

make their points during a budget process, move to an appropriations process, and get the government funded every year without all this drama. That is what the people of America want.

It will protect our military. It will protect our national security. It will let us take care of the domestic needs we need, and it will let us invest in our infrastructure to get this economy going again. Without this exercise, we will not start down the path that may take 30 or 40 years to bring this debt under control. It is that large.

Let me emphasize one more thing. If this debt is not addressed soon, the rising interest rates that we all know are coming—we are living in a false world today of zero interest rates. If we just get back to our 30-year average of about 5 percent, we will be paying \$1 trillion in interest. That is not possible. It simply is not workable. All things come into the conversation.

This is what is going to happen. We are going to start debating this on the floor, hopefully soon. It may run into next year. It may go to the following year. My commitment to my people at home is, we are not going to give up on this fight until we get something done about this. We proposed a couple of things.

Three guiding principles were developed by a small group of people, and it has been welcomed by a growing number of people in this body. No. 1, the budget needs to be a law. No. 2, everything we spend—all \$4 trillion of it—needs to go into the budget. They need to be debated and covered in the budget by both sides. No. 3, if we don't fund the government by the end of the fiscal year, there has to be serious consequences.

You heard one proposal tonight by Senator LANKFORD. There may be others, but we are going to put on the Senate and the House, for that matter, real consequences if we don't get the Federal Government budget done. Again, this is an exercise that we hope will be bipartisan. We want no advantage in this. We want a process that doesn't advantage either party. It gives both equal standing in the budget process, leading to a reasonable and effective funding of the Federal Government. A politically neutral platform, that is our goal.

I will close with this. If not now, when? If not us, who? I thank the forbearance of the Presiding Officer tonight. Thank you for allowing us to do this.

I yield back my time. I see we have other speakers on the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. LEE). The Senator from New Mexico.

(The remarks of Mr. HEINRICH and Ms. COLLINS pertaining to the introduction of S. 3458 are printed in today's RECORD under "Statements on Introduced Bills and Joint Resolutions.")

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Ohio.

UNANIMOUS CONSENT REQUEST— S. 2253

Mr. BROWN. Mr. President, too often this body talks about supporting our veterans while doing far too little to pass critical legislation that would actually help them.

The Senate Committee on Veterans' Affairs, of which I am a member—and I am joined by my colleague on that committee, Senator TILLIS, with whom I have worked on a number of issues in our time together in the Senate. Chairman ISAKSON and Ranking Member BLUMENTHAL have had in this committee perhaps the best cooperation of any standing committee in the Senate. And we continue to work to address challenges facing veterans and the Veterans' Administration.

Through hearings and legislative markups, we have listened and learned from veterans. As a result, we have worked together across the aisle to produce legislation that reflects the needs of those who served our country. It is a minimum we ought to be doing, and I think we are generally doing that pretty well.

One result of our efforts has been the bipartisan Veterans First Act. It is a good bill that comprehensively addresses a host of issues facing veterans, including education benefits, homelessness, health care, and VA accountability. As we see too often, even commonsense legislation like Vets First can't make its way to the floor. Our inability to act on this doesn't mean we shouldn't try to address specific issues that have bipartisan support.

One of those issues which I hope we can agree on is the need to provide relief to veterans who, through no fault of their own, were—there is no other way to say it—bilked by the for-profit school ITT. Veterans and other students were betrayed and bilked, and taxpayers were fleeced. Veterans who were attending ITT at the time of its closure lost the GI bill or VA benefits used to pay for their education. Meanwhile, all other students who were enrolled at ITT were eligible to have their Federal student loans discharged. So if you are not a veteran and you had Federal student loans, you could get those loans discharged. If you are a veteran under the GI bill or VA benefits, you couldn't. It wasn't anybody's intent to do that, but that is what the law says.

I know Senator ISAKSON, the chairman—and we are joined by Senator CARPER on the floor as well—he is interested in this. I also know that Senator TILLIS has cosponsored my bill to actually fix this. This is something we need to do. We are not the only ones who believe action needs to be taken. Governor Mike Pence, the Governor of the State next door to mine, Indiana, who is the Republican nominee for Vice President, supports this.

The closure of ITT was the fault of the management of that school, who spent a lot of money on marketing and a lot of money on helping students get

financing but not much money on education and even less on job placement for their students. The closure of ITT was not the fault of the veterans, for sure, not the fault of the students, but now veterans are worried about being able to pay their rent and pursue their education, which is what this legislation is going to allow them to do. In my State of Ohio, 520 veterans have been impacted by ITT's closure.

