

this case, as Lee pointed out, our country needs our colleges and universities to walk toward the cliff but not to go over it, just as we need healthcare workers, businesses, nursing homes, and nonprofits to do the same. Yet we can't ask them to do it blindly or in the dark or without providing the needed clarity so that they can manage their risks.

I think what is so different about this pandemic is that people get so much contradictory and conflicting information from a variety of sources. Most of us know how to manage risk in our lives, but it is hard to manage uncertainty, and that is what we are asking the Senate and the Congress to do is to provide some certainty in the midst of this uncertainty. These workers and institutions are critical to helping our response and recovery move forward, and we can't ask for or expect them to make decisions without having some level of certainty. They need to know with confidence that, if they are operating in good faith and obeying the public health and other government guidelines, that they will not inadvertently step over the edge of the cliff and find themselves in free fall.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Iowa.

SAFEGUARDING AMERICA'S FIRST RESPONDERS
ACT

Mr. GRASSLEY. Madam President, I come to the floor to discuss a piece of legislation that Senator BOOKER and I worked on to help public safety officers.

Since the COVID-19 pandemic began, over 100 first responders have lost their lives to this virus. Unlike the rest of us, these brave men and women, by the very nature of their work, haven't been able to stay home or social distance. In firehouses across the country, firefighters have had to continue sharing confined spaces and respond to emergencies in cramped trucks. Police officers have had to continue to respond to 911 calls and also interact with the public in very close quarters. While most of us are avoiding COVID at all costs, State and county EMT crews have been transporting the infected and others to hospitals for emergency care.

While I am inspired by the bravery of these first responders, I am not at all surprised by the actions they take to protect the people they serve. First responders always answer the calls to action, selflessly placing others before themselves. So, in recognition of the many sacrifices they make, Congress established the Public Safety Officers' Benefits Program a long time ago, in 1976. This law provides first responders with onetime payments if they die or are totally disabled on duty.

Let me be very clear. Nothing can ever put a family back together who has lost a loved one, but the Public Safety Officers' Benefits Program provides some economic relief to grieving

families and gives peace of mind to the first responders themselves in their knowing that their families will not be left destitute if tragedy is to befall them.

Unfortunately, the Public Safety Officers' Benefits Program wasn't designed to deal with a global pandemic of this type or magnitude that we were made aware of in the United States in late January. Under the existing statute then, to be awarded benefits, first responders had to be able to prove that they contracted COVID on duty. From the reports we get, it is kind of hard to tell where one comes in contact with it. So the last thing a grieving family needs to be worried about then, after experiencing the loss of a loved one, is whether the family will be able to successfully prove that its loved one contracted COVID in the line of duty and that it qualifies for the loss of life under the 1976 law.

Almost as soon as the nationwide stay-at-home order was instituted, I began working with Senator BOOKER to craft language to create a presumption that would allow families to receive benefits without having to prove that their loved ones contracted a deadly virus on duty. Senator BOOKER and I were determined to get this done as soon as possible because we understood that families who have lost loved ones will soon begin filing for benefits. We know that the number is about 100 at this point.

Our bill is entitled "Safeguarding America's First Responders Act," or SAFR, pronounced "safer" for short. The bill was introduced on May 5, which was 1 day after the Senate returned to session.

This bill is the product of several weeks of friendly negotiations and input from fire groups and police groups. The bill garnered a total of 22 bipartisan cosponsors, including the entire New York and New Jersey delegations. Last Thursday, the Senate unanimously passed our bill. It now is in the House, where we hope it will receive immediate consideration. I know our colleagues in the House are deeply concerned about our first responders, and I would expect this to have a successful effort over there. I have been working with Congressman PASCRELL and others on several other reforms for the Public Safety Officers' Benefits Program, so I think it has been well received over there by some outstanding people who can carry it to victory.

