

oligarchs that seems to match a list already put together by Forbes magazine. This is a reflection of the lack of seriousness with which they took up this task.

When it comes to sanctions, the White House has engaged in a dangerous Kabuki theater that tries to show strength when in fact there is none. These actions are not good enough. They are for show.

Why is the President so afraid to sanction Putin, his associates, or other corrupt Russian actors and officials? Why is President Trump giving Putin a free pass after he attacked our democracy? What is he so afraid of? The American people are asking that question, and they have their answers.

Only a year after a hostile foreign power shook the very bedrock of our democracy, any other President would spend his first State of the Union talking about efforts that were underway to punish the abuser and prevent such an attack from ever recurring. Why not this President?

If President Trump wishes to save his Presidency from the shame of having failed to address one of the gravest threats threatening our country, he will announce this evening in no uncertain terms that he is sanctioning President Putin. Any other President would have already made it their priority to take decisive action in their first year, but this President is paralyzed when it comes to Putin and his cronies in Russia.

Here are two words the President may not say tonight: "Russia sanctions"—but he ought to.

I yield the floor.

**THE PRESIDING OFFICER.** The Senator from Colorado.

**HONORING SHERIFF'S DEPUTY HEATH GUMM**

**MR. GARDNER.** Mr. President, I rise to speak about a horrible tragedy that occurred in Adams County, CO, on January 24, just last week. Adams County sheriff's deputy Heath Gumm was pursuing a suspect when he was shot and killed in the line of duty.

Heath was 31 years old and is survived by his wife and other loving family members. He had served with the Adams County Sheriff's Office since 2012, which was not a surprise to those who knew him best, because of his upbringing.

He grew up in a family of first responders. His father is a retired West Metro Fire Protection District engineer. So his teachers and classmates who knew Heath as a student at Mullen High School, in Denver, were not shocked to learn that he had decided to become a law enforcement officer.

As reported by the Denver Post, Heath's ninth grade English teacher, Sean Keefe, said:

By all accounts, he lived his life as a grown man as he did as a kid. He was a good guy. That didn't change. That only got more accentuated as he grew up. He lifted his friends. He made his friends the best version of themselves, and they did that to him as well.

Heath's cousin remembers him as the "kind of man you wanted out there protecting our streets. He was kind, fair, funny and friendly to everyone."

Keefe went on to remember Heath as "someone people gravitated towards, and he was someone who people could count on."

It is these qualities that made Heath such an incredible sheriff's deputy.

At a press conference last Thursday, Adams County sheriff Michael McIntosh read parts of a letter he had received from a stranded motorist whom Heath had recently helped when he was out on patrol.

The resident wrote: "Heath made the interaction enjoyable and easy to get through instead of acting like I was in trouble or a nuisance."

Heath showed what it means to be a law enforcement officer who selflessly serves and protects a community. He went to work each and every day—ready to walk that thin blue line.

When we lose an officer in Colorado, I come to this Chamber to honor his sacrifice and recite the words of LTC Dave Grossman, who wrote that American law enforcement is the loyal and brave sheepdog who is always standing watch for the wolf that lurks in the dark.

Unfortunately, many in this Chamber have heard me read that quote far too often in the last weeks.

Across Colorado and across the country, we owe so much to Heath and law enforcement officers for their service. Instead of fleeing to safety, they run toward danger to save lives. They provide hope and safety to our families in the worst of times.

I thank Heath for answering the call. He protected his community. I, along with Coloradans across the State, are forever grateful. We will never forget his sacrifice, and we will always honor his memory.

We also lost a sheriff's deputy on New Year's Eve in Colorado, just a few weeks before. In a tribute to him, I read something that former State Representative Joe Rice had written during his service in the Army. I think it is appropriate to share it now because, each and every day they wake up, I know the thoughts of many in law enforcement are reflected in the words of Representative Joe Rice:

In a few hours, it will be Christmas in Afghanistan. I spent 3 Christmas Days in Iraq. Only on one of them did I have to go out on Christmas Day, itself. I found myself praying that I didn't want to die this day and ruin every future Christmas for my family. I realize that most of the other soldiers I was with were quietly or openly saying the same thing.

