

(Mr. SASSE) was added as a cosponsor of amendment No. 3981 intended to be proposed to H.R. 2577, a bill making appropriations for the Departments of Transportation, and Housing and Urban Development, and related agencies for the fiscal year ending September 30, 2016, and for other purposes.

AMENDMENT NO. 3998

At the request of Mr. TESTER, the names of the Senator from Ohio (Mr. BROWN), the Senator from Arkansas (Mr. BOOZMAN) and the Senator from Nevada (Mr. HELLER) were added as cosponsors of amendment No. 3998 proposed to H.R. 2577, a bill making appropriations for the Departments of Transportation, and Housing and Urban Development, and related agencies for the fiscal year ending September 30, 2016, and for other purposes.

AMENDMENT NO. 4002

At the request of Mr. BLUMENTHAL, the name of the Senator from Florida (Mr. NELSON) was added as a cosponsor of amendment No. 4002 intended to be proposed to H.R. 2577, a bill making appropriations for the Departments of Transportation, and Housing and Urban Development, and related agencies for the fiscal year ending September 30, 2016, and for other purposes.

STATEMENTS ON INTRODUCED BILLS AND JOINT RESOLUTIONS

By Mr. GRASSLEY (for himself and Mrs. GILLIBRAND):

S. 2944. A bill to require adequate reporting on the Public Safety Officers' Benefit program, and for other purposes; to the Committee on the Judiciary.

Mrs. GILLIBRAND. Mr. President, I rise to speak about a bill I am introducing along with Senator GRASSLEY called the Public Safety Officers' Benefits Improvement Act.

When our first responders make the decision to join a police department or a fire department or an EMT squad, they do so knowing they might encounter hazards on the job that threaten their lives or even end their lives. These men and women work in some of the highest pressure and most dangerous environments—shootouts, fires, natural disasters, terror attacks.

Think about your own communities back home. When disaster strikes, when there is an emergency, who shows up first, speeding to the scene and ready to help? It is our police officers, it is our firefighters, and it is our EMT workers. Our public safety officers know that death or serious injury is a real risk in their jobs, but they show up to work anyway, ready to help and willing to sacrifice, if that is what it takes to keep their communities safe.

When first responders die as a result of their work, we all have the responsibility to help take care of their surviving family members. In 1984, more than three decades ago, Congress did the right thing and created a program called the Public Safety Officers' Benefit Program to help these families.

Whenever a tragedy struck and a first responder was killed on the job or passed away because of their job, these grieving families could take a little bit of comfort in knowing they would have the financial support they needed with this program. They knew they would have help from this program, transitioning to a life without their loved one.

In recent years, the families applying to the program have faced confusing and inconsistent requirements. They have faced long delays in receiving compensation. Before, when a loved one died on the job, the family would get compensation from this program without any serious delay. But now the burden to claim these funds and then retrieve them has been placed on the families—the same families this program is supposed to be helping.

As a result, hundreds of families who are already grieving now have to dig through public records themselves. They have to endure an exhausting paper chase with no guidance. And they have to go far beyond a reasonable doubt to prove to the Justice Department that their loved one did, in fact, serve as a first responder and sacrificed his or her life for this job.

Last fall, USA Today reported that of the more than 900 cases they reviewed, the average wait for a decision by the program about compensation was more than 1 year. For some families, it was 2 years, and for some, the wait was 3 years. This even includes our first responders who worked at Ground Zero. Think about the unnecessary stress these delays have placed on our families who lost loved ones.

We know we must fix this program. We must fix this program. These families of our fallen public safety officers are not getting the compensation they deserve, that their loved ones have earned, in the timely manner they need.

This bill—Senator GRASSLEY's and mine—is a bipartisan bill that fixes this problem. The Public Safety Officers' Benefits Improvement Act would make this compensation program more transparent and more efficient, and it would make sure it works.

The bill would require the program to report publicly the status of every claim so that families can know if and why their compensation is being delayed. It would give weight to the findings and records of Federal agencies, State agencies, and local agencies about the cause of the public safety officer's death so that families don't have to reproduce records that already exist. And this bill would reduce the wait for our families to receive the compensation they deserve and desperately need.

