

floor. Let's have the debate and have the vote. By the end of the day, let's have all of the relevant amendments considered to this legislation. I think we owe it to the people who have worked so hard to bring us to this moment, and now individual Senators should know that, to delay this, there is no excuse. Bring the Water Resources Development Act amendments to the floor.

In addition, the majority leader filed two amendments relative to the war in Iraq, which will be considered on a procedural basis to this Water Resources Development Act. It is a way to measure the sentiment of the Senate on two different approaches to resolving our difficulties between the White House and Congress on the funding in Iraq. There will be a cloture vote on those amendments tomorrow. That is an opportunity for Members to express their feelings.

As everybody knows, it takes 60 votes to invoke cloture. We hope we will have a strong bipartisan vote for one of those two approaches. I urge my colleagues to understand this is a very important and timely matter. We have little time left to deal with the requirements of funding our troops before the Memorial Day recess. The Democratic majority, as well as the Republican side, has made it clear we will fund our troops. At the end of the day, our troops will not go without the resources they need to provide for their own safety and a safe return home.

Also, we hope this week to initiate a conversation on the immigration bill.

RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

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

MORNING BUSINESS

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, there will be now a period for the transaction of morning business for 60 minutes, with the first half of the time under the control of the majority and the second half of the time under the control of the Republicans.

The Senator from Illinois is recognized.

IMMIGRATION REFORM

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, it is obvious to most Americans our immigration system is broken. There are 12 million undocumented immigrants living in the United States today, and hundreds of thousands are arriving each year. In America today, unscrupulous employers hire undocumented immigrants because they can pay them less than American workers and force them to work in conditions that Americans would not tolerate. Employers can do this with impunity because our Government doesn't enforce immigra-

tion laws that prohibit hiring undocumented immigrants.

Immigration is a complicated issue that ignites strong passions. Some would rather avoid this issue because it is so sensitive. But Congress has an obligation to fix our broken immigration system. We need a comprehensive approach, one that is tough but fair. We need, first, to improve border security by increasing manpower and deploying new technology. We need to enforce the law against employers who are hiring millions of undocumented workers. We need a realistic approach to the 12 million undocumented workers who live and work in our country.

I commend our majority leader, Senator REID of Nevada. He is not afraid of tackling tough issues, including immigration reform. He knows it is an important national priority. Last week, Senator REID introduced immigration reform legislation that the Senate will begin debating this week. Senator REID did a reasonable thing. He said we should begin the debate where it ended last year, with the bipartisan Kennedy-McCain, Hagel-Martinez bill.

This bill, sponsored by Republican Senators CHUCK HAGEL, MEL MARTINEZ, ARLEN SPECTER, JOHN MCCAIN, SAM BROWNBACK, and LINDSEY GRAHAM, and many Democrats, passed the Senate last year on a bipartisan vote of 62 to 36.

Of course, that Hagel-Martinez bill was only the starting point for the Senate's debate. Senator REID has set aside 2 full weeks to complete that debate. Members will have ample opportunity to offer amendments. This is the right place to start.

This is not a perfect bill. I voted for it, realizing there were real imperfections, but it reflects the culmination of months of work last year, including hearings and marathon markups in the Judiciary Committee, on which I serve, and over 30 rollcall votes on the floor of the Senate.

The bill is flawed, but it is comprehensive. It includes provisions to secure our borders, strengthen enforcement of our immigration laws, and address undocumented immigrants living in our country.

I am confident that over the next 2 weeks, through the amendment process, we can improve this bill and pass legislation that will be an important step in fixing our broken immigration system.

Unfortunately, there has been a hue and cry from the other side of the aisle. Some object to debating this bill. It is ironic, to say the least, that those on the other side who don't want to debate bipartisan legislation are objecting to a bill written, in large part, by their own side of the aisle—a bill that was passed when the Republican side of the aisle controlled the Senate last year. It is hard to understand how 21 Members of the Senate who voted for this bill last year now object to even proceeding to it now as the base bill for our debate. They understand, as we do,

that this bill is going to change once it comes to the floor. If they object to even bringing the measure to the floor—the same bill they voted for last year—one has to question whether they are committed to comprehensive immigration reform.

Some on the Republican side argue that backroom negotiations between the White House and Republican and Democratic Senators are close to a deal and that starting debate on immigration before that deal is reached is premature. I don't think that is a legitimate argument. I have been in many of these negotiations, and I will say a great amount of effort has been expended to move this bill forward. Some parts of it are very positive. An agreement between the White House and the Senate is a step forward. There are some parts that are very controversial.

Human nature and political nature are interesting. People will not move toward a goal unless they face a deadline. How many people wait until the last minute to file their tax returns or wait too long for the checkup at the dentist? When we know we are facing a deadline and time is running out, we make important decisions. The same will be true for the immigration debate. Bringing last year's bill to the floor, which passed with an overwhelming bipartisan rollcall vote, as the base bill is going to move those negotiators in that room to a conclusion more quickly. To leave this open-ended and say that at some time in the future we will get back to it is an invitation for talks to break down and for the participants to disappear.

We don't want that to happen. We cannot afford to wait. The Senate's calendar is full this year. There are so many things we need to do to make sure this congressional session is much more productive than those in the past, not the least of which is passing important appropriation bills, which now must be accomplished in order to fund the Government. We don't want to fall into the same circumstance as the previous Republican Congress, when they failed to pass appropriation bills and tried to play catchup and failed, leaving it to the new Congress, the Democratic Congress—an awesome responsibility—to fund the Government for the remainder of this fiscal year.

There are some who feel it is now or never for immigration. What the majority leader has done is to tell the negotiators this is the time to wrap things up. This is the time to reach an agreement. This is the time to decide who at that table is there in good faith and who is there to stop the process. If they reach an agreement, it can be considered on the floor of the Senate as an amendment to the bipartisan Kennedy-McCain, Hagel-Martinez bill, which is being offered as the starting point of this debate. If there is no agreement, these differences can be debated and voted on over the next 2 weeks.