

policy. It is neither. It is an un-American policy.

The United States, this great country that beckoned my maternal grandparents to come to the United States and Vermont, or my great-grandparents, paternal grandparents to come to the United States and Vermont—this great country must not be seen as terrorizing children to score political points. That is beneath the greatness of the United States. It is wrong. It is abhorrent. We must not be seen as pursuing policies with the intent of inflicting pain and anguish on vulnerable people, on children.

I hope Senators of both parties with join me in condemning this outrageous practice of forced family separation. We are a nation that is better than this. We have always thought of ourselves as better than this. Well, it is time we acted like we are better than this.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from South Dakota.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS OF THE REPUBLICAN-LED CONGRESS

Mr. THUNE. Mr. President, the May jobs report came out last Friday, and here are some of the headlines.

This is from Bloomberg: "U.S. Payrolls Rise 223,000; Jobless Rate Matches 48-Year Low."

This is from CNN: "Unemployment rate matches lowest point in half a century."

From the New York Times: "We Ran Out of Words to Describe How Good the Job Numbers Are."

In other words, the May jobs report was more good news for American workers. The economy created 223,000 jobs in May. The unemployment rate dropped to 3.8 percent—the lowest rate since April of 2000. That is right. The last time unemployment was this low, the iPod hadn't even been invented.

When the Republican-led Senate passed tax reform in December, there were estimates that this historic legislation would create nearly 1 million jobs for the American people. Well, the economy has already created more than 1 million jobs since tax reform was passed and 3.6 million jobs since President Trump was elected. The Republican pro-growth, pro-jobs agenda is working.

Government cannot create prosperity. It can't create the jobs and opportunities that Americans need for a secure economic future. Only businesses can do that. But government can create the conditions for economic prosperity. It can make sure businesses are free to create jobs and opportunities by making sure they are not weighed down with burdensome taxes and regulations.

As everyone knows, the economy stagnated during the last administration. Recovery from the recession was historically weak. Wages were stagnant, and opportunities were often few and far between. A big reason for that was the fact that businesses large and

small were weighed down by burdensome regulations and an outdated Tax Code. So when President Trump took office, Republicans and President Trump made reversing our economic decline a priority. We rolled back burdensome regulations, and in December, we passed a historic reform of our Tax Code.

Before the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act, the Tax Code was not helping businesses grow and create jobs. In fact, it was doing just the opposite, and that had real consequences for American workers. A small business owner struggling to afford the hefty annual tax bill for her business was highly unlikely to be able to hire a new worker or to raise wages. A larger business struggling to stay competitive in the global marketplace, while paying a substantially higher tax rate than its foreign competitors, too often had limited funds to expand or increase investment here in the United States.

So when it came time for tax reform, we set out to improve the playing field for American workers by improving the playing field for businesses as well. To accomplish that, we lowered tax rates across the board for owners of small- and medium-sized businesses, farms, and ranches. We lowered our Nation's massive corporate tax rate, which up until January 1 was the highest corporate tax rate in the developed world. We expanded business owners' ability to recover investments they make in their businesses, which frees up cash that they can reinvest in their operations and their workers. We brought the U.S. international tax system into the 21st century so that American businesses are not operating at a disadvantage next to their foreign competitors.

Now we are seeing results. Company after company has announced higher wages, better retirement benefits, bonuses, increased investment, new jobs, and more.

A recent survey from the National Association of Manufacturers reported that 77 percent of manufacturers plan to increase hiring as a result of tax reform, 72 percent plan to increase wages or benefits, and 86 percent report that they plan to increase investments, which means new jobs and opportunities for workers. Meanwhile, a recent survey from the National Federation of Independent Business reports that 75 percent of small business owners think the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act will have a positive effect on their businesses.

The Republican economic agenda is working, and Republicans are going to keep working to ensure that American businesses can thrive and that American workers have access to the jobs and opportunities they need for long-term economic security. While we are doing that, we are also going to continue to focus on the rest of the work the American people elected us to do. As I have said before, Congress can walk and chew gum at the same time.

While we have been laser-focused on removing obstacles to economic growth

and job creation, we have also accomplished a lot of other things so far this Congress.

By the end of the Obama administration, our Nation's military was facing a serious readiness shortfall. So this year we made the most significant investment in our military in 15 years, and we are going to continue to make sure that the men and women of our military have the resources they need to meet and defeat the threats of the 21st century. We recently passed legislation that makes much needed reforms to ensure our veterans have access to the healthcare they need, when and where they need it.

