

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

consideration in a few weeks. That is the first time we have ever heard that guarantee.

The same energy and spirit that the bipartisan group put into forging a compromise this weekend ought to be committed to finding a bill on DACA that will pass this body with 60 votes.

I support the bipartisan group. In fact, as some of our Members on the Democratic side had plans for it, I encourage them to join it and form it. I have had very good conversations with both leaders—Senator MANCHIN, a Democrat; Senator COLLINS, a Republican—and what they are doing is very good for the body. Speaking as Democratic leader, I encourage these kinds of groups to come forward.

I remember the old Senate. I remember that individual Senators were involved in negotiating very important and very difficult issues. It made the Senate a better place, it made the Members feel more fulfilled, and it made our ability to get things done much, much more likely.

Our task is different from the task last week. The Senate must find consensus. For that reason, we need to start from a new place. My negotiations with the President shouldn't dictate talks here on the Hill. That was then; this is now. It was a hope that last Friday the President would have reached out and supported something, that he wanted to get something that we wanted and he proclaimed to want too. It didn't happen. Now the group has to start in a new way, with no preconceptions, and come together and find a bill that can garner 60 votes. That is a job for these Senators who came together so well in the last few days.

Protecting the Dreamers is our moral obligation. The Senate is now in the spotlight. The eyes of the American people, who overwhelmingly sympathize with the Dreamers—90 percent, a majority of Republicans—believe in these Dreamers. They don't go for these calls of amnesty. These people have worked hard. They have been trying so hard to be Americans. They came across the border when they were little, and now they are in our Armed Forces, they are in our factories, they are in our schools, and they are in our offices. To say that allowing them to become Americans is amnesty is nasty—nasty.

Protecting the Dreamers is our moral obligation. The Senate is in the spotlight. The eyes of the American people, who sympathize with the Dreamers—the vast majority of Republicans, as well as Democrats, sympathize with Dreamers, and all of their eyes are on us. We need to get the job done.

REPUBLICAN TAX BILL

Mr. President, finally, a word on the Republican tax bill. Republicans promised that the massive corporate tax cut they passed would unleash unprecedented economic growth, raise wages, and boost jobs. We already have evidence that big corporations are not

turning their new tax cut into jobs for the middle class.

There was a lot of hoopla when AT&T said they would give bonuses. Do you know what they did at the same time? They announced plans to fire more than 1,000 workers, starting early this year, despite the tax cut. Macy's announced that it would be cutting 5,000 jobs, despite the tax bill. Kimberly-Clark plans to cut up to 5,500 jobs and close or sell about 10 plants, saying the savings from the tax bill gave them flexibility to make these reductions. Is President Trump going to claim credit for that one? Carrier—a company the President promised to save—continues to bleed jobs. They are a metaphor. A lot of nice announcements, a lot of blitz and glitz, but actually the condition of the American worker is getting no better and many times, worse.

Meanwhile, what are most companies doing—so many of them—with these big tax breaks, these massive tax breaks they got? They are announcing stock buybacks. That benefits the CEO. It raises their stock and doesn't help anybody else. Mastercard, \$4 billion; Bank of America, \$5 billion; Pfizer, \$10 billion; Wells Fargo, \$22 billion; and many, many more. One hundred billion dollars has been announced in stock buybacks since the Senate passed its tax bill.

When the American people learn that some of them are not getting anything, that some of them are getting raises and the rest are getting crumbs and big corporations and wealthy individuals are getting nice, fat pieces of pie, they are going to be outraged. They are already.

My friend the majority leader will not come to the floor and brag about the stock buybacks. He will, however, announce when a company gives a bonus to its workers. Let's hear both sides and let the American people judge. The bonuses are a good thing, but the truth is, these one-time bonuses are a drop in the bucket compared to what corporations could be doing for their workers.

By the way, let me announce a few other things these corporations did after they got the tax breaks. When Bank of America announced \$5 billion in stock buybacks, it also announced that it started charging low-income customers for free checking. When Pfizer announced its \$10 billion buyback, it said it would no longer research for Alzheimer's or Parkinson's, laying off 300 people. Wells Fargo announced \$22 billion in stock buybacks, helping its wealthy shareholders at the same time it is closing 800 branches.

Here is a paragraph from yesterday's New York Times.

Bank of America's bonuses will cost the bank \$145 million in 2018, or about 5 percent of the nearly \$2.7 billion in savings it is expected to reap in 2018 from a lower, 21 percent corporate tax rate. Apple's bonuses will cost \$300 million, a fraction of the \$40 billion, at least, that the tech giant is saving from a single provision in the law, which allows it to return earnings held overseas at less than

half the rate it would have paid under the old system. And two days before Walmart snagged glowing headlines for handing out \$400 million in bonuses and lifting its minimum wage at a cost of \$300 million, the nation's largest retailer by sales unveiled a plan to buy back company-issued debt. . . . \$4 billion.

Minimum wage, they pay out \$300 million; stock buyback, \$4 billion.

I am glad these workers are getting bonuses. They deserve them. But it seems that recently, these bonuses are token efforts to give corporate executives something to point to while they reap huge benefits for themselves and their shareholders.

A CNBC survey found that "cuts in corporate taxes haven't yet had a meaningful impact on American companies' plans to boost investment or raise workers' pay." That is CNBC.

Yes, we could have imagined tax reform that was deficit neutral, that closed loopholes while lowering rates, that lowered corporate taxes but actually stipulated that the money be put into wage increases and new jobs instead of what many companies are doing now—one-time bonuses and massive stock repurchasing programs. Many middle-class families have waited so long for better wages and more jobs. A tax bill properly constructed could have helped deliver that to them. Instead, Republicans squandered their once-in-a-generation opportunity on an extraordinary tax break for big corporations and the already wealthy, and we are already seeing the consequences.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. SULLIVAN). The Senator from Washington.

Mrs. MURRAY. Mr. President, almost a year ago, as Republicans were jamming through the confirmation of Tom Price as Secretary of Health and Human Services, I rose to object to his nomination. I voiced my very deep concerns about whether Secretary Price would be committed to protecting healthcare for our families, committed to putting evidence and sound policy over partisanship and ideology, and whether he would be committed to addressing the many ethical questions about his investments Republicans allowed to go unanswered. Well, he was not.

Today, Secretary Price is infamous for two signature accomplishments: first of all, undermining healthcare access for millions of people; and, second, resigning in scandal and disgrace.

In the wake of Secretary Price's resignation, President Trump had another opportunity to get this right. I believe families in Washington State deserve a Health and Human Services Secretary who will finally put patients ahead of politics.

Unfortunately, after meeting with Alex Azar, hearing his testimony, and carefully reviewing his record and his qualifications, I do not believe Mr. Azar is an acceptable choice to lead the Department, and I will be voting against his confirmation.