

ORDER OF BUSINESS

Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that at a time to be determined by the majority leader, in consultation with the Democratic leader, on or before Wednesday, July 24, the Senate proceed to the consideration of Calendar No. 153, H.R. 1327; that the only amendments in order be Lee amendment No. 928 and Paul amendment No. 929 to be offered; that there be up to 2 hours of concurrent debate equally divided between the leaders or designees; that the Senate then vote in relation to the amendments in the order listed, with no second-degree amendments in order prior to the votes; that there be 2 minutes equally divided prior to each vote; and that each amendment be subject to an affirmative 60-vote threshold. I further ask that upon disposition of the amendments, the bill be read a third time and the Senate vote on H.R. 1327, as amended, if amended, all with no intervening action or debate, notwithstanding rule XXII.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

The Senator from New York.

Mrs. GILLIBRAND. Mr. President, I reserve the right to object.

I am grateful that we now have this agreement on timing so that we can get to the floor next week and have an up-or-down vote on the 9/11 first responders bill and the healthcare they desperately need.

I just want to go to the merits of Senator LEE's amendment because I think there is a misunderstanding. I understand that there is a concern about 72 years and that my colleague believes it is a recipe for trouble, but the truth is, the timing is limited for this bill because these men and women aren't going to survive. So many of them are already sick and dying, and all they care about is just being able to provide for their families.

There is nothing about this bill that is trying to play politics with the lives of men. There is going to be no fraud. There is going to be no disuse. This is literally all that is necessary for families to survive during these horrible times when their loved ones are dying.

I will not support my colleague's amendment because it will cap the bill needlessly, and it will mean that if there are survivors who still need healthcare, they will have to come back and walk these halls again. The gravest concern I have is that we dare ask these brave men and women to do this all over again. To watch someone come to the Capitol with an oxygen tank, in a wheelchair, unable to breathe or talk properly because of their cancer and their illness, is something I cannot accept.

I am grateful that we now have a time agreement for Wednesday, and I am grateful that we now have a chance to get an up-or-down vote and to get this done.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, reserving the right to object.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Democratic leader.

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, I will not object. First, I just want to thank both my colleagues from New York and Utah for working out this agreement with the leader and me.

What this does is it paves the way, finally, for what we have been waiting on for a very, very long time—an up-or-down vote on H.R. 1327. There will be two amendments offered. We will oppose them. I don't think they have much of a chance of winning, but there is a right to offer them.

I want to thank my colleague from Utah for moving forward here, as well as, of course, my colleague from New York for the great work. Right now, for the first time, we can not only see the light at the end of the tunnel, we are getting very close to getting out of the tunnel. I expect that by Wednesday, we will be out of that tunnel, the bill will head to the President's desk, having already passed the House, he will sign it, and our first responders can go do the job they have been intending to do all along, which is to take care of themselves, take care of their loved ones, and take care of their brothers and sisters who have these injuries or who will get these injuries.

It has been a long, long and hard, hard struggle for over a decade, but now, finally—finally—it looks quite certain that this bill will pass the Senate, go to the President's desk, and at long last become law, and those first responders who made this happen more than anybody else will not—will not—have to come back again.

I do not object to the offer by my colleague from Utah.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

Without objection, it is so ordered.

The Senator from Utah.

Mr. LEE. Mr. President, I am grateful to the Democratic leader and to both Senators from New York for working with me on this and for getting this, along with my amendment and Senator PAUL's amendment, set up for a vote.

To be very clear—I want there to be no ambiguity—I would be willing to vote on this right now. There is no reason we should have to delay that. I am taking into account scheduling requests that were made by other Members of this body. As far as I am concerned and, as far as I am aware, as far as Senator PAUL is concerned, we would be happy to vote on these immediately. There is no additional reason for delay.

This is how the Senate is supposed to work. Each Member is supposed to have the opportunity to bring forward amendments to offer up improvements to legislation, to make sure that they happen and that they happen right.

I respectfully but strongly disagree with my colleagues on the merits of

some of the issues we have been discussing. We will debate those more in the coming days.

I would reiterate that it is not unreasonable to suggest that a program that takes the unprecedented step of authorizing funding for something until 2092—that, coupled with language authorizing the expenditure of such sums as may be necessary, creates problems. It is one of the reasons we opt to vote on this amendment and one of the reasons I believe in this amendment.