I thank my colleague Senator GRASSLEY for his strong leadership and his amazing advocacy, and I urge all my colleagues here to support this bill. Let's fix the Public Safety Officers' Benefits Program. Let's take care of these families—the families of our pub-

lic safety officers—and let's do the right thing.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Iowa.

Mr. GRASSLEY. Mr. President, I thank the Senator from New York for working together on this very important issue to get justice for some of our police officers and their families who have been burdened by too much red-tape. She and I have worked together on so many things, and I appreciate this one as well.

In 1962, President John F. Kennedy signed a proclamation designating this week as National Police Week. As part of that tradition, tens of thousands of law enforcement officers have gathered in our Nation's Capital to honor those who have paid the ultimate sacrifice to the service of this Nation.

I rise to join these officers in thanking the men and women who have dedicated their lives to protecting our communities. We must never take their sacrifice for granted, and we need to appreciate that their surviving families have suffered real loss.

In recognition of this truth, Congress passed the Public Safety Officers' Benefits Act in 1976. The goal of the law was to provide death benefits to survivors of officers who die in the line of duty. Over the years, the law has been amended to provide disability and education benefits and to expand the pool of officers who are eligible for these benefits.

Looking at the 40-year history of this law, the overall intent of Congress is very clear: Families of fallen officers deserve a fair and timely consideration of their application for these benefits, and the word "timely" is what isn't being carried out right now.

If we were in these officers' shoes, we would like to see an answer—either yes or no—not years of limbo and lingering uncertainty. Unfortunately, that is precisely what too many families have had to endure since at least 2003, all because bureaucrats in the Justice Department failed to do their job and do it on time.

Three weeks ago, I chaired a Judiciary Committee hearing to examine this problem on the lack of timeliness. What we found was troubling. The Justice Department has a goal of processing these claims within 1 year of filing. However, according to the most recent data, the Justice Department is failing to meet its own 1-year deadline in 61 percent of the 693 pending death benefit claims. Those are 423 families who have been waiting for more than 1 year. That rate is unacceptable for a program designed to support families of fallen officers.

Somehow, the delays have gone from bad to worse. The failure rate was 27 percent for claims that were filed between 2008 and 2013. So it is very difficult to understand how that could happen.

For 13 years and counting, since 2003, the delays have persisted despite a 2004

Attorney General memorandum, despite a 2007 Judiciary Committee hearing, and despite three independent audits recommending corrective action. Not surprisingly, there have been periodic improvements in timeliness whenever Congress or watchdogs shine light into these delays. However, these improvements have been very short-lived. For example, in 2007, the Justice Department more than doubled its monthly rate of processing claims in the first 2 months following a Judiciary Committee hearing. However, in the ensuing 5 years, the inspector general found not only significant delays but also a serious lack of documentation and data.

I began looking into this program last January after constituents informed me that families in Iowa waited more than 3 years to get a decision, but the Justice Department's response to my oversight letters confirmed that these delays persist on a nationwide scale. For instance, there are currently 175 pending death and disability claims that were filed on behalf of officers who lost their lives as a result of their September 11 response efforts. That is why I have written six letters to the Justice Department in the last 1½ years asking for status updates on all pending claims. Initially, after I sent my first letters, the number of pending claims went down at a steady pace. However, more recently the Justice Department has simply failed to respond to my letters.

At last month's Judiciary Committee hearing, a claimant from my State of Iowa testified about having waited 3½ years without an answer from the Justice Department, but just 2 days after that hearing, that claimant got a phone call from the Department saying the claim had been approved. What was the Justice Department doing for the past 3½ years on that claim? And what about the 692 other families who are waiting for a decision? Families of fallen officers and advocacy groups agree, transparency leads to accountability, and the Justice Department should be held accountable for its handling of these claims. So based on this 13-year record, I have concluded that the best way to ensure timeliness in these claims is to permanently increase the level of transparency surrounding this program.

