

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

that could not operate during the shutdown. Now we have to work on other items that have been stalled and held hostage too.

The first is disaster aid, which has been held up for months. The House of Representatives passed an \$81 billion disaster relief bill back in December, but so far that package has gone nowhere in the Senate. That is incredibly disappointing and exacerbates the hardships to the victims of Hurricane Irma and Hurricane Harvey, as well as the folks out West who suffered extreme wildfires, floods, and mudslides. They need to get access to that \$81 billion of disaster relief funding the House passed last December, but that too has been held hostage in the U.S. Senate.

It is especially disappointing in my home State of Texas. I just got off the phone talking with Governor Abbott, who is perplexed—the kindest word I can think of—as to why we would continue to delay disaster relief to the people who suffered as a result of Hurricane Harvey.

I am sure Governor Scott in Florida feels the same way. I am sure Governor Brown out in California feels the same way. I am sure the Governors of Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands feel the same way. What is wrong with Congress? Why can't they take up and pass an \$81 billion disaster relief supplemental that the House sent the Senate in December?

Last August, Hurricane Harvey devastated 28,000 square miles on the Texas coast. It has been called the most extreme rain event in history, certainly in the history of the United States. Highways were flooded. Thousands of homes were gutted. Places like Port Arthur, Beaumont, and Houston have not returned to normal. Routines are disrupted, shops and businesses remain closed, and houses are being renovated or rebuilt. But because of the size and the scope of the devastation, it is hard to get building supplies and it is hard to get the workers to rebuild these damaged homes and businesses.

In Rockport, where I visited over Thanksgiving, Harvey made landfall with 150-mile-per-hour winds and a 13-foot storm surge. As of the end of December, 284 families were reported to still lack permanent housing. Some people are even living in tents.

Rockport Mayor C.J. Wax said that 70 percent of businesses in Rockport remain closed—70 percent. According to the Federal Emergency Management Agency, one-third of Rockport is so badly damaged that it will be impossible to rebuild. Think about that. Think if this hit your hometown. One-third of your hometown is so badly damaged by a natural disaster that it will not be rebuilt, and 70 percent of the businesses in your hometown are closed and haven't reopened. Think of how you would feel.

Over in Nueces County, meanwhile, which includes Corpus Christi and Port Aransas, officials have been frustrated because they haven't received the tem-

porary housing assistance they need. Although FEMA—the Federal Emergency Management Agency—continues to marshal the full extent of its resources to help some people, for various reasons, many people are still living in motels and, as I said, even tents. This is completely unacceptable in the United States of America, especially while the House of Representatives has acted to produce a disaster relief bill, but it has been held hostage here in the Senate. This isn't a Democratic issue or a Republican issue; this is something we should be clamoring to solve—and not only clamoring, we should be acting to vote on that disaster relief today.

Stories like these are why we need to move additional funds for disaster relief without delay. It is not just Texas, as I said, it is Floridians, Puerto Ricans, and people who live in the Virgin Islands and the wildfire-ravaged parts of California as well. The Senate has been dragging its feet long enough, and the longer we wait, the more people forget.

I remember when the President and Mrs. Trump, along with the President's entire Cabinet, came down to Texas after Hurricane Harvey. The Speaker of the House, the majority leader of the House, and leaders on both sides of the aisle came down to Texas and said: We want to help. And the House has. The House passed an \$81 billion disaster relief bill. But this unrelated immigration issue shut down the government. This is another one of the hostages that need to be released.

June 1 is the beginning of hurricane season, and it is imperative that flood mitigation and storm surge protection projects begin without further delay. With support from Harris County, the city of Houston and members of the engineering community have identified the necessary projects, but we can't get started until we pass a disaster relief supplemental similar to the one the House passed in December. I talked to Mayor Turner of Houston, TX, one of the largest cities in the United States. He is beside himself, knowing that the House has passed this appropriation but that the Senate doesn't seem anywhere near to taking it up. It is hard for me to explain to him why the Senate has not acted. The simple fact is, this disaster relief should not be held hostage any longer.

Amidst the disaster, I do want to mention one piece of good news on the hurricane front. I am glad that FEMA has responded to Members of Congress who asked that they accept applications for relief from nonprofits, like houses of worship, that were affected by Hurricane Harvey.

