

There is well-documented scientific evidence of the long-lasting harm that policies like this have on children. In the Washington Post yesterday, in an article entitled “What Separation from Parents Does to Children,” a professor of pediatrics at Harvard Medical School, Dr. Charles Nelson, said:

The effect is catastrophic. There’s so much research on this that if people paid attention at all to the science, they would never do this.

It goes on and on and on. I could quote more detail for a long time about what he has said and about what other experts have said, but we don’t have time today. Suffice it to say the research that shows the damage that is done to children when they are forcibly separated from their parents explains why more than 9,000 mental health professionals and 172 organizations signed a petition to urge the President to end the policy of separating families. In this petition, the mental health professionals wrote:

From decades of research and direct clinical experience, we know that the impact of disrupted attachment manifests not only in overwhelming fear and panic at the time of separation, but that there is a strong likelihood that these children’s behavioral, psychological, interpersonal, and cognitive trajectories will also be affected. The National Child Traumatic Stress Network notes that children may develop post traumatic responses following separation from their parents and specifically lists immigration and parental deportation as situations of potentially traumatic separation. To pretend that separated children do not grow up with the shrapnel of this traumatic experience embedded in their minds is to disregard everything we know about child development, the brain, and trauma.

That is from the petition that was signed by mental health professionals across the country—9,000 of them. Those professionals and the professionals at the American Academy of Pediatrics, the American College of Physicians, and the American Psychiatric Association have also issued statements against the policy. Together, these organizations represent more than 250,000 doctors across the country. To support this policy, you would have to assert that a quarter of a million doctors in the United States of America are somehow wrong and that you know better.

If we were to ask the administration, “Before you put this policy in place, did you talk to the American Academy of Pediatrics? Did you talk to child psychologists? Did you talk to the American College of Physicians or other professionals who know something about children and trauma and long-term damage to their brains and to their development?” I am afraid the answer to that question would be no. Yet I await the answer from the administration. I hope the answer will be yes.

I have more here, but I know we have to go, so I will not use all of it. Over the next couple of hours and days, we have to keep insisting that the administration take action to end this policy today, which it could—which the Presi-

dent could, which the Attorney General could. I realize that sometimes here in Washington, people say: Do something right now. Take action today. Take action this week or this month. Yet, in this case, today matters; hours matter; days matter in the lives of those children—more than 2,300 or more, and the projections are just going through the roof about what will happen over the next couple of weeks and month.

Ending the policy today and reuniting child and parent matters a lot because every day that goes by makes it worse for that child. Unfortunately, for some children, it might be too late. That traumatic event and the aftereffects—the hours and the days and even weeks now that they have been separated—might result in permanent damage. I hope I am wrong about this, but days matter here, and even hours matter.

We are hoping that the administration will reverse course on a policy—I will say again and keep saying—that is straight from the pit of hell. It should end today.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Utah.

Mr. LEE. Madam President, our national debt stands at about \$21 trillion. The interest costs on this alone are more than \$300 billion every single year. That is money that can’t go toward shoring up our national defense or shoring up Social Security or Medicare or some other Federal program. That is money that goes to our creditors. Now, it has to, but the scary part is that that is just a drop in the bucket compared to what it could be just a few years from now. The only reason it is even this low is that our Treasury yield rates—the rates at which we pay interest on our national debt—are at an alltime, historic low. As soon as they return to their historic averages, we will see that interest payment increase manyfold. If we wait until that moment arrives, this will be a very difficult process not just for the Federal Government, not just for Congress, but for the entire country.

It is time for us to start taking gradual steps in the right direction now. This opportunity—this rescissions package that has been proposed by the President—provides us with a meaningful step in that direction. I applaud President Trump for proposing these rescissions. It is time for Congress to get back in the practice of taking these things up, of considering them, and of passing them.

I respectfully urge all of my colleagues to vote for this measure.

Mr. President, I yield back all time.

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

Mr. LEE. Mr. President, I ask for the yeas and nays.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there a sufficient second?

There appears to be a sufficient second.

The question is on agreeing to the motion to discharge.

The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk called the roll.

Mr. CORNYN. The following Senator is necessarily absent: the Senator from Arizona (Mr. MCCAIN).

Mr. DURBIN. I announce that the Senator from New Hampshire (Mrs. SHAHEEN) is necessarily absent.

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

The result was announced—yeas 48, nays 50, as follows:

[Rollcall Vote No. 134 Leg.]

YEAS—48

| | | |
|-----------|------------|----------|
| Alexander | Gardner | Paul |
| Barrasso | Graham | Perdue |
| Blunt | Grassley | Portman |
| Boozman | Hatch | Risch |
| Capito | Heller | Roberts |
| Cassidy | Hoeben | Rounds |
| Corker | Hyde-Smith | Rubio |
| Cornyn | Inhofe | Sasse |
| Cotton | Isakson | Scott |
| Crapo | Johnson | Shelby |
| Cruz | Kennedy | Sullivan |
| Daines | Lankford | Thune |
| Enzi | Lee | Tillis |
| Ernst | McConnell | Toomey |
| Fischer | Moran | Wicker |
| Flake | Murkowski | Young |

NAYS—50

| | | |
|--------------|------------|------------|
| Baldwin | Gillibrand | Murray |
| Bennet | Harris | Nelson |
| Blumenthal | Hassan | Peters |
| Booker | Heinrich | Reed |
| Brown | Heitkamp | Sanders |
| Burr | Hirono | Schatz |
| Cantwell | Jones | Schumer |
| Cardin | Kaine | Smith |
| Carper | King | Stabenow |
| Casey | Klobuchar | Tester |
| Collins | Leahy | Udall |
| Coons | Manchin | Van Hollen |
| Cortez Masto | Markey | Warner |
| Donnelly | McCaskill | Warren |
| Duckworth | Menendez | Whitehouse |
| Durbin | Merkley | Wyden |
| Feinstein | Murphy | |

NOT VOTING—2

McCain
Shaheen

The motion was rejected.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. COTTON). The Senator from Vermont.

Mr. LEAHY. Mr. President, I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

ENERGY AND WATER, LEGISLATIVE BRANCH, AND MILITARY CONSTRUCTION AND VETERANS AFFAIRS APPROPRIATIONS ACT, 2019—Continued

FORCED FAMILY SEPARATION

Mrs. GILLIBRAND. Mr. President, I rise to speak about the humanitarian crisis that is at our southern border right now. We are living through a moment in history when we are literally sending babies and toddlers into detention camps.

Think about that. Think about what I just said. Our Federal Government is sending babies and toddlers to detention camps. This is immoral. It is wrong.

The AP broke a story last night that left me speechless, and I want the details of this horror recorded and documented in the official Senate RECORD so Americans years from now will look back on us and will see how wrong we were.

I will read this article from the Associated Press, called “Youngest Migrants Held in ‘Tender Age’ Shelters.” It is by Garance Burke and Martha Mendoza.

Trump administration officials have been sending babies and other young children forcibly separated from their parents at the U.S.-Mexico border to at least three “tender age” shelters in South Texas, the Associated Press has learned.

Lawyers and medical providers who have visited the Rio Grande Valley shelters described play rooms of crying preschool-age children in crisis. The government also plans to open a fourth shelter to house hundreds of young migrant children in Houston, where city leaders denounced the move Tuesday.

Since the White House announced its zero tolerance policy in early May, more than 23,000 children have been taken from their parents at the U.S.-Mexico border, resulting in a new influx of young children requiring government care. The government has faced withering critiques over images of some of the children in cages inside U.S. Border Patrol processing stations.

Decades after the nation’s child welfare system ended the use of orphanages over concerns about the lasting trauma to children, the administration is starting up new institutions to hold Central American toddlers that the government separated from their parents.

“The thought that they are going to be putting such little kids in an institutional setting? I mean it is hard for me even to wrap my mind around it,” said Kay Bellor, vice president for programs at Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service, which provides foster care and other child welfare services to migrant children. “Toddlers are being detained.”

Bellor said shelters follow strict procedures surrounding who can gain access to the children in order to protect their safety, but that means information about their welfare can be limited.

By law, child migrants traveling alone must be sent to facilities run by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services within three days of being detained. The agency then is responsible for placing the children in shelters or foster homes until they are united with a relative or sponsor in the community as they await immigration court hearings.

But U.S. Attorney General Jeff Sessions’ announcement last month that the government would criminally prosecute everyone who crosses the U.S.-Mexico border illegally has led to the breakup of migrant families and sent a new group of hundreds of young children into the government’s care.

The United Nations, some Democratic and Republican lawmakers and religious groups have sharply criticized the policy, calling it inhumane.

Not so, said Steven Wagner, an official with the Department of Health and Human Services.

“We have specialized facilities that are devoted to providing care to children with special needs and tender age children as we define as under 13 would fall into that category,” he said. “They’re not government facilities per se, and they have very well-trained clinicians, and those facilities meet state licensing standards for child welfare agencies, and they’re staffed by people who know how to deal with the needs—particularly of the younger children.”

Until now, however, it’s been unknown where they are.

“In general we do not identify the locations of permanent unaccompanied alien children program facilities,” said agency spokesman Kenneth Wolfe.

The three centers—in Combes, Raymondville, and Brownsville—have been rapidly repurposed to serve needs of children including some under 5. A fourth, planned for Houston, would house up to 240 children in a warehouse previously used for people displaced by Hurricane Harvey, Mayor Sylvester Turner said.

Turner said he met with officials from Austin-based Southwest Key Programs, the contractor that operates some of the child shelters, to ask them to reconsider their plans. A spokeswoman for Southwest Key didn’t immediately reply to an email seeking comment.

“And so there comes a point in time we draw a line, and for me, the line is with these children,” Turner said during a news conference Tuesday.

On a practical level, the zero tolerance policy has overwhelmed the federal agency charged with caring for the new influx of children who tend to be much younger than teens who typically have been traveling to the U.S. alone. Indeed some recent detainees are infants, taken from their mothers.

Doctors and lawyers who have visited the shelter said the facilities were fine, clean and safe, but the kids—who have no idea where their parents are—were hysterical, crying, and acting out.

“The shelters aren’t the problem, it’s taking kids from their parents that’s the problem,” said South Texas pediatrician Marsha Griffin who has visited many.

Alicia Lieberman, who runs the Early Trauma Treatment Network at the University of California, San Francisco, said decades of study show early separations can cause permanent emotional damage.

“Children are biologically programmed to grow best in the care of a parent figure. When that bond is broken through long and unexpected separations with no set timeline for reunion, children respond at the deepest psychological and emotional levels,” she said. “Their fear triggers a flood of stress hormones that disrupt neural circuits in the brain, create high levels of anxiety, make them more susceptible to physical and emotional illness, and damage their capacity to manage their emotions, trust people, and focus their attention on age-appropriate activities.”

Days after Sessions announced the zero-tolerance policy, the government issued a call for proposals from shelter and foster care providers to provide services for the new influx of children taken from their families after journeying from Honduras, El Salvador, Guatemala, and Mexico.

As children are separated from their families, law enforcement agents reclassify them from members of family units to “unaccompanied alien children.” Federal officials said Tuesday that since May, they have separated 2,342 children from their families, rendering them unaccompanied minors in the government’s care.

While Mexico is still the most common country of origin for families arrested at the border, in the last eight months, Honduras has become the fastest-growing category as compared to fiscal year 2017.

During a press briefing [on] Tuesday, reporters repeatedly asked for an age breakdown of the children who have been taken. Officials from both law enforcement and Health and Human Services said they didn’t know how many children were under 5, under 2, or even so little they’re non-verbal.

“The facilities that they have for the most part are not licensed for tender age children,” said Michelle Brane, director of migrant rights at the Women’s Refugee Commission, who met with a 4-year-old girl in diapers in a McAllen warehouse where Border Patrol temporarily holds migrant families. “There is no model for how you house tons of little children in cots institutionally in our country. We don’t do orphanages, our child welfare has recognized that is an inappropriate setting for little children.”

