

most sacred and foundational right of our Republic and allows us to come together. History will not look kindly on our inaction.

Two days ago we honored the memory of Dr. King and Coretta Scott King with a Congressional Gold Medal. What better way to honor their legacy than to come together and strengthen the rights they fought so hard to secure for every American?

Voting is fundamental, and ensuring that every American has the right to vote is at the core of what makes our democracy vibrant.

I urge my colleagues on both sides of the aisle to come together and to find a way forward for us to put voting rights first and to restore the important legacy of June 19 from across so many incidents in so many years and to move us forward on a positive path.

Thank you.

Mr. President, could I ask my colleague's indulgence for one last 2-minute speech?

Mr. SESSIONS. Mr. President, I was to be recognized before, but I will be glad to, but would like the 15 minutes or so I was allowed to have even though it may back up after me.

So, Mr. President, I would ask unanimous consent that Senator COONS be allowed an additional 2 minutes and I be allowed 15 minutes thereafter.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

Mr. COONS. I object, and suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The objection is heard.

The clerk will call the roll.

The assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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 President, I ask unanimous consent that order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. MARKEY). Without objection, it is so ordered.

#### AMBASSADORIAL NOMINATIONS

Mr. COONS. Mr. President, when we send American Ambassadors to nearly every country around the world, we are able to strengthen democracy and protect our national security. Ambassadors are voices for American values and the interests we share with other nations. Simply put, they are critical to promoting our foreign policy, our economic and security interests, and our leadership in the world. Yet when—because of partisan politics and gridlock at home—we fail to confirm ambassadors, we send a dangerous message about our lack of interest in the world and our lack of interest to diplomacy.

I have the privilege of chairing the African Affairs Subcommittee of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. Through my work as chair, as well as time I spent earlier in my life in Africa, I have seen up close both the incredible opportunities in the continent of Africa as well as the stark challenges.

For instance, today, this decade, 7 of the 10 fastest growing economies in the world are in Africa. Yet right now 1 in 5 American embassies of the 54 countries on that continent lacks a confirmed ambassador. Africa faces serious security challenges. Boko Haram in Nigeria, which has recently kidnapped hundreds of girls and burned down churches and schools is just one example. Yet as the countries bordering that troubled area of Nigeria try to coordinate a response to ensure that conflict doesn't spill over borders, we lack confirmed ambassadors in the adjacent nations of Niger and Cameroon.

In Namibia, where we also don't have a confirmed ambassador, the United States is dedicating \$50 million to combat HIV and Aids. We need an ambassador to oversee those funds and make sure they are appropriately used.

I will briefly review some of the numbers and facts. Our nominees to the countries of Namibia, Cameroon, and Niger have waited for a vote for 330 days—almost a year. Our nominee to Sierra Leone has waited 352 days, our nominee to Mauritania has waited 289 days, and our nominee to Gabon has waited 287 days.

In the long absence of ambassadors, professional career Foreign Service officers, capable and competent Deputy Chiefs of Mission assume this role on an interim basis. I am deeply concerned that with the August turnover for Foreign Service officers quickly approaching, many of our embassies will also be left without a DCM at the helm.

This is inexcusable. It hurts our economy, our national security, and our leadership to leave these posts unfilled and the ambassadorial nominees unconfirmed for so long.

I have great hope for Africa's future. Across the continent there are emerging democracies, growing economies, and although there are some security challenges, I am optimistic we can meet them in partnership with Africa's leaders.

When we fail to send career public servants to serve as our ambassadors, we send the message that we are not serious about these challenges and are not willing to invest in these partnerships.

I urge my colleagues to work together across the aisle to devote ourselves to getting our ambassadorial nominees to Africa confirmed. This transcends partisanship, and it is a task we should turn to promptly.

I thank the Presiding Officer and I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Colorado.

Mr. BENNET. Mr. President, I wish to thank the Senator from Alabama for allowing me to go ahead of him in cue.

#### IMMIGRATION REFORM

Mr. BENNET. Mr. President, we say that America is a nation of immigrants, and, of course, that is true. There is no other country in the world

for which immigration is so central to its history and its identity. Let's take a moment to reflect on what that really means.

Here is a photo. I am afraid it is not a very good quality. I took it myself. It is a photo that I took at a naturalization ceremony held for Active Duty servicemembers in Fort Carson, CO. The 13 soldiers and spouses who became U.S. citizens on that day represented 11 different countries of origin even though they are wearing our uniform.

They came from all over the world: Colombia, Haiti, Malaysia, Mexico, Nicaragua, China, the Philippines, South Korea, Togo, Ukraine, and the United Kingdom. They all came for this pursuit of the American dream, and they all came to serve this country. They are going to be the people who help us determine our future.

