belongs—in the hands of Congress. That is after President Obama's DACA provisions failed in Federal court.

I am confident that both sides can come to an agreement regarding the legal status of these roughly 800,000 individuals who were brought to the country illegally while they were still quite young. That includes 124,000 DACA recipients in my State of Texas alone.

Many of these individuals make valuable contributions and should not be penalized for decisions made by their parents, the legal ramifications of which they could not at such a young age fully understand or consent to. But any such agreement must include corresponding measures regarding an enforcement of our immigration laws.

I think that one of the biggest tragedies in recent years in our country is that the American people have simply lost confidence in their government when it comes to securing the border and enforcing our immigration laws. I believe this provides an opportunity, not only for us to provide compassionate relief to the DACA recipients I mentioned a moment ago but to restore an enforcement of our immigration laws, including border security, the additional personnel, and the technology required in order for us to know who is coming into our country and why they are here and to make sure that they only do so by legal channels.

My hope is that our Democratic colleagues will abandon their threats to shut down the government and will engage with us in good faith, because we stand ready to talk to them and negotiate in good faith as well.

Finally, on my personal to-do list is my goal to pass the bill we call the Fix NICS Act as soon as possible. This is to fix the National Instant Criminal Background Check System that is checked by federally licensed firearms dealers when somebody goes into a store to buy a firearm—whether it is a shotgun to hunt, a pistol to defend themselves, a rifle for hunting, or for home defense. I think it is really important in the wake of Sutherland Springs for us to get this bill passed.

This is the bill I filed after those terrible shootings in Sutherland Springs, which resulted in the loss of 26 innocent lives, with about that same number injured as well. This tragedy was entirely preventable because the individual who committed that heinous act on that day was legally disqualified from purchasing a firearm by the fact that he was a convicted felon, he had been convicted of domestic violence, and he had been committed to a mental health institution. But none of that information was uploaded by the Air

Force into the National Instant Criminal Background Check System.

What did he do when he went in to buy firearms? He simply lied, and he said he had no disqualifying event in his life like those I mentioned earlier—convicted felon, mental health institutionalization, and a domestic violence conviction. He simply lied about it. The background check system failed us and the people who were victims of that terrible day in Sutherland Springs. We need to get that fixed.

This is one of those rare times when folks who are ardent believers in the Second Amendment, as am I, and those who are perhaps less inclined to be enthusiastic about the Second Amendment rights of law-abiding citizens can come together and say: Let's at least fix the current law. Let's make sure that if somebody is disqualified from buying a firearm, this National Instant Criminal Background Check System actually works.

I am delighted to say that Senator MURPHY from Connecticut, Senator FEINSTEIN from California, and Senator SCHUMER, the Democratic leader from New York, have joined me and Majority Leader MCCONNELL and so many others on our side of the aisle to say that this is something we can and we should do. I simply cannot face the prospect of looking into the eyes of somebody who has lost a loved one as the result of a preventable mass shooting incident like we saw in Sutherland Springs. We have the ability here to pass legislation that will save lives and to prevent people who are legally disqualified from purchasing firearms from doing so.

All of these on this list are just a few of the challenges we face as a new year begins. I think these are things we can address on a bipartisan basis. I know we had some tough fights last year on healthcare and tax reform, and our Democratic colleagues seemed disinclined to help at all to work with us to pass those pieces of legislation. I am hoping that with this new year and, hopefully, the optimism that goes along with it, our colleagues will work with us in goodwill for all and a renewed determination to do what is right, not only for the folks we have the honor of representing but for our entire country.

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

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. TOOMEY). Without objection, it is so ordered.

DACA

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, on September 5 of last year, Attorney General Sessions announced the repeal of the

Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals Program, which has been called DACA. The same day, President Trump called on Congress to come up with a solution to "legalize DACA."

The history of this issue I have explained many times on the floor, and I will say it briefly. Seventeen years ago, I introduced a bill called the DREAM Act, which said that if you were brought to the country as an infant, a toddler, a child, and you were raised in America and went to school here, had no problems of any serious nature with the law, that you would be given a chance to become a citizen of the United States.

Many of these children, of course, didn't have a voice in the decision of their families to come to this country, and this is the only country they know. They have gone to our schools. They have graduated from our schools. They stood up in the classrooms of those schools each and every day and pledged allegiance to that flag. It was their flag and their country. Many of them didn't learn until they were in high school, that technically, in the eyes of the law, this wasn't true; they were undocumented. They were illegal in the eyes of the law.

So what I tried to do with the DREAM Act was to give these young people a chance—a chance to become part of America's future and to become, ultimately, earning their way to legalization and earning their way to citizenship. That was the DREAM Act. We have passed it at various times in the Senate. We passed it in the House over the years. We have never done it at the same time, same year.

So I called on President Obama and asked him if he would issue an Executive order and do something to help these young people. He created DACA. DACA said to the young people: Come forward, pay your filing fee, go through a criminal background check, and we will let you stay in America for 2 years at a time, renewable, and we will let you work in this country. Well, more than 780,000 young people did that. They signed up, paid their fee, went through the background check, and received that protection. Then came President Trump who said: That is the end of the program. We are not going to protect these young people any longer.

Well, whatever happened to those 780,000 DACA-protected young people? Many of them are in school, they are in college, law school, medical school. Some of them joined our military. That is it. They went and took the oath and said: I will serve this country. I will bear allegiance to this country. I will give my life for this country in the U.S. military. Nine hundred of them are in the military today.

DACA is going to be eliminated as of March 5 of this year by President Trump, which means they will be asked to leave the U.S. military, to stop this volunteer service to our Nation. Another 20,000 are teachers all across this