

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 reestablished. 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

aisle last year to pass the Countering Iran's Destabilizing Activities Act, a bill to hold Iran accountable for its ongoing support for terrorism, ballistic missile proliferation, and human rights abuses. This legislation passed the Senate with an overwhelming bipartisan majority of 98 to 2. Ultimately, it served as the base text of the Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act, which addressed a wide range of hostile behavior from not just Iran but from Russia and North Korea as well. This bill calls for the administration to develop a comprehensive regional strategy to deter conventional and asymmetric threats. We are fast approaching the deadline for that strategy.

More importantly, however, we have heard the President say for more than a year that he was going to develop a plan to hold Iran accountable. Thus far, we have seen nothing more than tough talk. The reality is that this administration has yet to fully implement critical provisions of this law that could substantively counter Iran's nefarious behavior. The bill gives the President the authority to target human rights abusers, including those complicit in the ongoing repression of protesters, but he has yet to use that authority. The bill also authorizes the President to go after those individuals and entities that are violating international arms embargoes, exporting hateful ideologies and weapons across the region and fomenting violence and chaos against innocent civilians in Syria and Yemen, but he has yet to go after these actors.

While the administration designated Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps under terrorism authority—something I applaud—it has not effectively targeted actors associated with the IRGC.

All of my colleagues know that I was deeply skeptical and strongly opposed to the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action. I voted against the JCPOA precisely because I thought it was a mistake to roll back sanctions on Iran without the total dismantlement of its nuclear infrastructure. However, refusing to certify Iran's compliance with a deeply flawed deal, as the President did in October, does little to address its shortcomings. The President's move in October was a hollow attempt to fulfill a campaign promise while continuing to let Iran enjoy the benefits of the JCPOA and continue its non-nuclear malign activities throughout the region. Furthermore, this decision was carried without a clear path forward and without specific proposals that could have garnered critical international support.

At the end of the day, the Trump administration's actions may have actually left the United States with less leverage to address Iran's far-reaching, nefarious behavior in the Middle East, whether it be its support for terrorism, its human rights abuses, or its illegal ballistic missile development. None of

these critical security challenges are addressed simply by not certifying the JCPOA, nor does it move us toward a comprehensive international strategy for the nuclear program Iran plans to resume immediately following this agreement's expiration. In short, the President's own lack of policy has squandered whatever leverage he may have hoped to gain.

Furthermore, the President has severely disadvantaged himself by gutting the very instruments in his national security apparatus that should be taking the lead on Iran and all foreign policy matters. As an architect of the sanctions networks that crippled Iran's economy and forced its leaders to negotiate with the international community, I know how essential our diplomatic arsenal is to confronting Iran.

The President, however, seems committed to hollowing out those agencies and offices that are in the best position to advance our diplomatic interests. The Trump administration, for example, has shuttered the office of sanctions policy at the State Department. The Office of Foreign Assets Control at the Treasury Department is now woefully understaffed. As the President publicly talks about supporting democracy, his administration has scrapped funding for human rights and democracy programs and even removed the word "democracy" from USAID's mission statement.

Meanwhile, Iran continues to increase its presence in Iraq, to maintain support for the terrorist organization Hezbollah, and to take credit for Bashar al-Assad's murderous grip on power in Syria.

The United States must be willing to work with its allies if we are serious about holding Iran accountable. We should be corralling our allies in Europe to begin treating all of Hezbollah's entities as terrorist organizations. We should be moving our allies toward the development of a comprehensive international strategy for addressing Iran's nuclear ambitions once the JCPOA expires.

Finally, this administration must prioritize the release of American citizens unjustly arrested and detained in Iran. Today, Princeton University student Xiyue Wang, a scholar from one of the most renowned academic institutions in the world, in my home State of New Jersey, remains in prison under ridiculous charges of espionage. Similarly, Siamak Namazi, a former student of Rutgers University in New Jersey, remains in prison, along with his father, a former UNICEF employee. And Robert Levinson remains missing after more than 10 years.

In short, this President's approach toward Iran thus far has been a disjointed mix of campaign promises, bluster, and confusing signals to our allies—not a serious consideration of how to effectively confront an existing and growing threat.

So, as we approach a legally mandated deadline for the President to

present Congress and the American people with a sound policy to confront a real threat, I call on the President to make use of our incredible national security establishment, to consult experts who can help formulate a strong, sound policy capable of confronting Iran's destabilizing behavior in the Middle East, and to implement a strategy that will effectively confront Iran's continued support for international terrorism, its belligerent ballistic missile tests, and its ongoing public and brutal abuses of human rights within its own borders and around the world.

I yield the floor.

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

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

TAX REFORM BILL

Mr. CASSIDY. Mr. President, Republicans just passed the largest tax reform package in 30-something years, and middle America will go home in February with bigger paychecks than they did—I say in February because it will not take that long for the IRS to update their software. They will go home with more money in their pockets.

If there has been a theme in the Trump administration, it is that they want those working Americans, those middle-class Americans, to do better under this President than they did in the previous 8 years. That tax reform package is part of that, and I am amazed that my Democratic colleagues objected to it. They objected to middle-class Americans having more money in their pockets, in their take-home pay, for no other reason, I think, than to resist President Trump.

OFFSHORE OIL AND GAS LEASING PROPOSAL

Mr. President, what I am about to speak about speaks to better jobs and better wages for working Americans, for those middle-class families.

This afternoon, the U.S. Department of the Interior released the Trump administration's draft proposed program for offshore oil and gas leasing. This proposal would mean more affordable energy made right here in the United States of America. That is good news for American workers and families. I commend President Trump and Interior Secretary Zinke for their commitment to supporting American workers and making America energy dominant.

For decades, past administrations have handcuffed American energy manufacturers by restricting offshore leases to the western and central Gulf of Mexico. You could only drill there, not elsewhere. Past plans left 90 percent of U.S. offshore resources off limits to energy producers and in the process said no to thousands of good-paying American jobs and billions of dollars in offshore investments—when I say "offshore," I mean off the American shore