

guilty as charged. The Senator from Kentucky is right. We did that. Do you know the net result of it? The net result of it, it is going to reduce the deficit this year by \$1.3 trillion.

All this talk about the big spenders in Congress, the bill we put together for inflation reduction zeroed in on those two issues: capping the cost of prescription drugs for Medicare and making certain that corporations, profitable corporations, pay their fair share of taxes just like every American family. Those two elements were not mentioned by the Senator from Kentucky. It is understandable. But what I want to make clear is, we didn't have a single Republican vote in support of what I have just given you.

There is an additional section there that is controversial, but I feel strongly about it. I think we are facing in this world today obvious evidence of extreme weather and changes that should alarm us. Yes, it is climate change. It is global warming. And what we did in this bill was to create incentives for American families and corporations to start taking steps toward responsible conduct. It is coming. It wasn't a Federal mandate that required all the car companies to build electric vehicles. They see the writing on the wall. They realize we have to change the way that we energize transportation in America, and they want to be in front of the parade, not behind it. So do we. That was part of this bill as well. I support it. Not a single Republican voted for it. That is the reality.

Incidentally, inflation is a burden on American families and individuals. There is no doubt about it, and I am not going to sugarcoat it. We have seen some progress. For example, the price of gasoline stares us right in the face every time we drive right down the road. Well, I did some driving over the weekend, probably put 600 to 700 miles on the car in Illinois, driving around to various events, and I kept an eye out for the cost of gasoline. I don't know what it is in Hawaii or in any home State, but I will tell you that in Missouri, gasoline was selling for \$3.13 a gallon; in Illinois, closer to \$3.50 a gallon. High? Yes. But not \$5, which we faced just a few months ago. We have made some progress, and we need to continue to focus on reducing the cost of goods for families that they face every week. That is part of our mission as well.

IMMIGRATION

The last point I want to make is this. Madam President, there was a decision made by the Governor of Texas, Governor Abbott, several weeks ago to start transporting people who were legally in the United States but had just arrived from foreign countries on buses to various places around the country. Thousands of them were brought to Washington; thousands were brought to New York; and hundreds were brought to my city of Chicago that I represent.

These were people who came to our borders and asked if they could be ad-

mitted as legal immigrants to the United States, and they passed the threshold test. But let me quickly add, it is a threshold test as to whether they have credible fear for their own personal safety. They still have to face an adjudication, and the majority of them are not likely to win that adjudication. The problem we face is very obvious: It is a long time before that adjudication takes place. What are these families supposed to do when they are here waiting?

I went over to the Salvation Army rescue shelter on the West Side of Chicago to meet with some of these families and individuals who had been bused to Chicago by the Governor of Texas. I met one man, Carlos, and his family—his wife, his 5-year-old daughter, and his 8-month-old daughter as well. Through the translators, they told me their story. They are from Venezuela.

Venezuela is in a disaster situation. It is so dangerous that the United States warns travelers not to go to Venezuela, and the economy is so weak that the cost of living has gone up dramatically. Inflation there is even dramatically larger than the United States.

Carlos reached a point that, even working as hard as he could, he couldn't feed his family. So on May 15, he and his wife decided to pick up their children and try to make it to the border of the United States to try to find work. It took them 5 months, and they went through everything you can imagine; much of it on foot, and what travel they could find, they took advantage of. They were robbed, beaten up. They were pushed into a jungle situation in Panama where Carlos said, "I didn't think we were going to live through the night." It was that dangerous. They did survive, and they finally made it, and now they are here in Chicago.

I asked him what he wanted. He said, "I just want to go to work. I will take any job."

What we are finding—and the front page story in the New York Times confirmed it—is that many of these people are needed. Yes, we have unemployment of 5 million in America, but we have 11 million jobs that need to be filled. Many of them are entry-level jobs, and it is hard to get anyone to take them.

Last week, as well, I had the Illinois Farm Bureau come and see me. They started talking about their need for immigrant labor on the farms of America.

Madam President, you probably know this from your own home State, but currently half of the agricultural workers in America who are working on the dairy farms, picking crops, doing things that are pretty hard work, half of them are undocumented. We don't think twice about eating the fruits and vegetables that are the bounty of their work, but that is the reality.