There is no excuse for this bill not to receive a vote as soon as possible. It is the only bill of its kind that has the support of the International Association of Firefighters, of the International Association of Fire Chiefs, and of several State and Federal police groups. It was coauthored by Senator BOOKER and features the support of 11 Democrats and 10 Republican Senators as original cosponsors, including the Senate minority leader. SAFR, this bill, also has the support of the Department of Justice, which stands ready to

pay out benefits to grieving families but is limited by statute as to what it can do under existing law—hence, the importance of this legislation.

Simply put, this bill is a no-brainer. I urge Speaker PELOSI to schedule a vote on SAFR as soon as the House returns to session.

It is now my privilege to thank Senator BOOKER and to yield to my colleague from New Jersey, who worked so hard to get this done as well.

Mr. BOOKER. Madam President, let me just say, right at the top, how grateful I am to stand on the Senate floor again with Senator CHUCK GRASSLEY. He has been one of the great partners I have had in my short time in the Senate, and I am honored to have gotten a lot of good work done and good law passed. I thank him and his entire staff. They were all tremendous to work with and went above and beyond for us to get this done at a very quick pace. I thank our colleagues for acting with the urgency that this issue demands.

I am excited that this bill was able to pass, for it will ensure that the families of first responders who lose their lives to the coronavirus will be taken care of under the Public Safety Officers' Benefits Program. We expect now that over 100 of these death benefit claims will be submitted to the Department of Justice in the coming days and weeks, and we cannot leave these grieving families to fight alone for the benefits they need and deserve. As Senator GRASSLEY very pointedly put it, we hope that the House of Representatives will pick up this legislation for immediate consideration.

While COVID-19 has changed daily life across this country, for so many of us, I am grateful that my colleague and so many of my colleagues understand that our firefighters, our EMTs, our police officers, and our other emergency service personnel continue to put their lives on the line to protect our communities and have done so at significant and increased risk to themselves and their families.

In hard-hit areas across our Nation, we see first responders stepping up to enormous risk. Being a first responder during this pandemic is not a job; it is an all-consuming mission and, unfortunately, a tremendous sacrifice. It is responding to a call and knowing that, just by stepping inside someone's home, you are running a high risk of exposing yourself to the virus. It is wondering whether your personal protective gear—or PPE—that you have on is enough. In many cases, it is wondering whether your PPE is even real, with there being so many of our first responders, unfortunately, using whatever they can scrounge up. Whether it is the buying of foreign masks that are not designed for use in the United States or the buying of them from unknown vendors, they are doing what they can to protect themselves as they go about their urgent mission.

When they remove their PPE, there is a concern with their gloves or goggles or gown as they take them off piece by piece. They strain to remember what they touched, washing their hands repeatedly but wondering and worrying if it is enough. When performing lifesaving procedures like CPR, which may aerosolize the virus, you hope that the PPE you are wearing is enough to protect you. These are the daily, hourly, moment-by-moment concerns our first responders have.

Senator GRASSLEY has worked with first responders in so many ways, and he knows the challenges this brings, from having to meticulously clean every surface of an ambulance, cleaning the squad houses, police stations, knowing that the virus could be lingering there, and when they are going home, undressing in the basement, garage, or even outside their homes, heading straight into the house for a shower but still worrying if it is enough to protect their family.

We know that many of these first responders aren't actually going home to their families. They are separating themselves for periods of time because they live in fear of spreading the disease to a spouse, child, or parent. There is emotional stress and strain when responding to a call, doing everything they can to save someone from this virus. But we know our first responders are often seeing death in areas of the country at a rate and at levels that they have never experienced before. This all adds to the fear and anxiety, the worry about their families, and the worry about their communities.

Our first responders are doing what very few of us will ever have to do. They put their lives, their health, and often the health of their families on the line to protect their communities. They have always helped, but now, in the time of coronavirus, their sacrifices are intensified.

The very least we can do is to ensure that they don't have to worry about what will happen to their loved ones if something should happen to them. The Public Safety Officers' Benefits Program that Senator GRASSLEY mentioned was created to provide death and disability benefits to families of law enforcement officers, firefighters, EMS, and other first responders who are killed in the line of duty. Their benefits come in the form of financial support, as well as educational scholarships, for surviving spouses and children.

