

States through the refugee program. Again, it has been verified that this is an entry point for possible terrorists.

Fact No. 4: The horrible and coordinated assault in Paris last fall, in the words of President Francois Hollande of France, was “planned in Syria, organized in Belgium, perpetrated on our soil with French complicity.” And a fact related to that is that at least one of those terrorists got in through the refugee resettlement program there.

Fact No. 5: FBI Director James Comey has testified that the Federal Government doesn’t have the ability to properly and fully vet 10,000 or more Syrian refugees. Recently, during a hearing before the House Committee on Homeland Security, he stated:

We can only query against that which we have collected. And so if someone has never made a ripple in the pond in Syria in a way that would get their identity or their interest reflected in our database, we can query our database until the cows come home, but there will be nothing to show up because we have no record of them.

Fact No. 6: The “Reflections on the Tenth Anniversary of the 9/11 Commission Report,” released in 2014, states that “it is unclear whether the United States and its allies have sufficient resources in place to monitor foreign fighters’ activities in Syria (and neighboring Iraq) and to track their travel back to their home countries.”

Those are documented facts, which make perfectly clear what common sense should suggest. This refugee resettlement program is a vulnerability, and we need far better security to protect our homeland.

To do this, I have introduced a very strong bill to require a suspension of admissions of Syrian refugees until the Obama administration properly evaluates the protocols and procedures it has in place to relocate them here and to certify not just in the Department of Homeland Security and the Department of State but also with intelligence and law enforcement agencies that these procedures are adequate. My bill has seven cosponsors. I plan to continue to move it, hopefully, through an amendment process related to this bill so we can make sure we have proper, adequate reforms in place.

So that is today’s vote in simple, straightforward terms in terms of the real danger. We can’t properly vet all of these refugees right now. This is documented. This is from the experts. We need to put proper measures in place before we continue accepting this flood of refugees. We need to protect American families, secure our borders, and keep out all terrorists. Voting for the SAFE Act and voting to put it on the floor and engaging in this debate is an important first step in doing that. For that reason, I urge a positive vote to put this important measure on the floor and to pass it.

Thank you, Madam President.

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

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Ms. AYOTTE). Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. PETERS. Madam President, last week I was proud to host Hassan Jabber as my guest at the State of the Union Address. He is the director of the Arab Community Center for Economic and Social Services, founded in 1971 in Dearborn, MI. ACCESS is the largest Arab American human services nonprofit in the United States, providing health and wellness, education, employment, and youth services in its local communities, including support for refugees settling in America.

Hassan is a community leader and just one example of the many individuals who make up Michigan’s vibrant Arab American community, including some of the most patriotic people I know whose contributions to our culture and economy are invaluable.

That is why I am so concerned about the legislation we will be debating later today, which would impose significant barriers on our efforts to assist refugees fleeing violence and persecution in Iraq and Syria. I am a member of the Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee. Last November we held a hearing on refugee resettlement. We heard about the strict security checks involved in the Refugee Admissions Program, which could take 18 to 24 months.

The Refugee Admissions Program subjects refugees to the highest level of security checks of any category of traveler coming into the United States. They are screened by the National Counterterrorism Center, the FBI, the Department of Homeland Security, and the Department of Defense, as well as other agencies. Refugees considered for resettlement to the United States are subjected to biometric and biographic checks, as well as a lengthy in-person interview, all of which are conducted while the refugees are overseas, outside of the United States. Refugees are even required to repay loans to the International Organization for Migration to cover the cost of transportation and medical screening.

At the same hearing last November, we also heard how the Refugee Admissions Program prioritizes the most vulnerable refugees, including widows with children, victims of torture and trauma, persecuted religious minorities, and those who face death threats if they return home. These cases are our country’s top priority for resettlement. I saw this for myself at the end of last year when I had an opportunity to travel to the Middle East with Senator MURPHY and meet members of this vulnerable population. Visiting the Zaatarri Refugee Camp in Jordan, I saw the scale of the crisis that the world faces.

Talking to just some of the over 80,000 refugees at that camp, who are

only a small fraction of the 11.6 million people who have been displaced from their homes over the past 4½ years during the brutal civil war in Syria, it was clear that none of those refugees were there by choice. Before anything else, they just wanted to return home.

In the end, however, returning home is not something that is going to happen. They are not going to be able to return to the life they had before. They certainly did not want to have the very dangerous journey to escape violence and security by going far away. Unfortunately, the possibility of their safe return is unlikely at any time in the near future. They struggle to survive every day, and they persevere. Many have been vetted by the United Nations as people who are qualified to resettle as refugees in countries like ours because they simply can’t return home.

