

we ought to do on the minimum wage, what we ought to do on the overtime rule, and what we ought to do to expand the earned income tax credit. I do appreciate the Presiding Officer's interest, especially in the earned income tax credit—what he has tried to do there. We just simply can't find the time to do that.

We always help the people who have much in this society, and we just never get around, in this Congress, to helping the people who need a break.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. BRAUN). The Senator from Texas.

TEXAS VETERANS

Mr. CORNYN. Mr. President, I am proud of the fact that 1 out of every 10 persons who wears the uniform of the U.S. military calls Texas home. It is no surprise that with more than a dozen military installations in the State, many servicemembers choose to live in Texas when they return to civilian life. We have the second highest veteran population of all of the States, with an estimated 1.6 million veterans living in Texas.

As you might suppose, in having the honor of representing these 1.6 million veterans, I talk to them quite a bit and hear from them often. I hear about the challenges they face when they transition back to civilian life. Whether the challenges are the big ones or the little ones, whether the challenges are of navigating complicated trails of paperwork, getting the timely healthcare they need, or finding employment when they return to civilian life, I am eager to help them identify solutions.

Over the last few years, we have made some major progress. In the last Congress, for example, we passed the historic VA MISSION Act, which modernized the veterans' appeals process and the electronic health records system. The bill reformed GI benefits, improved accountability within the VA Administration, and provided the largest funding increase in history for veterans' care and services.

We have also passed other bills to help veterans transition from military service. For example, our Jobs for Our Heroes Act made it easy for veterans to get commercial driver's licenses. Believe it or not, it is hard for the private sector to find the truckdrivers it needs. After somebody has driven a large vehicle in the military as part of his daily duties, you can imagine that his transitioning to a commercial driver's license would be a relatively simple thing. Given the paperwork and the bureaucracy and the challenges of one's applying for a commercial driver's license, we were able to pass legislation to facilitate that transition.

We also passed the American Law Enforcement Heroes Act, which ensures that veterans get hired by local law enforcement agencies. If you think about that, it is a skill set that many learn in the military, whether they served in the military police or otherwise. If you talk to one of your local

police departments, one of the things the department is short on is the number of people who work for local law enforcement. That is also true for Federal law enforcement agencies, particularly for the Border Patrol. Many military servicemembers come out of the military with the very skills that are needed most by the police agencies that work to keep our communities safe.

To improve the educational opportunities that are available to these men and women, in the last Congress, we passed a bipartisan bill called the Harry W. Colmery Veterans Educational Assistance Act, also known as the Forever GI Bill. President Trump signed it into law in August of 2017. With a stroke of a pen, he enhanced and expanded education benefits for veterans, servicemembers, and their families.

The Forever GI Bill made much needed updates for veterans who face school closures while they are enrolled. It expanded work study activities. It also created a scholarship program for students who pursue degrees in science, technology, engineering, and math, the so-called STEM fields.

It established the Edith Nourse Rogers STEM Scholarship, which provides student veterans with an additional 9 months of GI bill eligibility to ensure they have the time and the financial assistance they need in order to complete their studies in some of our most needed fields. We later learned that there is an issue, though, that prevents many students from taking full advantage of that program. The current law mandates that students must be enrolled in a STEM program for more than 128 credit hours, but the Department of Veterans Affairs found that there are only three States in which the average STEM degree exceeds that minimum. That places many students in an unfair position of either picking from a limited list of schools or forgoing the scholarship money, which can provide up to \$30,000 in financial assistance. That is a Hobson's choice for our veterans, and it is time for Congress to fix that error.

To ensure that all veterans who want to take advantage of the Nourse scholarship are able to, on a bipartisan basis with several of my colleagues, I recently introduced legislation called the Veteran STEM Scholarship Improvement Act, which would lower the 128 credit hour requirement to the more common 120 credit hour requirement. Now, changing a number from an eight to a zero may not seem like a big deal, but for the veterans who have been frustrated by this impediment that prevents them from using the benefits they were promised, it can be life-changing. This would ensure that Texas's veterans who are interested in pursuing STEM programs that are offered in their communities are able to do so while they receive their GI benefits.

