

leader with Mr. Azar's extensive qualifications and excellent reputation. He will be responsible for overseeing \$1.13 trillion in Department spending, supervising critical research, and administering and reforming programs that touch millions of American lives, such as Medicare and Medicaid.

I look forward to voting soon in support of his confirmation.

TAX REFORM

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, the rising tide of economic optimism I have been highlighting on the floor is not showing any signs of subsiding.

Yesterday alone, three of the Nation's largest companies announced major new investments in the U.S. economy and workforce. Each said that their decisions were made possible by the improved business climate created by the landmark Tax Code overhaul that Congress passed last year.

First, Verizon announced plans to invest a chunk of its tax reform savings right back into its employees. Next month, about 155,000 Verizon workers, including senior management, will receive stock bonuses valued around \$2,500. Additional savings will also go to expanded philanthropy and infrastructure investments right here in America.

Further, the Walt Disney Company announced a new investment of at least \$175 million in its U.S. workforce. Over 125,000 employees will receive cash bonuses, and Disney will invest \$50 million in an employee education program designed to help hourly employees access higher education and vocational training.

JPMorgan Chase announced a \$20 billion, 5-year comprehensive investment plan to support economic growth and American workers. That plan includes permanent raises for 22,000 employees, hundreds of new bank branches across the country, thousands of new jobs, expanded philanthropy, and an increase in loans for affordable housing and small business development.

Just this morning, Starbucks has announced it is permanently raising pay and conferring new benefits, like one-time stock bonuses and expanded paid leave. This major investment in its U.S. workforce will affect more than 150,000 employees.

So the good news about tax reform and its benefits is rolling in almost faster than I can keep up with it. In retrospect, the surprise here is not that this tax relief has boosted the American economy; the real surprise is that those who opposed tax reform didn't see it coming.

RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the leadership time is reserved.

CONCLUSION OF MORNING BUSINESS

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Morning business is closed.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

EXECUTIVE CALENDAR

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate will proceed to executive session to resume consideration of the following nomination, which the clerk will report.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read the nomination of Alex Michael Azar II, of Indiana, to be Secretary of Health and Human Services.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The assistant Democratic leader.

DACA

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, we have 14 days, by our own established deadline, to do something about the Dreamers issue—about DACA.

Why do we find ourselves at this place? Because on September 5 of last year, President Trump, as well as Attorney General Sessions, announced the end of the DACA protection program as of March 5 this year. The 780,000 young people who were undocumented in the United States and who came here as children were given a chance by President Obama to stay legally, be able to work legally, and not fear deportation. For the most part, they are students and workers who are a vital part of the community, and they have done good things in their lives and promised to do even more.

This issue was created by the decision made by President Trump to put an end to this program. He made that decision. He also challenged Congress. He said: If we are going to end this Executive order, do something. Pass a law.

Well, here we are, just about at the fifth month out of the 6-month period he gave us to get down to work, and nothing has happened. Some of us have been working on this issue, trying to address it on a bipartisan basis in the hope that this Republican-controlled Congress would join with enough Democrats to solve the problem that the President presented.

I have worked with five of my colleagues—three Democrats and three Republicans—to craft a bill that we believe addresses the issue in a fair way. Compromise was included in that bill—some that I didn't like at all, but that is the nature of a compromise and bipartisanship.

We presented this bill to our colleagues, and we also attended a meeting on January 9 with President Trump in which he addressed this issue. Here it was, 4 months after he issued the challenge to Congress, and he basically told us: It is time to get this done. He said to us—and this was televised, so you can check my remarks if there is any question about what I am saying.

He said to us, basically: Send me a bill, and I will sign it. I will take the political heat on this issue.

Then the Republican leader on the House side, KEVIN MCCARTHY said that it ought to include the following four elements: first, DACA and the Dreamers; second, border security; third, family reunification issues; and finally, the visa lottery system, the diversity system that we had established years ago.

That is when I sat down and said to my fellow Senators—Democrats and Republicans, our little gang: We have to get this done. The President has challenged us, and he said that he is prepared to move forward if we can come up with a response. So we did. We came to an agreement among ourselves—the six Senators who had been meeting.

We presented it to the President through Senator LINDSEY GRAHAM of South Carolina, a Republican, on January 11. He rejected it.

So as of today, we really don't have a bill before us, and we are starting anew with a conversation about what to do to meet the President's challenge but equally, if not more importantly, to say to the 780,000 young people and those who were eligible to apply: This is what your future will be.

We have had our ups and downs, and it was a rocky weekend just a few days ago relative to funding the government and whether we were going to take up this issue. I thought it ended on a positive note when Senator MCCONNELL came to the floor and made an express promise to this Chamber—to Members on both sides of the aisle. I am going to try to characterize it, and I think this is accurate. Check the RECORD, if you don't think I say it quite right. But he said: If we have not reached an agreement on this issue by February 8, at that point, we will open a process on the floor of the Senate with what he characterized as a level playing field and an open amendment process. That, to me, is an opportunity, but I hope we can avoid that opportunity and reach an agreement, as he asked us to, by February 8. We have 14 days left. I would like to involve the House in this conversation so that we might reach a common agreement, but unfortunately, they are on recess this week. Those of us who were sitting and talking about it don't have a chance to get together with them. However, I am heartened by the fact that a number of my colleagues on the Republican side of the aisle are going to join a number on the Democratic side of the aisle this afternoon and start what we hope will be a productive process to reach a bipartisan agreement and do it in a timely way, as suggested and challenged by Senator MCCONNELL. To achieve this goal, I think we understand we are going to have to be mindful of one another and mindful of the realities we face. There are a lot of issues relative to immigration. The list is pretty lengthy. There are important issues that should be considered.