The refugees I met are struggling to live on 50 cents a day to buy food and have only one propane bottle to provide cooking fuel for an entire month. Unfortunately, most of that aid is slated to end in the next couple of months. The people in the camps live on the edge of having nothing, and they rely on humanitarian aid to get by on a day-to-day basis. They are thankful, but in the end they are living in limbo, waiting and hoping for an interview with a U.S. official.

Today, at the Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee hearing we focused on ISIS’s goals and ideology. We heard from experts that the United States should continue to welcome refugees. Proposals to block refugees based on their religious beliefs plays into the narrative that the United States and Muslims across the globe are in direct conflict. We heard that those who have left ISIS territory describe it as “a living hell,” and if we do not accept refugees, it harms our standing in the world and actually will weaken our national security.

The safety and security of the American people is always my top priority, but policies which alienate and divide, targeted at victims of terror and violence, do not support that mission. I am hopeful that this body will focus our efforts on the very real threat posed by terrorism and extremism, not on imposing unnecessary barriers that will prevent us from assisting the victims fleeing violence. I hope that we can stay true to the American values that make our country great.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

OUR “WE THE PEOPLE”  
DEMOCRACY

Mr. MERKLEY. Madam President, I rise today to kick off a series of

speeches where I will come to the floor on a regular basis to address issues affecting Americans and propose ways to solve the challenges we face. These speeches will cover a variety of topics, but they will all link back to the fundamental theme of our “we the people” democracy.

In the summer of 1787, a group came together of patriots, farmers, and scholars. They gathered in Philadelphia, and after 4 months of fierce debate and enduring compromise, they agreed to a set of ideas and a system of governance. They signed their names to a document, our Constitution, which has guided our Nation’s progress for over two centuries. They began that Constitution, that key document, with three simple words on parchment—“we the people”—and with that they launched our experience in democratic governance.

The Founders wrote this phrase in beautiful script, 10 times the size of the rest of the document, as if to say this is what it is all about, this is what America will be about—governance for “we the people.”

They did not say at the start of this document “we the titans of industry.” They did not say “we the titans of commerce.” They did not say “we the rich and powerful.” They said “we the people.” As President Lincoln summarized, the genius of our governance is that it is of the people, by the people, and for the people.

With this guiding light America has been a great nation. Because of our “we the people” principle, we insisted on a better, fairer, and freer nation for all citizens—because we the people demanded that all Americans deserve a chance to pursue their full measure of happiness, because we the people never stopped reaching for greater prosperity and growth to the benefit of all.

In order to address the challenges of our times, we must recapture this “we the people” spirit. We must set aside politics in favor of progress. We must reform a broken system that favors the interests of the wealthy and well-connected over the interests of the American people. That is the framework, the theme that my regular floor speeches will be about.

In this Senate Chamber our priority should be to build an economy and a government that works for working people, and, as Hubert Humphrey argued, a government that delivers for those “in the dawn of life . . . in the twilight of life . . . and those in the shadows of life.”

We all know that our success is not measured by a soaring stock market. America is succeeding when a mom can earn enough not to worry about where her kids’ next meal is coming from; when schools nurture the mind, the character, and the creative spirit of every child; when college is affordable to every family; when each individual in our Nation has peace of mind through access to quality and affordable health care; when no American

who works full time lives in poverty; and when our economy creates good-paying jobs for American workers here in America rather than shipping those jobs overseas. To achieve these ends we have a lot of work to do.

We had after World War II three golden decades from 1945 to 1975. The middle class gained enormously in size and prosperity. During that period the bottom 90 percent received approximately 70 percent of all income growth. From 1975 until now, 2015, we have had four decades in which working Americans’ experience has been flat or declining. What a difference that is from the three golden decades where workers fully shared in the prosperity they helped to create—the last four decades when they have not shared and gained over those decades. They received close to zero percent of all income growth. To put it differently, 100 percent of the growth went to the top 10 percent of Americans. We know that our families and our economy will never reach their full potential if growth benefits only those at the very top, if the growth is at best trickled down, coming from the top down, and not from the middle out.

So let’s commit to changing the direction we are on, to recreating an economy more similar to those three golden decades after 1945, after the end of World War II, putting people back to work rebuilding America’s roads and crumbling bridges, raising the minimum wage so that anyone who works hard can make ends meet, and keeping a cop on the beat to block predatory schemes preying on the middle class.