Our immigration system, at this point in time, is badly broken. We need

to have legal immigration into the United States—controlled legal immigration into the United States for work purposes. Many of these people who are arriving are desperately needed for jobs that Americans won't fill. They don't want to work picking crops, for example, or on a dairy farm. A friend of mine who is a restaurateur in Chicago told me, if you removed all of the undocumented workers from the restaurants of Chicago, you would just start closing them right and left. Behind that screen door in your favorite restaurant are people working hard every single day who are undocumented.

We have to reach the point where we sit down in a bipartisan basis and do something about it. It was 8 years ago when we put together a comprehensive immigration reform bill. Democrats, DURBIN, SCHUMER—and I want to salute MICHAEL BENNET, who time and again has been able to come up with a good bipartisan approach to ag workers—and BOB MENENDEZ of New Jersey, we were on the Democratic part of the team of 8. On the Republican part, we had Senator McCain, Senator GRAHAM, Senator RUBIO, and then Senator Flake.

We worked for months, put together a comprehensive bill, brought it to the floor of the Senate, and passed it with 14 Republicans joining us. There were 68 votes on the floor of the U.S. Senate for a bill that would have addressed the very issues we are facing today. The bill was then sent over, after it passed the Senate, to the House of Representatives, and the Republican leader refused to take up it or even call it.

We had a chance, and we have to create that chance again—comprehensive immigration reform. We shouldn't do it at the expense of a poor family like Carlos's family who came from Venezuela. I would say what the Governors of Arizona and Texas and Florida are doing now is to jeopardize the safety and the health of these families. That is not fair to them. It is not American. Putting them on buses and promising them, at the end of the journey, that there are going to be jobs waiting for them, for example, is just to mislead them.

In addition, if these Governors were transporting these people in good faith to Chicago or New York or Washington, they would have the decency to tell us who is coming and when. They don't. They put the buses on the road, and they stop at a train station and turn them all loose. Many of these people know no one in those cities. We found recent evidence that some of them are in a position where they are taken away from where they are supposed to report—legally report—in this country and sent hundreds and thousands of miles away by these Governors for political reasons I can't explain. That is not who we are.

I do want to commend the Salvation Army, Catholic Charities, many of the charities in our area.

WBEZ is our public radio station in Chicago. This was on their website:

Chicago agencies and local groups tell immigrants "We are so glad you are here."

They are getting an American welcome. They are being treated decently. They are being treated with respect.

Now, as we debate the politics of why they are here and whether they can stay, we shouldn't do it at the expense of demonstrating clear American values of humanity and caring. That is who we are. We are not going to allow these kids to reach a situation like they have before and be the victims of our political debate. We don't want kids in cages. We don't want kids forcibly removed from their parents. We don't want them to suffer on these bus rides, not knowing where they are going to end up and what is going to happen to them next. We are better than that as Americans, and we are better than that as a nation of immigrants.

I have said it on the floor many times, and I am proud to say it again: I am the son of an immigrant to this country. My mother came here at the age of 2 from Lithuania, brought with her the good luck that I could live my life and be part of the U.S. Senate and the governance of this Nation. We shouldn't look beyond that.

I will say the Presiding Officer holds a special place in the history of the Senate with her immigration status as well.

If you look in any direction, you are going to find immigrants, sons and daughters of immigrants, who really have made America what it is today. Let's get this right on a bipartisan basis. Let's not waste any time.

In the meantime, let us treat these people who are coming to our country and are now legally in the country with dignity and respect.

I yield the floor.

SOLID START ACT OF 2021

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. As if in legislative session and under the previous order, the Senate, having received from the House the returned papers with respect to S. 1198, the actions of the Senate on September 8, 2022, are vitiated; the committee-reported substitute is withdrawn; the Tester amendment at the desk, No. 5505, is agreed to; the bill, as amended, is considered read a third time and passed; and the motions to reconsider are considered made and laid upon the table.

Thereupon, the Senate proceeded to consider (S. 1198) a bill to amend title 38, United States Code, to improve and expand the Solid Start program of the Department of Veterans Affairs, and for other purposes.

The committee-reported amendment in the nature of a substitute is withdrawn.

The amendment (No. 5505) in the nature of a substitute is agreed to as follows:

(Purpose: In the nature of a substitute)

Strike all after the enacting clause and insert the following:

SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.

This Act may be cited as the "Solid Start Act of 2022".

SEC. 2. SOLID START PROGRAM OF THE DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS.

