

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The bill 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 Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.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 (Mrs. BLACKBURN). Without objection, it is so ordered.

NOMINATION OF BARBARA MCCONNELL BARRETT

Mr. THUNE. Madam President, later today, the Senate will vote to confirm Barbara Barrett as Secretary of the Air Force. I have come to the floor directly from a meeting with her this morning.

Ambassador Barrett has had an impressive career both inside and outside of government. Among other things, she has served as U.S. Ambassador to Finland, Deputy Administrator of the FAA, and as a member of the Civil Aeronautics Board. Most importantly, she has a deep understanding of the U.S. Air Force, thanks to her work as a civilian adviser to the Secretary of Defense and the Joint Chiefs.

As a member of the Defense Advisory Committee on women in the services, she fought to expand opportunities for women in the military. She became the first civilian woman to land an F-18 on an aircraft carrier, which was part of a mission to demonstrate women's fitness to fly in combat. Thanks, in part, to her work in 1993, the military changed its regulations to allow women to fly combat aircraft.

I am always particularly interested in making sure we have an outstanding Air Force Secretary because my State of South Dakota is lucky enough to play host to Ellsworth Air Force Base, home of the 28th Bomb Wing and future home of the B-21 bomber.

Over the State work period in October, I was able to visit Ellsworth to sit down with the new commander of the 28th Bomb Wing, Col. David Doss, as well as CCM Rochelle Hemingway. We had a great discussion, and we had a chance to talk about the needs of the base going forward, including what will be needed as Ellsworth prepares to serve as the first home of the B-21.

Ensuring that the base has the necessary resources and infrastructure to fully support the B-21 mission will be a priority of mine not just as we await the mission but for decades to come.

Since I came to Congress, I have worked with the base and the Greater Rapid City community to build up Ellsworth. We have gone from fighting to keep the base open, to adding an MQ-9 Reaper mission and supporting the B-1 as a workhorse of the bomber fleet, to hosting the largest training airspace in the continental United States, and to being chosen to host both the B-21 training mission and first operational squadron.

I am incredibly proud of all that Ellsworth airmen have accomplished, and I am looking forward to seeing everything the team at the base will be able to do in the future.

TURKEY AND SYRIA

Madam President, as I reflect on the critical role our military plays in the world, I want to take a moment to talk about what is happening in Syria right now and the U.S. response.

This is a complex situation. Given its proximity to several fronts of conflict and unrest, Turkey is facing immense pressure to address security concerns and is straining to support a huge number of refugees.

Turkey also has an understandable interest in rooting out terrorists within its country and stemming any factions that support them, but the Kurdish militias the United States has backed in Syria are not the same as the group Turkey has struggled to contain in its own country.

Turkey's decision to attack Kurdish forces in Syria will do nothing but exacerbate the humanitarian crisis on the border. It will also strengthen the Assad regime and foster greater influence in the region by Russia and Iran. Most alarmingly, Turkey's incursion will force the Kurds to pull resources that would otherwise be committed to keeping ISIS fighters imprisoned. It is deeply concerning that the withdrawal of U.S. forces has set this into motion.

As you know, a major reason for ISIS's rise was President Obama's decision to withdraw U.S. forces from Iraq on a timetable that he announced to our enemies and before the security situation was stable. The departure of U.S. forces created a vacuum in the region that ISIS quickly stepped in to fill. It is important that we don't allow history to repeat itself.

U.S. and Kurdish forces have been working together against ISIS for years now and have succeeded in drastically shrinking ISIS's territory and weakening this terrorist organization. Thanks to their work, in many respects ISIS can be said to be on the run, but this achievement could quickly be undone by a U.S. withdrawal from the country.

I hope we will be able to have some fruitful discussions here in Washington this week about the need to maintain our strategic gains against ISIS and avoid creating a vacuum for our enemies to fill, and I hope our NATO ally Turkey is listening closely.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

IMMIGRATION

Mr. DURBIN. Madam President, I rise today on the Senate floor to address an issue that is really fundamental to who we are as Americans. It is the issue of immigration.