So now, the government has to try to hire more caregivers. The recent call for proposals by the federal government’s Office of Refugee Resettlement said it was seeking applicants who can provide services for a diverse population “of all ages and genders, as well as pregnant and parenting teens.”

Even the policy surrounding what age to take away a baby is inconsistent. Customs and Border Protection field chiefs over all nine southwest border districts can use their discretion over how young is too young, officials said. And while Health and Human Services defines “tender age” typically as 12 and under, Customs and Border Protection has at times defined it as 5 and under.

For 30 years, Los Fresnos, Texas-based International Education Services ran emergency shelters and foster care programs for younger children and pregnant teens who arrived in the U.S. as unaccompanied minors. At least one resident sued for the right to have an abortion in a high-profile case last March.

For reasons the agency did not explain, three months ago the government’s refugee resettlement office said it was ending its funding to the program and transferring all children to other facilities. This came weeks before the administration began its “zero tolerance” policy, prompting a surge in “tender age” migrant children needing shelter.

In recent days, members of Congress have been visiting the shelters and processing centers, or watching news reports about them, bearing witness to the growing chaos. In a letter sent to Attorney General Jeff Sessions on Tuesday, a dozen Republican senators wrote that separating families isn’t consistent with American values and ordinary human decency.

On Tuesday, a Guatemalan mother who hasn’t seen her 7-year-old son since he was taken from her a month ago sued the Trump administration. Beata Mariana de Jesus Mejia-Mejia was released from custody while her asylum case is pending and thinks her son, Darwin, might be in a shelter in Arizona.

“I only got to talk to him once and he sounded so sad. My son never used to sound like that, he was such a dynamic boy,” Mejia-Mejia said as she wept. “I call and call, and no one will tell me where he is.”

The Presiding Officer has young children. I have young children. I am certain he cannot imagine how horrific it would be for him to give up his child

into the hands of those he does not know and then not know where they will take him or her. I am certain he can't imagine that pain and horror. This body should not allow it. We should stand against it. It is morally wrong. It is outrageous, and it must end.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Iowa.

TAX REFORM

Mr. GRASSLEY. Mr. President, 6 months ago, Congress passed historic tax legislation that fundamentally reformed our Tax Code and provided tax relief to middle-income Americans and also to small business job creators.

At the time, many of my colleagues on the other side of the aisle attempted to derail our efforts through a campaign of misinformation and demagoguery. They tried to argue that up was down and that tax cuts were tax increases. They even suggested the bill's passage was a sign of Armageddon.

Of course, such fearmongering was always nonsense. At the time, analysis from the nonpartisan Joint Committee on Taxation had made it clear that the vast majority of taxpayers across every income group would experience tax cuts. In fact, it made clear that middle-income groups would experience the largest percentage of tax cuts. In even looking at the liberal Tax Policy Center's analysis of the bill, the tax relief for the middle class is unmistakable. Its analysis found that more than 80 percent would experience tax cuts that would average more than \$2,100.

In the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act, we made good on our commitment to fix our broken Tax Code. It makes filing simpler, provides middle-income tax cuts, and reinvigorates our economy through pro-growth business tax reforms.

The positive effects of the tax cuts began almost immediately with companies announcing bonuses, pay raises, higher retirement contributions, new hiring, and increased investment as a result of the law. To date, the list of such companies has climbed to over 600, with there being more than 4 million employees who are benefiting.

This has included a number of businesses in my State of Iowa, which range from the small, like the Anfinson Farm Store, which has invested back into its employees in the form of \$1,000 bonuses and a 5-percent increase in wages, to the very large, like Wells Fargo, which has raised its base wage from \$13.50 to \$15 per hour and benefited more than 1,300 employees.

Higher wages and bonuses are not the only ways that taxpayers are benefiting from the historic tax relief.

Taxpayers across the country are seeing the benefit in the form of lower electric, gas, and water bills. Nationally, utility customers have experienced more than \$3 billion in savings thanks to lower utility rates as a result of tax cuts.

In my State of Iowa, Alliant Energy has estimated its customer savings to be between \$18.6 million and \$19.6 million for electric and from \$500,000 to \$3.7 million for gas. MidAmerican Energy has estimated between \$90 million and \$112 million in customer savings, and Iowa American Water Company has estimated customer savings to be between \$1.5 million and \$1.8 million.

The hundreds of businesses and utility company announcements were only the beginning of the positive news for American taxpayers. In February, taxpayers began seeing the effects of tax reform directly in their paychecks as less was taken out of their pay by the IRS. In all, about 90 percent of taxpayers are seeing less being withheld from their paychecks as a result of the law.

As it became evident that the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act was delivering meaningful benefits to working families, our Democratic colleagues were in search of new talking points on the law, considering the fact that their old talking points were not working. They could no longer, with a straight face, argue that tax cuts were really tax increases. Instead, they wanted hard-working Americans to believe that an extra \$50 a week in their paychecks or a \$1,000 bonus was "crumbs."

With all due respect to my colleagues who believe that this is true, they don't have a doggone clue what it is like in the real world where people have to work for a living. That \$1,000 bonus means a lot for a father or a mother whose children need new school clothes or who has a car that could use some repairs or who, simply, wants to take the family on a vacation. For a family on a tight budget, every additional dollar in a paycheck really counts. It means an additional dollar that can be put away for unexpected emergencies or for a child's college savings or, maybe, even for one's own retirement.

As important as the immediate middle-income tax benefits are that have been afforded by the law, the benefits that will accrue for everybody in this country as a result of the long-term, pro-growth effects of the bill are as important, if maybe not more important. Thanks to this historic tax measure, as well as to regulatory relief, Congress and the administration have declared that America is open for business. When Congress delivers historic tax cuts and, particularly, regulatory rollbacks, the American people enjoy the sweet taste of prosperity. That is how the cookie crumbles.

Despite critics in this town calling the tax cuts crumbs, I would invite them to chew on a few facts: National unemployment has fallen to 3.8 percent—the lowest level since April 2000. Wages have risen at the fastest pace since the end of the recession. For the first time on record, the number of job openings has exceeded the number of job seekers. U.S. manufacturers report historically high investment and hiring

numbers as 86 percent report they intend to increase investment, and 77 percent report they plan to increase hiring. Small business confidence has hit record highs. Consumer confidence has reached its highest level in 18 years. All of this good economic news points toward higher economic growth moving forward. This is key to sustainable long-term wage growth, which is the most powerful anti-poverty measure there is. This should be welcome news to all after the years of stagnant wage growth during the Obama years.

With all of this positive news, Democrats have been searching for a talking point that they hope will take hold. They are looking for a big distraction from the prosperity that results from this tax bill. Toward that end, they have lambasted corporate stock buybacks. Their hope is that the American public will disregard all the positive signs they have seen in their paychecks and in the economy generally and be outraged by the benefits accruing to stockholders—more class warfare on their part versus the compassion and social justice that this tax reform brings about. It is a play out of their old playbook, in other words. When all else fails, engage in the historic rhetoric of class warfare. But I have news for some of my Democratic colleagues: That dog no longer hunts either. Millions of middle-class Americans own stock—if not directly, through their 401(k) or pension plan. According to the Tax Policy Center, 37 percent of stock is held in retirement accounts. Thus, the idea of stock buybacks being a boon only to corporate fat cats is hogwash. It is a boon to the millions of middle-class Americans who are longing for secure and comfortable retirements.

Moreover, the Democrats' concerns with stock buybacks demonstrate a fundamental misunderstanding of economics. Stock buybacks are fully consistent with one of the main objectives of tax reform; that is, promoting economic growth through capital formation that makes workers more productive, which in turn leads to increased wages. When a company repurchases stock, that money is not stuffed into a mattress; it frees up dollars that can be reinvested in a growing economy or maybe a new startup small business. This in turn promotes the type of business expansion and capital investment necessary to grow our economy, boost productivity, and increase wages over the long term.

Although the economic landscape looks more promising than ever, there is more work to do. Those of us from Iowa are particularly focused on trade agreements and renewable energy policies that impact our home State.

So I hope overall that our colleagues across the aisle will finally put an end to their tired attacks on the tax bill and begin working with us to promote further economic growth that has already started at a high level as a result of this tax bill.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Missouri.

Mr. BLUNT. Mr. President, I want to join my friend, the Senator from Iowa, Senator GRASSLEY, and talk about what has happened with the tax bill—the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act, as the President insisted it be called because that is exactly what it was to do.

It has been 6 months since it was signed into law, and it is clear that the country is thinking differently about the future. It is clear that there is more confidence in our economy than there has been in past years. It is also clear, frankly, that a lot of that confidence began after the last election and was reinforced by commonsense regulation instead of out-of-control regulation.

The tax bill, on top of that, as it turns out, is doing the things those of us who voted for it said it would do and does not do the things people who were against it said were going to happen. I remember that nobody was going to get a tax cut—only to find out that 9 out of 10 people who paid income tax last year are paying less income tax this year.

This week, the Gallup poll organization found that the percentage of Americans who are satisfied with the direction of the economy is the highest it has been in almost 15 years.

In May, small business optimism increased among small business owners to the second highest level in the National Federation of Independent Business survey's 45-year history. In fact, there were several records that were broken in May. Compensation increases hit a 45-year high. Positive sales trends reached the highest level since 1995—over 20 years ago. Expansion plans were more robust than they had been at any time in the survey's history. That set a record as well.

The combination of lower taxes and full expensing of new and used equipment has created an additional cash flow incentive that is making a difference.

As of this month, 1 million new jobs have been created since the passage of the tax cut bill. In the last year, Missouri—my State—added nearly 35,000 jobs, and more than 4,000 Missourians who were unemployed just found jobs. Nationwide there are more job openings than people looking for work. In the 20 years that those two things have been measured at the same time—how many people are looking for work and how many job openings there are—it is the first time in 20 years that there were more jobs available than people looking for work.

I said a number of times on the floor as we debated the tax bill that there are two ways to increase people's take-home pay. One is to take less money out of the check they already get. Nine out of ten Americans who paid income taxes last year found that has happened for them. No. 2 is to be sure we have better jobs to start with, have an

economy where people are competing to get workers and competing to keep workers.

As businesses try to attract new employees, they are setting new, higher minimum entry-level skills and minimum job compensation than they have had before. The National Federation of Independent Business found that 35 percent of all small business owners reported increases in their labor compensation. One out of three NFIB employers says they are paying more now than they were 1 year ago.

In addition, the report found that nearly 60 percent of respondents are hiring or trying to hire. When 60 percent of the respondents to a survey are trying to hire, that is pretty good news. It is good news for the economy, but it is also good news for people out there trying to get hired. If you are in an economy where lots of people are looking for workers, you are in a lot better place than if you are in an economy where only a few people are looking for workers.

We need to make sure we have a skills and training match that gets people into those better jobs that are out there. I was all over our State a couple of weeks ago, in 10 different cities over 3 days attending business roundtables and going to manufacturing locations. In my hometown of Springfield, one manufacturing location had 20 available jobs right then. Other people were telling me that they have hired people back whom they had fired in the past, and the approach was: If you want a second chance, I know you know how to do what we do here. If you are ready to give it another try, I am ready to give it another try. That doesn't happen very often in very many economies.

According to the survey the Association of General Contractors released this year, more than three-fourths of the people who responded to that survey said they couldn't find or they were having a hard time finding the qualified workers they need.

In a bill that we will mark up in the Appropriations Committee next week, the subcommittee that I chair—the Labor, Education, Health and Human Services Subcommittee—we are going to continue to build this apprenticeship program in a bipartisan way that Congress has embraced. The President likes this program. We have had a 53-percent increase in just the last couple of years in the training money available for apprenticeships.