So, for all of those around the world who are in harm's way, we pray with you: Please God, just not today.

To our men and women in law enforcement, please know that I pray with you each and every day: Please God, just not this day.

I yield the floor.

**THE PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. KENNEDY).** The Senator from Florida.

#### DISASTER AID

**MR. NELSON.** Mr. President, I am absolutely shocked that FEMA has announced that on Wednesday it will stop distributing food and water to Puerto Rico. Cutting this aid to the people of Puerto Rico, while still almost a third of them do not have electricity, is unconscionable and a travesty.

I urge the administration to reverse this disastrous decision immediately and to continue providing the people of Puerto Rico with the help they need as they are trying to recover from two disastrous hurricanes.

This Senator has been speaking on the floor over and over of their desperate needs, but here I am again to remind our colleagues that Puerto Ricans are American citizens, that they are just like the people of any State, including those in the States of Kentucky, Texas, Wyoming, and in so many of the other States where needs might be forgotten. They are our fellow countrymen, and they deserve the same care and protection that we would provide any other citizen in his time of need. They have supplied some of the greatest warriors of our U.S. military in World War I, World War II, Korea, and on up to the present.

If the people of any other State were being neglected like the people of Puerto Rico have been in the wake of this storm, there would be an absolute outrage in this Senate. The people of Puerto Rico need help, but they are not the only ones. Millions of people were affected by the storms that hit last year in my State of Florida, in the State of Texas, in, of course, the U.S. Virgin Islands, and in Puerto Rico, and many were affected by the wildfires in California.

Right now, many of them are desperately waiting for the Senate to act on a disaster supplemental package to help them recover. We are trying to pass it, and it keeps getting shuffled off into the future. We are trying to add to the supplemental—the necessary disaster aid that is needed in agriculture, particularly for the citrus industry in Florida—the financial assistance that is needed in Puerto Rico. I hope our colleagues in the Senate will understand the urgency of this matter. We cannot keep pushing this off into the future. The need to act is now.

In addition, people in Florida are struggling. We should not neglect what is happening on the mainland. It is true in Texas. It is true in California. It is true in Florida. It is true on the islands. The storm destroyed homes and damaged apartments all around Florida, but we haven't seen any real attempt to address the housing needs of the hurricane victims in the State—by the way, including those coming to Florida from Puerto Rico.

Florida received about \$600 million out of the \$7.4 billion, which was made available in the CDBG-DR, in the September supplemental. What percentage is that of \$7.4 billion? It is much less than 10 percent. It defies comprehension. Florida was one of the places that

was the hardest hit last year. Hurricane Irma virtually covered up the entire peninsula of Florida. It wreaked havoc all across the State. Add to that the aftereffects of Hurricane Maria, with thousands fleeing Puerto Rico and going to Florida, and we have a real housing crisis on our hands. The \$600 million, which is to help those who have been left bare by two of the most devastating storms to hit the country in decades, is a drop in the bucket. We should be able to get people the help they need in the time they need it. It is required now—not a year later, not 6 months later, but now.

Schools in Florida have been stretched thin in their having enrolled nearly 12,000 students who have evacuated Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands. Every child has a right to a quality education, but the school systems cannot do it on their own, not after a natural disaster. Dealing with such a large influx of students in a short period requires extra resources.

The House has passed a package that includes \$2.9 billion for education funding. We desperately need it. The schools and students need this aid now. We cannot keep kicking the can down the road. Their educations cannot wait. You cannot keep relying on teachers to go out and get the extra supplies for them.

I mentioned our citrus growers. The industry has already been devastated by a bacteria called greening. When it gets into the phloem sap of the tree, it kills the tree in 5 years. We are not going to have a citrus industry if we can't find the cure for that. With the extra care of the groves, they have been able to nurture back crops. So here are all of these crops of oranges and grapefruit on the trees, and along comes Irma. In some groves, not only have 100 percent of the crops been blown off the trees, but the trees have been uprooted. That is why we desperately need the money—to clean up and replant.