We have a lot to do to tackle the greatest challenge facing human civilization: saving our planet from the ravages of climate change. Today it was announced, as anticipated, that the final results are in and 2015 is the warmest year on record. This warmth and the changing weather is having profound consequences on our forestry, on our farming, and on our fishing. All of these are manifested in my home State of Oregon and virtually every State represented in this Chamber.

We have to have a “we the people” movement to take on the oil and the coal billionaires, cut carbon pollution, and pivot rapidly to a clean energy economy. We certainly have a lot of work to do to make sure that folks who work hard all their lives can achieve a dignified and secure retirement as we watch the pensions in the private workplace melt away, slipping through our hands. We must set our children up for success and expand the promise of education, ensuring that our schools meet the demands of a new age and that all students can attend college without the fear of crushing debt.

To achieve these things through legislation is certainly possible. We can envision the pathway for each and every one of these objectives, but we cannot do it if this Chamber is essentially owned by the titans of commerce and industry. That, unfortunately, is what happened in 1976 when the Su-

preme Court under Buckley v. Valeo said that individuals can spend unlimited sums in the public marketplace and can do so even if they are drowning out the voices of the rest of America. Certainly a situation in which the 1 percent can drown out the voices of the 99 percent is not a “we the people” democracy; it is the opposite. It is a “we the titans” democracy. It is decisions made by and for the very best off, not decisions by and for the people of the United States of America.

This misguided 1976 decision sits right at that pivot point between the three golden decades from 1945 to 1975 and the last four decades of failed economic policy with workers’ outcomes being flat or declining. This decision was doubled down on the Supreme Court just a few years ago in the Citizens United decision, which said that not only individuals but corporations would be treated the same. They could use their combined assets even if they had never disclosed to the owners of the corporation, the stockholders, how they intended to spend funds, putting billions of dollars in play with a few people sitting in a boardroom, completely shielded from any public witness.

That is why we have to change campaign finance as a way to reclaim our “we the people” democracy, to reclaim our Constitution, to fend off the titans who are insisting on grabbing everything for the few and not for the benefit of the public, the 90 percent.

We have to continue to look for ways to restore hope for our working families and ensure opportunity for each, to protect the middle class, to empower the middle class against forces that are threatening to overwhelm them, and to build an economy where everyone is sharing in the economic prosperity they are helping to create.

The bottom line is that we have to make a choice about the kind of country we want to live in. I don’t choose a country in which the rules are made by and for the very few at the top. I choose a country embedded in the first three words of our Constitution, where decisions are made by and for the people of our Nation. I choose a country that honors these Founding principles, that comes together to tackle the big challenges, that works not for the 1 percent or the 10 percent but for 100 percent of Americans. Let us reclaim our “we the people” democracy, our “we the people” vision, and set our Nation back on track.

Madam President, I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

RECESS

Mr. LANKFORD. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate stand in recess as under the previous order.

There being no objection, the Senate, at 12:26 p.m., recessed until 2:15 p.m. and reassembled when called to order by the Presiding Officer (Mr. COATS).

AMERICAN SECURITY AGAINST FOREIGN ENEMIES ACT OF 2015—MOTION TO PROCEED

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate will resume consideration of the motion to proceed to H.R. 4038, which the clerk will report.

The legislative clerk read as follows:

Motion to proceed to Calendar No. 300, H.R. 4038, a bill to require that supplemental certifications and background investigations be completed prior to the admission of certain aliens as refugees, and for other purposes.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the time until 2:30 p.m. will be equally divided between the two leaders or their designees.

Mr. LEAHY. Mr. President, it is unfortunate that the fear and xenophobia being peddled by some Republican candidates for President is now being given time on the Senate floor.

Instead of solving the real problems facing Americans—like the student debt crisis or our need for energy independence—or responding to real threats to our national security—like our failure to track visa overstays or prevent terrorists from buying guns—today we are debating a strawman inspired by Donald Trump’s baseless rhetoric.

The bill the Republican leader is asking us to consider will not make America safer. In fact, it is a dangerous distraction that plays into the hands of the ISIS propaganda machine.

Instead of demonizing refugees, who are the most thoroughly screened group of people who enter the United States, we should take up and pass the Defeat ISIS and Protect and Secure the United States Act of 2015. That bill offers a comprehensive strategy to counter ISIS propaganda and violent extremism in the United States and abroad. It offers real solutions that will keep us safe rather than scapegoating refugees who are fleeing war and torture.