Today the Senator from New York, just speaking, and I are introducing a bill that would do just that. It is called the Public Safety Officers' Benefits Improvement Act. This bill would require the Justice Department to post on its Web site weekly status updates for all pending claims. This way the public can evaluate how well the Department is performing under its goal of processing claims within the 1-year filing deadline they have. The Justice Department is already posting weekly statistics with respect to the September 11th Victims Compensation Fund, which is a similar program. So the Department should be able to do

the same with respect to pending public safety officers' benefits claims by posting weekly statistics.

In addition, our bill would require the Justice Department to report to Congress other aggregate statistics regarding these claims at least twice a year, and the bill would make it easier for the Justice Department to process these claims in other ways; for example, by allowing the Department to rely on other Federal regulatory standards and to give substantial weight to findings of fact of State, local, and other Federal agencies.

In short, this is a simple bipartisan bill with narrowly tailored provisions. Each provision is targeted to specific problems that have been identified over the past 13 years by independent audits, by committee hearings, by advocacy groups, and, of course, as we would expect, by families of fallen officers who wonder what is going on at the Department of Justice.

So I thank Senator GILLIBRAND for working with me to develop this commonsense legislation. I urge my colleagues to stand with us in support of these officers and their families and help us get this bill done as our way of saying thank you to these men and women, particularly as we honor them in this particular season we call National Police Week.

By Mr. BOOKER (for himself and Ms. MIKULSKI):

S. 2946. A bill to amend title 5, United States Code, to include certain Federal positions within the definition of law enforcement officer for retirement purposes, and for other purposes; to the Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs.

Mr. BOOKER. Mr. President, today I wish to introduce the Law Enforcement Officers' Equity Act, a commonsense bill that would fix a loophole in Federal law that denies many Federal law enforcement officers Federal benefits. This week, as our Nation pauses to honor the sacrifices and services of our men and women in law enforcement, I am glad to introduce legislation to accord them with the benefits they so deeply deserve.

This legislation has been introduced in past Congresses by my friend and colleague, Senator BARBARA MIKULSKI. I am grateful to her for allowing me to introduce this bill, and I am glad to have her support as an original cosponsor of this legislation.

Law enforcement officers have one of the toughest jobs in America. Twenty-four hours a day and 365 days a year, they work to keep our communities safe and uphold the rule of law. During my tenure as mayor of Newark, I spent countless hours with police officers patrolling the streets, and I saw firsthand how difficult and dangerous their jobs can be. These brave men and women apprehend violent criminals and arrest drug kingpins, which carries with it immense pressure and stress.

The legislation I am introducing today would fix a loophole in our Fed-

eral law. Due to the level of training required and greater danger present in their profession, Congress determined years ago that individuals in Federal law enforcement should receive higher salaries and enhanced retirement benefits compared to other Federal employees. Unfortunately, approximately 30,000 Federal law enforcement officers are classified in a way that precludes them from receiving the enhanced retirement benefits they deserve.

As a result of this loophole, certain officers who work for Federal agencies—such as the Department of Defense, Department of Veterans Affairs, U.S. Postal Service, U.S. Mint, National Institute of Health, and many more—receive lower pensions as compared to other law enforcement officers with similar duties and responsibilities. This problem must be fixed. Correcting this error is not only dictated by fairness, but it is a matter of public safety because of the value of recruiting and retaining experienced and highly trained law enforcement officers is immeasurable.

The Law Enforcement Officers' Equity Act would expand the definition of "law enforcement officer" for retirement purposes to include all Federal law enforcement officers. The change would grant law enforcement officer status to the follow individuals: employees who are authorized to carry a firearm and whose duties include the investigation and/or apprehension of suspected criminals; employees of the Internal Revenue Service whose duties are primarily the collection of delinquent taxes and securing delinquent returns; employees of the U.S. Postal Inspection Service; and employees of the Department of Veterans Affairs who are Department police offices. These officers face the same risks and challenges as the men and women currently classified properly under Federal law as law enforcement officers, and they deserve the same benefits.

The Law Enforcement Officers' Equity Act would allow incumbent law enforcement officers' Federal service after the enactment of the act to be considered service performed as a law enforcement officer for retirement purposes.