We also took action to preserve healthcare for children in need by enacting the longest extension of the Children's Health Insurance Program in history, and we repealed ObamaCare's burdensome individual mandate which forced many, many Americans to buy health insurance they didn't want or couldn't afford.

We passed legislation to fight sex trafficking, to combat opioid abuse, to help community banks, to increase school safety, to keep energy affordable, and more. Of course, we confirmed a number of highly qualified judges to fill vacancies in our judicial system.

Republicans are working to honor the trust the American people have placed in us. We are fighting to make life better for hard-working Americans. We have accomplished a lot so far this Congress, but we know there is a lot more work to be done. We are up to the challenge.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

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

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to speak as in morning business.

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

REFUGEE CRISIS

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, history is a great teacher, if you learn your history. The history of the United States, when it comes to refugees, is a checkered history.

Back during World War II, there were people who came to the borders of the United States and begged for our mercy, begged for our help. Nine hundred of them were on a ship called the *SS St. Louis*. They were Jews who came from Europe seeking refuge in the United States from the Nazis. Sadly, the United States turned them away. Several hundred of them were forced back to Europe and died in the Holocaust. On the floor of this U.S. Senate, a Democratic Senator from New York,

Robert Wagner, offered a measure to allow 10,000 Jewish children to come to the United States during World War II and escape the possibility of imprisonment and death during World War II in the Holocaust. That measure was defeated on the floor of the U.S. Senate. Those children were denied refuge in the United States.

Toward the end of the war, things started changing. Our policies became more open. We started accepting more people, but the record had been written. During the darkest days of World War II, the United States virtually closed its borders to those who were trying to escape Nazi terror.

After World War II, we decided we were wrong, that we had made a mistake, and that the United States would demonstrate to the world that we did care about those who came to the United States as refugees and those who came from other countries seeking asylum. We wrote an amazing history after World War II. When you think of the many different nations that turned to us when they faced the worst circumstances imaginable, you think about what happened in the United States.

The Cuban population escaping communism in Cuba, where did they come? They came here, and you can still find them. You can find them all over the United States but especially in Florida, near Miami, in New Jersey—but everywhere. The Cuban Americans have made an amazing contribution to this country. They came as refugees, but they became real Americans. In fact, they love this country so much so that I believe three of our Members of the U.S. Senate are Cuban Americans today.

That is quite a story, but it is not the only story about refugees coming to this country. You could add to that litany of people who came the Vietnamese after the end of the war in Vietnam, the Soviet Jews who escaped persecution in Russia to come to the United States, and the list is long. It includes refugees from all over the world who came to this country.

Now, we don't just open our doors and say: Walk in and make yourself at home. We ask questions. We do background checks. We do everything we can to be sure the person coming is the person they say they are and that they will be safe for the United States.

Over the years, the number of refugees we accepted on an annual basis went up to 80,000 and 100,000, and the United States developed an international reputation—a reputation for caring for people who were in the worst circumstances who came here looking for refuge. I run into refugees, their families, their children, and their grandchildren every single day. They have made a great contribution to our country, and we have made a great model for the world when it comes to accepting people who are in the worst, most terrifying circumstances.

That is about to change. We are in the process now of facing the worst ref-

ugee crisis in the history of the world in so many different places, and the United States, instead of maintaining this image and this model of accepting refugees from other countries, under President Donald Trump, has decided to do just the opposite. It would cut in half the number of refugees we would clear, review, interrogate, and accept in the United States each year to 45,000, which is the official number, but in actuality only about 14,000 have been accepted so far in the few months of this year. It is an indication we will not even reach 45,000.

There is something going on as well when it comes to those who seek asylum or refuge in this country that is equally horrifying and objectionable. The Trump administration has decided to discourage those who would come to our borders looking for safety by telling mothers who bring their infants and children that those children will be taken away from them by the Government of the United States when they arrive at our border. It is hard to imagine, but that is the stated policy now of the Trump administration. It is a cruel policy. It is not a policy consistent with American values.

Since our Nation's tragic failure during World War II to help Jewish refugees fleeing Adolph Hitler, generations of Americans have tried to set an example for the world by providing a safe haven to the world's most vulnerable people. Now we face the worst refugee crisis in the history of the world, with more than 65 million people around the world displaced from their homes, but the Trump administration is admitting the fewest refugees since World War II and going to extreme lengths to prevent victims of war and terrorism from seeking asylum in the United States.