The same is true with the refugees fleeing persecution from around the world. The parents seeking opportunity for their children and those stepping forward to serve and sacrifice for our shared values have made this country the America we love. But our existing immigration policies do not reflect this history or the values that shaped it. Instead, it is a mess of unintended consequences that hurts our businesses, rips families apart, and keeps us at a competitive disadvantage with the rest of the world.

Tomorrow marks 365 days—1 year—since the Senate acted to fix these problems and passed bipartisan immigration reform. Yet here we are still waiting for the House of Representatives to do the same. The House's inaction is costing our Nation. It has cost us, among other things, \$13.4 billion in lost revenue in this last year alone. With each additional day that passes, we lose another \$37 million of revenue.

What is most frustrating about this to me is that we agree—on both sides of the aisle—that our current immigration system is broken. We agree that our immigration system is critical for our economy and for our country.

In June of last year we passed a bill in this Chamber with strong bipartisan support. It won the support of a broad coalition of Republicans and Democrats. It also has the support of countless organizations, from migrant workers to farmers and ranchers, from law enforcement agencies to the faith community, Latino leaders across this country, and the Chamber of Commerce to labor unions.

Often I tell those who despair about the lack of leadership in Congress that there is a model we can learn from, and it is the bipartisan work that was done on this bill. I cannot say enough about the Republican Members of the Gang of 8 who negotiated a bill over seven or eight months, knowing what the base of their party might say about the fact that they were in that room but still willing to do it because it was right to do for their country and it was right to do for their party—in that order.

In this job I have had the opportunity to meet with a diverse cross section of

Coloradans throughout the State, each struggling beneath the weight of a broken immigration system. I have spoken with peach growers on the Western Slope, vegetable growers in Brighton, and melon farmers in the San Luis Valley—farmers such as Philip Davis from Mesa Winds Farm and Winery in Western Colorado who cannot get the seasonal workers he needs. He will tell you how hard he and his family have had to work to fill these gaps, and how every single day they have to keep fighting to prevent their 36-acre farm from closing.

A legal, reliable, competent workforce for our Nation's farms and ranches is essential for Colorado's \$40 billion agricultural industry, and it is essential for our agricultural industry across the country. Maybe that is the reason why both the United Farm Workers union and the growers all across the United States of America endorsed this bill.

I have heard from Colorado's high-tech companies such as Full Contact, a tech startup in Boulder, CO, that acquired a company overseas. They have been unable to hire the talented engineers they need to grow their businesses and add jobs.

I have also heard from Colorado's dedicated teachers and administrators who work tirelessly to teach the next generation of entrepreneurs and innovators—teachers such as Mary Edwin from Colorado Springs. Mary, a graduate of Johns Hopkins with a master's degree in education, will likely be forced to return home to Nigeria, leaving behind the children she works with at Turman Elementary School, all on account of our broken, outdated visa system.

This year on April 7, approximately 6 months before the 2015 fiscal year even begins, the government announced it had already reached its statutory cap on H-1B petitions for H-1B visas. It has also reached its exemption for 20,000 advanced-degree holders. These are exactly the type of workers our State and the national economy require.

I will paint a picture of what our country would look like if the Senate's immigration bill were actually enacted. First, millions of people who came to this country for a better life, including young people whose parents brought them here as children, would have the opportunity to enter a tough but fair pathway to citizenship. With a path in place, we would see higher wages, greater consumption of goods and increased revenue. It would reduce our debt by nearly \$1 trillion—even in Washington that is real money—over 20 years, and increase our economic growth by roughly 5.4 percent over that period of time.

Next, our bill would put in place an efficient and flexible visa system that would enable us to compete in a changing 21st century global economy. Talented entrepreneurs and innovators from around the world would have the opportunity to stay here in order to

create jobs and fuel our economy. High-skilled workers in math and science, and lower-skilled workers in industries such as hospitality and tourism would come into the country to fill jobs where there are no available U.S. workers.

We would provide stability for our agricultural industry with a new streamlined program for agricultural workers—one that is more usable for employers and protects our workers.

Our borders would be more secure. There is one border security bill that has passed the Congress, and that is the bill passed by the Senate. It allows for new fencing, doubling the number of border agents, and increased spending on new technology. We would have full situational awareness on the border in order to allow us to intercept threats rapidly and successfully. And with the mandatory employment verification system and more effective entry-exit system, we would prevent future waves of illegal immigration.

A huge number of people who are here entered the country legally; we just don't know where they are. We ought to have a system that tells us that. These are all changes that our Nation urgently needs.

In the time since the Senate passed the bill, we heard a litany of reasons why it can't pass the House. They say the Senate bill doesn't have support in the House. If Speaker BOEHNER put the bill on the floor tomorrow, it would pass. They say the Senate bill is too long, too big, too comprehensive. I, for one, am willing to consider looking at this bill in smaller pieces as long as all the problems with the system are addressed. But the House has not produced—never mind voted—on a single bill, much less a series of smaller bills.

