

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. SASSE). Without objection, it is so ordered.

TRIBUTE TO BONNIE CARROLL

Mr. SULLIVAN. Mr. President, the Presidential Medal of Freedom is our Nation's highest civilian honor, presented to men and women who have made "an especially meritorious contribution to the security or national interests of the United States, world peace, cultural or other significant endeavors."

It is the highest honor a civilian of the United States can achieve. In all, the recipients have included seven Presidents, nine Supreme Court Justices, countless Members of Congress, First Ladies, military leaders, lawyers, artists, athletes, civil rights leaders, and doctors. It is the list of the best of America. It is a diverse list. The recipients come from all backgrounds and all walks of life. They all have one thing in common. They have dedicated their lives to achieving excellence in serving causes greater than themselves.

On November 24, next week, Bonnie Carroll, a proud Alaskan, will join this honor roll when she is presented with the Presidential Medal of Freedom at a White House ceremony. It is certainly an exciting time for all of us in Alaska. We are so proud of Bonnie, who just happens to be here tonight in the Gallery.

Let me tell you a little bit about Bonnie Carroll, a woman of determination, perseverance, honor, and strength. You can't talk about Bonnie without talking first about how she met her husband Tom, which in many ways—in tragic ways I will get to—led to the great work she has done for a grateful nation.

In 1988, Bonnie was working at the White House when news broke that three whales were trapped in the ice off the coast of Alaska. Now I know this doesn't happen in the Presiding Officer's State that often, but in Alaska we have certain challenges that other States don't. She picked up the phone to see what could be done, and on the other line was her future husband, Alaska Army National Guard COL Tom Carroll, who worked with many others to help rescue the whales. This was part of the love story between Bonnie and Tom and part of a story so unique that what happened up in Alaska actually caught the attention of Hollywood. You can see their love story portrayed in the film "The Great Miracle."

For the Carrolls, the story didn't end with the saving of the whales. Unfortunately, their story is in many ways happy but also did not have a so-called Hollywood ending—unfortunately, far from it. After they were married in 1992, COL Tom Carroll of the Alaska National Guard died in an Army C-12 plane crash in the mountains of Alaska. Seven other top Alaska National Guard members were tragically lost

that day. It was a horrible tragedy for America, for Alaska, for the Carroll family, and for all the other families who suffered tragic loss that day in Alaska.

After the crash Bonnie realized there were no organizations established in this country to help people like her who had lost loved ones—military members and family members who had lost military members in tragedies such as the day of that crash. What she did after that was amazing. What she did was heroic. She took her deep grief and put it to use for the rest of us.

Just 2 years after her husband's tragic death, Bonnie founded the Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors, also known as TAPS. The idea for TAPS came in part as a result of her consultations with former Senator Ted Stevens, another great Alaskan and great American, who would also tragically die in a plane crash in Alaska. This is why Bonnie is being honored by the President next week. Since 1994, her organization, TAPS, has offered support to 50,000 surviving families of our military members whom we have lost. Fifty thousand surviving family members and caregivers have benefited from the services of TAPS, which Bonnie founded. Think of the grief and think of what she has done across America to soothe grieving families.

TAPS provides a variety of grief and trauma resources, including seminars for adults and a summer camp for children in Alaska to help families heal and to help them work through their grief. I heard many of these stories, and you can't help but be touched and moved by the power of what TAPS does to help Americans, family members of our military, work through some of the most difficult times. For years those of us in the military and those of us in Alaska have known how Bonnie's work and the work of TAPS has been healing families throughout this country, for those we have lost—our heroes who have been defending this country. We have known in the military, we have known in Alaska, and as of Tuesday the world will know when Bonnie is presented with this incredible honor at the White House.

As she puts it: "Out of an Alaskan tragedy came hope and healing for tens of thousands of our military families."

For the work that she does with the families of our heroes who have made the ultimate sacrifice for all of us, Bonnie Carroll is utmost deserving of this great honor. She is a great Alaskan, a Great American, and she has made us all very proud.