In any event, this is the kind of thing that ought not to be difficult. When any Member of any political background sees a potential weakness or defect in a piece of legislation, the rules of our body are such that we are supposed to be able to offer that up and cast an amendment. In this circumstance, I am pleased that it worked out the way it did, and we will be able to get votes on these amendments.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Ohio.

THE ECONOMY

Mr. BROWN. Mr. President, just another day on Wall Street and just another news story. The New York Times' headline today was "Big Banks Are Earning Billions of Dollars. Trump's Tax Cuts Are A Big Reason."

So Congress can continue to do tax cuts for Wall Street. Congress can continue to weaken rules on Wall Street. Congress has forgotten. They have this collective amnesia about what happened 10 years ago when this country's economy almost imploded because of Wall Street greed. So now Congress—because of the tax cut and because of continued relaxation of Wall Street financial stability safety rules, Wall Street is doing really well again.

However, Congress can't pass an overtime bill—I mean, sorry. Congress can't pass a minimum wage bill. The last minimum wage increase in this Congress was signed by President Bush in 2007. President Obama never did it, and President Trump continues to oppose a minimum wage increase.

President Trump has rolled back an overtime rule, which in the State of Indiana—the Presiding Officer's State—almost 100,000 workers were going to get a raise because of the overtime rule we passed a couple years ago. So people, if they work more than 40 hours, they ought to get paid for more than 40 hours—President Trump rolled that back—and 130,000 workers in my State alone would have gotten a big bump in their wages because they were working 45, 50, or 60 hours a week.

This Congress will not pass an infrastructure bill. Look at the conditions of the roads in Cleveland, Toledo, Mansfield, Findlay, Akron, Youngstown, Gallipolis, Chillicothe, and Portsmouth, in my State, and all kinds of communities in Indiana, which the Presiding Officer represents. Congress can always find the time and can always find the money to help the richest 1 percent and help the big banks, but we can't turn around and do what

we ought to do on the minimum wage, what we ought to do on the overtime rule, and what we ought to do to expand the earned income tax credit. I do appreciate the Presiding Officer's interest, especially in the earned income tax credit—what he has tried to do there. We just simply can't find the time to do that.

We always help the people who have much in this society, and we just never get around, in this Congress, to helping the people who need a break.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. BRAUN). The Senator from Texas.

TEXAS VETERANS

Mr. CORNYN. Mr. President, I am proud of the fact that 1 out of every 10 persons who wears the uniform of the U.S. military calls Texas home. It is no surprise that with more than a dozen military installations in the State, many servicemembers choose to live in Texas when they return to civilian life. We have the second highest veteran population of all of the States, with an estimated 1.6 million veterans living in Texas.

As you might suppose, in having the honor of representing these 1.6 million veterans, I talk to them quite a bit and hear from them often. I hear about the challenges they face when they transition back to civilian life. Whether the challenges are the big ones or the little ones, whether the challenges are of navigating complicated trails of paperwork, getting the timely healthcare they need, or finding employment when they return to civilian life, I am eager to help them identify solutions.

Over the last few years, we have made some major progress. In the last Congress, for example, we passed the historic VA MISSION Act, which modernized the veterans' appeals process and the electronic health records system. The bill reformed GI benefits, improved accountability within the VA Administration, and provided the largest funding increase in history for veterans' care and services.

We have also passed other bills to help veterans transition from military service. For example, our Jobs for Our Heroes Act made it easy for veterans to get commercial driver's licenses. Believe it or not, it is hard for the private sector to find the truckdrivers it needs. After somebody has driven a large vehicle in the military as part of his daily duties, you can imagine that his transitioning to a commercial driver's license would be a relatively simple thing. Given the paperwork and the bureaucracy and the challenges of one's applying for a commercial driver's license, we were able to pass legislation to facilitate that transition.

We also passed the American Law Enforcement Heroes Act, which ensures that veterans get hired by local law enforcement agencies. If you think about that, it is a skill set that many learn in the military, whether they served in the military police or otherwise. If you talk to one of your local

police departments, one of the things the department is short on is the number of people who work for local law enforcement. That is also true for Federal law enforcement agencies, particularly for the Border Patrol. Many military servicemembers come out of the military with the very skills that are needed most by the police agencies that work to keep our communities safe.

