

(The remarks of Mr. LEAHY pertaining to the introduction of S. 3118 are located in today's RECORD under "Statements on Introduced Bills and Joint Resolutions.")

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from California.

Mrs. BOXER. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to speak as in morning business for about 12 minutes.

Mr. REID. Mr. President, has the morning business hour closed?

The PRESIDING OFFICER. It has not been announced by the Chair. It is closed.

Mr. REID. It is closed.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Time has expired.

Mr. REID. I am sorry?

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Chair has not yet announced that morning business is closed, but the designated time has expired.

Mrs. BOXER. Mr. President, I withdraw my unanimous consent request. Let us move on. Then I will take time under the cloture motion.

#### CONCLUSION OF MORNING BUSINESS

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Morning business is closed.

#### AMERICAN COMPETITIVENESS IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY ACT OF 2000—RESUMED

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will report the pending business.

The senior assistant bill clerk read as follows:

A bill (S. 2045) to amend the Immigration and Nationality Act with respect to H-1B nonimmigrant aliens.

Pending:

Lott (for Abraham) amendment No. 4177 (to the committee substitute), in the nature of a substitute.

Lott amendment No. 4178 (to amendment No. 4177), of a perfecting nature.

Lott (for Conrad) amendment No. 4183 (to the text of the bill proposed to be stricken), to exclude certain "J" non-immigrants from numerical limitations applicable to "H-1B" non-immigrants.

Lott amendment No. 4201 (to amendment No. 4183), in the nature of a substitute.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Iowa.

Mr. HARKIN. Parliamentary inquiry. I understand we are now under cloture and each Senator is recognized for up to 1 hour to speak.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Each Senator has a maximum of 1 hour.

Mr. HARKIN. Mr. President, I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Democratic leader.

Mr. DASCHLE. Mr. President, I appreciate very much the willingness on the part of the Senator from Iowa to give me an opportunity to make some remarks with regard to where we are on the legislation.

Yesterday's vote demonstrates clearly that there is strong bipartisan sup-

port in the Senate for increasing the number of visas for high-skilled workers. On that point, Democrats and Republicans agree, but there is a stark disagreement between our parties on the issue of fairness to immigrants.

Republicans do not want to acknowledge this; they do not want to admit that they oppose the Latino and Immigrant Fairness Act. That is why they have gone to such extraordinary lengths to try to avoid having to take a public position on it. There is an election coming up, and they do not want to have to explain to Latino and immigrant groups why they told thousands of hard-working immigrants who are in this country doing essential jobs: Go home. Republicans would rather risk not delaying the passage of the H-1B visa bill than vote for the Latino and Immigrant Fairness Act or risk the political consequences of voting against it.

There is really no reason we cannot pass both a strong H-1B bill and the Latino and Immigrant Fairness Act.

We are in the longest period of economic expansion in our Nation's history. We all know that now. The census numbers which were released yesterday confirm once again the remarkable progress we have made in recent years.

In the last 7 years, we have seen 20 million new jobs. Unemployment is lower now than it has been in 30 years. In my State of South Dakota, the jobless rate is between 2 and 3 percent.

Ten years ago, many companies could not expand because they could not get the capital. Today they can get the capital, but they cannot get the workers.

Clearly, one of the industries hardest hit by today's skilled-worker shortage is the information technology industry. According to a recent survey of almost 900 IT executives, nearly 10 percent of IT service and support positions in this country—268,740 jobs—are unfilled today because there are not enough skilled workers in this country to fill them.

The H-1B visa program was supposed to prevent such shortages, but it cannot because it has not kept pace with the growth in our economy. This year, in fact, the H-1B program reached its ceiling of 115,000 visas in less than 6 months. That is why my colleagues and I support substantially increasing the number of visas available under the H-1B program.

The high-tech industry, however, is not the only industry struggling with worker shortages. The Federal Reserve Board has said repeatedly that there are widespread shortages of essential workers all through the United States. All across America, restaurants, hotels, and nursing homes are in desperate need of help. Widespread labor shortages in these industries also pose a very significant threat to our economy. That is one reason my colleagues and I introduced the Latino and Immigrant Fairness Act earlier this year and why we wanted to offer that legis-

lation as an amendment to this measure.

The changes in our proposal are pro-business and certainly pro-family. They are modest, and they are long overdue. We have talked about them before, but let me just, again for the RECORD, make sure people are clear as to what it is we want to do.

First, we want to establish legal parity for all Central American and Caribbean refugees. That is not too much to ask. Why is it we treat refugees from some countries differently from refugees from other countries? All we are asking for is parity.

Second, we want to update the registry so that immigrants who have been in this country since before 1986, who have worked hard and played by the rules, will remain here permanently and will have the ability to remain here legally.

We want to restore section 245(i) of the Immigration Act so that a person who is in this country and on the verge of becoming a legal resident can remain here while he or she completes the process. Why would we want to send somebody back to the country they fled—someone who is eligible to be a legal resident—just so they can come back here again? If we do not change the law, that is exactly what will happen, forcing these immigrants to pay thousands of dollars, disrupt their lives, and maybe imperil their opportunity to come back at all.

Finally, we want to adjust the status of the Liberians who fled to America when Liberia was plunged into a horrific civil war. Thousands of them live in the State of the current Presiding Officer. Our Nation gave these families protected immigrant status which allowed them to stay in the United States but preempted their asylum claims. Instead of forcing them to return to Liberia, a nation our Government warns Americans to avoid because it is so dangerous even today, our bill will give them the opportunity to become legal residents. That is all it would do.

Earlier this month, a coalition of 31 associations—the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, the American Health Care Association, the National Restaurant Association, the National Retail Federation, and about 28 more—all came together and said: If there is something you do before the end of this year, now that we have PNTR finished, we hope you can pass the restoration of Section 245(i) and these other reasonable immigration provisions.

It is the only fair thing to do, and it is good business. We need this done. That is the message from the Chamber of Commerce and the American Retail Federation sent. The American economy is growing not in spite of immigrant workers, but with their help. That is one reason we should pass the Latino and Immigrant Fairness Act now.