Two hundred years ago, apprenticeships were the way everybody learned to do whatever it was they were going to do. If you were going to learn a skill, you were going to learn it as an apprentice.

This is a program that really gives the employers the tools they need to develop the workforce they would like to have. It gives workers an opportunity to earn a salary while they are learning skills. It does that in a way that makes it possible for employers to

do a couple things at the same time: prepare their own workforce, get people ready for work, and put people in a situation where they are suddenly showing up for work every day, learning skills while they are there, learning a lot of things that will get them ready for full-time employment.

For the 9 out of 10 Americans who complete apprenticeship training programs and get a job—and again, 9 out of 10 people who go through those programs get a job, and the average starting salary for those jobs is \$60,000 a year. These are not minimum wage jobs; these are significant opportunities to start at that level and work your way up. I hear from businesses and I hear from unions in Missouri all the time about the need for skilled workers and about the long-term careers that can result from meeting that skilled-worker need.

As we continue to focus on training our 21st-century workforce, we know there are a lot of challenges we have to address. Next week, our subcommittee will consider our bill. Dedicating resources for programs geared toward better preparing and training the next generation of workers is one of our top priorities.

I am pleased that the Trump administration has also taken important steps to strengthen apprenticeship programs. Last year, the administration issued an Executive order that doubled the amount the Federal Government spent on apprenticeship programs. In addition, the order shifted the role of developing government-funded workforce development programs from the Labor Department to private sector entities, such as trade groups, unions, and businesses, which, frankly, are much more likely to produce the workforce they know they need than a government program that is much more likely to produce the workforce we might have needed a couple of years ago.

This is a program that is working. With an economy growing as fast as ours, we need to promote job skills and training that fit the jobs of the future. We need to ensure that opportunities are available for workers in rural areas, suburban areas, and urban areas alike. It is critical that we ensure that Federal programs are designed to continue to take advantage of the apprenticeship model that is working.

Just a couple of years ago, I don't think people would have predicted where we would be with our economy today. The Tax Cuts and Jobs Act had a lot to do with that—resetting the foundation of our economy, making it possible for us to compete around the world, going from the highest corporate rate in the world to a rate right in the middle. We are fine in the middle. Nobody is fine, if they are trying to compete, when they give themselves the biggest disadvantage in that field of competition.

It has only been 6 months, but it has been a pretty good 6 months, and I

think we will continue to see the good news we have been seeing as people develop more confidence in their ability to take care of their families and to take care of themselves, and more confidence in the economy is going to make that possible.

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

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

Mr. BOOZMAN. Mr. President, as some of my colleagues mentioned already, today marks 6 months since Congress passed the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act and sent it to the President's desk to become law. When the President signed the legislation, he helped usher in the first major overhaul of the Tax Code in three decades.

Here are some of the results we have seen so far: Over 1 million new jobs have been created since the package of tax reform; at least 101 utilities across the country are lowering rates for customers, including Entergy Arkansas in my home State, as a result of the savings they are seeing from the tax reform bill; and 75 percent of small and independent business owners believe that the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act will have a positive impact on their businesses, which is leading them to make plans to invest in hiring and increase employees' compensation.

I could go on highlighting the good news related to our overhaul of the Tax Code, but instead I want to spend just a few minutes talking about what I have heard from small business owners and employees—beneficiaries of this historic reform—on a recent visit I made to Arkansas in the south and southwest regions.

Last month, I had the opportunity to travel around Arkansas' Fourth Congressional District with Congressman BRUCE WESTERMAN. We embarked on a tour called the "Talk Small Y'all" Small Business Tour to highlight the importance of small businesses to our State's economy and to local communities where they make such a significant impact. The tour was designed to be an opportunity for us to listen and learn, which is exactly what we did. We visited with business owners, managers, and employees of manufacturing companies, an oilfield and industrial products supplier, a food service distributor, dining establishments, and retail stores.

Everywhere we went, we heard a sense of optimism and excitement in the voices of those we were fortunate to meet. In addition to eliminating burdensome regulations through the Congressional Review Act, the passage of meaningful, historic tax reform—which makes our Nation's businesses more competitive globally—is pro-

viding cause for business owners to feel more confident about the current economic climate. Tax reform is helping to provide them with the certainty they need to grow and to succeed.

I came to the floor in February to talk about the developments we were seeing in Arkansas as a result of the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act, just 2 months after it was signed into law. Despite the dire warnings from our friends on the other side of the aisle who opposed our changes to the Tax Code, businesses across the country and in Arkansas were already beginning to reap the benefits and passing them along to their employees, their customers, and the communities they operate in.

I am pleased to say that this trend is continuing. More companies based in Arkansas or with a significant presence in the State are handing out bonuses, improving benefits, or investing in their businesses and their communities. Tax reform is helping hard-working Arkansans keep more of their money in their own pockets. It is delivering results that are helping the middle class.

On the 6-month anniversary of the passage of the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act, I join my colleagues in celebrating this achievement and the results that have followed from our commitment to make comprehensive tax reform a reality.

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. BOOZMAN. 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.

AMENDMENTS NOS. 2926 AND 2971 TO AMENDMENT NO. 2910

Mr. BOOZMAN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the following amendments be called up en bloc: Young No. 2926 and Tester No. 2971. I further ask that the time until 4:30 p.m. be equally divided in the usual form and that at 4:30 p.m. the Senate vote in relation to the amendments in the order listed and, finally, that there be no second-degree amendments in order to the amendments prior to the votes.

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

The clerk will report the amendments en bloc.

The bill clerk read as follows:

The Senator from Arkansas [Mr. BOOZMAN], for others, proposes amendments numbered 2926 and 2971 en bloc to amendment No. 2910.

The amendments are as follows:

AMENDMENT NO. 2926

(Purpose: To require the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to conduct a study on the effectiveness of the Veterans Crisis Line)

At the end of section 232 of title II of division C, add the following:

(c)(1) The Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall conduct a study on the effectiveness of

the hotline specified in subsection (a) during the five-year period beginning on January 1, 2016, based on an analysis of national suicide data and data collected from such hotline.

(2) At a minimum, the study required by paragraph (1) shall—

(A) determine the number of veterans who contact the hotline specified in subsection (a) and who receive follow up services from the hotline or mental health services from the Department of Veterans Affairs thereafter;

(B) determine the number of veterans who contact the hotline who are not referred to, or do not continue receiving, mental health care who commit suicide; and

(C) determine the number of veterans described in subparagraph (A) who commit or attempt suicide.

AMENDMENT NO. 2971

(Purpose: To prevent the denial of access to records and documents by various inspectors general)

At the appropriate place in title II of division C, insert the following:

SEC. ____ . INSPECTORS GENERAL.

(a) PROHIBITION ON USE OF FUNDS.—None of the funds appropriated or otherwise made available by this Act may be used to deny an Inspector General funded under this Act timely access to any records, documents, or other materials available to the department or agency of the United States Government over which such Inspector General has responsibilities under the Inspector General Act of 1978 (5 U.S.C. App.), or to prevent or impede the access of such Inspector General to such records, documents, or other materials, under any provision of law, except a provision of law that expressly refers to such Inspector General and expressly limits the right of access of such Inspector General.

(b) TIMELY ACCESS.—A department or agency covered by this section shall provide its Inspector General access to all records, documents, and other materials in a timely manner.

(c) COMPLIANCE.—Each Inspector General covered by this section shall ensure compliance with statutory limitations on disclosure relevant to the information provided by the department or agency over which that Inspector General has responsibilities under the Inspector General Act of 1978 (5 U.S.C. App.).

(d) REPORT.—Each Inspector General covered by this section shall report to the Committee on Appropriations of the Senate and the Committee on Appropriations of the House of Representatives within 5 calendar days of any failure by any department or agency covered by this section to comply with this section.

Mr. BOOZMAN. Thank you, Mr. President.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

FAMILY SEPARATION POLICY

Mr. CORNYN. Mr. President, we have been focused on the U.S.-Mexico border, where the prospect of children being separated from their family has shocked and horrified many of us. We have been working to come up with a solution to this problem. That includes President Trump, who yesterday called

on Congress to preserve family unity, while calling for a zero tolerance policy when it comes to violating our immigration laws.

I would like to provide a little bit of context for how we got here and offer a proposed solution. Just like under the Obama administration in 2014, when we saw tens of thousands of unaccompanied children coming across the border into my State of Texas from Central America through Mexico—I remember at the time President Obama called that a humanitarian crisis, and, indeed, it was—trying to find a way to deal with this flood of humanity coming across our border in a safe and humane manner was a huge challenge for the Federal Government, for local communities, like McAllen, TX, and for various faith-based and other organizations. But come they did.

Between August 1 of last year and May 31 of this year, the number of families apprehended at the southwest border rose 58 percent, compared with the same period a year earlier. Of course, just like the humanitarian crisis of 2014, most of these individuals came from Central America. I think it is important to point out that even though these are not unaccompanied minors in the same number that we saw in 2014, we are still seeing so far this year roughly 30,000 children coming across our southwestern border from across dangerous territory in Mexico and from Central America, transported by human traffickers and the cartels, for whom this is their business model. Let me explain for a minute.

Recently, an expert on this topic made the point that these criminal organizations that run children, families, and other adults across the border are “commodity agnostic.” That is what he said. In other words, they don’t care whether it is drugs, contraband, children, or adults. Whatever it is, they are in it for the money, and they have found an incredibly profitable business model in transporting all of those commodities, if you can call them that, from Central America and across the Mexican border.

For those who are worried about the opioid crisis here in America, which we all are, it is not just about prescription drugs—that is a huge part of the problem—but it is also the heroin that is frequently substituted for the prescription drugs because it is cheap and it is more plentiful. So all of these are good reasons, in my mind, for us to be very focused on what happens at our border.

My State happens to have 1,200 miles of common border with Mexico, and we are at ground zero when it comes to the border security challenges and when it comes to the humanitarian crises and to the law enforcement challenges that go along with it.

This Friday, Senator CRUZ, my colleague from Texas, and I will be traveling to Brownsville and McAllen, TX, to once again get an idea of what the facts are on the ground. We have been there many times before, of course, and

have worked hand in glove with our local and State officials, with our faith-based organizations and with everybody who is concerned about what is happening at the border, including the Border Patrol, the Texas National Guard, and the like.

I want to make one point when it comes to those who enter our country in order to claim asylum, as many of these people do from Central America. They claim a fear of persecution as the basis for a claim for asylum, but those who present themselves lawfully at ports of entry—those are the bridges that enter into the United States—can do so and claim asylum without violating any immigration laws. As Secretary Nielsen, the Department of Homeland Security Secretary, said, it is only those who try to enter the country in those vast areas between the ports of entry, which is exceedingly dangerous, by the way, who violate our immigration laws when they enter the United States illegally. When they come with a child, whether it is their biological child or somebody they claim is their child—maybe the cartels have figured out that if they pair these people up, they have found another way to exploit vulnerabilities in the system—it presents the challenges that we have seen here in the last few days.

I want to emphasize that we have seen the arrival of families and children before. So none of this is new, but we do need to put what is happening now in proper context. As the Secretary of Homeland Security, Ms. Nielsen, has said, if the situation in your home country is dangerous and if you have chosen to seek asylum for your family in the United States, there is no reason for you to enter the United States illegally. We saw this during the previous policy that was since eliminated by the Obama administration of Cuban refugees who, because of a unique policy called “wet foot, dry foot,” once they crossed over our ports of entry, they were entitled to seek refuge in the United States under the laws at the time. So none of this is new.

As I said, people with a credible fear of persecution in their home countries may present their claims through a normal, well-defined process. There is no reason for somebody to expose themselves, much less their children, to the dangerous, remote regions—areas I call the wild, wild west—down along the border in order to try to sneak through by illicit means.

But people do sometimes falsely claim a credible fear of persecution. In other words, they don’t qualify for asylum. So that is why it is so important for us to give them an opportunity and to insist that they present those claims to an immigration judge on a timely basis so those claims can be properly evaluated.

