cases, almost 1 in 5 deal with the FBI name check.

One step that legal immigrants have to take to stay in the country lawfully is going through a security check by the FBI. This is a standard procedure, and it is critically important to screen the folks to which we are granting citizenship and permanent residence. Unfortunately, the system is overwhelmed.

The FBI's National Name Check Program is asked to review 62,000 names a week—62,000 a week. In 2005, the FBI was asked to check 3.3 million names, a 20-percent jump from 2001. A great majority of these people are cleared automatically by computer, but for many, FBI agents have to comb through paper records spread across more than 265 sites across the country.

According to a November 2005 GAG report, the FBI background check is one of the top factors beyond the Bureau of Citizenship and Immigration Services' control that contributes to long wait times and an extended backlog. The report found that 11 percent of applications studied took longer than 3 months, and a significant portion of those took much longer. The Department of Homeland Security has taken many steps to try to speed up this process, but unfortunately there are just too many requests being sent to the FBI, and not enough analysts to deal with them.

Many of my constituents have reported waiting as long as 2 years to get cleared by the FBI. These are innocent people who have jumped through every legal hoop we have put in front of them. But because of a bureaucratic mess, they are put in legal limbo.

My amendment isn't overly ambitious. It just gives the FBI a small amount of resources to start tackling this problem. It authorizes $3.125 million a year for the next 5 years to allow FBI to hire additional staff and take other steps to improve the speed and accuracy of the background checks. It also requires the FBI to report back to Congress on the size of the backlog and the steps it is taking to reduce it.

This is a problem we can do something about. And at a time when we are trying to stem the flow of immigrants entering the country illegally, this is a problem we must address. We should not punish the folks who have been responsible and applied to enter the country legally. We should make the system as efficient as possible. I urge my colleagues to support this amendment.

MORNING BUSINESS

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Missouri.

Mr. TALENT. Mr. President, I understand we are speaking in morning business; is that correct?

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator is correct.

IMMIGRATION REFORM

Mr. TALENT. Mr. President, I rise to speak against the bill. I want to begin by saying that America has a proud history of immigration. When we say that America is a nation of immigrants, we mean that deep in our national consciousness is the image of America as a haven and a place of opportunity for people from all over the world.

Our policies have reflected that image. America has always had more open immigration policies than any other country. But those policies have been the result of choices the American people have made.

We are a nation of immigrants, but we are also a nation of laws. Like all sovereign nations, America has the right to determine who may enter our country and who may not. The American people have chosen to strike a legal balance between their desire to provide opportunities to new residents of diverse backgrounds and the economic reality that too much immigration too fast will depress the wages and diminish the hopes of millions of our own citizens.

I say with the utmost respect that the bill before us completely abandons that traditional balance. It provides an amnesty to those who, however understandable their motives, have chosen to trespass on our hospitality and violate our laws and does so under conditions that history has shown will increase rather than decrease illegal immigration in the future. It allows a vast new immigration for decades to come, with no regard whatsoever for the impact on the lives and hopes of our own citizens who have the first claim to the American dream, and it does little or nothing to repair the existing system of legal immigration which regularly confounds the expectations of millions around the world who claim a legal right to enter the United States.

Moreover, the Senate has regrettably and inexplicably rejected commonsense amendments which were designed to restore the balance Americans want and have the right to expect. For those reasons, I could not support voting to end debate on the bill, and I will not now support its final passage.

I should say at the outset that I do support the border security provisions in the bill. Border security is a national security issue rather than an immigration issue. For that reason, I recently sponsored bipartisan legislation, the Border Security and Modernization Act, in order to help secure America's border with additional manpower, new barriers, and high-tech surveillance equipment.

The bill I cosponsored authorizes new funds for technology to assist our Border Patrol, to construct roads, fences, and barriers along the border and to purchase air assets such as helicopters. In addition, the Border Security and Modernization Act will increase resources for border detention centers and enact stricter criminal penalties for human smuggling, falsifying work entry documents, and drug trafficking.

The immigration bill before the Senate contains many provisions similar to those in the bill which I cosponsored, and I am pleased the Senate approved an amendment which I also cosponsored to strengthen those provisions providing for the construction of at least 370 miles of triple-layered fence and 500 miles of vehicle barriers at strategic locations along the southwest border. But the good done in the immigration bill by these provisions could largely be accomplished by the President without new statutory authorization and is, in any case, far outweighed by the negatives in the bill.

I oppose the bill first because it grants a broad-based amnesty—the right to legal residence and even citizenship—to 10 to 12 million people who violated our laws. Permanent residence in the United States, not to mention American citizenship, is a valuable and important privilege.

Granting these privileges under these circumstances rewards and therefore encourages unlawful immigration. It demoralizes and punishes the millions of people around the world who have respected our rules and who are trying patiently to immigrate legally into the United States, and it makes a mockery of the policy that is supposed to form our immigration laws—the desire to balance our need for workers and vision of America as a place of opportunity against the importance of protecting jobs and wages at home.

If Congress grants an amnesty under these circumstances, what will be the argument against granting another amnesty 5, 10, or 20 years from now if millions more people, in response to the incentives created by this bill, manage to enter the United States illegally?

To those who say this will not happen, I say that it has already happened. Congress granted an amnesty 20 years ago for largely the same reasons under the same conditions and with the same assurances being offered in support of this bill before us today. Far from preventing illegal immigration, that amnesty has magnified the problem by four- or fivefold. What reason do we have to believe the same thing will not happen if we pass this bill, especially since the amnesty procedure in this bill is certain and takes effect immediately, while the border security provisions may not work at all and will, in any event, take years to implement? I suspect the pressure on our borders is increasing even now simply because the Senate is seriously debating an amnesty.

I also oppose the bill because it authorizes a vast and unvalidated increase in immigration. The bill allows 70 to 90 million immigrants to enter the country over the next 20 years—not, by and large, scientists, doctors, or engineers, but people who will compete directly against Americans for