

Government is coming up with urgent deadlines with respect to the debt limit and beginning the appropriations process.

The full faith and credit of the United States cannot be in question. The last thing Americans need is for Washington to throw a big wrench in this red-hot economy that is creating historic levels of job opportunities and growing their take-home pay, and so faced with our Democratic colleagues' reluctance, the Trump administration took the high road. They did what needed to be done for our Armed Forces and veterans and negotiated a successful deal. In fact, compared to current law, the administration has secured a larger increase for defense spending than for nondefense. Let me say that again: a larger increase for defense than for nondefense compared to current law.

What is more, the administration successfully kept leftwing poison pills and policy riders far away from this agreement. We know some of the far left have been hankering to claw back the Hyde amendment protections or cut away at reprogramming authorities and flexibility that Presidents rightly possess. I applaud the fact that no leftwing riders like that were allowed into the deal.

This is the deal that was necessary to continue rebuilding our national defense after years of neglect, and it is the deal that was possible in divided government. I am proud to join President Trump in support of it, and I will be proud to support it when the Senate votes on the agreement before we adjourn at the end of this month.

NOMINATION OF MARK T. ESPER

Mr. MCCONNELL. Madam President, in the meantime, this body has other significant business to complete for the American people. Most immediately, in just a few hours, we will be confirming a new Secretary of Defense. The vote to advance Dr. Mark Esper's nomination yesterday afternoon came in at 85 to 6. That is precisely the kind of overwhelming bipartisan vote that is called for in this circumstance.

The nominee is beyond qualified. His record of public service is beyond impressive. His commitment to serving our servicemembers is beyond obvious. The need for a Senate-confirmed Secretary of Defense is beyond urgent. I urge every one of my colleagues to vote to confirm our next Secretary of Defense later today.

9/11 VICTIM COMPENSATION FUND

Mr. MCCONNELL. Madam President, that isn't the only important task we will tackle on a bipartisan basis today. In just a few hours, the Senate will attend to an important subject we have never failed to address; that is, the September 11th Victim Compensation Fund.

I know my colleagues don't need any extended lecture from me about the

solemn commitments this program represents: commitments to the firefighters, police officers, and all the first responders who rushed selflessly toward the World Trade Center just moments after the attacks began, to the first responders and workers who reported for duty days or even weeks later, putting their health at serious risk to help others, commitments to those who responded to the Pentagon and in Shanksville, PA, as well, and in the cases where injury or illness has already claimed the lives of those heroes, commitments to the surviving families.

Congress can never repay these men, women, and families for their sacrifices, but we can do a small part to make our heroes whole. That is why the Senate has never failed to attend to the fund before. We are not about to do so now.

I had the honor of meeting with a group of first responders and advocates several weeks back. They gave me the badge of Luis Alvarez, a New York Police Department bomb squad detective who was terminally ill and has since tragically passed away.

It was my honor to receive it. It was my honor to reiterate that the Senate's ironclad commitment to getting this done was never in doubt. I told the first responders I wanted the Senate to address this prior to the August recess, and today we will do so. It will be my honor later today to vote for the funding and ensure this fund is secure. I urge my colleagues to do the same.

HONG KONG

Mr. MCCONNELL. Madam President, on one final matter, in recent weeks, I have spoken about our Nation's renewed competition with other great powers, like Russia and China. Despite decades of efforts to welcome these nations into a peaceful, prosperous, and fair international system, we are constantly reminded that these nations have their own design on the future. In their visions, foundational principles of sovereignty, freedom, human rights, and a rules-based international order tend to take a backseat to power politics and the pursuit of hegemony.

The Chinese Communist Party, for example, is working to extend its control and influence everywhere from Taiwan to Cambodia, to Laos, to Burma, to Hong Kong, as we have seen recently. The tools and tactics may differ but the goal is the same: Beijing wants to bend its neighbors to its will.

Earlier this month, after historic protests, Hong Kong's Government hit pause on legislation that would have further eroded its autonomy and invited more meddling from the mainland, but victory for freedom and autonomy is not yet assured. The bill in question has been suspended, but it hasn't been totally withdrawn.