There are some questions of finding a way to pay for this legislation, but I believe finding a pay-for is a red herring. We are simply giving the VA the authority to provide relief to veterans. No one is running around trying to find a pay-for for the Federal student loans that are going to be discharged. So we are saying we are just going to do the discharge on the nonveteran students, and we have to find a little legislative sleight-of-hand pay-for to take care of the veterans. That just doesn't make sense. Why should veterans be treated differently or worse than nonveteran students? All we are looking to do is to make sure veterans are treated like all other students who attended an institution like ITT or Corinthian, another scam institution that shut down.

Veterans were promised GI benefits when they signed up to serve our country. ITT has cheated them out of the quality education they earned. If we fail to act today before leaving town, we abandon the responsibility to our Nation's heroes.

Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee be discharged from further consideration of S. 2253 and the Senate proceed to its immediate consideration; that the bill be read a third time and passed and the motion to reconsider be considered made and laid upon the table with no intervening action or debate.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

The Senator from North Carolina.

Mr. TILLIS. Mr. President, reserving the right to object, my colleague from Ohio and I have worked on a number of different measures on the Veterans' Affairs Committee, and I hope to continue to work with him.

I wish to talk a little bit about the process here. It may seem odd, on a bill on which I am one of the lead Republican sponsors, to come to the floor and object to the UC, but let's talk about structurally what is going on here. We said that the only reason there is a problem is there is no pay-for. In other words, we are trying to pass a policy that we haven't taken the time to make a decision about how to pay for it. We can say that we are authorizing the VA to pay for it, but what are they going to do? We haven't provided them with any funds to do it, so what potentially suffers as a result? That is one piece.

We just heard a number of speeches here with Republican freshmen and a couple of veteran Members on the floor talking about being responsible in the

budgeting process and actually living within our means and paying for things. Now I am in the uncomfortable position of having to object, potentially—reserving my right to object—to a measure that includes policy that I fundamentally support. What I don't want to do, though, is send something half-baked to the House and pretend that somehow it is going to be taken up before we get back from the recess. It won't be. As a matter of fact, if we don't do our job here, it will probably not move in the House.

So why not work with Senator ISAKSON, who has done a remarkable job of trying to work with the veterans service organizations that have a concern with the direction we were going with the pay-fors, to find a legitimate way to pay for this policy before we send it to the House and make it more likely that before we get out at the end of the year, this bill will be passed? This is just about being responsible and doing both parts of our jobs—coming up with good policy and then coming up with a way to pay for it.

So for those reasons, I do object.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Objection is heard.

The Senator from Ohio.

Mr. BROWN. Mr. President, I thank Senator TILLIS, and I understand his view on this issue. I appreciate the position of Senator TILLIS, my colleague on the Veterans' Affairs Committee. I just fundamentally say that, first of all, we shouldn't leave town. We should finish our work. We should confirm the Supreme Court nominee or at least have hearings. We should finish our work that we haven't done this year. We have been in session less this year than any Senate in the last 60 years. I know Senator MCCONNELL wants to send his Members home so they can campaign for reelection and spend their Koch brothers money that they have benefited from.

More than that, what I don't get here is—we are only giving the VA the authority to provide relief for these veterans. We are treating veterans worse than other students at ITT or Corinthian. So if you were at ITT and you found out 3 weeks ago that that school was closing—2, 3 weeks ago, something like that—and you are a veteran and you have a friend who is a nonveteran, the nonveteran gets their loans discharged, and you as the veteran don't with your GI benefits, because they had Federal student loans and you had GI benefits. It is just not fair to them.

I don't think we should ever leave this place having treated a veteran worse than a nonveteran in the exact same situation. So I don't really understand the opposition. I hope we can re-engage and figure this out and take care of these 500 or so Ohioans who served their country well.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, I support Senator SHERROD BROWN's unanimous consent request that the Senate adopt the Veterans Education Relief

and Restoration Act, S. 2253, to support veterans who were harmed by the closure of ITT Tech.

ITT Tech's predatory practices led to its sudden closure early this month, leaving tens of thousands of students in the lurch. Many veterans using GI bill benefits at ITT Tech have been particularly affected by this company's practices and now its closure and bankruptcy.

ITT Tech has for years been a major recipient of GI bill benefits. According to a 2014 report by Senator TOM HARKIN's HELP Committee, ITT Tech was the third largest recipient in 2012-13, receiving \$161 million in GI bill funds. When it closed earlier this month, an estimated 7,000 veterans were enrolled at ITT Tech.

Not only have these veterans used up part or in some cases all of their limited GI bill education benefits, some of them relied on VA housing assistance to pay their rent and afford a place to live for themselves and their families. Veterans can only receive this housing stipend if they are enrolled in a school that qualifies for GI bill benefits, so the closure of ITT Tech has put them at risk of being unable to afford their current housing and further disrupting their lives.