This is a picture of one of the synagogues I attended in the Meyerland community in Houston, TX, which shows some of the devastation the synagogue there experienced. The rabbi asked me: Would you please go back to Washington and see whether, on a non-sectarian basis, you can get FEMA to

expand its relief efforts to respond to houses of worship, many of which use or volunteer their facilities for community meetings and the like. So it is good to know that churches, synagogues, and other houses of worship will be able to get that sort of relief.

This is the United Orthodox Synagogue that I visited after Harvey, where, as I mentioned, I saw this firsthand and had that discussion with the rabbi.

The other issue we have to address is budget caps. This is another issue which has been held hostage by this unrelated immigration issue known as DACA, which everybody has heard so much about now. In conversations regarding the budget caps—these are the spending levels for this current fiscal year.

The fiscal year of the U.S. Government lasts from October 1 to September 30, and we are already well into the fiscal year. We are in January. So we have already been on continuing resolutions because the spending caps have not been agreed to, and we all know why by now—because our Democratic colleagues refuse to agree to the spending caps, so we can get a spending bill that funds the military and the rest of government, until they get a solution for the DACA issue. This is another hostage that has been taken. I am very worried about its impact on our military because we already know that our military is in dire straits when it comes to readiness, and they can't operate on a 3-week continuing resolution, which is the one we are on now. Even if the spending caps were agreed to today, it would take the Appropriations Committee a matter of additional weeks to come up with a bill we could vote on.

As a result of the shutdown, the Democratic leader—who said he voted against the 4-week continuing resolution because he didn't like continuing resolutions—has guaranteed us at least two more continuing resolutions even if the spending caps were agreed upon in the next few days. This is terrible for the Pentagon, the people we depend upon to defend us and keep our country safe. This is an impossible situation for them to manage and to be as effective and efficient as we want them to be.

The Defense Department has been operating under continuing resolutions for more than 36 months since 2010—36 months since 2010. By way of comparison, in the previous 8 years, the military was funded that way for less than 9 months. The consequences are clear, and they are deadly. Many of the mishaps that have involved our naval vessels, such as the *McCain* and the *Fitzgerald*, are the result of sailors spread thin, budgets spread thin, not enough training, and not enough preparation for the challenges they face. So these mishaps occur, and people die.

The Wall Street Journal reports that only 5 of 58 brigade combat teams in the Army are prepared to fight. Only 5 out of 58 are prepared to fight. Now, I

don't think our adversaries should take any comfort from that because I know Americans well enough to know that if there were an imminent threat, we would rise to the occasion and make sure that all 58 of them were prepared to fight, but right now, 5 out of 58. The U.S. Air Force, which provides the airpower, is short 2,000 pilots.

Our military dominance across the globe is never guaranteed, and we know there are many signs that our military dominance is eroding. When American power erodes, when we retreat, either for policy or fiscal reasons, there are other people more than happy to fill the void. When that happens, the world becomes a more dangerous place, miscalculations occur, and conflict breaks out.

Defense Secretary Jim Mattis put the matter succinctly last year when he said: "For all of the heartache caused by the loss of troops during [our recent] wars, no enemy in the field has done more to harm the combat readiness of our military than sequestration." He might have said "Congress" because Congress is responsible for sequestration. Unfortunately, General Mattis is right. Our soldiers, sailors, airmen, and marines who so bravely serve our country deserve all of the political and financial support we can muster.

We need to quit fooling ourselves into believing that our security won't be negatively impacted by our current funding approach. We need to quit dawdling and raise the defense spending caps without further delay. It is dangerous not to do so, and lives have been lost as a result of the lack of readiness caused by underfunding our military.

Yesterday when the Senate Democratic leader spoke, he said that common sense and bipartisanship won and the government reopened. As conversations addressing spending caps and disaster relief continue, we need to make sure that those two things continue to prevail—common sense and bipartisanship—particularly when it comes to funding our military and other critical government functions, and to make sure they are no longer held hostage to an unrelated immigration issue that we are working on as hard as we know how to do. We understand the clock is ticking, and both political parties are demonstrating their good faith in working to solve that problem. So let's let these other hostages go.

BENTON, KENTUCKY, HIGH SCHOOL SHOOTING

Finally, Mr. President, on a different note, I want to extend my condolences to the men and women affected by the school shooting yesterday at a high school in Benton, KY. Two 15-year-old students were killed and more than 18 more were injured.