Hong Kong's people, emboldened by this rare victory over Beijing's creeping influence, have continued to exer-

cise their freedom of assembly to reclaim the rights, privileges, and autonomy slowly sliced away in recent years by the PRC.

Protests continue and with them countervailing pressures from authorities beholden to Beijing. Increasingly brutal police tactics and pro-mainland vigilantes are drawing blood in an effort to intimidate Hongkongers back into submission.

Hong Kong's autonomous governance, political freedoms, and stable rule of law has been a crucial precondition of its tremendous growth and prosperity. U.S. firms have invested tens of billions in Hong Kong's economy because they trust the autonomous region's political climate, independent judicial system, and degree of independence from Beijing.

By contrast, international firms are currently pulling back from China due to concerns about corruption, autocracy, intellectual property rights violations, and state-sponsored corporate espionage.

At a time when China faces slowing growth, Beijing should seek to emulate Hong Kong, not engulf Hong Kong and remake it in the image of the Chinese Communist Party.

The PRC has long been working hard under the surface to increase its influence and power. In Hong Kong, like in so many other areas, China has used this approach that experts have called "hide and bide"—hiding their intentions and biding their time, slowly slicing away resistance, building leverage, and encroaching, one step at a time.

In the case of Hong Kong, Beijing and its agents have overreached, but they are recalculating—postponing action on this legislation while biding time to resume the encroachment.

This is not just a matter of the people of Hong Kong. The PRC's treatment of Hong Kong—just like its treatment of the Uighurs or Tibetans that Beijing claims as citizens—is an indicator of how Chinese rulers will behave abroad. All nations who trade with the PRC should be watching the drama unfolding on the streets of Hong Kong.

The world is watching and wondering: If a government cannot respect the basic rights of people it claims as its own citizens, why on Earth would it be trusted to respect the rights and interests of its neighbors, its trading partners, or the companies that invest in its economy?

As we all know, the people of Hong Kong have been carrying the banner for decades. I am proud to say that here in the United States, we have been marching alongside them the entire way. Back in 1992, I was proud to author the U.S.-Hong Kong Policy Act and helped codify America's stance on the special status of Hong Kong.

So on the 70th anniversary of the PRC and the 30th anniversary of the Tiananmen Square massacre, I am grateful the administration and Congress, on a bipartisan basis, are reexamining America's relationship with

the PRC. I am grateful for the bipartisan work my colleagues have done on this important issue, and I am confident Congress will continue to hold hearings and stay vigilant on the subject of autonomy and democracy in Hong Kong, as well as China's overall strategy and its implications for the United States, our allies, and the entire world.

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. SCHUMER. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

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

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Democratic leader is recognized.

BORDER SECURITY

Mr. SCHUMER. Madam President, last Friday, I went with a group of Senate Democrats to visit several detention centers at our southern border, including the Border Patrol facility in McAllen and processing centers at Donna and Ursula, TX. The searing accounts about the conditions endured by the migrant families are true. We saw overcrowding. We heard migrants tell us they are unable to brush their teeth, shower, call their families, or access feminine hygiene products. We saw children in soiled clothing, caged and expressionless. It is heartbreaking—the thousand-smile stares on the faces of toddlers where smiles and laughter should have been. It breaks your heart and makes your blood boil all at once.

But we saw something else. I am always looking for the positive. We saw a much better model employed by a non-profit Catholic Charities center, run by Sister Norma Pimentel. There, families had access to medicine, food, and showers as their asylum cases were being processed in an orderly fashion. These people were being treated humanely, and they were following the law.

Sister Norma told us that the government could replicate this model. She explained that if ICE reinstated the Family Case Management Program, we could see as high as 99-percent compliance with immigration court orders without the need for expanded detention and overcrowding. What a difference that could make.

Sister Norma showed us that we can treat these migrants with respect and decency without sacrificing border security or law and order. The two are not mutually exclusive. That is such an important point. You can have both humane treatment and rule of law. Anyone who says that we must choose between treating these people humanely and enforcing our laws is offering a false choice. We can do both, and

we can follow the model of Catholic Charities all along the border.