We just celebrated, this past week, a day dedicated to Christopher Colum-

bus, who, supposedly, discovered America. Of course, we know better. Native Americans were here and discovered it before him, but he was the first European to discover America and really triggered an immigration to this part of the world that has really changed America and the world forever.

This immigration from all over the world has created one of the most diverse nations on Earth. I am a beneficiary of that immigration. My mother was an immigrant to America in 1911, coming here from Lithuania to East St. Louis, IL, where she was raised and where I had the chance to grow up, as well.

Today, her son—this immigrant mother's son—has been serving as a U.S. Senator from Illinois with humility and pride. It is an indication of our family's story, but it is also America's story—how immigrants came from far and wide to America and made lives and great futures and built families that continue to serve this Nation to this day.

You would think, since immigration is such a central part of who we are as Americans, that there would be a general consensus about the issue, but it turns out to be one of the most hotly contested and debated issues almost since the arrival of the Mayflower.

How many people should be allowed to come to this country? Where are they going to come from? What will they do when they come here? What impact will they have on those of us who are already here? All of these questions of national security have led us into an ongoing national debate about immigration.

Today, this morning, I come to the floor to discuss one aspect of it. This last Sunday morning, I was back in Illinois and was invited to a Democratic Party event in Schaumburg, IL. It was a fairly routine breakfast meeting of the Democratic township organization. I have been to many of them. It is great to see old friends.

When I arrived at the event, I was surprised to see demonstrators, protesters—perhaps 200 of them—holding signs with my name on them. It is not exactly the way you want to start a Sunday morning, greeting 200 people with signs about this fellow named Durbin. I had a chance to talk to them. I didn't run away from them because I wanted to find out who they were and why they were there.

By and large, they were people from India who are currently living in the United States and want to become legal citizens here. Most of them came to the United States bringing special skills that were needed. Many of them are in the Silicon Valley high-tech industries—engineers who came to the United States once companies certified that they couldn't find an American to fill the job, which is a requirement. Having been unable to find an American, these companies asked permission to bring in these highly skilled people from India to serve as engineers in the United States.

They come in on what is known as H-1B visas, by and large, and that allows them to work in the United States for several years and to renew that work status on a recurring basis. But there reached a point where they wanted to stay here. They have lived here awhile. They bring their families and raise their families here, and they want to become part of America's future. They apply for what is known as an employment-based immigrant visa, which leads to a green card. A green card is the ticket to legal, permanent residency, which can lead to citizenship.

So these people from India, who were waiting to see me and say a few words to me, stated the fact that the waiting list for those in this category from India has now passed 520,000. There are 520,000 who are seeking permanent status in our country.

I met one of them from my hometown of Springfield, IL, a young Indian physician who is serving at one of our hospitals in Springfield. He brought with him his daughter. His daughter is 12 years old. He is worried because if he, the physician who came here to work from India, is not allowed to legally stay in this country and his daughter reaches the age of 21, her status changes. She is no longer his dependent. She now has her own immigration status, and she is not technically, legally, beyond the age of 21, allowed to stay in this country.

So he says to me: Here is my daughter, who has been here for 10 years. This is the country she knows and loves and wants to be a part of, and if I don't get approval to stay as a doctor in this country, she is technically undocumented at that point, and we run into problems with the future.

For example, it is no surprise that this doctor wants to see his daughter go to college. Well, his daughter, undocumented, will not qualify for any assistance in the United States by way of Pell grants or loans. How is she going to pay for college? Where would she go? Our immigration system says, at that point, if her father doesn't reach this green card status, she would return to India, a place she maybe never remembers and that was part of her infancy in her early time here on Earth.

So it is a complicated situation. There is a debate under way here about how to stop this backlog of people who are waiting in line 10 years, 20 years, and more to reach green card status. You can imagine the uncertainty in their lives, the uncertainty for their children, and why they are looking for some relief.