The Trump administration has made the very commonsensical decision to have a zero tolerance policy when it comes to illegal immigration. They

have made the decision to fully enforce our laws by prosecuting adults in criminal courts when they are apprehended crossing our borders illegally. In my opinion, that is exactly the right decision—enforce the laws as written. The relevant laws—the ones that criminalize illegal crossings—have been on the books for a long time. They are a product of congressional action and Presidential approval, like all legislation. These are not something that President Trump created out of whole cloth, as some people would have you believe. But the truth is that often these laws were not enforced by previous administrations and, particularly, when families were involved. Now that they are being enforced, the adults are, unfortunately, under the status quo, separated from families as part of the legal process as it plays itself out. It is not because of any desire to separate families and children, but rather because of previous Federal court decisions, consent decrees, and statutes that Congress has passed that require children to be placed in a separate, safe setting. In other words, we don’t want to place children in a jail cell with hardened, potentially violent criminals because the adult that brought them into the country has violated our criminal laws. So putting the children in a safe, separate setting was really motivated by the best of intentions.

The relevant authorities are important to acknowledge because, as the New York Times has stated this last weekend, contrary to what you may have heard, “technically, there is no Trump administration policy stating that illegal border crossers must be separated from their children.”

What there are, instead, are many variables that are hard to disentangle from one another, and, I think, unfortunately, those who would like to create a false narrative here have taken advantage of the complexity of these laws and the situation in order to claim some sort of sinister intent to tear children away from their parents unnecessarily. That is not the goal. In fact our goal is just the opposite: How do we keep these children with their families, pending the decision by an immigration judge of whether or not they have a viable claim to asylum or some other benefit.

The so-called Flores agreement is one of those laws that are required to be observed which requires that children can be held no longer than 20 days. A Ninth Circuit opinion applies the Flores bill to family units, protracted timelines for asylum claims, limited detention facilities, and a division of responsibility among ICE, or Immigration and Custom Enforcement, Health and Human Services, and other agencies. All of this adds to the complexity of this situation.

Most of these factors are pretty uncontroversial. I think every Member will agree with the Trump administration that we should never place children in prisons or jails with hardened,

potentially violent criminals when their parents are being lawfully prosecuted for entering the country illegally.

We need to see that this is how we got to where we are now. They are entirely reasonable decisions that seemed to make sense at the time—that children should not be held for any longer than is strictly necessary, that they should never be detained with adults in a jail cell in potentially dangerous circumstances. A lot of that seemed to make sense at the time. By the same token, I and many others certainly don't want family members to be separated from one another as a consequence of officials doing their duty and enforcing the laws they are sworn to uphold.

I know Customs and Border Protection leaders like Manny Padilla, chief of the Rio Grande Valley sector, and David Higginson, and all of the other men and women who work under them in the Rio Grande Valley, are trying to do their job. They are trying to enforce the law. That is what we have asked them to do. That is their duty. It is a good thing, and I think we should all appreciate their attempt to do so in a very complex environment.

This is where I have some questions for the minority leader Senator SCHUMER and others. Senator FEINSTEIN, my friend from California whom I have worked with on a number of pieces of legislation, secured the support of all Members of the Democratic side of the aisle on a piece of legislation which does nothing to ensure that the law will be enforced. Sure, it purports to deal with family separation but basically provides a get-out-of-jail-free card to any adult who illegally crosses the border. In fact, they go from a zero tolerance program by President Trump's administration to a zero enforcement program, thus creating an incentive for people to illegally immigrate across the border and making it almost impossible for law enforcement to enforce our immigration laws. That will continue to be a draw on people from different parts of the world who would love to move to the United States.

We can be sympathetic. We can be concerned. We should do everything within our power to help them so they can live in their own country safely, but we know we simply can't have an open border policy so anybody and everybody who wants to move to the United States can do so. That is why we have exceptions like asylum claims that have to be decided by an immigration judge.

Yesterday, Senator SCHUMER said President Trump alone could fix this situation by signing a Presidential order, but even though the President has stated his decision to do so, I think that is likely not going to be decided finally by the President but rather by the courts when that Executive order is challenged based on the other legal considerations I mentioned a moment

ago: the Ninth Circuit decision, a consent decree in the Flores case, and other statutes.

I don't think our friend, the Democratic leader, actually believes President Trump can do this by a flick of a pen, as he said; otherwise, he wouldn't have cosponsored the bill by the Senator from California to address this situation. Why in the world would he propose legislation if he actually sincerely believes the President alone can fix this problem?

The truth is, we in Congress and the President have a shared responsibility and a role to play in addressing this crisis at the border, but the result of the proposal by the Senator from California, embraced and cosponsored by the Democratic leader, is that it makes it impossible to enforce the laws Congress has written when it comes to adults illegally entering the United States when they are accompanied by a child.

We should not be under any illusion that the criminal organizations that facilitate the movement of people from other countries into the United States—they understand these gaps in our laws. That is why they sent tens of thousands of unaccompanied children into the United States in 2014, creating that humanitarian crisis. They know well that because of the gaps in our law that allow adults with children to be treated differently, they are exploiting that for financial gain.

The result of the proposal by the minority leader and our Democratic colleagues means it is impossible to enforce laws that Congress has written. Ending zero tolerance means ignoring the law, and that amounts to ignoring the will of the people who put Members of Congress in office and ending our respect for the rule of law. Ending zero tolerance, as they would seek to do, means tolerating criminal activity. As I mentioned, these are organized criminal organizations—they are sometimes called transnational criminal organizations—and they will trade in anything that makes them money: People, guns, drugs, any sort of contraband we can imagine. Not applying the law to illegal entry does nothing but fuel them and feed their money machine, which is why they continue to do what they do.

The other concern I have with the legislation proposed by our Democratic colleagues, even though they have said only the President can fix it, is that while legislation from the Senator from California does seek to keep families together—a goal we share—it doesn't specify where those families should be held. That is a big problem because when it comes to the safety of these children, we don't want to leave that open to interpretation or misunderstanding. We want to be sure and clear that these families are kept in separate residential housing facilities, away from hardened and potentially violent criminals, but our Democratic colleagues' bill that every single one of the Democrats in the Senate has signed

on to doesn't even address that. As I said, in fact, their bill would likely result in many adults entering the United States illegally getting off scot-free because of the no enforcement zone, basically extending within up to 120 miles from the border. Basically, Federal law enforcement authorities, not just the Border Patrol but the FBI, the U.S. attorneys, and others, would be essentially prohibited from prosecuting anybody for violation of our laws.

Now, all of us sat up and paid close attention when former First Lady Laura Bush and the current First Lady Melania Trump expressed their concerns about family separation and called on us to find a better way to answer the current crisis, and I agree with them. In fact, we have gotten off to a pretty good start.

Led by our colleague from North Carolina, some of our colleagues and I, just a few minutes ago, introduced a bill called the Keep Families Together and Enforce the Law Act. The goals of this legislation are pretty straightforward: keep families together in safe, secure facilities while their cases are waiting to be decided by a court.

We set mandatory standards of care for family residential centers to make sure they are hygienic and safe and the sort of place where we can treat people compassionately.

We also authorize 225 new immigration judges because of the huge backlog that makes it hard to handle all the cases that come across the border. We give these families a chance to move to the head of the line to get their cases decided on an expedited basis so that while they are being detained in these safe, secure, family facilities, their cases can be decided quickly. Also, if they are entitled to an immigration benefit like asylum, they could be afforded that on a reasonable timetable and not left in limbo for any longer than absolutely necessary.

Now, I believe, talking to my friend the senior Senator from California, Mrs. FEINSTEIN, that these are elements of a bill we might be able to agree to, Democrats and Republicans, in order to address the common concerns we have about family separation. Throughout the course of our discussions, though, it has become clear this is something we all believe; that families crossing the border should be kept together. Where we may differ is whether that should also go along with a joint commitment to enforce our immigration laws, but, as I said earlier, this is not an either-or situation. We can keep parents and children together while, at the same time, remaining resolute in enforcing our immigration laws—something I believe we should do.

The Trump administration has said it will not tolerate any violation of those laws and that all offenders will remain on the table for prosecution, but there is no reason for our Democratic colleagues to oppose what I have

laid out. Either we are or we are not a nation of laws, with a government that enforces those laws, or we are a nation with no law and open borders; simply waving through anybody who wants to come into the country at their discretion.

So I would urge all of our colleagues to work together to continue talking about and supporting a bill that represents these shared values. If we come together, we can resolve the situation swiftly and ensure that these children are kept together with their families and, as I said, that they can be expeditiously presented before an immigration judge so they can present any legitimate claim they may have to any immigration benefit. I think that is a commonsense solution to this problem, and I look forward to our colleagues working together to try to solve it.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Wyoming.

NORTH KOREA

Mr. BARRASSO. Mr. President, as we know, last week President Trump took what I believe is a historic first step in making America and the whole world more safe, more stable, and more secure. I believe his efforts to end North Korea's nuclear weapons program have already produced tangible results. North Korea has suspended nuclear tests and is dismantling a test facility. They have also committed to recovering and sending home the remains of Americans killed during the Korean war.

Now the Trump administration is taking the next steps. The State Department is hard at work on followup discussions. Secretary of State Pompeo says he may personally return to North Korea before very long.

When we heard from President Trump about his trip to Singapore last week, he was upbeat about the talks. He understands these followup talks are going to be where the specifics really start to be discussed. That is where, as they say, the rubber meets the road. I think the talks have a very real opportunity for success. Success means an agreement that is durable, enforceable, and verifiable. It means an agreement that eliminates all nuclear weapons from North Korea and from the entire Korean Peninsula—nothing less. So I am cautiously optimistic about the talks.

President Trump has applied a program of maximum pressure, and that has brought North Korea to the table. We had a hearing in the Foreign Relations Committee, and the upload from the whole discussion was this: Sanctions work.

The next stage of these negotiations is going to help us understand whether now is the right time, whether the Kim regime is truly ready to give up its nuclear weapons. If it is not ready, the pressure can resume. The pressure can even be increased. The maximum-pressure approach will ultimately work—if not today, then someday.

Meanwhile, the United States is in a very strong negotiating position. We know that as a result of the efforts by President Trump and the strong position we are in, it is something that not just we know but North Korea knows as well. We know exactly what we need to have happen in these talks and exactly what North Korea must do. We are willing to walk away if an agreement falls short. That is how you win a negotiation.

When President Obama negotiated with Iran over their nuclear program, I think he lost sight of that important rule. He wanted a deal so badly that what he was willing to accept was a bad deal. President Trump is a negotiator, and I am confident that he is going to walk away if the only deal to be had is one that is bad for the United States.

I am confident we can reach our goals of a nuclear-free North Korea—today or at some point down the road. I remain very clear-eyed, as does the President, about the possibilities, as well as the pitfalls, and I think we should be clear-eyed and concerned.

The world remains a very dangerous place. Our adversaries, including North Korea, are cunning, opportunistic, and aggressive. We need to be sure we don't lose sight of whom we are dealing with. The Kim regime, going back to his father and grandfather, has a history of appalling attacks on their own people. They have shown no interest in the human rights, political rights, or civil liberties of North Koreans. I think history will judge this family very harshly.

All that said, making the world a safer place and doing what is best for America means we have to deal with other countries as they are. Sometimes it includes sitting down to negotiate with other countries and other leaders who have a terrible record on human rights. The United States must continue to do all we can to force hostile nations back from the brink of war. We must encourage countries to embrace democracy, to abide by the rule of law, and to support the freedoms and rights of all people. As President Kennedy once said, "Is not peace, in the last analysis, basically a matter of human rights?"