That is why Democrats have been pushing to restart and infuse more dollars into alternatives to detention despite Republican objections. The Family Case Management Program, coupled with a Democratic bill to address the treatment of children—a bill that Senators MERKLEY, FEINSTEIN, DURBIN, and I have sponsored, as well as many others—over 30 other Democrats, I believe—would both improve the conditions at the detention centers and ensure that families comply with our immigration laws.

I would say one more thing about these kids and the parents. They are not criminals. I asked Mark Morgan, who is certainly known as a hard-liner on immigration: What percentage of these kids and parents are criminals? It is a very small percentage. At one point, it was said that 96 percent—and at another point 98 percent—are not criminals. They are the same people our grandparents or our great-grandparents or our great-great-grandparents were, who sought safety and a decent life in America. Their children and their grandchildren—on my father's side I am one of the grandchildren, and on my mother's side I am one of the great-great-grandchildren—have done good things for America throughout the country. That is what America is all about. These people are not fleeing to break the law. They are not fleeing to traffic drugs. They are fleeing because the gangs down there have told the parents: We will rape your daughter, we will murder your son, and we will burn your house if you don't do what we want. They are fleeing for the safety, the beauty, and the opportunity of America, which generations since the 1600s have done and have made this country great.

We need to return to a rational discussion about the reality on the ground, and that includes a discussion about the root causes of immigration. Again, when the President says Americans should know that all of these people arriving at our borders are criminals trying to game the law, he should know who they are. As I said, Mark Morgan, his own CBP Commissioner, admitted as much to our congressional delegation on Friday when we questioned him. The vast majority of families are fleeing unimaginable violence and degradation in their countries. So let's get at the root causes of this, instead of just tweeting and going on TV and ranting, which people have done.

First, allow migrants to apply for asylum inside their own countries. Second, hire more immigration judges to reduce the backlog in cases at the border. Third, provide security assistance to these Central American countries to help them crack down on the vicious gangs and drug cartels that cause so many to flee in the first place.

This is a rational thing to do. I think most Americans, regardless of their ideology, regardless of their party, re-

gardless of their political position, would support this. But the Trump administration has now pledged to end the security assistance to Central American countries. That is counterproductive. It is boneheaded because it is going to cause more people to flee. Unfortunately, it is been typical of the President's approach. This morning, the President tweeted and bragged about how he has cut off funding to Guatemala 9 months ago. It is counterproductive. That means more—not fewer—people at our borders, plain and simple.

In my experience, I have not seen the President be serious about dealing with immigration. He has used the issue; he riles up his base without telling them the truth, making them think they are all criminals—I see this on FOX News all the time as well—demeaning immigrants, who are what America is all about, inflaming racial tensions, and stoking fear.

So we in Congress, Democrats and Republicans, should take the lead and develop a way forward, a real way that will solve the problems at the border in a way that complies with humanity, the American way, and the rule of law.

BUDGET AGREEMENT

Madam President, on a different subject, yesterday, four congressional leaders in the Trump administration reached a bipartisan agreement that will strengthen our national security and clear the way for important investments in America's middle-class—investments in healthcare, education, childcare, veterans, cancer research, and more.

First and foremost, I am pleased to report that in this deal, Democrats have finally found a way to end the threat of sequester permanently. The arbitrary and draconian limits of the sequester have hammered our ability to invest in working Americans for too long. There are large forces pushing the middle class around—globalization and automation—and the only answer, because most of our international companies haven't really made the effort at least until now, is government providing ladders—ways out, ways in, and ways up—so that average middle-class people can maintain that great American dream, which means, simply put, if you work hard, you will be doing better 10 years from now than you are doing today, and your kids will still be doing better than you. We need those kinds of programs—education, infrastructure, healthcare, and childcare—to make this happen; otherwise, these big economic forces are going to continue to push the middle-class and poor people around. The wealthy—they will do fine, even though this Republican Party and this administration seem to make them their first choice. Look at that tax cut.

So this is a good thing. It means that the shadow of sequestration, the inability of the government to provide ladders so that middle-class people can