The farmers in Florida suffered at least \$2.5 billion in losses when Hurricane Irma tore through the State, and that included a lot of our citrus. Citrus alone experienced \$760 million in losses. That is on top of the difficulties that they were having already with the bacteria.

The USDA is estimating that Florida growers will only harvest 46 million boxes this season. Get this: 10 years ago, there were 203 million boxes of citrus harvested. A decade before that, there were 244 million boxes of oranges harvested. For months our farmers have been told to wait their turn. Some of them are going bankrupt. They have waited long enough. They need the help now. We just have to act on this disaster bill.

Additionally, it has been over 100 days since Hurricane Maria hit Puerto Rico. Over 30 percent of the island remains without power, and parts of the island still lack running water. Some people have running water still, but

they cannot drink it. They have to boil it.

When I was there in the little mountain town of Utuado, the source of water about 2 weeks after the hurricane—with the roads cut off, the only source of outside help was by helicopter, and the running water that they had was from a pipe that was coming out of the mountain, the mountain water draining down. I don't want to mince words here. We have a full-blown humanitarian crisis in Puerto Rico right now. My colleague, MARCO RUBIO from Florida, has been there also, and he is here to testify to the same thing.

As a result, recent estimates suggest that over 300,000 Puerto Ricans may have moved to Florida. Some are fortunate enough to move in with relatives, but others are living in motels that line the I-4 corridor. Some are living out of their cars. This is absolutely heartbreaking. How can we fail fellow American citizens like this? Yet, given the current situation, the administration thinks that now, today, is the appropriate time to cut off food and water for the people of Puerto Rico.

There is no common sense here. FEMA needs to continue to provide food and water to the island until, at the very least, all of the island has access to potable water and electricity. They are suffering, and while the administration is trying to abandon the responsibility of the United States to Puerto Rico, the House aid package shortchanges recovery efforts on the island. We must enhance it in the Senate package.

For instance, it fails to address the current Medicaid crisis that is just a month away. If nothing is done, Puerto Rico's Medicaid Program is going to run out of money. Congress must act; otherwise, over 1 million U.S. citizens will be denied healthcare coverage when they need it the most.

It has been over a month since the House passed the disaster bill. We haven't seen any action. The longer we wait, the more people suffer. It is clear the government is not working the way it should. We need to turn the corner, and it needs to start with this disaster bill being bumped up in the Senate and then quickly passed.

I beg our colleagues, and Senator MARCO RUBIO joins me: Let's take up this bill. Let's fix the deficiencies, and let's pass it immediately.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Florida.

MR. RUBIO. Mr. President, I want to begin by thanking Senator NELSON, the senior Senator from our State, for once again raising this on the floor. I am glad to be able to follow him and to make many of the same points about the importance of acting on this.

The Presiding Officer is from a State that has been impacted by storms. He knows that long after the cameras leave and long after the stories have been written, real people's lives have

been disrupted, sometimes permanently, certainly in ways that we don't think about. We have come to think about hurricane damage as roofs being ripped off of buildings and trees in the road, and once those are picked up, everything is back to normal. What we don't recognize is that underneath all of that is the long-term damage done to a small business that went 2 weeks without any sort of income, so they closed.

There is the impact we see in the Florida Keys, where there are a lot of people, for example, who have used their retirement savings to buy a small property that they rent out in the Florida Keys. It is very common. They buy a small townhouse, they rent it out in the winter for people to stay there, and then they use it in the summer for their family.

Well, guess what. This winter they are probably not getting a lot of visitors. In some cases—I know of one in particular—there is all this debris from the storm that is sitting in the canal. It is not very attractive for a visitor to come to the Keys and stay in a townhouse where they can't even go out into the ocean because the canals and the waterways that take them out have refrigerators floating in them and have all kind of debris in them. By the way, there is still debris there from previous storms, almost 15 years—10 years ago.