I support the bipartisan Veterans Education Relief and Restoration Act, or VERRA, introduced by Senators BLUMENTHAL and TILLIS, to reinstate GI bill education benefits in certain cases and to give the Secretary of Veterans Affairs the authority to temporarily extend housing benefits to veterans, including those who attended ITT Tech, who find their education interrupted by a sudden closure of a school.

The closure of ITT Tech makes the need to pass VERRA an emergency for so many veterans across the country. This is a commonsense bill—it's bipartisan—and it's time sensitive.

I urge Republicans not to block this effort to extend this modest and much-needed relief to our veterans who have been put in this terrible position by ITT Tech.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Delaware.

Mr. CARPER. Mr. President, I stand before my colleagues this evening as a veteran of the Vietnam War who returned to this country after a third tour in Southeast Asia. I moved from California to Delaware and enrolled there at the University of Delaware in their business school, in their MBA program. I was fortunate enough, along with many other Vietnam-era veterans, to receive a GI bill benefit; it was about \$250 a month. College tuition was a lot less in those days. I was happy to have every penny of it. But today we offer a GI bill benefit that is far more robust and far more needed than it was when I came back from Southeast Asia.

Today, veterans return often throughout the course of the year in Delaware. The Governor and our con-

gressional delegation—Senator COONS, Congressman CARNEY, and I—will either send National Guard men and women off to deployments around the world or we might welcome them home. Whenever we welcome them home, I say to the returning National Guard men and women, the Army Guard and Air Guard: Welcome home to the best GI bill benefits in the history of the country.

If they want to go to the University of Delaware, tuition is paid for; at Delaware State University or Delaware Community College, tuition is paid for. If they need books—they probably do—they are paid for, and fees are paid for. If they need tutoring, it is paid for, and they also receive roughly a \$1,500-a-month housing allowance. That is a great benefit, and folks who go to those schools generally get a very good education, and they get a lot of help in job placement after they have completed their education. That is not always the case in some of our for-profit colleges and universities. Some of them do a good job; some of them don't.

One of them that hasn't done a good job is called ITT Tech. We heard it talked about this evening on the Senate floor. There were about 7,000 veterans using the Post-9/11 GI bill benefits that ITT Tech took from them when the school suddenly collapsed earlier this month. This provided \$22,000 a year in educational assistance to private nonprofit and private for-profit colleges. The Post-9/11 GI bill provides a housing allowance that our veterans depend on to support their families while they attend class.

When ITT Tech closed its doors, it also meant that this housing allowance came to an abrupt halt. I urged the Department of Veterans Affairs to work closely with the Department of Education to ensure that ITT Tech student veterans had the same resources and guidance they need to transfer and continue their education at high quality institutions of learning. But some veterans will not be able to transfer to another school this month or next month. We want them to make smart decisions about their educational future. That is why passing this bipartisan bill or some similar bipartisan bill to restore lost educational benefits and temporarily—underline temporarily—extend the housing allowance for students who attend schools like ITT Tech that suddenly close is so critical to our Nation's veterans and their families.

We want to make sure that the student veterans have enough time—not an endless period, but enough time—to decide whether it is best to transfer to another school, to discharge their student loans, or start over at another school, such as a community college. This legislation is really about making sure the veterans continue to receive benefits they have earned in service to our country.

Our Nation's veterans did not cause ITT Tech to collapse. Our Nation's veterans and our Nation's taxpayers deserve better than they have received at

the hands of ITT Tech. The least we can do is provide some very modest relief during this tough period of transition. I think passing this bill or something similar to this legislation is the least we can do.

My hope is that after we return from the recess after the election we can start talking across the aisle about more help to our student veterans and folks on the Post-9/11 GI bill. It is ironic that folks who are not veterans but recipients of Federal aid for education are in a similar situation, and they essentially would be made whole, but that is not the case with our veterans. I am not comfortable with that situation, and I suspect a lot of my colleagues are not either.

I will close this part of my remarks. I think most of us ascribe to the Golden Rule—treat other people the way you want to be treated. I have been a veteran myself. I got a great education, graduate school at the University of Delaware, but I know how I would want to be treated if I were in the shoes of these thousands of veterans who have been mistreated at the hands of ITT Tech. We need to do something about it, and I hope that when we return, we will.

TRIBUTE TO FEDERAL EMPLOYEES

JUSTO "TITO" HERNANDEZ AND MELISSA
FORBES

Mr. CARPER. Mr. President, as some of my colleagues know, nearly every month for more than 1 year now, I have come to the Senate floor regularly to highlight the diverse and difficult work performed by the men and women at the Department of Homeland Security. I have been privileged to be at times in recent years the chairman of the Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs and today serve as the senior Democrat, the ranking member of that committee.