I came to this issue never dreaming that I would end up being in the middle of most debates in the Senate on immigration, but I welcome it because it is such an important issue and because I have strong feelings myself about America's immigration policy.

I serve as the ranking member of the Subcommittee on Border Security and Immigration for the Senate Judiciary

Committee. As I have said, my own personal family and life experience have really made me warm to the subject, and I try to learn as much as I can about a complex field. Make no mistake, the immigration system of the United States of America is badly, badly broken. How to fix it is hotly debated here in the Senate and in the House and across the Nation.

Last night, when I was watching the Presidential debates, groups were running ads on a regular basis on the issue of immigration. Many believe that it is going to be a hot topic in the 2020 election. It is quite possible that it will be. We know that in State legislatures and city halls, on cable news and social media, and almost everywhere, there is a debate under way about immigration. But there is one place where there is no debate about immigration—here in the U.S. Senate.

This year, we had one hearing in the Border Security and Immigration Subcommittee. And the Senate Judiciary Committee voted on only one immigration bill. The chairman limited debate to only one hour and didn't allow any amendments, and we have not had any debates on the floor of the Senate.

I look to the Galleries and the people who come to the Senate and expect to see a debate on an issue—an important issue. Here is one: immigration. But all they have is a speech from this Senator and a few others, instead of addressing the issue of immigration.

Senator KENNEDY has come to the floor, and I am going to make a unanimous consent request in just a few minutes. He is a member of the Senate Judiciary Committee, too, and I think he appreciates, as I do, what a great honor it is to serve on this storied committee. But the fact is that to have the titles of Judiciary Committee and Border Security and Immigration Subcommittee and to do nothing, I think, is a dereliction of duty.

We are supposed to step up and debate these things and come to the best bipartisan conclusion we can to solve problems in this country. Here is a problem we are not solving: how to deal with a backlog of people, highly skilled and important people, like the doctor from my hometown of Springfield, from India, who wants to have a green card, giving him an opportunity to become an American citizen.

Do you know what? I want that doctor to become an American citizen. I want him to get a green card. We need him in my hometown and many more just like him, and I want his family to be there with him so that his life is complete as he pursues his professional responsibilities.

Now, in recent weeks, there has been an effort to pass a bill to address this issue. The bill is S. 386. It is known as the Fairness for High-Skilled Immigrants Act. Unfortunately, there was an effort to pass it without any debate or a chance to even offer an amendment.

Now, this bill makes significant changes in our immigration laws, but

there has never been a hearing on the bill or a vote in the committee. The lead sponsor of the legislation is MIKE LEE, who is the senior Senator from Utah and a personal friend. He has negotiated several amendments in private with his Republican Senators, but there has been no conversation with myself or any other Democratic Senators about these negotiations.

That is not how the Senate should work. I believe I have seen the Senate at its best, and, unfortunately, it was 7 years ago. We decided—eight of us in the Senate, four Democrats and four Republicans—to actually sit down and try to fix the immigration system. It is a pretty ambitious task, but we had some pretty talented people engaged in it. Leading on the Republican side was John McCain from Arizona. Next to him was LINDSEY GRAHAM from South Carolina, Jeff Flake from Arizona, and MARCO RUBIO from Florida.

On our side, I was engaged with Senator CHUCK SCHUMER, who is now the Democrat Senate leader, as well as BOB MENENDEZ, of course, a Hispanic Senator from the State of New Jersey, and MICHAEL BENNET from Colorado.

So the eight of us came together. We did what I think the Senate is supposed to do. We sat down and took our time and spent months, every single week, sometimes several evenings each week, going through a different section of our immigration law and trying to make it work, reform it, and change it. It took us months—some 6 months of meetings. That is what we are elected to do.