What does that mean? That means the owner of the unit doesn't have the rent they were using to pay the mortgage. She might be a teacher or he might be a firefighter, and now they are not getting the income they were counting on to make the mortgage, so they potentially could fall behind and could lose this rental property that they had invested in for their family. These are not rich people. These are people who had an investment for the future and had a good business model until the storm came. That is not measured anywhere, but that is real harm.

The small businesses have been harmed. The Florida Keys, in particular, is a place that has had lot of small businesses that have been there for a long time. Some of these places have gone months without clients. If that person doesn't come and rent out that unit I just described, that means that person isn't using the fuel from the local gas station, isn't eating at the local restaurants, and isn't contributing to the local economy.

To top it off, it is so expensive. Imagine if you are a worker at one of these buildings making \$15 an hour. It is so expensive. They already had a housing problem, and this has made it worse. So it would be a mistake to say that the hurricane damage is over, and the effort to address it ends the minute the trees are removed from the road and the roofs are tarped and repaired. It goes on for a while.

In the case of this particular storm, Florida was also impacted by the impact that Maria had on Puerto Rico. As

Senator NELSON just outlined, up to 300,000 American citizens—I say that because there are still a lot of people wondering, why are we giving aid to Puerto Rico? Puerto Rico is a U.S. territory, and its residents are U.S. citizens. There are 300,000 U.S. citizens from Puerto Rico who have moved to Florida. They enrich our State, but our schools weren't counting on the kids, so they have to scramble to deal with that.

Our housing stock—I met with a group of people on Friday. We still have people living in hotels who have been there for 3 or 4 months. Even if they wanted to go out and find an apartment, there is nothing available. There are all sorts of challenges. We have heard stories, for example, that they have to pay a \$75 application fee for each one of the housing units they apply for, even if they are turned down. Just figure that out. If someone applies to just three or four of them, that is a lot of money out of pocket for someone who has already lost everything in the storm. Florida is facing that as well.

I am disappointed. If someone had told me that we would get to the last week of January without taking up disaster relief, I would have been surprised because we had a chance to actually address this at the end of last year. The House sent over a bill that didn't go far enough. The Senate had ideas about how to make it better, and then for reasons involving leverage and using it as a tool to get people to vote for CRs—short-term spending at the end—it has been held up. That is unfortunate because these problems are only getting worse, not better, as time goes on.

Senator NELSON talked about the citrus industry. One of our signature crops, if not our signature crop, was already being challenged by citrus greening, which is a terrible disease. Senator NELSON and I went to some of those groves together, and there are growers who basically were already hurting. They have lost everything for this year. There is no money coming in. The fruit is gone. Once that fruit touches the ground and that ground is wet, you can't sell it. The trees are damaged. It is not as though we can just buy a new tree at Walmart, and in 1 year it produces. It has to put it in the ground, and it takes 5 years before it will start to produce. They are hurting, and they are wondering, should I replant? Is this a good business for me to be in?

Some of these families have been in citrus for three or four or five generations, and this could be the end, not just the end for them but the end of Florida citrus. We helped them in the tax bill with the ability to immediately expense replanting, but that will not be enough. That is why this package has to include USDA resources to help replace these lost trees and rehabilitate the groves that were flooded. This is critical and essential to our food supply.

The Army Corps of Engineers plays a huge role in the State of Florida. For example, there is the Herbert Hoover Dike, which is a dike on Lake Okeechobee that would prevent a catastrophic flooding event, should the lake levels rise too high. We have people living just south of it, and what happened, almost a century ago, is that people died because of flooding there. So this dike was built. It has been found to be and rated among the most vulnerable water infrastructure projects in the Nation, and we are lucky that it wasn't breached in the storm, but it could have been, had the rainfall been located at the right place at the right time. It has been the priority of our delegation for a long time to expedite the construction of rehabilitation to strengthen that dike. This is a good opportunity to do that because there will be other storms. Because the project was delayed when the storm hit, this is a chance to finish that role.

