

We must expand Social Security services for seniors. Since 2010, Congress has cut Social Security's operating budget by 16 percent, and Republicans want to cut it another 4 percent this year. These budget cuts have resulted in the loss of more than 10,000 employees, the closing of 64 field offices, and reduced hours in many others. In Vermont, one field office has seen its staffing cut by 30 percent. According to a recent Washington Post article, 10,000 people died in the past year while they waited for decisions on Social Security disability benefits. We need to increase the funding for these vital services by at least \$1.4 billion just to bring staffing back up to where it was in 2010.

We need to keep our promises to our veterans, the men and women who put their lives on the line to defend our country. Right now, we have tens of thousands of vacancies in the VA. Those vacancies must be filled. Veterans must be able to get high-quality, timely healthcare.

We must fight the opioid and heroin epidemic that is sweeping this country. All over America, we are seeing tens of thousands of people, often young people, overdosing on opioids and heroin. States and communities all over this country need the resources for prevention and treatment. That is an issue that cannot be delayed. It has to be dealt with now.

Everybody knows that in the last several months, we have seen disastrous hurricanes impact Texas and Florida and Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands. In Puerto Rico today, there continue to be many people who still do not have electricity. We must pass disaster relief right now that is adequate and that treats Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands just as we will treat Texas and Florida. We cannot continue to delay given the enormous suffering that is existing in Puerto Rico and in the Virgin Islands.

Very briefly, let me touch on another issue of enormous consequence which simply cannot be ignored. On September 5, 2017, President Trump announced that he would be rescinding President Obama's Executive order on DACA. That decision means that some 800,000 young people who have known the United States of America as their only home—this is where they grew up; this is where they went to school—are on the verge of losing their legal status in terms of education, in terms of employment, and in terms of serving in the military if that program is not re-established. Without the legal protections afforded by the DACA Program, these young people live in a constant fear of being deported. Since the President's announcement in September, more than 11,000 people have lost the protections under DACA, with there being approximately 22,000 set to lose their legal protections by the March 5, 2018, deadline.

Any spending agreement must address the fear and uncertainty that has

been unnecessarily caused by the administration's reckless actions, and a clean Dream Act must be signed into law as part of the budget negotiations. Protecting the Dreamers and moving these young people toward citizenship is not some kind of wild and radical idea; it is precisely what the American people want. A recent Quinnipiac poll showed that 77 percent of the American people support providing legal protections to the Dreamers. This is an issue that must be dealt with, and it must be dealt with now.

When history looks back on this period, I do not want it to see a U.S. Congress that worked overtime to protect billionaires and large corporations and a Congress that turned its back on working families and the children and the sick and the poor. I do not want history to look back on this period and say that Members of Congress thought it appropriate to spend \$100 billion more on the military but were not concerned about veterans who did not get the healthcare they needed or some 800,000 young people who are now frightened that they will lose their legal status.

As the U.S. Senate, we must get our priorities right, and we need a budget that deals not only with military spending but with the needs of the middle class and working families of this country.

I yield the floor.

RECESS

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate stands in recess until 2:15 p.m.

Thereupon, the Senate, at 12:52 p.m., recessed until 2:15 p.m. and reassembled when called to order by the Presiding Officer (Mr. LEE).

EXECUTIVE CALENDAR—Continued

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from New Jersey.

IRAN

Mr. MENENDEZ. Mr. President, I rise today as brave citizens in Iran are taking to the streets to exercise their fundamental right to freely express their opinions and protest against their government.

As a democracy founded on core values, including the freedom of speech, equal rights under the law, and basic human dignity, the United States must always stand up for those peacefully advocating for these principles. For decades America has championed these principles, not only because they are right but because they promote our interests. We know that nations whose governments respect human rights and freedom of expression, that uphold the rule of law, and that protect the civil rights and liberties of their people serve as America's most reliable allies, most strategic security relationships, and most prosperous economic partners. Our enduring belief in democratic

values compels all of us to stand up, not as Democrats or Republicans but as Americans, and to support citizens around the world courageously protesting the regimes that oppress them.

We stand with those who speak out, and even risk their own lives, to make their voices heard in the struggle against oppression, inequality, and injustice. The fact that today's protests in Iran are against a regime that engages in activity that directly threatens our Nation, our allies, and our security interests is a separate matter.

Iran's leaders may try to blame the protests on outside forces, but in reality this unrest is homegrown. The Iranians marching in Tehran know exactly who is to blame for the hardship, inequality, and oppression they face in their daily lives. It is the regime itself. For those who have closely followed the developments in Iran for years, it is no surprise to learn that the regime continues to disregard the basic rights of its citizens. The regime has proven that it has no moral qualms with forcing the innocent to suffer. Already security forces are responsible for the deaths of more than 20 Iranian protesters. They have detained and imprisoned hundreds of people who are simply speaking their minds.

Of course, these abuses are just one example of the consistently odious behavior we have witnessed from Iran in recent years. This is a regime that has proven that it is more interested in building ballistic missiles than building bridges, that believes money is better spent on terrorist networks in Lebanon and Syria than on schools and hospitals for the Iranian people, that any revenue generated by Iran's international energy deals go directly into the pockets of those fomenting discord in the region and not into the hands of Iranian citizens trying to feed their families, and that will continue to engage in malign activity that isolates it from the community of nations, directly at the expense of the Iranian people. For these reasons and many more, I sincerely hope that the international community lives up to its responsibility to support all those who are protesting this repressive regime.

However, words go only so far. The United States must continue to lead international efforts to counter the Iranian regime's destabilizing behavior overseas. Unfortunately, this administration has yet to take the lead. We hear plenty of bluster from this President, but threatening tweets do not constitute policy nor can they hold Iran culpable. Putting a nation "on notice" means nothing if there are no policies put in place. We need a real strategy that addresses Iran's destabilizing activities in the Middle East, whether it is the regime's continued support for terrorist networks, illegal ballistic missile development, or human rights abuses and political interference in other countries.

These threats are what compelled me to work with my colleagues across the