This legislation has the support of numerous law enforcement groups, including the Fraternal Order of Police, Postal Police Officers Association, National Association of Police Officers, the Federal Law Enforcement Officers' Association, and the National Treasury Employees Union.

According to the Postal Police Officers Association, "These officers face the same risks and challenges as their federal law enforcement colleagues who currently receive [law enforcement officer] retirement status. This bill will ensure that officers across the country, who put their lives on the line each and every day to protect us, earn the benefits that they deserve."

And the National Association of Police Organizations has said, "This bill

will ensure that officers across the country, who put their lives on the line each and every day to protect us, earn the benefits that they deserve.”

Fundamental fairness demands that we close this loophole in Federal law and give all Federal law enforcement officers the retirement benefits they deserve. I ask my colleagues to support the Law Enforcement Officers' Equity Act, and I urge its speedy passage.

SUBMITTED RESOLUTIONS

SENATE RESOLUTION 469—COMMEMORATING THE 100TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE 1916 EASTER RISING, A SEMINAL MOMENT IN THE JOURNEY OF IRELAND TO INDEPENDENCE

Mr. LEAHY (for himself, Mr. McCONNELL, and Mr. MARKEY) submitted the following resolution; which was referred to the Committee on Foreign Relations:

S. RES. 469

Whereas the 100th anniversary of the 1916 Easter Rising has a particular resonance in the United States;

Whereas since the founding of the United States, Irish people and the millions of United States citizens of Irish descent have helped to shape the history of the United States;

Whereas, in the words of President John F. Kennedy, “No people ever believed more deeply in the cause of Irish freedom than the people of the United States”;

Whereas 5 of the 7 signatories of the 1916 Proclamation of Independence spent periods of time in the United States that significantly influenced the thinking and actions of those signatories;

Whereas the United States is the only foreign country specifically mentioned in the 1916 Proclamation of Independence;

Whereas the contemporary ties between the United States and Ireland are of extraordinary depth and breadth;

Whereas continued United States engagement in the Northern Ireland peace process is vital to safeguarding the gains made since the Good Friday Agreement;

Whereas the 100th anniversary of the 1916 Easter Rising offers an opportunity for remembrance, reconciliation, and reimagining of the future;

Whereas, on May 17 and 18, 2016, the Taoiseach, the Prime Minister of Ireland, will visit Washington, D.C., for events commemorating the 100th anniversary of the 1916 Easter Rising; and

Whereas more than 200 other commemorative events will take place across the United States to mark the 100th anniversary of the 1916 Easter Rising: Now, therefore, be it

Resolved, That the Senate—

(1) recalls the special ties between Ireland and the United States, continually sustained and strengthened throughout the intertwined history of both countries;

(2) welcomes the program of commemorations in the United States marking the 100th anniversary of the 1916 Easter Rising of Ireland, including the events taking place in Washington, D.C.; and

(3) recognizes the importance of nurturing and renewing the unique relationship between the United States and Ireland, and the people of the United States and Ireland, into the future.

SENATE RESOLUTION 470—RECOGNIZING THE 100TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE PORTLAND CEMENT ASSOCIATION, THE NATIONAL ORGANIZATION FOR THE CEMENT MANUFACTURING AND CONCRETE INDUSTRY

Mr. MORAN (for himself and Mr. MANCHIN) submitted the following resolution; which was referred to the Committee on the Judiciary:

S. RES. 470

Whereas the first concrete road in the United States was built in 1890, and a portion of the original pavement of that road is still in use as of May 2016;

Whereas, in 1916—

(1) the Portland Cement Association was established as the national organization for the cement manufacturing and concrete industry; and

(2) Congress passed the first Federal-aid highway legislation, setting in motion the development of a network of national highways;

Whereas, in 1921, the Portland Cement Association joined the Bureau of Public Roads and various State agencies to determine the best ways to design and build concrete roads, resulting in the Illinois Division of Highways Bates Test Road, a landmark project that established the most economical design for concrete pavements;