So far this year, about 15,000 unaccompanied children have been apprehended at our southwest border. This is not necessarily a crisis in a nation of 325 million people, especially at a time when we are asking friendly nations—our allies in the Middle East—to do much more in accepting refugees.

The real crisis that gives cause to people showing up at our southern border asking for asylum can be traced to three countries—Honduras, El Salvador, and Guatemala—the so-called Northern Triangle. These countries in Central America have among the highest homicide rates in the world. Young girls face a constant threat of sexual violence with little or no protection. That is why families are doing desperate things, taking extraordinary risks to come to our border and ask for protection. Is there any parent who would not do the same to save their child?

How has the Trump administration responded to this refugee crisis on our border? They are trying to discourage families from fleeing to our borders by separating parents from their children. In March, we learned in my office in Chicago about a 7-year-old girl and her mother who came from the Democratic

Republic of the Congo. I have been there. It is a land of terrible massacres, barbarism. It is a land of violence. The Democratic Republic of the Congo had these two, a mother and daughter, come to our shores. They were separated for 4 months—a 7-year-old girl from her mother.

I asked the Department of Homeland Security inspector general to investigate this. Why would we separate a 7-year-old girl from her mom who is coming from the Congo seeking protection? Well, at the time, the Trump administration said: We don't separate families. That was the official statement at the time.

Last month, Attorney General Jeff Sessions announced that the separation of children from their parents was a new “zero tolerance” approach, and now family separation has become the official policy of the Government of the United States of America. In just the first 2 weeks of this policy under Attorney General Sessions, 658 children have been impacted.

White House Chief of Staff John Kelly says separating families is “a tough deterrent” to parents who are fleeing persecution, and he dismissed any concerns because “the children will be taken care of—put into foster care or whatever.”

Well, our Nation's leading medical experts disagree. The American Academy of Pediatrics and the American Medical Association have condemned this official policy of the Trump administration separating families in immigration detention. Here is what the President of the American Academy of Pediatrics said:

Separating children from their parents contradicts everything we stand for as pediatricians—protecting and promoting children's health. In fact, highly stressful experiences, like family separation, can cause irreparable harm, disrupting a child's brain architecture and affecting his or her short- and long-term health. This type of prolonged exposure to serious stress—known as toxic stress—can carry lifelong consequences for these children.

The Trump administration has been taking some heat, deservedly, for separating families. In typical fashion—no surprise—they have decided the real cause of the problem would be the Democrats. Just this morning, President Trump tweeted: “Separating families at the Border is the fault of bad legislation passed by the Democrats,” but the law he is talking about wasn't passed by the Democrats. It is the bipartisan Trafficking Victims Protection Reauthorization Act, which was passed by unanimous consent in the Senate and was signed into law by Republican President George W. Bush. President Trump has his facts wrong again.

This law has nothing to do with the separation of families. Instead, it ensures the United States meets its international obligations to protect unaccompanied children seeking safe haven in our country. It was a response to concerns by Republicans and Democrats that children apprehended by the

Border Patrol were being returned to countries where they might be further persecuted or killed.

Under this law, unaccompanied children from the Northern Triangle countries I mentioned earlier are transferred to the Department of Health and Human Services and placed in deportation proceedings, giving them a chance to make their case to a judge as to why they are seeking protection in America.

Consider “Samuel” and “Amelie,” who are siblings, ages 3 and 6, from Honduras. They are 3 and 6. When they arrived in the United States, they were traumatized and refused to speak. After months of counseling, Amelie revealed that both children had been raped by drug cartel members. Without the protection of this law which the President condemned this morning, these children would have been returned to Honduras and almost certain exploitation or death.

Two weeks ago, there was a hearing on unaccompanied children in the Senate Immigration Subcommittee which I serve on as a ranking member. We examined the administration's claim that the law the President objects to is being exploited by gangs. Here is what we learned:

Unaccompanied children undergo multiple screenings and background checks when they present themselves at the border, and the law gives the government the authority to place any unaccompanied child in a secure facility if there is any notion of a threat. Since the year 2012, 6 years ago, the U.S. Customs and Border Protection has processed more than 250,000 unaccompanied children. Of those, how many were confirmed or suspected of affiliation with the MS-13 gang that the President talks about nonstop? Sixty. It was 60 out of 250,000—60 over 6 years, which is 10 a year, fewer than 1 a month. The President says we have to separate these kids because of drug gang worries. I don't want a single member of any gang anywhere admitted into this country, period. For goodness' sake, 250,000 children and 60 over a 6-year period were confirmed or suspected of affiliation with MS-13? Instead of stoking fears, we should focus on preventing unaccompanied children from being recruited by gangs.