(a) IN GENERAL.—Chapter 63 of title 38, United States Code, is amended by adding at the end the following new subchapter:

"SUBCHAPTER II—OTHER OUTREACH PROGRAMS AND ACTIVITIES

"§ 6320. Solid Start program

"(a) IN GENERAL.—The Secretary shall carry out a program, to be known as the 'Solid Start program', under which the Secretary shall—

"(1) build the capacity of the Department to efficiently and effectively respond to the queries and needs of veterans who have recently separated from the Armed Forces; and

"(2) systemically integrate and coordinate efforts to assist veterans, including efforts—

"(A) to proactively reach out to newly separated veterans to inform them of their eligibility for programs of and benefits provided by the Department; and

"(B) to connect veterans in crisis to resources that address their immediate needs.

"(b) ACTIVITIES OF THE SOLID START PROGRAM.—(1) The Secretary, in coordination with the Secretary of Defense, shall carry out the Solid Start program of the Department by—

"(A) collecting up-to-date contact information during transition classes or separation counseling for all members of the Armed Forces who are separating from the Armed Forces, while explaining the existence and purpose of the Solid Start program;

"(B) calling each veteran, regardless of separation type or characterization of service, three times within the first year after separation of the veteran from the Armed Forces;

"(C) providing information about the Solid Start program on the website of the Department and in materials of the Department, especially transition booklets and other resources;

"(D) ensuring calls are truly tailored to the needs of each veteran's unique situation by conducting quality assurance tests;

"(E) prioritizing outreach to veterans who have accessed mental health resources prior to separation from the Armed Forces;

"(F) providing women veterans with information that is tailored to their specific health care and benefit needs;

"(G) as feasible, providing information on access to State and local resources, including Vet Centers and veterans service organizations; and

"(H) gathering and analyzing data assessing the effectiveness of the Solid Start program.

"(2) The Secretary, in coordination with the Secretary of Defense, may carry out the Solid Start program by—

"(A) encouraging members of the Armed Forces who are transitioning to civilian life to authorize alternate points of contact who can be reached should the member be unavailable during the first year following the separation of the member from the Armed Forces; and

"(B) following up missed phone calls with tailored mailings to ensure the veteran still receives similar information.

"(3) In this subsection:

"(A) The term 'Vet Center' has the meaning given that term in section 1712A(h) of this title.

"(B) The term 'veterans service organization' means an organization recognized by

the Secretary for the representation of veterans under section 5902 of this title."

(b) CONFORMING AMENDMENTS.—Chapter 63 of such title, as amended by subsection (a), is further amended—

(1) by inserting before section 6301 the following:

"Subchapter I—Outreach Services Program";

and

(2) in sections 6301, 6303, 6304, 6305, 6306, and 6307, by striking "this chapter" each place it appears and inserting "this subchapter".

(c) CLERICAL AMENDMENTS.—The table of sections at the beginning of chapter 63 of such title is amended—

(1) by inserting before the item relating to section 6301 the following new item:

"SUBCHAPTER I—OUTREACH SERVICES PROGRAM";

and

(2) by adding at the end the following new items:

"SUBCHAPTER II—OTHER OUTREACH PROGRAMS AND ACTIVITIES

"6320. Solid Start program."

The bill (S. 1198), as amended, was ordered to be engrossed for a third reading, was read the third time, and passed.

EXECUTIVE CALENDAR—Continued

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Democratic leader is recognized.

PUERTO RICO

Mr. SCHUMER. Madam President, today, my thoughts are with all our fellow Americans in Puerto Rico—and all communities across the Caribbean—battered by the destruction of Hurricane Fiona. As of this morning, well over a million residents on the island remain without power, and two-thirds remain without running water.

In a short while, I will get on the phone with the FEMA Administrator and urge that they be ready to approve temporary 100 percent Federal cost share for all emergency protective services that Puerto Rico conducts in the coming days. That means covering the island's costs for distributing food and water, disaster operations, and emergency medical care. Right now, the FEMA Disaster Relief Fund has about \$15 billion as of late last week—a fund we Democrats fought extremely hard to secure.

I will also join with my colleagues in the New York delegation to send FEMA a letter calling on them to be ready to support Puerto Rico on any upcoming request for aid.

Five years—almost exactly 5 years to the day—after Puerto Rico was devastated by Hurricane Maria, the Federal Government has a responsibility to make sure we don't repeat the mistakes of the previous administration. The Federal response should be swift, robust, and continued for as long as the island needs.

JUDICIAL NOMINATIONS

Madam President, now on judges, as we begin the third week of the work period, the Senate presses ahead to confirm more of President Biden's impressive lineup of judicial nominees.