To improve the educational opportunities that are available to these men and women, in the last Congress, we passed a bipartisan bill called the Harry W. Colmery Veterans Educational Assistance Act, also known as the Forever GI Bill. President Trump signed it into law in August of 2017. With a stroke of a pen, he enhanced and expanded education benefits for veterans, servicemembers, and their families.

The Forever GI Bill made much needed updates for veterans who face school closures while they are enrolled. It expanded work study activities. It also created a scholarship program for students who pursue degrees in science, technology, engineering, and math, the so-called STEM fields.

It established the Edith Nourse Rogers STEM Scholarship, which provides student veterans with an additional 9 months of GI bill eligibility to ensure they have the time and the financial assistance they need in order to complete their studies in some of our most needed fields. We later learned that there is an issue, though, that prevents many students from taking full advantage of that program. The current law mandates that students must be enrolled in a STEM program for more than 128 credit hours, but the Department of Veterans Affairs found that there are only three States in which the average STEM degree exceeds that minimum. That places many students in an unfair position of either picking from a limited list of schools or forgoing the scholarship money, which can provide up to \$30,000 in financial assistance. That is a Hobson's choice for our veterans, and it is time for Congress to fix that error.

To ensure that all veterans who want to take advantage of the Nourse scholarship are able to, on a bipartisan basis with several of my colleagues, I recently introduced legislation called the Veteran STEM Scholarship Improvement Act, which would lower the 128 credit hour requirement to the more common 120 credit hour requirement. Now, changing a number from an eight to a zero may not seem like a big deal, but for the veterans who have been frustrated by this impediment that prevents them from using the benefits they were promised, it can be life-changing. This would ensure that Texas's veterans who are interested in pursuing STEM programs that are offered in their communities are able to do so while they receive their GI benefits.

I just want to say a word about the GI bill because it is personal to me and

my family. My dad, who was a B-17 pilot in the Army Air Corps and was stationed at Molesworth Air Force base in England, flew a total of 26 bombing missions over the English Channel into the industrial heartland of Germany to try to end that terrible, terrible war. Unfortunately, he was shot down and was captured as a prisoner of war on his 26th mission, and he served the last 4 months of World War II as a prisoner of war. Thankfully, he survived that experience.

To my point here, when he came back to Corpus Christi, TX, he took advantage of the GI bill so he could continue his education. He received a 2-year associate of arts degree from, as it was called then, the Del Mar Community College. He also met my mother at about that time, and they married. Lo and behold, he ended up deciding, I think I want to go to dental school. So, after he had been shot out of the sky by German anti-aircraft guns, maybe a nice, placid dentist's life sounded pretty good, and that is what he chose.

It was thanks to the GI bill that the whole generation of that so-called "greatest generation" was able to come back from the war and get the tools and the education they needed in order to contribute to our country and help make our economy and our country as strong as we inherited it and welcome it today.

Even for this next greatest generation of veterans who fought in Iraq and Afghanistan and for those who still serve today, it is important for us to keep this opportunity of the modern GI bill benefits when they take off the uniform as Active-Duty servicemembers and transition to civilian life.

I thank my colleagues—particularly Senators RUBIO, CRUZ, MANCHIN, and SINEMA—for supporting the STEM bill I described a little earlier. The House passed the legislation this last month, and I hope the Senate will do the same soon so we can get this bill to the President's desk for his signature.

In addition to this legislation, I am eager to vote on the final passage of the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2020. Last month, the Senate passed our version of the bill with broad, bipartisan support. As a matter of fact, only eight Senators voted against it. It is hard to find many things that are that bipartisan in the Senate or in Washington, DC, today.

In addition to investing in military modernization and in providing the largest pay raise in a decade for our troops, this legislation also included other provisions to support our veterans.

A bill I introduced with Senator BALDWIN, of Wisconsin, called the HAVEN Act, was included as a provision of the NDAA. This bill would shield VA and Department of Defense disability benefits in bankruptcy proceedings in the same way Social Security disability is exempted. Veterans shouldn't be penalized for receiving