They say they want more border security, but what do they know about the border that our Republican colleagues from Arizona, JOHN MCCAIN and JEFF FLAKE, don't know? What do they know about the border that Senator FLAKE and Senator MCCAIN don't know? We have 21,000 border agents, and we are putting another 21,000 on the border if this bill were passed. We spend more money on the border than we do on all other Federal law enforcement combined, but they say there is not enough border security—not that they passed a border security bill. The only folks who have passed a border security bill are right here in the Senate. We should ask them how many more agents they need, and how many more billions of dollars we should spend.

If the House wants to secure the border first, which the Senate bill does, let's see their legislation. We are waiting. I, for one, would like to see them think about customs agents and trade instead of adding more billions of dollars at the border.

The most common excuse we have heard is that the House has not had time to pass a bill. The House was only scheduled to work 9 days last September. Ultimately, they came back

for a few extra days to shut the government down.

In the year since the Senate passed the bill, the House has found the time to vote 17 times to repeal, delay or dismantle the health care bill—54 times in total in the last 4 years. They voted to name 20 post offices and an assortment of 20 other government buildings. They have held five separate House committee hearings. They produced three different public reports and passed one resolution on the topic of Benghazi—a topic that has never come up in most of our town hall meetings.

What I hear in Colorado over and over is we have to stop excuses, stop posturing, and pass a bill—a good bipartisan bill, and that is what the House of Representatives ought to be doing now. Fixing our broken immigration system is long overdue, and I believe that the bipartisan solution crafted in our Senate bill will fix it just fine. It is time for the House to act.

With that, I yield the floor, and I thank my colleague, again, for his patience and kindness in allowing me to go first.

**THE PRESIDING OFFICER.** The Senator from Alabama.

**MR. SESSIONS.** Mr. President, I appreciate my colleague. I would note he didn't mention and wasn't mentioned in the effort to pass the Gang of 8 bill, which was dead on arrival in the House, the American worker. The numbers just came out yesterday, a revision of the economic numbers—our gross domestic product showed a decline in the first quarter of 2.9 percent, a GDP decline of 2.9 percent, which is the largest we have seen since the recession hit—those dramatic days.

We are not creating jobs in this country. Wages are not going up. We do not need to be surging the number of immigrants coming into the country. We don't need to be passing a law such as the Gang of 8 bill that would double the H-1B workers brought into America, increase by 50 percent the annual flow, add another 500,000 so-called backlog workers, in addition to legalizing some 11 million-plus, at a time when Americans are having wages fall and jobs are very difficult to find.

For example, I would note that workforce participation levels have fallen to their lowest point since the 1970s. This is a dramatic decline in the number of people working and the numbers continue to slide. Since 2009, we have had a decline in median income for families in America of \$2,300.

They suggest repeatedly that this legislation we have brought to the floor was focused primarily on melon harvesters, but that is not so. About 80 percent of the people who would be given legal status and would be allowed to come to America to work under the guest worker program would not be on the farms. They would be taking jobs in plants and factories all over America, reducing the need for businesses to increase wages for a change and try to attract people into some of these more

difficult jobs. It is not that people won't do this work; it is that the wages aren't sufficient to take care of them and their families.

We need wages to rise. We have a loose labor market, not a tight labor market. People are having a hard time finding jobs. We are talking about a dramatic increase in the number of workers at a time when the economy is struggling, workers are hurting, wages are down, and unemployment is up.

I just want to dispute that. I want to push back on it. That has been my analysis from the beginning.

Oh, we need more high-tech workers, they say, and businesses say that too. But what do the numbers show? Professor Harold Salzman at Rutgers did a report that said we are actually graduating about 500,000 STEM graduates—science, technology, engineering, mathematics—about 500,000 graduate a year, but we only have jobs for fewer than half of them. Most STEM graduates are not working in their fields. They haven't been able to find the kind of work for which they trained. One of the reasons is that a substantial number of those jobs are taken by H-1B workers who are brought in not to immigrate to America to create jobs, I say to my colleagues; they come in on the H-1B visa, which is a limited period of time, they work at lower wages, and they return to their country. They are not on a path to be permanent citizens. But it is a great asset to businesses that don't want to hire, perhaps—it seems—people and put them on a career path where they might be expected to get pay raises in the years to come.

So I will challenge even that fact. I talked to a business person recently about a factory they have. The work sounded pretty good to me. He wants to bring in foreign workers to Alabama. Well, we have unemployment in Alabama. We have people on unemployment insurance. We have people on welfare and food stamps and assistance who need to be taking those jobs.