The worst human rights violations imaginable would be a nuclear explosion killing millions of people, some of them instantly, many of them slowly and in agony. President Trump knows that is what these negotiations are about, that the stakes are high, and that Mike Pompeo is the right person for this difficult job. He understands the people he is negotiating with, and he understands the facts on the ground.

During his confirmation hearing to be Secretary of State, Mike Pompeo said an interesting thing about America's place in the world. He said: "If we don't lead for democracy, for prosperity, and for human rights around the world, who will?" I think it is clear that the Secretary of State approaches

these talks with a clear understanding of what American leadership looks like. He also knows what American strength looks like.

The President hit the "pause" button on military exercises scheduled for later this year. He can just as easily restart those exercises. We have 28,000 U.S. troops in South Korea. I have visited some of them who are from my home State of Wyoming. The U.S. Navy is still in the area; they remain ready at a moment's notice.

So America is going to be in a position of strength at every step of these negotiations, whether it is economically, diplomatically, politically, or militarily.

I was critical of President Obama's Iran deal because it was a bad deal, not because ending Iran's nuclear program was a bad idea. I was critical of the Iran deal because it gave up too much in return for too little. It made permanent concessions for temporary return. I was critical because it was done without the support of the American people through their representatives in the Senate. I am confident that President Trump will not make the same mistakes. President Trump has given Kim Jong Un a taste—just a taste—of what it means to be welcomed as one of the peaceful, civilized nations of the world. It is up to Kim whether he wants to remain in this world or whether he wants to return to being an isolated, backward, pariah state, as North Korea has been for so long. It is up to Kim whether he wants to embrace civilized norms of respecting human rights and the freedom of his people. That is his decision to make.

As for the rest of us, we can remain hopeful while still being skeptical. We cannot insist that the talks in North Korea must lead to great breakthrough immediately. Nobody can make a promise like that, and no one can expect that as the only standard for success. What we can expect is that our President will always put the interests of the American people first, whether he is negotiating with our allies or with our adversaries. That is what the American people expect, and I think all of us can rest assured that President Trump will keep that promise.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Connecticut.

FAMILY IMPRISONMENT POLICY

Mr. BLUMENTHAL. Mr. President, as we await the details of the President's Executive order today, we know enough already to have serious and significant concerns about the continuing policy of this administration in dealing with asylum seekers coming across our borders.

Make no mistake—ending family separation would be a welcomed and humane step, but the solution cannot be the immoral and unlawful detention and imprisonment of children. Family separation cannot be replaced with

family incarceration and imprisonment. Indefinitely imprisoning children and families is still inhumane and ineffective law enforcement.

President Trump's current policy, as articulated in this Executive order, will put children behind bars indefinitely and indiscriminately, and that is intolerable in a free and democratic society. Children will experience much of the same lasting trauma that they do now in the current situation, and the world will continue to watch the spectacle of the American Government locking up innocent children and throwing away the key. Locking up innocent children indiscriminately and indefinitely is a betrayal of American values.

Much like the policy of family separation, this new policy of indefinite and indiscriminate family imprisonment harkens back to the worst days of our country's history.

Japanese children thrown into World War II-era detention camps were imprisoned with their parents, but the days of history rightly judged that decision harshly, and history will also judge us harshly if we permit an inhumane and immoral policy to be carried out without our protests and opposition. Instead, we must now shame the administration into adopting a humane and moral policy.

This policy threatens to be costly. It will be costly in dollars and cents. The estimate is, approximately, almost \$800 per day for every incarcerated person or detained individual. Even more costly will be the undermining of our moral authority and our image around the world and our own sense of offending our basic morality, our image of ourselves, and our sense of our own morality must be offended by imprisoning, indefinitely and indiscriminately, families with their children.

There are alternatives. One is stronger oversight and supervision over families who can be released without danger of flight or physical violence. These programs have been tried, and they have been proven successful. Family case management efforts have produced appearance rates above 90 percent, and those alternatives must be explored instead of detaining and incarcerating, indefinitely and indiscriminately, children with their families.

The world and all of us were repulsed by the images of children separated from their families. Those sights and sounds were searingly painful, but so must be children in cages and behind bars indefinitely, without the basic services and respect for humanity that our great Nation has epitomized.

At the core of the current administration policy is so-called zero tolerance, which results in criminal prosecution of the asylum seekers. The President has recognized the public outrage and yielded to it, but the policy of zero tolerance will continue.

The current approach of detaining and incarcerating these children indefi-

nately likely violates court orders issued in 1997 and 2016, but indefinite and indiscriminate imprisonment of children and families ought to violate, as well, our rules of morality and humanity.

I urge the administration to explore alternatives, to work with Congress on real reform, to support the legislation that has been supported by every Democrat in this body that would, in effect, avoid imprisonment of immigrant families.

Beyond that legislation, we should pass compassionate and comprehensive immigration reform that provides a pathway to citizenship for the 11 million undocumented immigrants currently living in the shadows and improves the due process right so that adjudication is fairer and more effective.

We must shame this administration to do what is right—to end zero tolerance and support changes to our immigration system that represent the best in America, not as the House bills to be voted on today or tomorrow reflect the worst.

We are here on World Refugee Day, appropriately. We ought to acknowledge the remarkable journey of refugees and asylum seekers as they pursue freedom and opportunity over the immense obstacles they encounter. We should recognize their contributions to our country, the talents and energy they bring here. We should recognize the humanitarian importance of refugee resettlement programs nationwide.

Though victims of global conflict come here from all parts of the world, almost all of these refugees are also resilient survivors who embrace their new lives and contribute to their communities, even after these harrowing journeys to the United States. Too often we fail to recognize their contributions to American communities, but today we celebrate all that they offer.

Today, on World Refugee Day, we commemorate that Connecticut, since 2005, has resettled 7,000 refugees—our small State, with 3½ million people from all over the world, particularly in major resettlement cities like Bridgeport, Hartford, and New Haven.

Today, proudly, I wish to share some of the stories from refugees who have made Connecticut their home and highlight the important work my constituents are doing to support refugees. There are several refugee agencies throughout Connecticut that serve as a key touchstone for these refugees by providing essential case management and employment services. I am proud of these organizations and am grateful for the work they do.

IRIS—Integrated Refugee & Immigrant Services—is Connecticut's largest refugee resettlement and immigrant services organization headquartered in New Haven. Volunteers welcome and resettle refugee families in over 35 of Connecticut's towns. Likewise, the Connecticut Insti-

tute for Refugees and Immigrants, located in Bridgeport, assists refugees and immigrants in resolving legal, economic, linguistic, and social barriers as they integrate into their communities.

Let me tell you about the journey of Issa, Aminah, and their three children. They resettled in Westville, CT, the night of the 2016 Presidential election. This family fled Syria to Jordan after one of their members was abducted and beaten by the regime. When they arrived in the United States, Issa started working as a parking attendant at a hospital parking garage, and Aminah launched a thriving catering business. Their children are thrilled to attend school again after years of educational disruption caused by their displacement.

Let me tell you about Rafid. He was an electrical engineer in Baghdad who worked with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers during military operations in Iran. After he received death threats from insurgents, he fled with his family to Jordan and then resettled in Connecticut, where he works as a team leader at Schick Manufacturing in Milford. He also started his own subcontracting company, Golden Gate CT, to create jobs for other Connecticut residents. He is truly an entrepreneur in the best sense of that word.

Francis and Evelyn fled persecution in Rwanda and the Democratic Republic of the Congo to resettle in Bridgeport, CT. When they shared their story with my office, they said: "We understood that the American Dream was alive in each of us if we wished to move forward and work hard." Francis and Evelyn certainly embody that American dream.

Connecticut constituents have embraced these refugee families. They have opened their hearts to these individuals and families who are seeking nothing less than the American dream and escape from the trauma of war, the violence of persecution, and the face of oppression. In the face of unimaginable upheaval and horror, they have come to this country and made that journey. I am grateful to them for their courage.

I wish to recognize one of my constituents who has demonstrated equal courage and strength, a Trinity College professor, Janet Bauer. She has dedicated her entire career to welcoming and integrating families. She established the Hartford Global Migration Lab, which connects college students and refugees. Through this program, Janet's students tutor at Jubilee House and help children with their homework at the Hartford Public Library.

Like her, Jean Silk, a coordinator with the Jewish Community Alliance for Refugee Settlement, has also worked with refugees and done immeasurable good. At a time of global conflict, when the horrors of war are all too real every day, the Trump administration has capped refugee resettlement at 45,000 this fiscal year—the lowest in American history. Even with

this cap, the estimate is that the United States will resettle only about 20,000 refugees this year.

Each of these numbers represents an individual human life transformed by coming to this country, given new light and life. I hope the administration will commit to resettling at least 75,000 refugees in fiscal year 2019.

Again, as I close, I want to emphasize the importance of this day, the historic significance of our turning a point and taking advantage of an opportunity to do right and to do better than we have. I urge that colleagues across the aisle join in supporting a policy that stops indefinite and indiscriminate imprisonment of children. It may be with their families, but it recalls the worst chapters in our history when families were detained indiscriminately and indefinitely.

When the judgment of history is made, I hope we will be spared the kind of blame that rightly went to previous generations who made the wrong decision. Let us do what is best for America. Let us exemplify the best in America.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. GARDNER). The Senator from Delaware.

Mr. CARPER. Mr. President, I come to the floor today to talk about the 74th anniversary of the GI bill, which we will be celebrating later this week.

Before the Senator from Connecticut leaves the floor, I want to thank him for his comments. I want to follow up briefly on what he has said. As the Presiding Officer knows, and our colleague from Connecticut knows, every Wednesday morning, there is a prayer breakfast. Democrats, Republicans, Independents, and a number of Senators from both sides have breakfast together. One of the Senators talks about their faith and how their faith affects the way they approach their work here, our work here.

Today, I was invited to speak, and I mentioned that sometimes when people say "What kind of Democrat are you?" I say I am a Democrat who has read Matthew 25.

People say: What is Matthew 25?

Matthew 25 goes something like this. When I was hungry, did you feed me? When I was naked, did you clothe me? When I was thirsty, did you give me something to drink? When I was sick and imprisoned, did you visit me? When I was a stranger in your land, did you welcome me?

Every day here, the Chaplain starts our session with a prayer, and we have Bible study groups. I want to take a minute, and I don't expect my friend from Connecticut to stay on the floor, but I want him to hear the beginning of this. I just want to cite a couple of Scriptures. There are one or two in the Old Testament and maybe one or two in the New Testament.

In the Book of Leviticus in the Old Testament, chapter 19, we read these words: "When a stranger resides with you in your land, you shall not wrong him."

The next verse, 34, reads: "You should treat the stranger who sojourns with you as the native among you, and you shall love him [or her] as yourself, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt."

In the New Testament are the words of Jesus. We read in Matthew 18, I think verses 2 through 6: "He called a little child [meaning Jesus] and placed the child among them."

Jesus said to them: "Truly, I tell you, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of Heaven. Therefore, whoever takes the lowly position of this child [who was with him that day] is the greatest in the kingdom of Heaven. And whoever welcomes one such child in my Name welcomes me."

Matthew 18:6 reads: "If anyone causes one of these little ones, those who believe in me, to stumble, it would be better for them to have a large millstone hung around their neck than be drowned in the depths of the sea."

That is pretty straight talk or, as we used to say in the Navy, the straight skinny. Those are good words from the Old Testament and the New Testament to keep in mind.

Again, I thank my colleague from Connecticut for his words.

74TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE GI BILL

Mr. President, our colleague from Connecticut, by the way, is somebody who has spent time in uniform. His sons have spent time in uniform, and I think one or two are still serving.

When I came back from Southeast Asia at the end of the Vietnam war, after having been a naval flight officer for a number of years, I was fortunate to have been eligible for the GI bill. The GI bill that I was eligible for was a bill that provided me \$250 a month to help pay for my tuition and my expenses at the University of Delaware, where I was in the business school trying to earn an MBA, which I ultimately did.