Other parts that are critical to Florida's economy are beach renourishment and intracoastal navigation projects. These are hugely important and not just what makes Florida an attractive place to live; it is the reason people visit. Some of these beaches were severely eroded. Particularly in Northeast Florida, there is no beach, and the water is coming up to the edge of the property lines. If there is no beach, the hotels and the condominiums that rent out on that beach do not have visitors. People will not go there unless there is sand on the beach, and the erosion that happens in a storm like this needs to be fixed.

Of course, we have all been engaged, and I hope all are committed to our Everglades restoration projects. The Everglades are some of the most unique environments on the planet. They happen to be in the United States and happen to be in our home State. In these Everglades restoration projects, we want to continue to make progress toward our goal of saving them.

By the way, the Everglades are a source of water for over 8 million Floridians. So I hope the disaster funding also addresses all the work that was destroyed and the damage that happened to a lot of the restoration projects that were in place.

I will not go deep into education because Senator NELSON has already addressed that, but suffice it to say we had thousands of students who were displaced, and we add to that thousands of people from Puerto Rico whom the school districts welcome but weren't counting on. Now we have to accommodate classroom space. In many cases, for these children, although everyone in Puerto Rico learns English and Spanish, their primary language is Spanish, so we have to get instructors who are able to bring them to proficiency in English. That is a challenge. All of that is falling on the State of Florida as well. While Florida welcomes our fellow Americans from

Puerto Rico who are seeking refuge, the costs need to be accounted for.

We had hospitals that were damaged from the storms, and the repairs to some of these continue to rise. In some cases, these hospital repairs resulted in the closure of the hospital for more than a year.

There is a hospital in the Keys that is going to be completely rebuilt. If you have ever been to the Florida Keys, the distances are bad, and there is a hospital that is going to have to be completely rebuilt.

In addition to all of that, we have our healthcare providers in Florida who provided charitable care, not just to Floridians after the storm but to displaced Americans from Puerto Rico and from the U.S. Virgin Islands. They need to be reimbursed for doing that. They didn't sit back and say: We are not going to do it unless you send us a check. They did it, and there were real expenses. Then they were also hit by the storm, and they are dealing with those new expenses.

By the way, one of the things I hope we will do is expedite hiring authority for medical personnel in HHS because, for years, we have failed to maintain adequate levels of personnel willing to give a couple of weeks of their time to aid in a time of disaster. Our medical teams are depleted, and at this rate we will already have a staffing shortage by the next hurricane season, which is just a few months away.

NOAA, another Federal agency—the disaster bill needs to fund the continued removal of the things I have already discussed: marine debris, lost lobster traps, capsized vessels. There is an environmental component to it, and there is an economic component to it. If our canal is full of refrigerators, debris, things that need to be removed, the water cannot be navigated. The value of all that property is wiped out, and also what is wiped out is the desire of people to come and visit. Beyond increasing—or as we call it around here “plussing up”—critical FEMA accounts like the Disaster Relief Fund, we should also include language in the bill to protect counties, cities, towns, and individual homeowners who received FEMA disaster assistance from the uncertainty about when the Federal Government may come back in a few years and claw back that support. In essence, they can come back in a few years and say: We gave you too much money; give it back to us.

If someone did something wrong, I am not talking about that. I am talking about a good faith estimate that both sides agreed on, and they delivered the money, and then 4 years later they show up and say: Hey, we have looked at it again, and in hindsight we gave you \$1,000 more in the case of an individual or \$50,000 or \$100,000 more in the case of a city or a county, and now they have to scramble to pay this back.

So I will continue to work to make sure that FEMA has the resources it needs to assist for recovery victims for

both short-term and long-term recovery but without this threat of clawback, and there are ways to do that which will allow us to be fiscally responsible.

I have already talked about the housing issue in Monroe County in Southwest Florida. Monroe County is in the Florida Keys, and that is why it is critical that FEMA has the resources to utilize programs such as direct relief assistance, which will enable the Federal Government to lease a property that would not generally be available to the public, such as corporate lodging, to house survivors, to house people, as opposed to just giving them a voucher and saying: Go find a hotel.

