

Our rural communities, like those in Vermont, rely on immigrant and seasonal farmworkers and know how important improving our legal migration system is to our rural economy.

We need to address the limited number of family- and employment-based visas to address the backlog of green card applications that already exceed 10 million people, and we need more worker visas and other alternatives for our employers to be able to get the job done.

I voted last week to proceed on the first version of that border agreement that was worked out by our colleagues in the hope that we could work and pass amendments, improve it, and pass it. But the Republicans who first embraced that agreement or that effort turned their backs once Donald Trump insisted they take no action to secure the southern border before the November election. Donald Trump has a campaign, and we have a responsibility to govern, and that includes taking action on the southern border.

That situation is the result of inaction over many years. Republicans and Democrats can take credit for some of those failures, but we have to do there what we have done in so many other places—work together to get a secure border, find pathways for legal migration, and have safety and security at a border we control.

I am going to end where I began, and that is by thanking Leader SCHUMER and Leader MCCONNELL for their extraordinary effort in getting us to this vote on this important legislation.

I also want to say to the Senate staff and to our Senate pages, who have been here all night: Thank you. We are very grateful for the work that you do. This was not just an important day; it has been an important several months where the business of the Senate in debating the important issues of our time has occurred, and you all have been part of history.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Colorado.

SUPPLEMENTAL FUNDING

Mr. BENNET. Mr. President, I know that the hour is—not late. I guess it is early, but the staff have been on the floor all night, and the pages are exhausted. They have been working.

I wanted just to say—and I know the Presiding Officer doesn't deserve to have to spend 5 minutes listening to me. I just want to say a word, as we get out of here, about where we are. I want to thank the Senator from Vermont for his moral leadership and for his clarity in this difficult time.

Not that long ago, we had a conversation with the President of Ukraine, President Zelenskyy. It was while we were still in the midst of COVID, and we were meeting on Zoom. He said to the U.S. Senate that the Ukrainian people were fighting so they could live their lives the way we live our lives—

the way we live our lives in the United States.

More recently, in our last meeting with him, which was in person, he came here and met us in the Old Senate—or in, I guess, the Mansfield Room. He said to us that they were going to continue to fight; that if we didn't support them, they would lose but that they would never stop fighting because the Ukrainian people know what freedom is about, and they wouldn't stop. He thought that they could succeed if we continued to support them. He was very clear about that.

It wasn't clear to me that we were going to be able to fulfill our commitment. There have been moments—I have been here now 14 years or so. There have been moments when I have really wondered whether the U.S. Senate is just a relic of its former self; that our democracy is a relic of its former self; that the evidence that Xi Jinping and Vladimir Putin believe has piled up over the decades and, over the century, has put the United States in a place where it has no capacity to lead anymore. That is what they say at every negotiating table at which we find ourselves with them—that the 20th century was our century but that this is a different century. It is a century for totalitarianism, a century for authoritarianism, a century where might makes right.

As the Presiding Officer knows, my mom was born in Warsaw in 1938—a Polish Jew. It was the worst place on planet Earth that anybody could have been born at the worst moment when anybody could be born. I am going to spare you because we are here and we have got to move on, but they lived through the worst that humanity had to offer—my mom and my grandparents, Halina Klejman and John Klejman.

They finally came here to the United States of America, after the war was over, to rebuild their shattered lives, and they said to me that they had been happy here ever since—that was their language—with humanity's greatest treasures: democracy, freedom, and love as they described it. They hoped that, in the course of our lives, their grandchildren would be able to spread these treasures around the world.

Tonight, that is what we have done here in the U.S. Senate. Tonight, we have said that the rule of law matters; that democracy matters; that we recognize that the fight the Ukrainian people have been in for the last 2 years—a very unexpected fight with unexpected successes along the way and more predictable setbacks along the way—is an extraordinary testament to the Ukrainian people's courage, to their stamina, to their willingness to fight just to be free, just to live, as President Zelenskyy said, the life that we have lived, to die in the cause of democracy. That is what they have done over the last 2 years.