I just want to say a word about the GI bill because it is personal to me and

my family. My dad, who was a B-17 pilot in the Army Air Corps and was stationed at Molesworth Air Force base in England, flew a total of 26 bombing missions over the English Channel into the industrial heartland of Germany to try to end that terrible, terrible war. Unfortunately, he was shot down and was captured as a prisoner of war on his 26th mission, and he served the last 4 months of World War II as a prisoner of war. Thankfully, he survived that experience.

To my point here, when he came back to Corpus Christi, TX, he took advantage of the GI bill so he could continue his education. He received a 2-year associate of arts degree from, as it was called then, the Del Mar Community College. He also met my mother at about that time, and they married. Lo and behold, he ended up deciding, I think I want to go to dental school. So, after he had been shot out of the sky by German anti-aircraft guns, maybe a nice, placid dentist's life sounded pretty good, and that is what he chose.

It was thanks to the GI bill that the whole generation of that so-called "greatest generation" was able to come back from the war and get the tools and the education they needed in order to contribute to our country and help make our economy and our country as strong as we inherited it and welcome it today.

Even for this next greatest generation of veterans who fought in Iraq and Afghanistan and for those who still serve today, it is important for us to keep this opportunity of the modern GI bill benefits when they take off the uniform as Active-Duty servicemembers and transition to civilian life.

I thank my colleagues—particularly Senators RUBIO, CRUZ, MANCHIN, and SINEMA—for supporting the STEM bill I described a little earlier. The House passed the legislation this last month, and I hope the Senate will do the same soon so we can get this bill to the President's desk for his signature.

In addition to this legislation, I am eager to vote on the final passage of the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2020. Last month, the Senate passed our version of the bill with broad, bipartisan support. As a matter of fact, only eight Senators voted against it. It is hard to find many things that are that bipartisan in the Senate or in Washington, DC, today.

In addition to investing in military modernization and in providing the largest pay raise in a decade for our troops, this legislation also included other provisions to support our veterans.

A bill I introduced with Senator BALDWIN, of Wisconsin, called the HAVEN Act, was included as a provision of the NDAA. This bill would shield VA and Department of Defense disability benefits in bankruptcy proceedings in the same way Social Security disability is exempted. Veterans shouldn't be penalized for receiving

disability compensation that they are rightly due.

I hope this provision will be included in the final version, which will follow the conference committee on the national defense authorization bill. The House passed its version of the NDAA last week, and I hope the conference committee will quickly iron out the differences between the two bills so we can approve this legislation.

Like all of my colleagues, I am grateful for the dedicated service and sacrifice of millions of men and women across our country who defend our freedoms. I want to make sure, as we all do, that their transitioning to civilian life after their military service is as smooth as possible.

By improving access to healthcare, employment, and education, the Senate is working hard to support America's veterans, and we are demonstrating in a country that has an all-volunteer military that we will keep our commitments to our military members while they wear the uniform and keep our commitments to our veterans when they transition to civilian life. This is an important part of our continuing to recruit and retain the best and brightest to serve in the U.S. military.

I yield the floor.

THE PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Pennsylvania.

Mr. CASEY. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to speak as in morning business.

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

BORDER SECURITY

Mr. CASEY. Mr. President, I start this afternoon with a topic we are all talking about—the horror that we saw and heard last night at a rally when there was a chant over and over again—we have seen the footage of it—of “send her back.”

I condemn this—as I did earlier today—in the strongest possible terms, and I want to reiterate my condemnation of that chant. I know that condemnation is widely shared on both sides of the aisle. I hope folks in both Chambers and both parties will condemn and reiterate the condemnation of that kind of chant but also what is underneath it. It is racist, for sure, and it is not who we are. That is not America.

I am glad the President said that if it happens again, he will try to stop it. I wish he had done that in real time last night, but let's see what happens at the next rally.

There is no excuse for any public official to do anything other than condemn that kind of language. Representative OMAR is a Representative in the Congress of the United States who came here as a child, and for anyone to utter those kinds of words against her or anyone else, of course, should be condemned.

Fortunately, I think most Americans agree with me, and we have to be very clear when we have that kind of senti-

ment expressed, especially when it is repeated across the country, as we saw last night.

I want to talk about our asylum system, a legal asylum system that was established in the wake of the horrors of World War II. We as a Nation—the United States of America—vowed after that conflict to do better, to be better, to serve as a refuge for those fleeing violence and persecution in their home countries.