The benefit for GIs today is not \$250 a month. As my colleagues know, whatever the tuition costs are, they are paid for by the GI bill. If you go to a private school or something like that outside of your State, the benefit could be higher. There is a cap on that, but I think it is over \$20,000. The expenses for tuition, tutoring, books, and fees are paid for by the GI bill. In Delaware, there is a monthly housing allowance, and there is in every State. The monthly housing allowance in Delaware is \$2,000 a month. That compares with those of us who, at the end of the Vietnam war, received \$250 a month.

I don't deny or feel bad about the current GIs—sailors, airmen, airwomen. I don't feel bad about their getting a lot more, because it is a good benefit, and it is one that is worth celebrating.

My dad came back from World War II, and my uncle served either in World War II or Korea. I was born after the war was over. Somewhere along the line when I was a little kid, my dad

talked about how he got his early training after the war, but I was not old enough to understand what he was talking about. Shortly after the war ended in 1945, he went back to West Virginia.

As best I could figure out, other people took advantage of the GI bill, which was new then. They went to colleges and universities. My recollection is that Frank Lautenberg, who was a Senator for a number of years, went to Harvard. People went to different kinds of colleges and universities and maybe to community colleges.

Apparently, my dad got training not by going to a 2-year school or a 4-year school but by gaining a skill. The skill that he apparently gained was to be able to fix wrecked cars and to do bodywork on those cars. He worked at a place called Burleson Oldsmobile in Beckley, WV. He must have been pretty good at what he did. One day, an insurance adjuster came in from Nationwide Insurance to look at a car that was insured by Nationwide. He talked to my dad for a while.

The insurance agent from Nationwide Insurance said: You sound like a pretty sharp guy. I am surprised that somebody who seems to have as much on the ball as you do is here, fixing wrecked cars. You could do what I do.

My dad asked: Do you mean be a claims adjuster for Nationwide Insurance?

The fellow said: Yes.

Sure enough, a year later, my dad, apparently, became a claims adjuster for Nationwide Insurance. He had a high school degree from Shady Spring High School, which is just outside of Beckley. My mom did as well. Neither of them ever went to college. My dad worked for Nationwide for probably 25 years or more—maybe 30 years—in different places around the country. One of his last assignments for Nationwide Insurance, in its home office of Columbus, OH, was to run the training school for Nationwide's insurance adjusters from all over the country.

Here was a guy with a high school degree, who had served in World War II with honor, who had a chance to get a GI bill benefit and turn it into a lifetime opportunity for himself and his family. It enabled my sister and me to go on and finish school. Thanks to the Navy, I got my Navy scholarship and used some money when overseas to help my sister go to school.

The GI bill means a lot to my family, and it does to a lot of families. I think this is a benefit which has been around now for I believe 74 years this Friday. Think about that—three-quarters of a century this Friday. This Friday marks the 74th anniversary of President Franklin Roosevelt's signing of the Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944 into law. This legislation is more commonly known as the GI bill, and we have always called it the GI bill.

Thanks to the GI bill, millions of returning World War II veterans flooded our Nation's colleges and universities,

and it ushered in an era of unprecedented economic expansion. Since 1944, the GI bill has transformed our country and the lives of millions of veterans, including mine. It really helped to create a middle class in this country, as millions of GIs came back and had a chance to learn a skill and go to college in many cases and have economic opportunities for themselves and their families that never before had been possible.

This week, we are recognizing—I think for the first time—the historical significance of the GI bill. We are going to designate the week from June 18 through June 22 as “National GI Bill Commemoration Week.”

I want to thank several Senators.

I thank Senator SULLIVAN from Alaska—a colonel in the Marine Corps.

As the chairman and ranking member of the Senate Veterans’ Affairs Committee, I thank JOHNNY ISAKSON and Senator JON TESTER for joining me in submitting the resolution in the Senate to designate June 18 through 22 as “National GI Bill Commemoration Week.”

I thank House Veterans’ Affairs Committee Chairman ROE and Ranking Member WALZ for submitting the same solution in the House of Representatives.

I also thank the American Legion for its hard work in making this resolution a reality and for advocating for veterans and veterans’ education benefits in Congress, as have other service organizations, but I think the American Legion was present at the creation and worked very hard right at the creation to make sure that we had a GI bill and that it would survive.

Because this is GI Bill Week, I want to mention just a few reasons some folks refer to the GI bill as the greatest legislation. We have a greatest generation—my parents’ generation. They are the folks who grew up in the Great Depression and went on to do amazing things with their lives.

Some have referred to the GI bill as the greatest legislation, and I have already shared my own story today. The GI bill made immediate financial support, education, and home loan programs available. I bought my first home with the GI bill, with VA mortgage-backed insurance. That is how I insured my mortgage. I was able to get the low rate offered in the GI bill. Millions of veterans bought homes with the help of the GI bill. This combination of opportunities changed the social and economic fabric of our country.

A 1988 report from the Joint Economic Committee estimated that for every \$1 the United States invested in the GI bill, about \$7 was returned in economic growth. Think about that. For every \$1 we invested, there was a \$7 return in economic growth thanks to the GI bill.

Close to half a million engineers, close to a quarter of a million accountants, close to a quarter of a million

teachers, almost 100,000 scientists, about 67,000 doctors, over 120,000 dentists, and thousands of other professionals entered the workforce of the United States. I might add that they are still entering the workforce of the United States.

The GI bill truly democratized our higher education system, established greater citizenship and civic participation, and empowered the “greatest generation” to lead our country following World War II.

Over the past 74 years, Congress has enacted subsequent GI bills to provide educational assistance to new generations of veterans, including the Veterans Readjustment Benefits Act of 1966, the Post-Vietnam Era Veterans’ Educational Assistance Act of 1977, the Veterans’ Educational Assistance Act of 1984, and most recently the Post-9/11 Veterans Educational Assistance Act of 2008, which we voted on and debated here, I think in about my eighth year here in the Senate.

After returning from three tours of duty over in Southeast Asia, as I said earlier, I was fortunate enough to be able to use my Vietnam-era GI bill benefits at the University of Delaware.

I close by saying that Senator YOUNG is on the floor. I think he is going to offer an amendment in just a moment. He is a marine, and I am proud to serve with him. The Marine Corps and the Navy have different uniforms but are on the same team. I salute him for his service.

If you go back to 2008, that was when we were falling into the worst recession since the Great Depression, some of us will recall. These pages up here were about half their current age. They are now about 15 or 16 years old. They were about 8 years old when we were falling into the worst economic hole we had been in since the Great Depression. The unemployment rate for our country, as I recall, reached or exceeded 10 percent. The unemployment rate—I was told by my staff—was higher for veterans. It was higher than 10 percent. I have been told it was significantly higher. That was where we were in 2009—at the bottom of the great recession.

Since that time, a lot of veterans have come home. They have been able to take advantage of the current GI bill, the new GI bill—a very generous GI bill. Do you know what has happened? They have found jobs. They have found economic opportunity. They are doing all kinds of things with the education they have gained at sometimes 4-year colleges with advanced degrees, at 2-year colleges, at trade schools.

The unemployment rate for our country has now dropped to under 4 percent. We are in the ninth year of an economic expansion—the longest running economic expansion in our country’s history. While the national unemployment rate is about 3.9 percent, the veterans’ unemployment rate is no longer above the national average. It is below.

The national average is down to about 3.9, and the veterans’ unemployment rate is about 3.4. Again, I think we can say that the GI bill has helped to educate a whole new generation of young men and women. The GI bill is in no small part responsible for that.

I commend my colleague Jim Webb, a former Senator from Virginia, who was the author of the legislation in 2008 that a lot of us supported and voted for.

We are also grateful to those veterans and to the people of this country for having confidence in us in making sure that we could make an investment on their behalf and our behalf.

Later this week, on Friday—people ask, what day is Friday? It will be the 74th anniversary of the GI bill. It is one of the greatest pieces of legislation we have ever passed and enacted in this country. It is the gift that keeps on giving, and it hopefully will continue to do so for a long time.

Mr. President, there are two Senators on the floor who lead the Veterans’ Affairs Committee. I ask unanimous consent for Senator YOUNG, who is the author of an amendment that has been offered, to speak for 5 minutes and for Senator TESTER to speak for 3 minutes.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. CARPER. I thank the Presiding Officer.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Indiana.

Mr. YOUNG. Mr. President, I thank the distinguished Senator from Delaware for his naval service and for his concern for veterans. It is a pleasure to serve with him.

AMENDMENT NO. 2926

Mr. President, as marines, we tend to make interservice jokes when we are in the company of one another, but I know we share a common dedication in making sure our veterans receive the sort of care and support that, of course, they deserve. That is why I rise in support of amendment No. 2926 to the MILCON-VA bill.

Suicide is one of the most serious problems that face our veterans today. According to the Department of Veterans Affairs, “after adjusting for differences in age and sex, risk for suicide was 22 percent higher among Veterans when compared to U.S. non-Veteran adults.” That figure is 19 percent higher among male veterans when compared to U.S. non-veteran adult men and 2½ times higher among female veterans.

Our veterans deserve the highest possible quality of care. Mental health care services are a critical component of that effort and are essential to preventing veteran suicides. Congress and the Department of Veterans Affairs has a solemn duty to ensure that programs designed to protect veterans’ emotional and mental health are effective.

The Department of Veterans Affairs launched what is now known as the

Veterans Crisis Line in 2011. While we applaud the VA for administering this program, we embrace the fundamental responsibility of Congress to exercise robust oversight of the Veterans Crisis Line to ensure that this program is actually effective and properly supporting at-risk veterans. That is why I joined with Senator DONNELLY and Congressman BANKS to introduce a bill to study the effectiveness of the Veterans Crisis Line and the followup treatment these veterans receive.

Amendment No. 2926 is based on the core elements of the original S. 2174 Veterans Crisis Line Study Act. Studying the Veterans Crisis Line is vital to ensure that it is successful in its mission to save as many veterans as we can, and I ask my colleagues for their support.

Thank you.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Montana.

Mr. TESTER. Mr. President, I would like to thank the Senator from Indiana for this amendment. It is a good amendment and is an amendment we need to pass in this body. As Senator YOUNG pointed out, issues around mental health are very prevalent. It is the signature injury coming out of the Middle East. When these folks come back home, our men and women who have served need to have access, especially when they are in crisis. I thank Senator YOUNG.

AMENDMENT NO. 2971

Mr. President, I have a different amendment. This amendment does one simple thing. It stresses the importance of the independence of the Office of the Inspector General at the VA. To be honest, I am not sure we should ever have had to have this amendment, but we do because it is clear the VA is denying access to the Office of Inspector General to get the information it needs to carry out its mission of oversight. Over the past week, there have been a flurry of letters back and forth from the VA to the IG about access to information about the nature of the relationship between the two.

This is what I have to say. The rhetoric coming out of the VA is a bit troubling. Sunlight, bringing information to light, is the best antiseptic for good government. When the IG is doing its job correctly, that is exactly what happens. So with the rhetoric that is coming out of the VA, it opens the door to the VA to be able to control or interfere for political reasons what should be the OIG's independent oversight efforts. I am here to state that the VA is not above the law or exempt from independent oversight. Despite the Acting Secretary directing the inspector general to act like he is his subordinate, he is not. This amendment No. 2971 simply prohibits funds appropriated in this bill to be used in a way that limits the access of the Office of Inspector General to the information or documents it deems necessary to investigate and do the oversight of the VA's work.

As we have seen, the Department cannot be trusted to police itself. It must be held accountable to the veterans and taxpayers, and the Office of Inspector General is an important watchdog that should not be undermined.

I would like to add to the RECORD the cosponsors of this bill: Senators ISAKSON, MURRAY, BLUMENTHAL, HIRONO, MANCHIN, DUCKWORTH, BALDWIN, KING, GILLIBRAND, WARREN, BROWN, MCCASKILL, JONES, DURBIN, and WYDEN.

