

the refugee program. So is it any wonder that the citizens we represent are concerned?

According to one recent survey, nearly 80 percent of Americans and 77 percent of Democrats say refugees should go through a more robust security process. President Obama seemed to suggest these Americans were motivated by some animus toward widows and orphans. I would suggest they are motivated by a love for their families and communities. I remind the President that this country has a proud tradition of compassion, and we have settled millions of refugees from around the world. Many Americans are telling us they want to continue helping others, but they want to do it in a smarter and more secure way.

So I want to say this before moving forward. In his State of the Union Address, President Obama decried the political divisions that have widened during his Presidency. He called for cooperation and a more elevated debate. He warned that “democracy breaks down when the average person feels their voice doesn’t matter.”

“Democracy,” he said, “doesn’t work if we think the people who disagree with us are all motivated by malice.”

I ask him to reflect on those words. We each have a choice in this discussion. We can glibly dismiss the sincere concerns of middle-class families or we can work to unify Americans by pursuing bipartisan and balanced solutions.

Democrats and Republicans in the House of Representatives chose bipartisan and balanced solutions when they worked together to pass the American SAFE Act a few weeks ago. Democrats and Republicans in the Senate should choose bipartisan and balanced solutions by working together to advance the American SAFE Act today.

This bipartisan bill would allow Washington to step back, take a breath, and ensure it has correct policies and security screenings in place before moving ahead with the refugee program for Iraq and Syria. No wonder dozens of Democrats joined with Republicans to pass this balanced bill with a veto-proof majority over in the House. It is certainly worrying to hear that Senate Democrats are now being pressured to block us from even debating it. I understand the political pressure to oppose this balanced bill may be intense, but it is also intensely shortsighted, and I urge our Democratic friends to resist it.

Boosting confidence in our Nation’s vetting process is critical for our citizens, just as it is critical for every refugee who truly needs our help. Our Democratic friends know a cloud of unfair stigmatization threatens to hang over legitimate refugees so long as Democrats block commonsense safeguards to weed out ISIL sympathizers.

If our Democratic friends are serious in what they imply about promoting tolerance for widows and orphans and in strengthening security for Ameri-

cans, they will not vote to block the Senate from debating balanced, bipartisan legislation that can advance both priorities simultaneously.

Let’s work together to enact the American SAFE Act and its reforms, and then let’s work together on the root of the problem. Refugees are fleeing Syria because of a brutal civil war, and they are fleeing Iraq because the terrorist group Al Qaeda in Iraq has evolved into the largest terrorist group in history—ISIL—so the ultimate solution is to make the region somewhere they can return to.

Here is what hasn’t helped: The precipitous withdrawal of our advise and assist force from Iraq, the indecision attached to drawing and erasing red lines in Syria, mocking the genuine concerns of American citizens here at home.

Here is what will help: the administration cooperating across the aisle to finally develop a serious plan to confront ISIL. That is what the American people continue to call for, that is what the American people deserve, and it is what the administration will pursue if it is truly serious about helping both our country and the victims escaping this brutal terrorist group.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Democratic leader.

Mr. REID. Mr. President, I think we have the makings of an agreement here, at least the way I understood the Republican leader.

We agree that refugees should go through a robust screening process. The bill we are talking about before the Senate, though, is stressing bureaucracy and paperwork. Each refugee who comes to this country—and there are about 100 a day—would have to be signed off by three Cabinet Secretaries. That is 300 personal signatures a day. We don’t want more paperwork.

What we have said is we want four amendments to change the underlying bill. We are not going to be demanding days of debate time. We would be happy—we would be very reasonable with whatever the leader felt appropriate. We believe we should move forward with real solutions, not paperwork.

We are not saying we don’t want to get on the bill. We are willing to get on the bill. We want four amendments. That is it, four amendments. I am sure the leader will look this over and get back to me at the appropriate time, but we are willing to work on this bill.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The majority leader.

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, I will obviously be talking to the Democratic leader on a way forward on the bill, and we will have those discussions and report back later.

Mr. REID. Thank you very much, Mr. President.

#### RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, the leadership time is reserved.

Mr. REID. Mr. President, I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Without objection, it is so ordered.

#### AMERICAN SAFE ACT

Mr. THUNE. Mr. President, similar to most Americans listening to President Obama’s State of the Union Address last week, I found his take on national security and world affairs rather surprising.

According to a poll in December, 60 percent of the American people see national security and terrorism as a major concern, and they have good reason to be worried.

As President Obama finishes his last year in office, Syria is wracked by civil war, Iraq is in turmoil, Russian aggression is growing, North Korea has tested yet another nuclear weapon, Saudi Arabia and Iran are immersed in a cold war, and ISIS continues its campaign of terror. Yet, according to the President, we have nothing to worry about; America’s leadership is strong, and we are headed in the right direction.

Unfortunately, this fairytale version of our global situation stands in stark contrast with reality. In his State of the Union Address, the President did acknowledge: “The world will look to us to help solve these problems, and our answer needs to be more than tough talk.”

Well, I couldn’t agree more, but unfortunately tough talk with no action has been the hallmark of this administration. In 2011, after the onset of the Syrian civil war, both President Obama and then-Secretary of State Hillary Clinton stated unconditionally that Syrian President Bashar al-Assad had to go. The President drew a line in the sand: If Assad used chemical weapons, America would act. But when Assad flouted this red line, killing his own people—including women and children—with the large-scale use of sarin gas, the President chose to forgo a decided military response and instead pursue negotiations involving the Russians, working out a compromise that ultimately strengthened Assad’s position, and the results of the President’s decision have not been pretty.

In the wake of the negotiations, an emboldened Vladimir Putin invaded Crimea and eastern Ukraine, and the situation in Syria got worse. It appears now that the Assad administration will outlast Obama’s. Worse, our allies in the Middle East no longer trust America to come to their aid. The President’s failure to back up his tough talk with action has undermined American leadership, and this may take years, if not decades, to repair.