So the first responsibility of a congress, a senate, when they consider an immigration bill is what is in the interests of the American people. I don't believe it is wrong to discuss that. We have to ask what is in our national interests, the interests of our people, and this is not a time to be doubling the H-1B workers into America. It is just not. And more and more scientific, peer-reviewed, excellent studies are coming out on that.

I see my colleague, Senator DURBIN. I know he is exceedingly busy. My intention is to make a unanimous consent request that we actually do something about the crisis we have on the border.

#### UNANIMOUS CONSENT REQUESTS— S. 202 AND S. 91

Mr. SESSIONS. I ask unanimous consent that the Committee on the Judiciary be discharged from further consideration of S. 202, the Accountability Through Electronic Verification Act;

that the Senate proceed to the immediate consideration of the measure; I ask further that the bill be considered read a third time and passed and that the motion to reconsider be made and laid upon the table, with no intervening action or debate.

For the information of all Senators, S. 202, introduced by Senator GRASSLEY and of which I am a cosponsor, amends the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act of 1996 to make an E-Verify program permanent. This is critical to protecting jobs and wages of American workers. It requires the government to at least run a cursory computer check to determine whether a person applied for a job is legally in this country.

I renew my unanimous consent request.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection to the request of the Senator from Alabama?

The Senator from Illinois.

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, reserving the right to object, a year ago today on the floor of the Senate we passed the comprehensive immigration reform bill, and 68 Senators—14 Republicans and all of the Democrats—voted for it. We sent it to the House of Representatives. Included in that bill was a requirement that all employers use a mandatory electronic employment verification system to verify that all their employees were legal. Job applicants were required to show identifying documents, such as passport, driver's license, biometric work authorization card, including a photo ID. Any employer who continued to employ undocumented immigrants faced serious penalties. That would end the hiring of undocumented workers, which the Senator from Alabama has spoken to. E-Verify, though, has to be part of comprehensive immigration reform; otherwise, it would devastate the economy and hurt innocent workers. This was included in the bill, and we said there would be no path to citizenship until we have established this as a nationwide standard to verify that workers truly were not undocumented.

That bill came to the floor a year ago. The Senator from Alabama voted against it. It passed. It went to the House of Representatives. It has languished for 1 solid year. House Speaker JOHN BOEHNER will not call that bill because he knows it will pass. We are not going to take that bill apart piece by piece, as the Senator from Alabama suggests.

I object.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Objection is heard.

The Senator from Alabama.

Mr. SESSIONS. Mr. President, I thank the able Senator from Illinois for his articulate response. I would note that the E-Verify program should already have been fully implemented long ago. If it is so good, why don't we bring it up and pass it now? Why do we have to pass along with it a bill that will double the number of guest work-

ers in the country and would increase immigration and also had many other flaws in it?

So I ask unanimous consent—and this will be my last unanimous consent request this evening—that the Committee on Finance be discharged from further consideration of S. 91, the Child Tax Credit Integrity Preservation Act of 2013; that the Senate proceed to the immediate consideration of the measure; I ask further that the bill be considered read a third time and passed and that the motion to reconsider be considered and laid upon the table with no intervening action or debate.

For the information of all Senators, S. 91, introduced by Senator VITTER and which I cosponsored, would close a loophole in the law that permits illegal aliens to illegally and improperly receive cash tax credits from the Internal Revenue Service, according to the Treasury Department's own inspector general. The IRS sent illegal aliens \$4.2 billion in additional child tax credit payments in 2010. The cost has quadrupled in 5 years. In one instance, four illegal aliens fraudulently claimed benefits for 20 children they claimed lived with them in the same trailer and received from the IRS \$29,000 in refunds.

So I ask unanimous consent that this bill be passed.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, reserving the right to object, the circumstance is this: If a person is legally required to pay income taxes in America, a person is legally entitled to some deductions and credits. One of those credits which a person is entitled to is a child tax credit. If a person has a minor child, that person pays less in taxes in America.

What the Senator from Alabama and this bill try to do is restrict the availability of this child tax credit to some workers in America. I think they have gone too far. I want to make sure working families with small children have the helping hand of our Tax Code. I want to stop any fraud in any program in our Tax Code, but I don't believe this bill is a balanced approach to solving the problem, and I object.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Objection is heard.

Mr. SESSIONS. Mr. President, I appreciate the comments of the Senator from Illinois. I would have to say that the inspector general of President Obama's own U.S. Treasury Department has said this is a clear abuse. They have written a detailed letter on why it ought to be closed. I am flabbergasted and amazed that we would sit by and allow \$4 billion in child tax credit payments to go out that are not justified. We have been told this. Why is it that we won't even respond to this little problem?

It is one reason I brought it up today—because I want the American people to know this Congress, this Democratic majority is not willing to