This is a good amendment. It is a good governance amendment. It is an amendment to allow us, the folks in the Senate, to offer the kind of oversight we need to offer to the VA to make sure it is serving the veterans of this country.

With that, I yield the floor.

VOTE ON AMENDMENT NO. 2926

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the question is on agreeing to the Young amendment No. 2926.

Mr. ALEXANDER. I ask for the yeas and nays.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there a sufficient second?

There appears to be a sufficient second.

The clerk will call the roll.

The assistant bill clerk called the roll.

Mr. CORNYN. The following Senators are necessarily absent: the Senator Tennessee (Mr. CORKER) and the Senator from Arizona (Mr. MCCAIN).

Mr. DURBIN. I announce that the Senator from Illinois (Ms. DUCKWORTH) and the Senator from New Hampshire (Mrs. SHAHEEN) are necessarily absent.

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

The result was announced—yeas 96, nays 0, as follows:

[Rollcall Vote No. 135 Leg.]

YEAS—96

| | | |
|--------------|------------|------------|
| Alexander | Gillibrand | Murray |
| Baldwin | Graham | Nelson |
| Barrasso | Grassley | Paul |
| Bennet | Harris | Perdue |
| Blumenthal | Hassan | Peters |
| Blunt | Hatch | Portman |
| Booker | Heinrich | Reed |
| Boozman | Heitkamp | Risch |
| Brown | Heller | Roberts |
| Burr | Hirono | Rounds |
| Cantwell | Hoeven | Rubio |
| Capito | Hyde-Smith | Sanders |
| Cardin | Inhofe | Sasse |
| Carper | Isakson | Schatz |
| Casey | Johnson | Schumer |
| Cassidy | Jones | Scott |
| Collins | Kaine | Shelby |
| Coons | Kennedy | Smith |
| Cornyn | King | Stabenow |
| Cortez Masto | Klobuchar | Sullivan |
| Cotton | Lankford | Tester |
| Crapo | Leahy | Thune |
| Cruz | Lee | Tillis |
| Daines | Manchin | Toomey |
| Donnelly | Markey | Udall |
| Durbin | McCaskill | Van Hollen |
| Enzi | McConnell | Warner |
| Ernst | Menendez | Warren |
| Feinstein | Merkley | Whitehouse |
| Fischer | Moran | Wicker |
| Flake | Murkowski | Wyden |
| Gardner | Murphy | Young |

NOT VOTING—4

| | |
|-----------|---------|
| Corker | McCain |
| Duckworth | Shaheen |

The amendment (No. 2926) was agreed to.

VOTE ON AMENDMENT NO. 2971

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The question now occurs on agreeing to Tester amendment No. 2971.

Mr. BARRASSO. I ask for the yeas and nays.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there a sufficient second?

There appears to be a sufficient second.

The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk called the roll.

Mr. CORNYN. The following Senator are necessarily absent: the Senator from Tennessee (Mr. CORKER), and the Senator from Arizona (Mr. MCCAIN).

Mr. DURBIN. I announce that the Senator from Illinois (Ms. DUCKWORTH), and the Senator from New Hampshire (Mrs. SHAHEEN) are necessarily absent.

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

The result was announced—yeas 96, nays 0, as follows:

[Rollcall Vote No. 136 Leg.]

YEAS—96

| | | |
|--------------|------------|------------|
| Alexander | Gillibrand | Murray |
| Baldwin | Graham | Nelson |
| Barrasso | Grassley | Paul |
| Bennet | Harris | Perdue |
| Blumenthal | Hassan | Peters |
| Blunt | Hatch | Portman |
| Booker | Heinrich | Reed |
| Boozman | Heitkamp | Risch |
| Brown | Heller | Roberts |
| Burr | Hirono | Rounds |
| Cantwell | Hoeven | Rubio |
| Capito | Hyde-Smith | Sanders |
| Cardin | Inhofe | Sasse |
| Carper | Isakson | Schatz |
| Casey | Johnson | Schumer |
| Cassidy | Jones | Scott |
| Collins | Kaine | Shelby |
| Coons | Kennedy | Smith |
| Cornyn | King | Stabenow |
| Cortez Masto | Klobuchar | Sullivan |
| Cotton | Lankford | Tester |
| Crapo | Leahy | Thune |
| Cruz | Lee | Tillis |
| Daines | Manchin | Toomey |
| Donnelly | Markey | Udall |
| Durbin | McCaskill | Van Hollen |
| Enzi | McConnell | Warner |
| Ernst | Menendez | Warren |
| Feinstein | Merkley | Whitehouse |
| Fischer | Moran | Wicker |
| Flake | Murkowski | Wyden |
| Gardner | Murphy | Young |

NOT VOTING—4

| | |
|-----------|---------|
| Corker | McCain |
| Duckworth | Shaheen |

The amendment (No. 2971) was agreed to.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Kansas.

Mr. MORAN. Mr. President, first of all, I want to associate myself with the remarks of the Senator from Montana, Mr. TESTER, on his amendment in support of the VA's inspector general position. I believe it is critical to ensuring oversight and accountability at the Department of Veterans Affairs.

What this amendment does and the reason I support it is that it ensures that the inspector general's office can fully vet, investigate, and examine the cases presented to them by making certain they have access to the necessary

records and documentation within the Department of Veterans Affairs. To arrive at the truth, the inspector general must have all of the information associated with any given situation to determine what is accurate and who should be held accountable.

Mr. President, I also want to express my pleasure in speaking today in regard to something I have long advocated for, and I compliment the three chairmen and women here in support of the appropriations bills of which they have jurisdiction, but we need regular order, and this return to regular order for consideration of the fiscal year 2019 appropriations process is important to the U.S. Senate. More importantly, it is valuable to the American people and valuable to my constituents home in Kansas.

As a U.S. Senator and a member of the Appropriations Committee, our duty is to fund the Federal Government in a responsible way that will wisely utilize every taxpayer dollar, which requires a deliberation to prioritize Federal spending. I also think, when we can return to regular order, we have greater ability to influence decisions made by Cabinet Secretaries, department heads, bureau chiefs, and agency heads because we can influence decisions they make because of the power of the purse string.

On the appropriations bills we are debating this week, I want to call attention to the MILCON-VA appropriations bill and the great work Senator BOOZMAN and his ranking member, Senator SCHATZ, have achieved as chairman and ranking member of the subcommittee. I am very familiar with their staff, and I compliment them on their work.

This bill provides an additional \$1 billion in fiscal year 2019 for the VA to provide veterans access to care in the community, and to avoid any lapse in that care, this bill provides \$11 billion in advance appropriations for fiscal year 2020.

The point I am making is, we have worked hard to provide services in the community for veterans who either can't get the service or live such a distance from the VA or, now, because of the new law, when it is in their best interests to have care provided in the community. It is necessary we provide the funding to accomplish that.

We have the opportunity to provide veterans and the VA with appropriations for fiscal year 2019 that builds on the momentum the reform legislation, which just became law, the VA MISSION Act, provides. I want to make sure we do the right things because we want the VA MISSION Act to work.

On June 6, we paid tribute to one of our Nation's heroes who bravely stormed the beaches of Normandy in November of 1944. In addition, 2 weeks ago today, on June 6, Senator BOOZMAN and I, as well as many of our colleagues, were at the White House, where we joined the President as he signed the VA MISSION Act into law.

The VA MISSION Act represents a significant achievement in providing

our Nation's veterans with access to the care they are entitled to and that they deserve.

Just as I urged my colleagues to support the VA MISSION Act, I call on my colleagues to support the appropriations for implementation of the reforms contained in this legislation. It is critical we do so to make certain veterans can rely on a community care program that meets their needs and offers access to the care they deserve.

The MISSION Act delivers several critical reforms that the funding provided in this bill will enable the VA to carry out and build on. Particularly helpful for the appropriations process, it requires the Department to submit routine strategic plans to Congress and develop a multiyear budget process to better forecast future needs and requirements. It also mandates market area assessments to better understand what communities and local VAs are able to offer their veterans, allowing the VA and Congress to better identify gaps that require more resources to be filled and prevent redundancy; in other words, to provide the resources where they are needed and to make sure we don't spend them where they are not.

As my colleagues are aware, the VA has faced several budget shortfalls in recent years. We have been on the floor often, and I have spoken about this numerous times. Unfortunately, it has required our attention numerous times. The VA has been unable to estimate how much money they will need to provide care in the community through the Choice Act, and this legislation requires a process by which they can accurately forecast those needs, particularly when it comes to care in the community.

I have long believed that when it comes to the VA, it isn't a lack of funds that is the problem. In fact, we have consistently—and this bill does it again—increased their budget. Instead, it is a problem of how they spend the funds that are appropriated to them, how they manage those funds, and how the Department of Veterans Affairs is led.

I am confident reforms like those included in the MISSION Act will enable the VA to be a better steward of taxpayer funds, while also enabling them to better carry out their mission of providing veterans with the care and benefits they are entitled to through consistent, stable budgeting.

As reforms in the VA MISSION Act and the new community care programs are implemented over the next year, it is important that third-party administrators—administration entities which managed the community care program, Choice, in its old days for the VA—manage a network of community providers that serve veterans. Continuity of care is paramount to the success of VA's community care program, and we must ensure that the VA maintains veterans' access to the care they need by utilizing third-party administrators during the implementation stage of these reforms.

I remind my colleagues that the VA is not ready to manage or operate a health network themselves. Our urgency to fund the Choice Program during repeated shortfalls in the past was, in part, out of the necessity of making certain that network continued to support veterans and those third-party administrators—the services they provide. I do not believe the VA is now capable of building or replicating those networks that currently exist, and I would indicate that, at least in part, the contract with the third-party administrator is terminated on June 30, and we need assurance the Department of Veterans Affairs has a plan to make certain those contracts are extended so that care does not lapse.

This next year must be focused on the implementation of the MISSION Act and readying the VA healthcare system for its transformation. Any distraction from completing this mission is unfair to veterans who will benefit from it and puts the community care program at risk.

Our work on the MISSION Act and a community care program is in jeopardy if the Department of Veterans Affairs declines or is unable to renew contracts to keep the network in place.

We are on the cusp of real reform and transformation at the VA which will benefit veterans and their families for decades to come. I can think of no greater obligation during this year's appropriations process than ensuring veterans, and the programs that serve them, are resourced to deliver the care and benefits they deserve.

I thank the chairman, Senator BOOZMAN, the ranking member, Senator SCHATZ, and their staff for their expertise and their work in making sure the appropriations process lends its support to the MISSION Act—the John McCain MISSION Act—we enacted in the Senate and was signed by the President now just a few short days ago.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Ohio.

FORCED FAMILY SEPARATION

Mr. BROWN. Mr. President, the images that we have seen from our own country over the past few days are shocking and heartbreaking. They don't reflect our values as a nation. I am glad the President is reversing course. I am glad that he is signing something, putting a stop to his administration's cruel, pointless, and heartless policy of separating children from their parents at the border. That is just the beginning of the work that needs to be done to undo the damage that the President's policy has inflicted on these children and to begin to create a more human and humane immigration solution.

Any parent can tell you that being separated from a child is one of the worst things you can imagine. We have seen pictures and heard the sounds of crying children—children who are still in diapers. When I first heard that

audio clip—I think all of us remember the first time we heard it—of children who were screaming and crying for their parents, I almost couldn't listen to it.

As an American, as a human being, as a father, as a grandfather, it was revolting. It should be hard to listen to. We should recoil at those terrible sounds. The second it is not heard, the second we shrug our shoulders and do nothing at the sounds of little children who are wailing, that is the second we lose our humanity. It is hard for us to listen to. If it is hard for us to listen to—if it makes us uncomfortable—that is nothing compared to what it must mean, to what it must feel like, and what those parents are going through.