Congratulations, Bonnie.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

THE ANNIVERSARY OF EXECUTIVE ACTION ON IMMIGRATION

Mr. LEAHY. Mr. President, a year ago today, in a nationwide address, President Obama announced a series of measures to improve our broken immigration system. He outlined efforts to focus scarce resources on identifying and deporting those people who pose a danger to our communities, to modernize our legal immigration system, and to provide temporary relief from the threat of deportation for hard-working, law-abiding members of our communities. For many, the President's announcement offered at last a hope for stability. It acknowledged the longstanding presence and contributions of immigrants to our country.

But the President's announcement also underscored the real human consequences of the House of Representatives failing to allow a vote to reform our immigration laws. Importantly, it highlighted the impracticality of deporting 11 million undocumented immigrants. Many of them have strong family ties in the United States and a deep desire to become fully integrated in our country. They are mothers and fathers, sisters and brothers, sons and daughters. To suggest that we can simply remove them is unrealistic and it would conflict with fundamental American values.

The President's Executive action is no substitute for legislation. He reminded critics of that very fact during his address, pointing out that the commonsense, responsible solution to the problems in our immigration system is to pass a comprehensive reform bill. A year later, the Republican-led Senate has failed to debate, let alone pass meaningful immigration reform. Instead, it has repeatedly taken up divisive and partisan proposals that do not reflect a desire to fix what we all agree is a broken system.

These political gimmicks are not serious attempts to address an issue as important as immigration and could not be more different from what the Democratic-led Senate accomplished in 2013 when we passed a bipartisan immigration bill supported by 68 Senators. During the Senate Judiciary Committee's consideration of the Border Security, Economic Opportunity, and Immigration Modernization Act, I convened multiple hearings, and we heard from 42 witnesses. Government officials and individuals representing a range of perspectives—including law enforcement, civil rights, labor, faith, business, and State and local governments—testified about the challenges confronting our current immigration system.

We heard the powerful testimony of witnesses such as Jose Antonio Vargas and Gaby Pacheco who pressed the urgent need for immigration reform. The compelling stories of DREAMers, young immigrants brought to this country as children, who have grown up as Americans and have every desire to make meaningful contributions to their communities, continue to inspire.

Many of them have qualified for the temporary relief provided by the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals, DACA, program, which has established a path for them to become our next generation of teachers, engineers, public servants, and doctors. Our Senate-passed, comprehensive bill included the DREAM Act, an important measure that would have provided a long-lasting solution to the problems these courageous young individuals face, acknowledging that they deserve to be part of our Nation's future.

The Senate-passed bill would have addressed many of the injustices in our current immigration system. It was a remarkable example of all that we can accomplish when we actually focus on the hard job of legislating. But the Republican-led House of Representatives blocked that effort. It stubbornly refused to even allow a vote on that bill. Given that lack of action, I understand the President's frustration and motivation. His Executive action was a response to what we all acknowledge is a broken system, but it is no substitute for comprehensive immigration reform.

Following the President's announcement, the Senate Judiciary Committee held a hearing on the Executive action program and heard the testimony of Astrid Silva. Hers is a fundamentally American story. It is similar in many ways to those of our parents and grandparents. It is a story of a family looking to find a better life. Astrid qualifies for the President's Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals, DACA, program. And her parents would be eligible for the Deferred Action for Parents of Americans and Lawful Permanent Residents, DAPA, program because her younger brother is a U.S. citizen. For more than 20 years, Astrid's family has been working hard and contributing to their local community. They are the kind of family we want to have as our neighbors and coworkers. Their stories remind us that their dreams, along with those of so many others affected by our dysfunctional immigration system, hang in the balance, and underscore the need for a permanent legislative solution.

Some in Congress claim that the President's executive action undermined the prospect of achieving comprehensive immigration reform. But I remind them that the President's action—prompted by congressional inaction—is not an excuse for continued congressional inaction. We must keep working to find a permanent legislative solution that provides today's immigrants with an opportunity to prosper and contribute to our country. As families across the Nation gather next week around the table to give thanks, we will all count our family members and their security among our greatest blessings. Our fight for comprehensive immigration reform is at its core a fight to help reunite families and provide the security that we all want for our loved ones. I urge Republicans to return to the cooperative and bipar-

tisan approach of 2013 and work on comprehensive immigration reform legislation. The American people support immigration reform. It is the right thing to do, and it should not be delayed any longer.