Here is what happens. They get a hotel in South Dade in Homestead, and the big rates come in February, and everyone gets kicked out in February because those rooms were booked a year ago at those rates, and they have nowhere to go. It is disruptive. If we were able to lease out an entire long-term corporate housing or lodging facility, these people would have some certainty to go about their lives while their homes and their lives are rebuilt. Programs such as Direct Lease assistance provide the type of flexibility that Florida and, quite frankly, the whole country needs. We are going to continue to advocate for the program so we can provide roofs over the heads of displaced Floridians and Puerto Ricans.

Infrastructure damage throughout Florida is also substantial. In particular, I was able to go down to the Everglades to Flamingo. It is a place we have gone often. It is one of the places we leave from to go fishing with my children. The facilities there were already in bad shape, to be frank. It looked like something out of one of those 1960s black-and-white movies they show in schools.

This place was badly hurt. Again, this is Federal property. That is a national park that belongs to the American people, under the custody of the Federal Government, and it was wiped out and hurt and destroyed. We need to help rebuild it. By the way, that includes airports, NASA—the Kennedy Space Center—which also suffered damages.

I have a couple more points, then I will close.

Housing and Urban Development. On December 14, I introduced the Disaster Assistance Simplification Act. That prohibits HUD from penalizing victims of natural disasters who apply but then turn down an SBA disaster loan. So if you apply for an SBA disaster loan, HUD will come back and take away your assistance or render you ineligible for HUD assistance not because you received the HUD loan but because you applied for it. That should be taken out.

I have worked with colleagues to ensure that this language is included in the upcoming supplemental because I don't understand how we can allow

unsynchronized and burdensome disaster assistance programs to make recovery more difficult for someone impacted by a storm. You just went through a storm. Your business was destroyed. Your home was destroyed. Your family had to move to another county or another city. On top of that, you have to agonize over what the Federal Government may or may not give you. If they gave it to you, you have to agonize over when they may come back and take it away. We can't further victimize victims by penalizing victims who do not take assistance. Our laws are discouraging people from applying for SBA disaster loans.

Again, on that particular point, I am not talking about people who are double-dipping. I am talking about people who applied for HUD and SBA. Just the act of applying for that loan means you can't get the HUD assistance. That is ridiculous.

I will close with Puerto Rico. It doesn't get enough attention, in my mind. We read about the situation every day. Now the articles are saying: Can you believe they still don't have electricity in Puerto Rico? There are a lot of problems that need to be addressed. Puerto Rico had a lot of problems before the storm.

At end of the day, here is the bottom line. Puerto Rico is a U.S. territory. It is the responsibility of the United States. These are American citizens. They are children. They are residents. They wear the uniform of this country. If you go to Arlington Cemetery, not far from here, you will see their names after paying the ultimate sacrifice. They contribute to every area of our lives, whether they choose to live on the mainland or on the island. Perhaps because it isn't always in the headlines, a lot of people just don't understand its status, its importance, and our relationship and obligations.

We have been involved from the very beginning, not just because of the impact it has had on Florida but because, on a personal level, I have so many friends and people I care about who live there. If you live in Florida, you know people who have people they love who live there.

Right after the storm, I sent three members of my staff, who spent over a week at their emergency operations center, just trying to act as a conduit to facilitate between Federal efforts and the efforts of Puerto Rico's government, but the work that remains is extraordinary.

I talk about the people who are still displaced. We have seen the story of people losing their housing vouchers who were staying in a hotel. People say: We just heard from the government in Puerto Rico that your home is habitable so you are done. Check out tomorrow afternoon. They have nowhere to go. If they have family, maybe, but if they don't, where do they go that night? It is a problem. We have seen that happen in Connecticut and fear it could happen in other places.

On the disaster relief, we think recovering is not just about putting up light posts. We think it is about helping the economy grow, about attracting business and investment back, and about helping people who want to stay to be able to stay.

We have a number of provisions we hope will be included. One is a temporary payroll tax deduction so whatever it is you get paid, you get to keep more of it. It would be temporary for a year, but at least it is a way of giving people a raise without being a burden on businesses.