The Department of Homeland Security is part of the government that we have direct jurisdiction over, and it is one that I have had a great privilege to work with and have had an opportunity to oversee the operation of that Department. The Department of Homeland Security has more than 230,000 employees stationed around our country at our ports of entry, major transit hubs, and in major cities and small communities alike. Each day the Department of Homeland Security performs some of the most challenging jobs in the Federal Government. From securing radiological material to protecting our cyber networks to responding to natural disasters such as floods, fires, and tornadoes, the Department of Homeland Security employees work around-the-clock to stay ahead of threats to our communities, our homes, and our families.

I commend Secretary Jeh Johnson, Deputy Secretary Mayorkas, and their entire leadership team for their continued efforts to bring the entire depart-

ment together and make the Department of Homeland Security more than just the sum of its parts.

Last week, the 2016 Federal Employee Viewpoint survey was released with some good news. The annual survey is provided to hundreds of thousands of Federal employees every year to gauge their satisfaction with their jobs and their engagement with their agency as a whole. After 6 years of declining morale numbers, the tide has begun to turn at the Department of Homeland Security. That is a good thing. Since last year, morale has increased throughout the Department by some 3 percent. I think that is probably more than any other Department in the Federal Government—over the last year, a significant one-year improvement and a better result than the Federal Government average over the same period.

Like turning an aircraft carrier, improving morale over a large Federal agency takes time. You can turn an aircraft carrier's course, but it takes a little while, and so does changing and improving the morale of a department with a quarter of a million people spread out all over the world. I believe this latest survey shows that the hard work done by Secretary Johnson and Deputy Secretary Mayorkas and their team has begun to put this ship on a better course for the future.

While more work needs to be done to improve morale at the Department of Homeland Security, this effort does not fall on Secretary Johnson alone. Each Member of Congress and every American can help support the Department and its employees by simply acknowledging the good work that the employees do there every day. Whether we simply say thank you to a TSA agent or TSO officer the next time we pass through an airport or give an occasional speech on the Senate floor as I am doing tonight and have done on other occasions, our support makes a difference.

Mr. President, each September, the Federal Emergency Management Agency, which we affectionately call FEMA, marks National Preparedness Month. Throughout the month, FEMA encourages all Americans to prepare for natural disasters and emergencies. To continue highlighting National Preparedness Month and to continue to highlight the important work done by FEMA and its people, I want to take a moment tonight to thank just a few of the employees of FEMA, one of the 22 component agencies all told that make up the Department of Homeland Security.

As my colleagues may know, just last month, historic flooding inundated much of the State of Louisiana. What some may not know is that even before the floodwaters had peaked, FEMA employees and personnel were on the ground there. They were setting up Incident Support Bases to provide supplies, coordinating with State and local officials, and supporting first respond-

ers in rescue efforts. FEMA also set up Disaster Recovery Centers to assist residents seeking Federal aid to get back on their feet in the aftermath of the storms.

One of the first FEMA employees on the ground there more than a month ago was Justo Hernandez, and Justo's picture is right here. Justo goes by the nickname Tito and is a Team Leader of the East II National Incident Management Assistance Team. With 28 years' experience with FEMA, Tito leads his team in immediate response efforts to natural and manmade disasters whenever and wherever they occur.

Ready at a moment's notice, Tito and his team are experts in disaster response, specializing in operations, logistics, planning, and recovery. They put their experience to use by supporting State and local officials as they work through the most trying of situations.

Members of Tito's team say that he is by far the best manager and supervisor they have ever worked for. As a leader, Tito leads by example, not afraid to get his hands dirty and never turning down a task, large or small. With their team expected to be deployed nearly 9 months out of the year, Tito has a deep respect for his team members' personal time.

When Tito does get some time back at home, I know he enjoys spending every moment with his wife and three children. His family is incredibly generous, and we are grateful to them for lending our Nation their husband and father so he may undertake this important work in many parts of America on behalf of all Americans.

As a FEMA employee, Tito embodies the spirit of dedication and caring, shaking hands with each individual he comes into contact with, asking them, "How are you doing?" As with most of the men and women at FEMA, Tito doesn't stop there. He does all he can do to help people.

Last month, I visited FEMA headquarters here in Washington, DC. I met a number of the thousands of dedicated employees who work there. This is a picture from FEMA. These are some of the exceptional people who help us in some of our darkest hours. While many of these men and women were not directly involved in the response effort in Louisiana, they felt obligated to do all they could for their colleagues who were on the ground in Louisiana or coordinating from around the country. In fact, FEMA headquarters established a backup call center in their offices, and dozens of FEMA employees volunteered—during or after their regular working hours—to man the phones and talk to people through some of the toughest situations imaginable.

One FEMA employee who asked how she could help is Melissa Forbes. Melissa has a Ph.D. in public policy and serves as Director of Enterprise Resource Planning in FEMA's Office of Policy and Program Analysis. Melissa's day job is to ensure that FEMA has the