Sadly, my State is no stranger to these kinds of tragedies. There was a shooting in Italy, TX, outside of Dallas, on Monday. Of course, everybody remembers the shooting last fall at the First Baptist Church in Sutherland Springs, where 26 people were killed and 20 more were injured.

Each time these events happen, I fear that we become more desensitized to these terrible tragedies, and when we are desensitized, we are paralyzed. But we must not be desensitized, and we must not be paralyzed. We must work together to do everything we can to meet this challenge. So it is important for us to work together to find common ground that will improve public safety by targeting criminals who perpetrate acts of mass violence—people who have been convicted of domestic violence, felons, people who have been adjudicated mentally ill.

All of them are disqualified from purchasing firearms. When they lie to the federally licensed firearm dealer who runs the background check, unless those items are reported to the FBI and recorded on that background check, they can get away with a lie, as the shooter in Sutherland Springs did when he had at least three disqualifying events in his life. He had been in a mental institution; he had been convicted of domestic violence—fractured the skull of his stepson in the process and assaulted his wife; and he was a convicted felon. There is no way in the world he should have gotten access to a firearm—except he lied about it. Because the Air Force refused to do its duty and upload those convictions into the background check system, he got away with it.

One way we can begin to address at least some of these horrific incidents is through commonsense bipartisan solutions, such as the Fix NICS Act bill that I introduced. I am beyond gratified to know that many of our colleagues on the Democratic side and on the Republican side have come together to cosponsor this legislation.

When it comes to guns in America, so much of your attitude is a product of where you were raised and how you were raised. In Texas, most Texans believe strongly in the Second Amendment to the U.S. Constitution. I do too. I believe in the right of law-abiding citizens to keep and bear firearms, but I also believe the background check system needs to be fixed. Commonsense, bipartisan solutions like the Fix NICS Act are critical, and we need to act without further delay.

I am gratified that the Democratic leader and the majority leader are among those who cosponsored this legislation, and I hope we will take it up as soon as possible. When these terrible tragedies occur—like this one in Kentucky or the one in Italy, TX, most recently—most people say: We need to do something. We do need to do something, but specifically, we need to fix the broken background check system and save lives in the process.

I don't know how any of us can go home and look into the faces of families who have lost loved ones because people have lied and evaded the background check system because it doesn't work the way it should—I don't know how we can go home and look these families and victims in the face and

say we have done our duty. Until we pass this legislation, we will not have done our duty.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

RECOGNITION OF THE DEMOCRATIC LEADER

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Democratic leader is recognized.

DACA

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, the government funding bill that passed on Monday left us—all of us—with 3 weeks to come to a resolution on legislation to protect the Dreamers. At the same time, we must work on legislation to improve American healthcare—I see the Senator from Washington State, who has been so vigilant in that area—and a budget agreement that supports our military and our middle class, delivering long-awaited funds—we Democrats will insist on these—for the opioid epidemic, veterans' healthcare, and pensions. We should feel an urgency about all of these issues and many more that we can make happen.

Leader McConnell's promise to take up immigration on February 8 should light a fire under everyone. The Republican leader and moderate Republicans bear a special responsibility to make sure these votes happen. All of those in the country who want to make sure the Dreamers get treated fairly should be focusing their attention on getting 60 votes on a resolution that is fair to the Dreamers.

The clock is ticking. If we don't solve this problem in 14 days, the Republicans are going to have to explain to Dreamers what their plan is to prevent them from being deported. When those horrible pictures of deportation occur—God forbid that they do, but if they do, it will clearly be on the delay, the obfuscation, and the lack of humanity that too many of our Republican colleagues are showing in this regard.

Every Democrat—all 49 of us—supports DACA. Many of my Republican colleagues do as well. We certainly can find a bill that gets 60 votes in the Senate, and that is where our focus is. I had a very good meeting with the Hispanic groups yesterday. Some of us had disagreements about what happened a few days before, but it was an amiable and fine meeting, and we all agreed that we were going to focus on getting the 60 votes. I hope people throughout the country of both parties, of all political persuasions—business, labor—will join us like a laser in appealing to and imploring more Republican Senators to join us so that we get 60 votes on a fair DACA bill.

We cannot let those who are anti-immigrant, who call giving the Dreamers hope "amnesty," block us because then we will fail, and it will be on the other side of the aisle that made that happen.

Over the weekend—and I am very glad about this—a bipartisan group of moderate Senators from both parties came together in a very inspiring way. Their efforts led to the agreement between the majority leader and me that an immigration bill will receive fair