As Senator GRASSLEY said, it cannot replace the life that is lost, but it is something that could give comfort to those families and even to the first responders who themselves are being put in grave danger.

Infectious disease is currently covered under the program, though the officer's family or department is required to provide evidence that the disease they contracted occurred while on duty. Providing that evidence can be

straightforward, when the first responder came into contact with a dirty needle, for example, and then was infected by something that caused their death.

The problem with COVID-19 is that it presents an entirely different challenge. While the Department of Justice works to ensure that families who have members who are killed by COVID-19 are covered, we must eliminate the instances when families are asked to prove what is unprovable, to prove that somehow they caught this while they were in the hours of their duties. This is why our bill makes urgently needed changes to the PSOB program to reflect the unique threat that COVID-19 poses to first responders in putting their lives on the line in this crisis.

Many first responders have already made the ultimate sacrifice. I am so grateful that Senator GRASSLEY mentioned that. In New Jersey alone, 29 first responders have lost their lives to coronavirus just in the past 7 weeks. We know this crisis is ongoing in our country.

The bill that CHUCK GRASSLEY and our team wrote creates a presumption that, if a first responder contracts COVID-19 during this pandemic and tragically dies, their death will be treated as a line-of-duty death without the need to affirmatively prove their illness was contracted while on the job. When this bill is passed by the House and signed by the President, this presumption will be retroactive to January 1, 2020. It will last until the end of 2021. The bill ensures that the families of first responders have the support they need and deserve when they face unimaginable loss.

Twenty-seven years ago, New Jerseyan John Careccia watched as two EMTs saved his son's life. That same year, he became a volunteer EMT so that he could pay it forward. Since then, he has worked as an EMT and served as the chief and training director at the Woodbridge Township Ambulance and Rescue Squad in Woodbridge, NJ.

John passed away on April 17, after contracting COVID-19. He is survived by his children, Toni, Roseanne, and John, and his 10 grandchildren.

John's loved ones shared in his obituary that he "will be remembered for his contagious laugh, big heart and greeting you with 'hey guy.' He loved to spend time with his family and always had a story to tell. His favorite place to eat was the Reo Diner. He always chose to bring a chocolate cream pie for his dessert contribution to any family gathering."

His family asked that in lieu of flowers being sent, "John would hope that you will perform an unexpected act of kindness for someone in his name."

Charles "Rob" Roberts joined the Glen Ridge, NJ, Police Department in 2000. He lived in Glen Ridge with his wife, Alice. Together they raised their three children, Shea, Natalie, and Gavin, right there in Glen Ridge.

Officer Roberts contracted COVID-19 in the line of duty in April and was rushed to Mountainside Medical Center after being resuscitated in his home by his fellow officers and members of the volunteer ambulance squad. On May 11, Officer Roberts passed away at the age of 45.

Last week, hundreds of residents of his town of Glen Ridge stood on their front lawns and sidewalks to pay tribute to Officer Roberts' life, his service, his love of community and family.

In a New York Times article published after his passing, many of Officer Roberts' colleagues and neighbors shared stories about his kindness and his calm demeanor in the face of challenges. Quoting from the article:

There was the couple who remembered how calm he was when he helped deliver their baby in their kitchen.

There was the older woman, forever grateful for the gentle way he held her hand when she broke her hip and they waited for an ambulance. And there was the father who struggled with a difficult son and remembered how Mr. Roberts looked him in the eye and reassured him that his boy was a good kid.

Officer Roberts' father shared at his memorial that he "wanted to make others happy."

Israel "Izzy" Tolentino served in the U.S. Marine Corps before becoming a volunteer EMT and then a firefighter for the City of Passaic, NJ. Izzy contracted COVID-19 in the line of duty and on March 31 passed away at the age of 33, the first New Jersey firefighter to be killed by the virus.

Israel is survived by his wife, Maria, and their two children, daughter Ailani, age 9, whom he called his princess and his son Israel, age 7, whom he called his best friend.