We would also like to see a temporary expansion of the child tax credit. Because of a quirk in the law, people who file taxes from Puerto Rico are not eligible for it at its full value the way someone on the mainland would be. Again, all they have to do is move to Florida, and they can do it.

These are U.S. citizens. If they can fight in our Armed Forces, if they pledge allegiance to our flag, if they are citizens of our Nation, why should they not be entitled to the same tax versions there that they would be if they were living on the mainland?

We also need to deal with, as Senator NELSON talked about, the Medicaid cliff. Because of the healthcare law that passed a number of years ago, the funding mechanism that was created places them in a position where soon they will run out of money in their Medicaid Program. Ultimately, what will happen is, people who need these services will move to Florida or some other State, and then they will sign up for Medicaid in the States and get what they couldn't get in Puerto Rico. It will actually cost more. If money is what you are worried about, it will cost more in the long run not to do it than to do it.

I also think we need to increase funding for energy grid technical assistance from the Department of Energy. On that note, I would say, we are getting reports that they are being forced to rebuild using the exact same equipment that was there before the storm. Some of this equipment is so old, it isn't even manufactured anymore. They don't make it anymore. They had to retrofit and make things up.

If we are going to rebuild or help rebuild the grid in Puerto Rico, shouldn't they be able to put in something that is modern as opposed to rebuilding the old stuff? That makes no sense. It will actually make the system more resilient.

A lot of these proposals may meet with resistance, but they all make sense. We can justify every single one of them. I hope we will pursue them. I worked very closely with Resident Commissioner Jenniffer Gonzalez on these efforts. I am grateful for her strong advocacy and the support of so many of my colleagues on behalf of our fellow Americans in Puerto Rico.

I close by asking our colleagues this. I know we have the policy work this week. The Democrats and Republicans

are doing their thing. I know we have funding issues a week from this Friday that we have to address. I know immigration is an important issue that we need to confront, but do not forget about disaster relief. We have to get it done for the people out west in California, the people in Texas, the people of Florida, the people of Puerto Rico, and for our fellow Americans who were hurt by the hurricanes this season and the fires of 2017.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Arizona.

#### IMMIGRATION

Mr. FLAKE. Mr. President, as we continue the debate on the issue of immigration as it relates to providing a permanent solution to those young immigrants who benefited from the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals, or DACA, the scope of this debate has expanded to include other issues.

Some of these issues are directly related to the DACA issue, including persistent concerns on our southern border, like improving barriers and border access roads, providing hiring and retention incentives for Customs and Border Protection personnel to ensure that all locations on the border remain secure. Other things being debated, like changes to legal immigration levels, truly need their own debate.

Some appear to have seized on this as an opportunity to push forth an agenda aimed at limiting the future flow of legal immigration. Before this idea gains any steam, we have to fully discuss and debate its potentially enormous impact on our economy. It is easy for some to see unemployed Americans and point to immigrants as a scapegoat. To suggest that every immigrant who passes through our borders represents a job being pried from the hands of an American citizen is far-fetched, at best.

After taking the time to actually examine the facts, the shortsightedness of this thinking is exposed. For example, cleaving the number of new legal immigrants by almost 50 percent—which is what the White House proposal appears to envision over time—would initially reduce the overall rate of economic growth in the United States by an estimated 12.5 percent when compared to currently projected levels through 2045. This is because labor force growth is one of the most important factors tied to economic growth. More troubling, these changes in legal immigration would come just as the aging U.S. population increases our dependence on a growing workforce.

Some have suggested that legal immigrants represent some sort of drag on government resources. In fact, the National Academy of Sciences estimates that the average immigrant contributes, in net present value terms, \$92,000 more in taxes than they receive in benefits over their lifetime.

We can only expect these numbers to increase as we move to a kind of merit

or employment-based system. I should note that in the bipartisan approach in 2015, we did restrict the number of family-based visas. I think it was from a total of 75 percent of legal immigration, we moved it down to 50 percent from family-based visas. At that same time, what we did was reallocate those visas to merit-based or employment-based visas so we wouldn't have an overall drop in legal immigration.