REFORMING THE EB-5 REGIONAL CENTER PROGRAM

Mr. LEAHY. Mr. President, I have championed the EB-5 Regional Center Program for many years. I have done so because I have seen its ability to generate investment and create jobs in distressed communities. But the program is facing some pressing challenges. Reports of rampant fraud and abuse raise serious concerns and threaten to cripple the program's integrity. The incentives Congress established to invest in high unemployment and rural communities are also routinely abused, undermining a core objective of the program—to spur growth and create jobs in underserved areas. The Regional Center Program is set to expire on December 11. It should be reauthorized, but we should not extend it blindly. There is bipartisan consensus that the program is in dire need of reform, and we cannot squander this opportunity.

I have long sought reforms to the Regional Center Program. Last Congress, my EB-5 amendment to Comprehensive Immigration Reform provided the Department of Homeland Security additional authority to revoke suspect regional center designations or immigrant petitions. It also provided for increased reporting, background checks, and securities oversight. My amendment was unanimously approved in the Judiciary Committee, but unfortunately the improvements it contained have all had to wait, as the House of Representatives failed to allow a vote on the bipartisan immigration reform bill that passed the Senate last Congress.

In the past year, only more concerns have emerged. In January, I joined Senators GRASSLEY, CORKER, JOHNSON, and others in requesting that the Government Accountability Office, GAO, audit the EB-5 program. The GAO report released in August detailed fraud vulnerabilities within the program and questioned its economic impact. Separate reports from the Department of Homeland Security's Office of Intelligence and Analysis and Office of the Inspector General highlighted additional issues that need to be addressed.

I am also troubled by the fact that the incentives Congress created to promote EB-5 investment in rural and high unemployment areas have been rendered meaningless. Investors are provided a discount if they choose to invest in rural or high unemployment areas, known as targeted employment areas or TEAs. At present, however, the most affluent neighborhoods in the country routinely qualify as TEAs by selectively stitching together otherwise unrelated census tracts. Depart-

ment of Homeland Security Secretary Johnson rightly described this practice as gerrymandering. I do not suggest that affluent areas should not benefit from EB-5; they should. But they should not qualify for incentives intended to benefit high unemployment and rural areas. These areas typically do not have access to significant capital and often struggle to create jobs.

Secretary Johnson himself called for significant reforms to strengthen the Regional Center Program. In a letter to the Judiciary Committee last April, he asked for authority to quickly act on criminal and national security concerns, additional protections for investors, enhanced reporting and auditing, improved integrity of TEAs, increased minimum investment amounts, and more.

I have now worked for over 2 years to develop legislation that would provide a necessary overhaul of the Regional Center Program. In June, I was joined by Chairman GRASSLEY in introducing this reform-oriented legislation, S.1501. Since then, Chairman GRASSLEY and I have worked with House Judiciary Chairman GOODLATTE on a bicameral bill based on S.1501.

This bicameral bill would provide the Department with the authorities and investigative tools necessary to address national security concerns and fraud. The reforms include further expanding background checks, conducting a more thorough vetting of immigrant investors and proposed investments, and providing for the ability to proactively investigate fraud, both in the United States and abroad, using a dedicated fund paid for by certain program participants. The bill would provide greater protections for investors and clarity and shorter processing times for project developers. It would also raise minimum investment thresholds so more money goes to the communities that need it. And it would help to restore the program to its original intent, by ensuring that incentives to invest in distressed and undercapitalized areas are restored.

Such reforms would answer the concerns raised by Secretary Johnson, the Department's inspector general, the GAO, and others, instilling both confidence and transparency in the program. I believe these reforms would result in a secure EB-5 program that creates American jobs and promotes economic growth throughout our country. We cannot continue to leave the Department ill-equipped to administer this job creation program. We know what is needed to fix it. And we should fix it now.

NOMINATION OBJECTION

Mr. GRASSLEY. Mr. President, I intend to object to any unanimous consent request at the present time relating to the nomination of Thomas A. Shannon, Jr., of Virginia, a career member of the Senior Foreign Service, class of Career Ambassador, to be an