In contrast, the bill we are asked to consider has put forward fresh fodder for the false narrative that we are at war with Islam.

I will oppose this House bill.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from North Carolina.

Mr. BURR. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the quorum call be equally divided between both sides.

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

Mr. BURR. I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

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 senior assistant legislative 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 motion to proceed to calendar No. 300, H.R. 4038, an act to require that supplemental certifications and background investigations be completed prior to the admission of certain aliens as refugees, and for other purposes.

Mitch McConnell, Rob Portman, John Thune, Tom Cotton, Steve Daines, James M. Inhofe, Mike Crapo, Thom Tillis, Roger F. Wicker, Lindsey Graham, Pat Roberts, John Cornyn, Shelley Moore Capito, John Boozman, Michael B. Enzi, James E. Risch, John McCain.

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 motion to proceed to Calendar No. 300, H.R. 4038, an act to require that supplemental certifications and background investigations be completed prior to the admission of certain aliens as refugees, and for other purposes, shall be brought to a close?

The yeas and nays are mandatory under the rule.

The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk called the roll.

Mr. CORNYN. The following Senator is necessarily absent: the Senator from South Carolina (Mr. GRAHAM).

Mr. DURBIN. I announce that the Senator from Vermont (Mr. SANDERS) is necessarily absent.

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

The yeas and nays resulted—yeas 55, nays 43, as follows:

[Rollcall Vote No. 4 Leg.]

YEAS—55

Alexander	Fischer	Paul
Ayotte	Flake	Perdue
Barrasso	Gardner	Portman
Blunt	Grassley	Risch
Boozman	Hatch	Roberts
Burr	Heitkamp	Rounds
Capito	Heller	Rubio
Cassidy	Hoeven	Sasse
Coats	Inhofe	Scott
Cochran	Isakson	Sessions
Collins	Johnson	Shelby
Corker	Kirk	Sullivan
Cornyn	Lankford	Thune
Cotton	Lee	Tillis
Crapo	Manchin	Toomey
Cruz	McCain	Vitter
Daines	McConnell	Wicker
Enzi	Moran	
Ernst	Murkowski	

NAYS—43

Baldwin	Gillibrand	Peters
Bennet	Heinrich	Reed
Blumenthal	Hirono	Reid
Booker	Kaine	Schatz
Boxer	King	Schumer
Brown	Klobuchar	Shaheen
Cantwell	Leahy	Stabenow
Cardin	Markey	Tester
Carper	McCaskill	Udall
Casey	Menendez	Warner
Coons	Merkley	Warren
Donnelly	Mikulski	Whitehouse
Durbin	Murphy	Wyden
Feinstein	Murray	
Franken	Nelson	

NOT VOTING—2

Graham Sanders

The PRESIDING OFFICER. On this vote, the yeas are 55, the nays are 43.

Three-fifths of the Senators duly chosen and sworn not having voted in the affirmative, the motion is rejected.

The majority leader.

PROVIDING FOR CONGRESSIONAL DISAPPROVAL OF A RULE SUBMITTED BY THE CORPS OF ENGINEERS AND THE ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY—VETO—Continued

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, I call for regular order with respect to the veto message on S.J. Res. 22.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The veto message is the pending business.

The Senate proceeded to reconsider the joint resolution.

CLOTURE MOTION

Mr. MCCONNELL. I send a cloture motion to the desk on the veto message.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The cloture motion having been presented under rule XXII, the Chair directs the clerk to read the motion.

The legislative 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 veto message on S.J. Res. 22, a joint resolution providing for congressional disapproval under chapter 8 of title 5, United States Code, of the rule submitted by the Corps of Engineers and the Environmental Protection Agency relating to the definition of ‘waters of the United States’ under the Federal Water Pollution Control Act.

Mitch McConnell, Tom Cotton, John Thune, Johnny Isakson, Steve Daines, Roy Blunt, Cory Gardner, Deb Fischer, Pat Roberts, Thom Tillis, John Cornyn, Joni Ernst, David Vitter, Lamar Alexander, John Barrasso, Ron Johnson, Thad Cochran.

Mr. MCCONNELL. I ask unanimous consent that the mandatory quorum call be waived.

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

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that notwithstanding rule XXII, this cloture vote be set at 10:30 a.m. on Thursday, January 21; further, that if cloture is not invoked, the veto message be indefinitely postponed.

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