I hate to say this, but it is true. There were moments over the last 4

months or 6 months or so when it was not clear that the U.S. Senate was going to be able to overcome our divisions to support the Ukrainian people in their battle even with the knowledge that we have a particular role to play, at least in theory, as the United States of America when it comes to battles around the world between democracy and totalitarianism—an obligation we have never fulfilled perfectly but an obligation that at least, since World War II, we have had to carry uniquely among all nations.

I will say, as I come to a close, that I have had my doubts over the last 14 years about whether this place could operate again; whether we could make hard decisions on behalf of the people—our children and our grandchildren; whether it was just a relic of some bygone era. That has been particularly hard for me because I actually believe in democracy. I believe in the wisdom that is created not from, you know, what I think or what you think or what the Senator from Georgia thinks or even what the pages who are sitting on this floor think but the wisdom that comes from the collision of our disagreements and the collision of our disputes—disagreements and disputes that can only happen in a free country with the First Amendment and the ability to express oneself, with a free press.

The only places—the only human societies—where everybody agrees with each other are totalitarian societies where there is somebody in charge, telling everybody what to think, like Putin's Russia, like the situation in England when the Founders were trying to break away into a new republic.

And what I want to say to the American people tonight—or this morning—is that not that we are out of the woods and not that they can take their foot off the gas but that, today, we actually did something pretty significant here in this place, and we stood with the Ukrainian people, who have stood for democracy for these 2 years, who have given their lives just to live their lives the way we live our lives after having been invaded by a tyrant who had violated the post-World War II order.

The U.S. Senate not only supported it but did it with a vote of 70, with a vote where 20 Republicans split from President Trump's view of this world, which is a very different view than either Democratic or Republican Presidents have had since World War II. They were willing to split with that for the good of our Nation, for the good of our world. That is not an easy thing to do. It is not an easy vote for them to take, and I don't think there was one of us who would have predicted 4 months ago that we would have ended up in a place with those 20 votes.

So I want to say thank you to the people who took those votes. I want to say thank you to Senator SCHUMER for his leadership, for his patience. I know there are days when he feels like I am the biggest complainer around this place, but he did an amazing job in

holding this thing together over the last 4 months. I want to thank Senator McCONNELL for his role in making sure we ended up where we have ended up. For a moment, at least in my view, we have restored confidence in our ability to do hard things just in the nick of time, just in the nick of time.

There is so much left for us to do, and there are so many things that are beyond our control in this world that I think it really is important for us to get our act together. It is really important for us to have an education system in this country that delivers opportunity rather than reinforcing the income inequality that we have, which is a threat to our democracy. It is really important for us to find a way to work together; to create a healthcare system that doesn't make the lives of the American people a misery; to create, as the Senator from Vermont was saying, an immigration system that actually is a strength for the American people rather than a headwind for the American people; to strengthen our democracy.

All of those things are work that is left in front of us, but what we were

able to do tonight, I think, tells us that we actually can meet these challenges; that we can meet this moment; that we can overcome the divisions that tear at our communities and tear at our democracy; that are a threat to our democracy and a threat to our future, a threat to our children; and that each of us can make a difference in making the world a little bit better.

There are a lot of people in this town who believe that the House of Representatives will never pass this bill. They believe that politics has already made the decision about whether or not this bill is going to be passed. I don't believe that.

I will make a prediction this morning, and my prediction is that this bill is going to pass in the House of Representatives and that this country is going to stand with Ukraine; that we are going to stand with NATO; that we are going to stand with free people all over this planet in a fight that is no less important today than it was when my mom was born in Warsaw in 1938. It is exactly the same fight with exactly the same importance.

The United States has a new role to play, I think, in a new century. This morning, we have demonstrated that the U.S. Senate is going to lead, and I am very, very grateful for that.

I yield the floor.

ADJOURNMENT UNTIL FRIDAY,
FEBRUARY 16, 2024, AT 3:30 P.M.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senate stands adjourned until 3:30 p.m. on Friday.

Thereupon, the Senate, at 7:16 a.m., adjourned until Friday, February 16, 2024 at 3:30 p.m.

DISCHARGED NOMINATION

The Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs was discharged from further consideration of the following nomination under the authority of the order of the Senate of 01/07/2009 and the nomination was placed on the Executive Calendar: Cardell Kenneth Richardson, Sr., of Virginia, to be Inspector General, Department of State.