Today, families from Central America are arriving at our southern border, hoping to avail themselves of this system because of the violence in their home countries. The three we have heard so much about—Honduras, Guatemala, and El Salvador—rank in the top 10 countries in the world for homicide—homicide. According to a report issued by Doctors Without Borders in 2017, Northern Triangle countries, these three countries, are experiencing—and this is a direct quote from the Doctors Without Borders report, 2017—“violent displacement, persecution, sexual violence, and forced repatriation akin to the conditions found in the deadliest armed conflicts in the world today.” So said Doctors Without Borders.

In the face of violence and other such circumstances, the choice to move in search of opportunity and safety is one that the vast majority of families would make, even when that journey can further subject them to violence and danger.

Late last month, the Nation was horrified—indeed, the world was horrified—by a photograph of a 2-year-old girl and her father, her small arm clinging to her father as they lay facedown in a river, dead.

That is not the picture I am showing here. We all know that picture. I don't need to show it again. So many Americans, so many people around the world remember that picture.

But the picture I put up is a picture of that little girl and her father as they lived, a picture of the two of them that appeared in the Washington Post in an article dated Thursday, June 27, 2019, on page 3.

Here is the article that the picture was taken from. The headline reads, “Pair who died at border were desperate for a better life”—desperate for a better life.

That is the story of so many of these families—desperate for a better life, free from violence or the threat of violence, free from or at least distant from death threats, and free from poverty, grinding poverty, the likes of which so many of us have never had to experience. That is what they are desperate for when they say “desperate for a better life.”

Rather than simply focus on this father and his daughter and how they died and the picture of them facedown in a river, I wanted to make sure we saw their faces, to celebrate their lives but to remind us of our obligation, our enduring obligation, to make sure that

we at least—at least—take steps to reduce the likelihood that we will ever see again a horrific picture like the one of the two of them dead in a river, facedown.

Here is what part of the story is of this little girl and her father. The little girl's name was Valeria. Quoting from the Washington Post story:

Valeria was a cheery child. Not even 2 years old, she loved to dance, play with her stuffed animals and brush her family members' hair. Her father, Oscar Alberto Martinez Ramirez, was stalwart. Nearly always working, he sold his motorcycle and borrowed money to move his family from El Salvador to the United States. Martinez and his wife, Tania Vanessa Avalos, wanted to save up for a home there. They wanted safety, opportunity.

“They wanted a better future for their girl,” Maria Estela Avalos, Vanessa's mother, told The Washington Post.

They traveled more than 1,000 miles seeking it. Once in the United States, they planned to ask for asylum, for refuge from the violence that drives many Central American migrants from their home countries every day. But the farthest the family got was an international bridge. . . . On Sunday—

This would be the Sunday before June 27.

On Sunday, they were told that the bridge was closed and that they should return Monday. Aid workers told The Post the line to get across the bridge was hundreds long.

Then we know what happened next to this father and his daughter.

There was also another story in the New York Times the day before, June 26. The headline read “Girl was Safe but Tried to Follow Father Back.”

I will not go through all of it, but here is what they were facing in terms of their own economic circumstances. At the end of the New York Times story it reads as follows:

Mr. Martinez quit his job at Papa Johns, where he had earned about \$350 a month. By then, his wife had already left her job as a cashier at a Chinese restaurant to take care of their daughter.

The couple lived with Mr. Martinez's mother in the community of Altavista, a massive housing complex of tiny concrete houses east of San Salvador, according to [someone referred to earlier in the story].

Though Altavista is under the control of gangs, the couple was not fleeing from violence, [Ms. Ramirez] told him. Rather, the grind of surviving as a family on \$10 a day had become unmanageable.

So we have a lot of families fleeing for reasons based on violence and death threats and that horror, and then we also have families fleeing because they, in this case, had \$10 a day to live on.

So these families risk danger as they cross through—what could only be said by way of understatement—treacherous terrain. They risk that danger because the graver risk is not to make that journey.

The administration has not sought, in my judgment, to address the root causes of migration, such as what we just talked about: violence, poverty, and corruption. Rather, the administration has repeatedly attempted to walk back our Nation's solemn vow