Whereas the Portland Cement Association participated in design and testing for the Hoover Dam, the Grand Coulee Dam, and many other concrete projects;

Whereas 60 percent of the 41,000-mile highway system authorized under the Federal-Aid Highway Act of 1956 (70 Stat. 374), which established the Highway Trust Fund, was constructed using concrete, based on research and performance data identifying the significance of using concrete throughout the interstate highway system;

Whereas due to new and increasing uses of concrete that required specialized research, the Portland Cement Association added 2 new laboratory facilities in 1958, a structural laboratory and a fire research center, which resulted in the development of more durable and economical buildings and improvements in fire safety for concrete structures and transportation facilities;

Whereas 2016 marks the 100th anniversary of the establishment of the Portland Cement Association; and

Whereas the Portland Cement Association advocates in support of sustainability, resiliency, economic growth, infrastructure investment, and overall innovation and excellence in construction throughout the United States: Now, therefore, be it

Resolved, That the Senate—

(1) recognizes the 100th anniversary of the Portland Cement Association;

(2) commends the Portland Cement Association for its work and dedication to—

(A) the infrastructure of the United States; and

(B) innovative developments;

(3) recognizes the strong initiatives of the Portland Cement Association to improve the state of the cement industry; and

(4) recognizes the members of the Portland Cement Association and all cement manufacturers on the centennial celebration of the establishment of the Portland Cement Association.

SENATE RESOLUTION 471—DESIGNATING THE WEEK OF MAY 15 THROUGH MAY 21, 2016, AS “NATIONAL PUBLIC WORKS WEEK”

Mr. INHOFE (for himself and Mrs. BOXER) submitted the following resolution; which was considered and agreed to:

S. RES. 471

Whereas public works infrastructure, facilities, and services are of vital importance to the health, safety, and well-being of the people of the United States;

Whereas the public works infrastructure, facilities, and services could not be provided without the dedicated efforts of public works professionals, including engineers and administrators, who represent State and local governments throughout the United States;

Whereas public works professionals design, build, operate, and maintain the transportation systems, water infrastructure, sewage and refuse disposal systems, public buildings, and other structures and facilities that are vital to the people and communities of the United States; and

Whereas understanding the role that public infrastructure plays in protecting the environment, improving public health and safety, contributing to economic vitality, and enhancing the quality of life of every community of the United States is in the interest of the people of the United States: Now, therefore, be it

Resolved, That the Senate—

(1) designates the week of May 15 through May 21, 2016, as “National Public Works Week”;

(2) recognizes and celebrates the important contributions that public works professionals make every day to improve—

(A) the public infrastructure of the United States; and

(B) the communities that public works professionals serve; and

(3) urges individuals and communities throughout the United States to join with representatives of the Federal Government and the American Public Works Association in activities and ceremonies that are designed—

(A) to pay tribute to the public works professionals of the United States; and

(B) to recognize the substantial contributions that public works professionals make to the United States.

AMENDMENTS SUBMITTED AND PROPOSED

SA 4005. Mr. HELLER submitted an amendment intended to be proposed to amendment SA 3896 proposed by Ms. COLLINS (for herself, Mr. KIRK, Mr. REED, and Mr. TESTER) to the bill H.R. 2577, making appropriations for the Departments of Transportation, and Housing and Urban Development, and related agencies for the fiscal year ending September 30, 2016, and for other purposes.

SA 4006. Mr. VITTER submitted an amendment intended to be proposed to amendment SA 3896 proposed by Ms. COLLINS (for herself, Mr. KIRK, Mr. REED, and Mr. TESTER) to the bill H.R. 2577, supra; which was ordered to lie on the table.

SA 4007. Mr. PAUL submitted an amendment intended to be proposed to amendment SA 3896 proposed by Ms. COLLINS (for herself, Mr. KIRK, Mr. REED, and Mr. TESTER) to the bill H.R. 2577, supra; which was ordered to lie on the table.

SA 4008. Mr. DAINES (for himself and Mr. TESTER) submitted an amendment intended to be proposed to amendment SA 3896 proposed by Ms. COLLINS (for herself, Mr. KIRK,