To look into the future of what happens when the philosophy of limiting legal immigration takes hold, we need to look no further than the current economic struggles Japan is having. In a timely piece by Fred Hiatt in the Washington Post this last Sunday, he points out that Japan's population of 127 million is forecast to shrink by one-third over the next half century. The increase in lifespans coupled with a decrease in fertility is projected to lead to near-stagnant economic growth, reduced innovation, labor shortages, and huge pressure on entitlements and pensions in Japan.

These disastrous realities facing Japan are the direct result of that nation's historically low level of immigrants. As Hiatt astutely points out, "You can be pro-growth. You can be anti-immigration. But honestly, you can't be both."

Legal immigration policy is complicated, but it is important, and it is worth debating this reform on its own. There may be a strong appetite for merit-based immigration, but rather than drastically cutting legal and necessary immigration flows, we need to work together to provide a way for the best and brightest to make it to the United States, both for their benefit and ours.

Let's not be lured into thinking that legal immigration is some kind of simplistic zero-sum game that can be easily reformed without consequence. During the last administration, many of us rejected the new normal of low economic growth driven by overregulation and irrational tax policy. It would be a supreme irony if we were to fix those anti-growth fiscal and regulatory policies only to counteract them with immigration restrictions that affect our workforce.

Let's give this important and complex issue the time for discussion, analysis, and debate it deserves and not shoehorn it into a DACA fix.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Vermont.

#### THE BUDGET

Mr. LEAHY. Mr. President, I cannot help but note that the fiscal year began October 1 last year. Four months have passed. That is 122 days since the start of the fiscal year, and we still don't have a budget deal to allow us to finish the fiscal year 2018 appropriations bills. That is 122 days, and the Congress has not done their job.

Recently, President Trump has taken to Twitter. He has accused Democrats of holding up funding for our troops.

Well, the idea that Democrats are holding up defense spending doesn't pass the laugh test. I mean, last July—7 months ago—I called for bipartisan budget negotiations, something we have always done in the past. As the vice chairman of Appropriations, I put forward a proposal that would increase defense spending by \$54 billion and would increase nondefense spending by an equal amount of \$54 billion. Basically, what we did when Senator MURRAY and then-Congressman RYAN worked out the budget agreement. We did that years ago based on parity. The proposal was responsible, it was reasonable, and it was based on parity. It was something we have done for years. It would have fully funded President Trump's budget request for our military, but it would also have provided much needed relief from the damaging effects of sequestration that we have seen on both sides of the ledger, defense and nondefense.

But instead of trying to reach a bipartisan budget deal to allow us to finish our spending bills on time, the Republican leadership, which controls the agenda, had other priorities. They spent the last 7 months trying to repeal healthcare for millions of Americans and rolling back important consumer protections. They cut environmental and workplace protections, protections for women in the workplace, and they passed budget-busting tax cuts that primarily benefit big corporations and the wealthiest Americans. As a result of doing that, the funding for our troops, as well as for key domestic priorities, has been left to limp along under four continuing resolutions.

Yesterday, the Trump administration—and I wonder if they have actually looked at the President's budget—accused Democrats of holding defense spending hostage over arbitrary demands for lower priority domestic programs.

I am curious. What are the domestic programs the Trump administration considers a lower priority? Do they consider the services for our veterans that are lacking around this country—do they think helping our veterans is a lower priority? What about the funding to combat the opioid epidemic? Every single State represented by every single Senator here, Republican and Democrat alike, in every corner of our country, has been hurt by the opioid epidemic. Is the Trump administration saying that is a lower priority? How about investments in education for our Nation's children? Is that a lower priority? Is disaster relief for our communities that have been devastated by hurricanes—there are so many—a lower priority? What about replacing our crumbling bridges all across the country before people start dying in record numbers? Is that a lower priority?

The President puts before us a false choice, and it makes me wonder if he is actually seeing the budget his administration proposes. There is no reason we