Yesterday, the administration reported that some 2,300 children were taken from their parents at the border in just a single month. Everybody in this body has gone to a school, and probably everybody in this body has gone to a grade school to visit. Remember what it is like to walk down the hall or to walk into a gym or to walk into a classroom and see dozens or even hundreds of children. Think about that. Think of walking into a school and seeing happy children—lots of them, dozens of children—who are singing or talking or playing on a playground.

Now think of these 2,300 children who were taken from their parents at the border in a single month—from May 5 to June 9. For 5 weeks, there were 60 kids taken, every single day, on average. There were 60 kids yesterday, 60 kids the day before, and 60 kids the day before that. We don't know how many since June 9, but from May 5 to June 9, there had been 60 kids every single day.

Clearly, the President did the right thing. Clearly, the President did it under great political pressure. Clearly, the President never admitted he was wrong about it. That is not something he would do, unlike most human beings I know. Yet signing something today doesn't magically reunite those families overnight. It is not like these children now—as any of my colleagues who have watched children who are at a grade school, who will run out to the cars when their moms pick them up or run out to the playground, joyfully, when their dads visit. They will not magically reunite with their families overnight. Signing this order the President signed—oh, so clearly reluctantly—will not undo the trauma those children have endured.

We still don't have good answers as to what has happened to those kids or what kinds of conditions they are living under. We have heard reports of siblings who have been ripped from their parents that they can't hug each other. We have heard of staff being told they are not allowed to comfort these children by touching them and hugging them. Imagine that. A child is taken away from her mother, and you are not even allowed to comfort her. You are just supposed to let her scream. That is

inhumane, un-American, and is counter to everything most of us—at least in this body, if not the White House—have been taught.

Dr. Colleen Kraft, the current President of the American Academy of Pediatrics and the past medical director of the Health Network by Cincinnati Children's in my State, warned that the toxic stress resulting from these separations can slow down brain development. She called it “a form of child abuse.”

Today, I demanded answers from the Secretary of Health and Human Services and from the Secretary of Homeland Security about what they are doing to care for the mental, physical, and emotional well-being of the thousands of traumatized children in their custody.

This chapter isn't closed. You don't just say, “Thank you, Mr. President, for finally doing the right thing. Everything is fine.” We have to track those 2,300 children for that month's period. There have been almost 2 weeks since then and more children. We have to find these children, comfort them, and examine them. Pediatricians have warned that this is some kind of child abuse because it can slow down brain development, and these children have already seen horrors that the rest of us can't imagine.

Some of these parents are seeking asylum in America. They are fleeing violence, and they are just looking for a safe place for their children. Who knows how many of these children already were traumatized because they had lived in a war zone, because they had lived in an area with all kinds of violence from drug wars. They were pulled out of that and were traveling with almost nothing but the clothes on their backs and very little, with one or both parents, and went north, not knowing what was going to happen each day and seeing things that almost none of us growing up has seen. Then they were separated from their parents at the border.

The way we keep our country safe is by going after terrorists and violent criminals, not by turning our backs on families and children just like ours, whose only goal is to escape violence and persecution.

We have a lot of work to do to fix our immigration system, but tearing families apart will not solve anything. We need to come together, and we need to work on a bipartisan solution that recognizes we aren't going to deport 13 million people who are already here. We can secure our borders. We can create a pathway for people to earn citizenship if they follow the law, to have a job, and pay taxes.

My son-in-law, Alejandro, lives in Cranston, RI—the boyhood home of our colleague Senator JACK REED. He was 10 years old—maybe 11 years old—when he came to this country. His mother was a journalist. She had her life threatened as a journalist in El Salvador. She fled their country to come

to our country. The parents then went to New York. We embrace people like that—who are refugees, whose lives we can save, and who can contribute so much to our country, as Alejandro has and his mother has. His whole family has contributed to this country. He is the father of two of our grandchildren now.

This may be a complicated issue, but we are a country of values that protects people. We are a haven for so many people. We have made a difference in so many lives because of who we are and what our values are. Surely, it is a complicated issue, but the administration has only made it so much worse. It has added the challenge of having to undo the damage it has done in having to work to get those children back to their parents and help to make them whole.

I hope we are seeing the end of this heartlessness. I hope this isn't a one-step pullback by the President, and then there will be more attacks on immigrants and more attacks on children. We have a lot of work to do to pick up the pieces and reunite families. The administration needs to provide answers immediately as to how it is going to make that happen and end the cries of these children with comforting words and much more.

I close with this story.

I had a message on Facebook from an Ohioan. He had heard the tragic story of a 10-year-old with Down syndrome who was reportedly separated from her parents at the border. That is barbaric, but this Ohioan gives me hope. He wrote that he and his wife have a daughter with Down syndrome. They wanted to offer to take in the little girl and her mother and have them stay with their family in Ohio. Imagine that.

Those are the values of Ohioans. Those are the values of North Carolinians. Those are the values of Americans. They are not the President's values, who, because of whatever motive, has separated these families. That encompasses the State and the country I love—this family who wrote to us. I know there are so many more Americans out there who feel the same way—who practice compassion, whose hearts break for these children. It is time for their government to step up and reflect those values of this great country.

Mr. President, yesterday, I met a veteran from Massillon, OH, James Powers. Mr. Powers brought to my attention a problem he was having with the VA's accounting mistakes, and our conversation led to a bill I introduced with Senator TESTER, a Montana Democrat, and Senator BOOZMAN, an Arkansas Republican, the bipartisan Veteran Debt Fairness Act. Both Senators serve with me on the Veterans' Affairs Committee. Both Senators know how VA overpayment and debt affect veterans every day.

James retired 2 years ago, but he noticed that the Army was continuing to pay him both an Active-Duty salary

and retirement benefits. James caught the mistake. He did the honorable thing. He notified the VA it was overpaying him, but the VA continued to overpay him. Then it charged him twice to recoup the overpayments, and they garnished his benefits.

The staff in my office worked with the VA to resolve James's issues, but this should never have happened in the first place. It is fixed now. He had to go through that. To his credit, to James's credit, he wanted to make sure his experience, which was uncomfortable—or worse at times—would change policy and affect future veterans so they wouldn't have to go through this, which is why I admire him so much.

This story is too common. In 2016, the VA issued some 200,000 overpayment notices to veterans. When this happens, the agency often tries to get its money back by withholding some or all of the monthly disability payments our veterans have earned. Our veterans deal with enough stress already. They shouldn't be forced to pay for the VA's accounting mistakes.

Our bill would ban the VA from charging veterans for its own mistake in overpayments. It should protect veterans' payments who depend on their benefits by capping the amount the VA can deduct from a veteran's monthly payment at 25 percent. It would ban the VA from collecting debts that are more than 5 years old.

Our veterans sacrifice so much already to serve our country. I am the first Ohioan to ever serve a full term. I have been on this committee now for 12 years, the Veterans' Affairs Committee. I am on that committee because we should serve those who serve us. We should protect those who protect us. The veterans shouldn't be paying for the mistakes of the agency that is supposed to serve them.

Unfortunately, our bill was not included in the National Defense Authorization Act last week. Instead, we have an amendment to the MILCON-VA bill to require the VA to track down these overpayments and report to Congress on the scope of VA debt. We will continue to push for the Tester-Boozman bill, but I hope all of my colleagues will join me in supporting this bipartisan, commonsense step toward fixing VA overpayment and debt for America's veterans.

I yield the floor.

Ms. HASSAN. Mr. President, I have submitted amendment No. 2955 to H.R. 5895 on behalf of Senator JEANNE SHAHEEN. I strongly support the provision's intent to ensure that veterans in New Hampshire receive the best possible care.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. TILLIS). The majority leader.

CLOTURE MOTION

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, I send a cloture motion to the desk for amendment No. 2910.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The cloture motion having been presented under rule XXII, the Chair directs the clerk to read the motion.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

CLOTURE MOTION

We, the undersigned Senators, in accordance with the provisions of rule XXII of the Standing Rules of the Senate, do hereby move to bring to a close debate on the Senate amendment No. 2910 to Calendar No. 449, H.R. 5895, an act making appropriations for energy and water development and related agencies for the fiscal year ending September 30, 2019, and for other purposes.

John Thune, Todd Young, Lamar Alexander, John Boozman, Ben Sasse, Johnny Isakson, Thom Tillis, Cindy Hyde-Smith, David Perdue, John Cornyn, Patrick J. Toomey, Pat Roberts, Jeff Flake, Mike Rounds, Mike Crapo, Tim Scott, Mitch McConnell.

CLOTURE MOTION

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, I send a cloture motion to the desk for the bill H.R. 5895.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The cloture motion having been presented under rule XXII, the Chair directs the clerk to read the motion.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

CLOTURE MOTION

We, the undersigned Senators, in accordance with the provisions of rule XXII of the Standing Rules of the Senate, do hereby move to bring to a close debate on Calendar No. 449, H.R. 5895, an act making appropriations for energy and water development and related agencies for the fiscal year ending September 30, 2019, and for other purposes.

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Mr. MCCONNELL. I ask unanimous consent that the mandatory quorum calls be waived.

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

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, here is where we are. I filed cloture, but we anticipate that will not actually be necessary and we will be able to vitiate the cloture motions tomorrow because we anticipate being able to process additional amendments throughout the day and wrap the bill up sometime tomorrow afternoon. But there will be an opportunity during the day to continue to process amendments, and we should be able to finish the bill this week without resorting to cloture.

MORNING BUSINESS

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate be in a period of morning business, with Senators permitted to speak therein for up to 10 minutes each.

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

VOTE EXPLANATION

Mr. NELSON. Mr. President, I was necessarily absent for the June 19, 2018, vote on Senate amendment 2914 to Sen-

ate amendment 2910 to H.R. 5895, Energy and Water, Legislative Branch, and Military Construction and Veterans Affairs Appropriations Act, 2019. I would have voted yea.

Mr. President, I was necessarily absent for the June 19, 2018, vote on Senate amendment 2920 to Senate amendment 2910 to H.R. 5895, Energy and Water, Legislative Branch, and Military Construction and Veterans Affairs Appropriations Act, 2019. I would have voted yea.

WORLD REFUGEE DAY

Mr. MENENDEZ. Mr. President, I rise today in honor of World Refugee Day and to express my deep concern over the Trump administration's systematic assault on refugees, asylum seekers, and the United States' refugee resettlement program.

Manmade conflict, natural disasters, poverty, and violence have left the world in the midst of the largest refugee crisis in recorded history with over 25 million refugees worldwide. Tragically, less than 1 percent of these individuals will ever be resettled to a third country.

The United States was built on the hopes and dreams of those fleeing persecution and oppression, those seeking better lives for themselves and their families. The values and moral compass that embraced these individuals and shone as a beacon of freedom have made this country great. In times of crisis, the United States traditionally asserted global leadership through these values that have made this country so successful. That leadership served as an important uniting and motivating voice in the face of tremendous international challenges.

Unfortunately, instead of asserting moral and strategic leadership, the Trump administration has chosen to retreat. The President has traded in our proud tradition of lifting up the most vulnerable for an agenda of degrading and insulting those who seek our support. Starting with his assertion that Mexicans are "rapists" and "drug dealers," this President has spent his tenure as our Nation's leader attacking America's immigrant and refugee communities. The President said he wanted to protect Dreamers; yet he abruptly ended the DACA program throwing the lives of 800,000 people into great uncertainty. He imposed a slap-dash Muslim ban that has been repeatedly struck down by the courts. He has slowed refugee admissions to a trickle, closing America's doors to some of the most vulnerable people on the planet, reducing America's global leadership standing.

Driven by vitriolic voices, the President and the Attorney General together have worked to effectively destroy the refugee resettlement program, which traditionally received broad bipartisan support. Last September, the President decreed that the number of refugees to be admitted in