

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 Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.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

deal with the big forces pushing them around, will no longer hover over our work on the Federal budget.

Not only did we permanently end that devastating sequester, which, by the way, the military hated, as well as people who wanted help on the domestic side—it slashed them as well. General Mattis was fanatic, almost, in a good way about this. I miss him. But we Democrats did this in an extraordinary fashion.

The agreement includes a significant increase in funding for critical domestic priorities, including an increase in the domestic budget authority that even exceeds the increase in defense by \$10 billion over the next 2 years. For those counting, yesterday's deal means that Democrats have secured over \$100 billion in funding increases for domestic programs since President Trump took office. At the same time, it ensures that our military is prepared to keep Americans safe around the world.

This \$100 billion sounds abstract. But let me tell you what it means: more funding to the States for opioid treatment. The States are desperate for more help. Young people are dying of these horrible drugs. Treatment works.

I held in my arms a father from Buffalo whose son had served in Iraq, had PTSD, and then got hooked on opioids when he came back here. Finally, the kid hit bottom. He said: Dad, I want to go to a treatment center.

Unfortunately, there was a 23-week waiting period, and the young man killed himself in the 22nd week. The father cried in my arms, a big steel worker with tattoos and everything else. He was devastated, as anybody else would be over the loss of a child. Now there will be more money for that. This is not abstract.

What about fixing VA hospitals? What about more money to help educate our kids properly? What about some money to make the burden of college less great, as heavy as it is? What about money for climate and clean energy? What about money for infrastructure and transportation? That \$100 billion is not abstract. It is for all of these things. It is going to mean jobs for the American people. It is going to mean ladders up for the American people. It is going to mean some hope for the American people.

I know that on the other side some on the right will say: This increases the deficit. Just a year ago they voted to increase the deficit by \$1.5 trillion—now, maybe \$2 trillion—with a deep tax cut, the overwhelming part of which went to the wealthiest people in America. So don't start hollering “deficit” when it comes to helping the middle class when you are willing to deepen the deficit when it comes to helping the wealthy. Of course, now, part of this is that the debt ceiling will be extended until the summer of 2021, preserving the full faith and credit of the United States.

Looking forward, I think we have laid the groundwork for legislation

that will hopefully avoid another senseless and harmful government shutdown. The House will now move quickly to put this agreement up for a vote, and then the Senate can follow suit and send it to the President's desk. I was glad to see that the President tweeted—I believe it was tweeted—and put out a statement that he supports this agreement.

9/11 VICTIM COMPENSATION FUND

Mr. SCHUMER. Madam President, finally, there is something we can vote on today at long, long last—the 9/11 Victim Compensation Fund for those brave heroes who rushed to the Towers on 9/11. The light at the end of the tunnel of what has been a very long and sometimes very dark time is now only a few hours away. We have waited too long to settle this matter. Too many people have put up bipartisan roadblocks along the road.

Now we are here, about to exit the tunnel and guarantee once and for all that the heroes who rushed to the Towers 18 years ago will no longer have to worry about compensation for their families when they are gone. These men and women, many of them sick, some of them gravely so, will not have to return to Congress anymore to fight for the compensation they always should have been given. They will be able to go home, tend to their illnesses, their family members, and their friends. That is what they always wanted to do—just take care of themselves, their families, and their friends who got sick from the poisonous stuff that was in the air right after 9/11, when, bravely, these men and women rushed to the Towers. That is what we want. We have waited too long.

Now, we are going to have a few amendment votes first, and I warn my colleagues on both sides of the aisle: If you vote for these amendments, you will, at best, delay the bill but, at worst, kill it. Neither is a good choice, neither is a palatable choice, and neither is an acceptable choice. Let's defeat these amendments. I believe they will be defeated. Then, let's pass the bill overwhelmingly.

This body has come together to help veterans time and again. These people are just like veterans, and 9/11 seemed like a war. I was there. I was there the next day. I was in Washington the day it happened. In a time of war, these brave people selflessly risked their lives and rushed to the Towers to defend our freedom, just like our soldiers do and just like our armed services do. So we should sign this bill into law.

Now, I will have more to say on the matter before and after the vote, about what this means, and thanking the many people, particularly the first responders—names like Zadroga, Pfeifer, and Alvarez—who made this happen. Until then, let me just say it is hard for me to express how much I am looking forward to passing this bill here today.

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

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

RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the leadership time is reserved.

CONCLUSION OF MORNING BUSINESS

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Morning business is closed.

LEGISLATIVE SESSION

NEVER FORGET THE HEROES: JAMES ZADROGA, RAY PFEIFER, AND LUIS ALVAREZ PERMANENT AUTHORIZATION OF THE SEPTEMBER 11TH VICTIM COMPENSATION FUND ACT

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate will resume consideration of H.R. 1327, which the clerk will report.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

A bill (H.R. 1327) to extend authorization for the September 11th Victim Compensation Fund of 2001 through fiscal year 2092, and for other purposes.

NOMINATION OF MARK T. ESPER

Mr. THUNE. Madam President, later this morning we will be voting on the nomination of Mark Esper to be Secretary of Defense. Dr. Esper is an outstanding choice. I don't need to tell anyone how essential the position of Secretary of Defense is to our national security. The Secretary of Defense is key to ensuring that our Nation is prepared to meet and defeat any threat. Dr. Esper has the experience, the knowledge, and the character for the job. He has an illustrious resume: West Point grad, Gulf war veteran, Bronze Star recipient, Rifle Company commander, a total of 10 years on Active Duty, and an additional 11 in the National Guard and Army Reserve.

In addition to his practical military and leadership experience, he has extensive experience on the policy side of things as well. He has a master's degree from the John F. Kennedy School of Government at Harvard and a doctorate in public policy from George Washington University here in the Nation's Capital. He worked as a senior professional staff member on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee and the Governmental Affairs Committee, as policy director for the House Armed Services Committee, and as national security adviser to former Senate Majority Leader Bill Frist. He also served