It is unrealistic to think we are going to propose or even agree on a bipartisan and comprehensive immigration bill in 14 days. What we can do is address the President's challenge dealing with DACA and those DACA-eligible, so-called Dreamers. What we can do is address border security in a realistic and honest way.

I took a look this morning at some of the publications of the Department of Homeland Security to try to get an understanding of what our challenge is when it comes to the undocumented of the United States. Where do they come from? How do they come to this country and how do they stay in this country if they don't have legal authority to do so?

For example, the Department of Homeland Security tells us that each year 50 million—50 million—visitors come to the United States from visa waiver countries. Those who are visiting from those countries have not gone through an application process to visit the United States. They carry a passport from a country we have an understanding or agreement with that they can travel back and forth. Think about the European countries, for example, where we can travel extensively back and forth between there and the United States.

Out of those 50 million, about 1.5 percent end up staying longer than they are supposed to. We end up with hundreds and thousands of undocumented people here by visa overstays. Forty percent of all those who are in this country undocumented came here by visa overstays. There is no wall you can build on the border of Mexico and Canada that is going to solve that problem. This is a problem that really relies on technology, which we should be investing in and which we can invest in on a bipartisan basis.

So if your true goal is the reduction of the undocumented in America and trying to make sure there is legal status for as many as possible and you are looking at the incremental growth each year, you wouldn't look to the border first. You would look to the visa overstays first. Those are the ones who are slipping through the system, who should be policed and monitored with new technology.

We have talked about it for decades. It is time to do something about it but also to concede, as I said, that no wall is going to stop that problem—no wall is going to solve that problem.

When I take a look at the asylum issue, which I wouldn't say I am amused, but I would say I am interested—it is one that is always raised by the Department of Homeland Security; those who present themselves in the United States at the border or otherwise and suggest they have a credible fear in returning to their home country. It is interesting to look at the statistics because we find out that even though there may be this notion that they are primarily from Mexico, they are not. They are primarily from coun-

tries in the Northern Triangle of Central America. There is also a large contingent each year from China.

So if we are talking about the asylum issue and not addressing all of the countries who are the major suppliers of those seeking asylum in the United States, then we are not talking about it in honest terms or in its entirety as we should.

I might mention that China, along with 22 other countries, does not even have an agreement with the United States in terms of deportation, according to the report from the Department of Homeland Security. There is a lot we can do there to make sure China and those countries comply with the United States when we say we are deporting someone from your country that we find to be a danger to us, and rather than incarcerate them here, you get to have them back. They are yours. They shouldn't be here in the first place. When we talk about dealing with the issues of the undocumented, the issues of security in this country, many of these are not going to be solved with a wall. They are going to be solved if we deal with technology and look in honest terms and count real numbers about those coming from different parts of the world.

I also want to address this issue about unaccompanied children coming to our border. I understand that challenge. The numbers have risen dramatically in prior years, and we have to take it seriously.

I followed some of those children from the border to a protective gathering they have in Chicago in a place called Heartland Alliance, and I went in to meet them. I was shocked when I went into the cafeteria to see that some of these children were as young as 6 years of age, 6 years old presenting themselves at a border of the United States. What circumstances could have led to that? It is possible it was a smuggler who either threatened or exploited the family and ended up with a child, pushed them across the border into the arms of one of our Border Patrol agents. That is possible. That is something we should do everything we can to stop. That is an exploitation of that child. That child is likely to be abused in the process of this immigration, and it is something we ought to do everything we can to discourage, but to simply turn away children at the border is a dangerous thing. What are we going to do with that 6-year-old from Honduras or El Salvador or Guatemala at the border when they establish, through a written note or whatever, that there is a credible fear for them returning to their country? Do we ignore it? Do we turn them back to their country regardless? We better be careful. Awful things can happen.

What do we do with the 12-year-old or 13-year-old girl who is a victim of rape and sexual assault in one of those countries, who was sent to the United States and our border because her parents believed she was about to be raped

again or killed? Do we turn her back or send her back and ignore the reality?

I commend to my colleagues and others who follow this debate an article that was written in the New Yorker last week by Sarah Stillman. It was entitled "When Deportation Is A Death Sentence." She followed the terrible story of a young woman who was undocumented, who was stopped, and who said over and over again: If you send me back to Mexico, that husband of mine is going to kill me. There have been protective orders issued. He is a dangerous man. She was sent back anyway, and she was killed.

These are complex situations not easily answered with the common definition that anyone who presents themselves to the border with such credible fears is going to be turned away without any consideration about the merits of that claim. We have to be careful. Human lives hang in the balance. Our reputation as a caring and principled Nation hangs in the balance as well.

We need to do the right thing. Stop the exploitation when it occurs but also be mindful and sensitive to the fact that many people who do present themselves seeking asylum are truly leaving desperate circumstances and trying to find a safe place for themselves and their families.

So the conversation continues this afternoon, on a bipartisan basis, among the Senators in the U.S. Senate to meet the President's challenge, to accept that challenge, and to come up with a bipartisan measure.

I don't know the position of the President of the United States now. I couldn't express it after the experience we had a couple of weeks ago. I don't know where he stands. He has never issued anything by way of a suggestive piece of legislation. We haven't heard from him.

So we have to do our part. We have to meet our responsibility in the Senate, hope the House does the same, and at some point the White House would join us in solving this problem, which the President actually created on September 5 of last year.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant 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.

DISASTER RELIEF AND FUNDING OUR MILITARY

Mr. CORNYN. Mr. President, on Monday, Democrats relented after 3 long days and allowed the government to reopen. They agreed to pass a continuing resolution to reopen the government until February 8.

I am glad they finally decided to fund the Children's Health Insurance Program on which 9 million vulnerable children rely as well as fund our military and essential government entities