We produced a comprehensive immigration reform bill that was supported by virtually everyone. Groups of business leaders, as well as groups of labor leaders, the church community, and all sorts of people from the conservative side of politics to the liberal side of politics said that this was a good, fair, bipartisan compromise.

So in 2013, we reported this bill to the floor, after our Democratic Judiciary Committee chairman at that time, PATRICK LEAHY from Vermont, had a lengthy hearing. We considered over 100 amendments—amendments offered by those who were voting against the bill, like Jeff Sessions from Alabama, and amendments offered by those supporting the bill, like MAZIE HIRONO from Hawaii. Each person offered an amendment, debated it, and we voted. It sounded like the U.S. Senate; didn't it? We were actually voting on amendments on a critically important bill. Thanks to Chairman LEAHY's skill and patience, I might add, after hundreds of amendments were considered, the bill was reported out of the Senate Judiciary Committee, came to the floor of the Senate in 2013, and we called for a vote. It passed 68 to 32. After all that work, on a bipartisan basis, we finally got it right. I thought we did, and I voted for it.

Sadly, that bill was sent across the Rotunda, over to the House of Representatives, as the Constitution requires, and, unfortunately, the Republican Speaker, John Boehner, refused

to call the bill or debate an alternative to it. It literally died from lack of any effort to deal with the issue in the U.S. House of Representatives.

So one would ask—that was more than 6 years ago—what has happened since? The answer is nothing—virtually nothing—except decisions by the Trump administration, for example, to eliminate some aspects of our immigration law, like the DACA provision.

Madam President, I ask unanimous consent for 3 additional minutes.

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

Mr. DURBIN. In light of an attempt to pass the Fairness for High-Skilled Immigrants Act without hearings or debate, I come to the floor today to present an alternative. I am introducing the Resolving Extended Limbo for Immigrant Employees and Families Act, known as the RELIEF Act, which will treat all immigrants fairly by eliminating immigrant visa backlogs.

One of the most serious problems of our immigration system is that there are not enough immigrant visas, known as green cards. As a result, immigrants are stuck in crippling backlogs for decades. Close to 4 million future Americans, many of whom already live and work in the United States, are on the State Department's immigrant visa waiting list. However, under current law, only 226,000 family green cards and 140,000 employee green cards are available each year. Children and spouses of lawful permanent residents, known as LPRs, count against these caps, which further limit the number of available green cards.

The backlogs are a tremendous hardship on families caught in this situation. Children of parents waiting to become LPRs often age out, as I described earlier, because they are no longer children by the time the green cards are available for them. The solution is clear: increase the number of green cards.

Let's be clear. Lifting green card country caps alone, without increasing green cards, as the bill that Senator LEE is sponsoring would do, will not eliminate the backlog for Indian immigrants, the nationality with the most people in the employment backlog, and it will dramatically increase backlogs for the rest of the world.

Mr. Ira Kurzban, who is the Nation's expert on immigration laws, has said that we are virtually trying to solve the problem with Senator LEE's bill for Indian immigrants at the expense of everyone else in the world. He says:

From 2023 until well into the 2030s, there will be zero EB-2 visas for the rest of the world. None for China, South Korea, Philippines, Britain, Canada, Mexico, every country in the [European Union] and all of Africa. Zero.

It would also choke off green cards for every important profession that isn't in the information technology field.

More than 20 national organizations have now rallied against the Lee legis-

lation and have said things such as that the bill offers a "zero-sum approach," pitting one group of immigrants against another to fight the broken immigration system.

The RELIEF Act, which I am introducing today, is a solution.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator's time has expired.

UNANIMOUS CONSENT REQUEST—S. 2603

Mr. DURBIN. Madam President, as in legislative session, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate proceed to the immediate consideration—

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator has used his extra 3 minutes.

Mr. DURBIN. I am making a unanimous consent request.

As in legislative session, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate proceed to the immediate consideration of S. 2603, introduced earlier today; further, that the bill be considered read three times and passed and that the motion to reconsider be considered made and laid upon the table with no intervening action or debate.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

The Senator from Louisiana.

