

that. Our roads and bridges are crumbling, generally, not just at our parks. We need an infrastructure bill. Maybe the parks bill will be the start of that. We will see if that can be something where we can find compromise.

Of course, we also have to make progress on healthcare. The costs of healthcare are out of control. I know Senator ALEXANDER talked about this earlier on the floor today, but there are so many opportunities for us to improve our healthcare system and the cost and the quality of that system. It is something that has been very difficult and very partisan. It has been difficult for us to make any progress on that, but I think we have to put our partisan blinders away and say: How can we come up with sensible solutions? Some have talked about it today on the floor. Senator COLLINS, who was here earlier today as Presiding Officer, has specific legislation to have these high-risk pools in States—it has worked in her State of Maine, and it can work nationally—to be sure that we are reducing the cost for everybody for their premiums, deductibles, and copays.

I think the American people are looking for wins right now. I think it would help our country to have some of these wins. I think there are some great examples I have presented today of some pretty easy wins, of some low-hanging fruit—whether it is dealing with these issues that we are left with here with the government shutdown, making some small steps forward on immigration reform right away, or whether it is low-hanging fruit like the reform of the Internal Revenue Service, the retirement savings expansion, so people can save more for retirement, and this idea that we can begin to turn the tide on the opioid epidemic, which has gripped our country. It doesn't have to be a year of gridlock. It can be a year of progress.

My hope is that on this opening day, as Members are walking down the aisle and are here with their families and celebrating and the optimism of opening day and thinking that hope springs eternal, this can be a good season. This can be a good year. This can be a year where we focus on what is best for the people we represent and focus on what is best for our country. If we do that, I think we will make a difference, and I think we will look back and realize that it doesn't have to be this way.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mrs. CAPITO). The majority whip.

GOVERNMENT FUNDING AND NATIONAL SECURITY

Mr. THUNE. Madam President, as we begin a new Congress, it is always an exciting time. There are a lot of families and friends here. Our Members and colleagues were sworn in earlier today. It represents a new beginning—obviously, a time when there is hope and optimism that we can come together

and do some good things for the people we represent in our respective States and for our country. That is the way we approach this new session of Congress.

There is a lot I think we can do. We can find some common ground and work together. Obviously, we have to deal with the issues of last year's business before we can start this business of this new year.

Last year's business is incomplete. We are almost 2 weeks into a partial government shutdown because Democrats don't want to fund increased security for the border. Border security is a national security requirement. Every Member of Congress, Democrat or Republican, should take seriously our responsibility to protect our Nation by ensuring that our borders are secure. At one time Democrats understood that.

In 2006, the Democratic leader and the ranking member of the Senate Judiciary Committee voted for legislation to authorize a border fence. They were joined in that vote by then-Senators Biden, Clinton, and Obama. In 2013, every Senate Democrat supported legislation requiring the completion of a 700-mile fence along our southern border. This legislation would have provided \$46 billion for border security and \$8 billion specifically for the wall.

Nearly every Senate Democrat supported \$25 billion in border security funding just last February—just recently, less than 1 year ago. Yet today, Democrats would rather keep part of the government shut down than provide the money needed to secure our borders. The question is, What has changed?

Our national security situation certainly hasn't changed. Our borders are not sufficiently secure, and as we have seen, they are a target for illegal entry. Over the past year, illegal border crossing apprehensions have shot up by more than 30 percent. The holes in our border security leave us susceptible to illegal entry by gang members, human traffickers, drug dealers, terrorists, and weapons traffickers. The Democrats are refusing to budge on sorely needed border security funding. Why? I think that is a fair question.

It is, I think, because Democrats are reluctant to oppose the far-left wing of their party, which increasingly seems to be advancing this preposterous notion that we really don't need to secure our borders at all. Every nation has to secure its borders. A country without borders really isn't a country. Preventing dangerous individuals and goods from entering is an essential part of every country's security, and as my Democratic colleagues have proved in the past, they know this, which is why they voted that way in previous sessions of Congress, as recently as last year.

I hope they will think better of this government shutdown and decide that their national security obligations are more important than catering to the

far-left wing of their party. It is time to fund our border security and to end this shutdown. It simply requires sides to come together to find that common ground and to do what is in our country's best interests and the best interests of the American people; that is, to make sure that our country has a secure border and that we discourage people from coming here illegally and encourage them to come through legal means.

I had the opportunity a couple of weeks ago in my State of South Dakota to welcome into our State and country 99 new citizens from 33 countries around the world. They came here the legal way. They went through the process and followed our rules, followed our laws. That is what we want to encourage more of.

What we don't need more of are people coming into this country illegally and presenting the types of threats I mentioned earlier—anytime we have that many people, in a mass way, migrating across our border. I hope and sincerely believe that as a Congress, as a Senate working with this President—who has made this a big priority for his administration—it is an important priority for our country and a requirement and obligation that I think we all have as U.S. Senators, first and foremost, to protect our country and to protect the American people. If we don't get that right, the rest is really just conversation.

I hope the Democrats will come to the conclusion that their statements in the past and their votes in the past in support of border security are the right way to proceed and will continue in that tradition we have had in the country in the past in which, on these important issues, both sides come together and work to find common ground.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. BOOZMAN). The majority leader.

TRIBUTE TO MICKEY MILLER

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, this month my friend Mickey Miller will retire from Nolin Rural Electric Cooperative Corporation, Nolin RECC, after 45 years at the organization, including more than a quarter century as its president and CEO. Mickey has dedicated his career to providing reliable, cost-effective energy services to Kentuckians in nine counties with integrity and innovation. I would like to take a moment to reflect on his remarkable career in our Commonwealth.

From LaRue County, Mickey graduated from the University of Kentucky with a degree in agriculture economics and marketing. During his time at Nolin RECC, Mickey has championed a great deal of growth and advancement. In fact, the cooperative's membership has more than tripled, providing vital services to Kentucky families and employers and fueling development in the region.