Sadly, the Trump administration's budget is slashing funding for the Office of Refugee Resettlement, the government agency that is responsible for these important gang prevention efforts.

At our hearing, we also discussed the conditions in the Northern Triangle countries in Central America that are driving families to flee to our border. If people were migrating because of the so-called legal loopholes, which we hear so often about from this administration, they wouldn't be just coming from three countries; they would be coming from all over the region, but we learned more than 90 percent of the unaccompanied kids referred to the De-

partment of Health and Human Services are from three nations—the three of the Northern Triangle.

Instead of addressing the root causes that are driving migration from these countries, the Trump administration is making the situation on the ground worse. The administration's budget request for the region would slash aid by more than one-third, and the administration is terminating the temporary protected status for two of these countries—El Salvador and Honduras, forcing many people to return to them even though these countries are clearly unstable.

Last year, the administration also ended the Central American Minors Program, which permitted children from the Northern Triangle to apply for refugee resettlement from their home country. We said to mothers with their babies and their infants: Don't make this dangerous journey. If you are in danger in your home country and want to seek asylum or refuge in the United States, make the application from where you are before you have to make that journey. Unfortunately, that came to an end with the administration's request to stop the program.

There are many issues to come before the American people but few that have stoked emotions more than this issue. The notion that the United States of America—over 300 million good and caring people—would make it an official policy to separate these infants and toddlers and children from their mothers and fathers is not American. It is extreme, it is mean, and it is cruel. Sadly, it is the official policy—the so-called zero-tolerance policy that has been announced by Attorney General Sessions.

We learned a bitter lesson back in World War II. We ignored the realities of human suffering. People across the world asked: What is going on in America? What are their values? After that war, we tried to make it clear what we do stand for, the things that are clearly important, and now this administration has decided we can no longer afford to do that. We have to separate children from their mothers, separate them by thousands of miles, put them into foster care, remove them from their mothers, even if that parent qualifies for protection here in the United States under our laws of asylum.

This is a sad and cruel policy. I hope Americans across the board will stand up and speak up. We are a better Nation than this.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The assistant bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

BIG BANKS AND THE SECOND AMENDMENT

Mr. KENNEDY. Mr. President, I rise today because, in my judgement, we are in the midst of a deeply troubling trend regarding banking and the Second Amendment. I know that seems a bit strange. What does banking have to do with the Second Amendment? I have wondered that myself. Allow me to explain.

We have 120 million gun owners in America. Like those Americans, I am alarmed by the activist anti-gun policies unveiled by the “we are smarter than you” financial elites who run two Wall Street banks: Citigroup and Bank of America. They have a political agenda, and those banks' political agenda stands to hurt many small businesses in my State of Louisiana that are going to lose their banking services simply because these small businesses choose to exercise their constitutionally protected Second Amendment rights.

On March 22 of this year, Citigroup issued a press release. That press release detailed how Citigroup will penalize banking clients who follow Federal, State, and local gun laws. Citigroup's new policy will tell businesses what kinds of firearms they can stock, what kinds of accessories those small businesses can stock in their stores, and who they can sell them to. I thought this was America.

This new policy has already taken effect all across Citigroup, and it has impacted hundreds of small businesses, institutional clients, and even their credit card partners.

Not to be outdone, 2 weeks later, Bank of America joined in. On April 10, Bank of America announced that it will no longer loan money to businesses that, in its opinion, are “deplorable” because those businesses manufacture legal semiautomatic rifles. Targeting firearms owners and business owners is not only an affront to responsible, law-abiding, constitutional gun owners across this country; it is a threat to the sanctity of our very Constitution and the Second Amendment.

I realize that the management of these two banks have a constitution whose bill of rights jumps from one to three, but I can assure them that in the Constitution read by the rest of America, there is a Second Amendment.

I have written to both the chief executive officers of Citigroup and Bank of America about my concerns, and they have yet to respond. I understand that Mr. Brian Moynihan, the CEO of Bank of America, is actually here in Washington lobbying folks on Capitol Hill this week. I suppose he was too busy to come by and address my concerns. Once again, I invite him to come by my office and speak about this in person.

I can't overstate the gravity of this issue. It is important for consumers and businesses all across America. Both Citigroup and Bank of America are considered by the U.S. Government to be “systemically important banks.”