Mr. KENNEDY. Madam President, reserving the right to object, no one in this Chamber has more respect for the senior Senator from Illinois and the Democratic whip than I do. I share much of his frustration. I also share, and I believe what the Senator also believes, that immigration is an extraordinarily important subject that this body should be addressing. We are a nation of immigrants. The American people support legal immigration. I know the senior Senator from Illinois supports it. I certainly support it.

I am rising to object because a number of my colleagues—and I don't want to simply put it on them; I join with them in this—would like a little additional time to study this bill. Equally important, if not more important, many of my colleagues' sentiment is that we should take this bill up first in the Judiciary Committee.

I commit to the minority whip that I will join with him in trying to get our esteemed chairman to take this bill up. I don't think we ought to be afraid of this issue. I don't think we ought to be reluctant to take difficult votes. That is why we are here in the U.S. Senate. I also cannot think of a subject that is more important for this body to address than the subject of immigration, including but not limited to legal and illegal immigration.

The fact of the matter is that the American people deserve an immigration system that looks like somebody designed it on purpose.

For the reasons I just expressed, Madam President, I respectfully object.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Objection is heard.

The Senator from Illinois.

Mr. DURBIN. I thank my colleague from Louisiana. We have worked on things together, and I hope we will continue to do so in the future.

This is controversial, but it is so timely and important. The hundreds of people who demonstrated against this Senator last Sunday were people I welcomed into this country and believe will be an important part of our future. I am willing to find a solution to the problem, and I am willing to work on a bipartisan basis to do it. Your help will be invaluable.

#### CLOTURE MOTION

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Pursuant to rule XXII, the Chair lays before the Senate the pending cloture motion, which the clerk will state.

The bill clerk read as follows:

#### CLOTURE MOTION

We, the undersigned Senators, in accordance with the provisions of rule XXII of the Standing Rules of the Senate, do hereby move to bring to a close debate on the nomination of Frank William Volk, of West Virginia, to be United States District Judge for the Southern District of West Virginia.

Mitch McConnell, Martha McSally, Rick Scott, John Thune, Mike Crapo, Lamar Alexander, Johnny Isakson, John Cornyn, Roy Blunt, Roger F. Wicker, John Hoeven, Mike Rounds, Kevin Cramer, Steve Daines, John Boozman, Cindy Hyde-Smith, James E. Risch.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. By unanimous consent, the mandatory quorum call has been waived.

The question is, Is it the sense of the Senate that debate on the nomination of Frank William Volk, of West Virginia, to be United States District Judge for the Southern District of West Virginia, shall be brought to a close?

The yeas and nays are mandatory under the rule.

The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk called the roll.

Mr. THUNE. The following Senators are necessarily absent: the Senator from Tennessee (Mr. ALEXANDER), the Senator from Georgia (Mr. ISAKSON), and the Senator from Wisconsin (Mr. JOHNSON).

Further, if present and voting, the Senator from Tennessee (Mr. ALEXANDER) would have voted "yea" and the Senator from Wisconsin (Mr. JOHNSON) would have voted "yea."

Mr. DURBIN. I announce that the Senator from Colorado (Mr. BENNET), the Senator from New Jersey (Mr. BOOKER), the Senator from California (Ms. HARRIS), the Senator from Hawaii (Ms. HIRONO), the Senator from Minnesota (Ms. KLOBUCHAR), the Senator from Vermont (Mr. SANDERS), and the Senator from Massachusetts (Ms. WARREN) are necessarily absent.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Are there any other Senators in the Chamber desiring to vote?

The yeas and nays resulted—yeas 90, nays 0, as follows:

[Rollcall Vote No. 315 Ex.]

YEAS—90

|           |            |       |
|-----------|------------|-------|
| Baldwin   | Blumenthal | Braun |
| Barrasso  | Blunt      | Brown |
| Blackburn | Boozman    | Burr  |