I would like to share a few words from an NJ.com article published in the wake of Izzy's passing.

Israel Tolentino was born to be a firefighter.

It wasn't out of love of the uniform, though Tolentino beamed with pride everyday he walked out wearing the Passaic Fire Department emblem. It wasn't even out of a mountain of bravery or a penchant for running towards the flames.

It was, his wife Maria Vasquez said, because he couldn't help but be selfless.

"It fulfilled his urge to serve others," said Vasquez, his wife of more than 10 years. "He was so selfless. It drew me closer to him. It drew everyone closer to him."

These are only 3 among the 29 heroes just from New Jersey. There are countless more first responders across the country who lost their lives in responding to this crisis. Some of their names we know, and some we will learn in the weeks and months to come. What we do know is, we owe it, as a nation, to their families and to the departments they served to be there for those families and to be there for those children. Their families and the families of all first responders across the country who have lost loved ones to this virus deserve to be taken care of. For their sake, I hope the House of Representatives will act quickly to pass this legislation and that the President will sign it into law.

Our first responders in this unprecedented global pandemic did not hesitate or equivocate. They did their duty. They stood up and faced danger. They answered the call. We now must answer the call, and we must have their backs just as they had ours.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Oregon.

KLAMATH AREA DROUGHT

Mr. MERKLEY. Madam President, at this moment, Americans everywhere are confronting unprecedented challenges and uncertainties as we continue to grapple with the coronavirus pandemic and the associated economic implosion.

That is not all that is going on across the country. Although some of the challenges we face are quite severe, they are just getting drowned out by the daily news about the pandemic. But imagine being a family farmer in the midst of this crisis. You have already faced any number of challenges in recent years—low commodity prices, tariff wars—only to face the greatest health and economic disaster any of us have experienced in our lifetime. Then, when you thought nothing else could go wrong, something else does go wrong. You have to face a severe drought. Twelve hundred farms in the Klamath Basin in Oregon and California don't have to imagine this situation because they are living through it as we speak.

The Klamath Basin is sometimes referred to as the "Western Everglades," an area rich with agricultural resources and exceptional populations of wildlife. This basin attracts 80 percent of the Pacific Flyway's waterfowl and supports the largest overwintering population of bald eagles anywhere in the lower 48 States and is home to some of the country's most productive salmon river systems in the country.

It is also home to 1,200 family-owned farms of different sizes, encompassing some 200,000 acres of farmland. That farmland is irrigated with water from both the tributaries of the Klamath River and Klamath Lake. Those who are familiar with the basin will know that the water is essential to the health of the river, the health of the lake, the wildlife in the refuge, and the economic success of the ranchers and farmers.

In many years, there is enough water to address all of these needs, but in other years, such as this year, 2020, there isn't enough water to go around. So when there is a dry year with less water in the lake and river, it is bad for everyone—bad for the refuge, the river, the lake, and it is a horrific challenge for our ranchers and for our farmers.

This year, 2020, isn't just a dry year; it is "as difficult a year as anyone could have imagined," according to Jeff Nettleton, Area Manager of the Bureau of Reclamation, Klamath Basin area office.

As Governor Kate Brown put it back in March, "Drought conditions arrived

early and have persisted, including reduced snowpack, precipitation, and minimal streamflow." In other words, this is a perfect storm of challenges.

The Governor went on to say that "the long-term forecast for the region continues for warmer than normal temperatures and lower than normal precipitation." There has been nothing in the 2 months since she said that which has reversed that course.

As of last Friday, the snowpack in the Klamath region, the natural reservoir that replenishes the lakes and streams providing water for the irrigation system for the summer, was just 28 percent of normal.

You can get some sense of how bad the drought is this year by looking at the historic numbers on this chart. This is one way of presenting it. We can see deliveries that are coming to the Upper Klamath Lake project, and the blue lines are the more normal years. Then we have the worst ever drought of 2001. Then we have the terrible drought of 2010, and here we are with this year's drought deliveries forecast to be essentially the same as 2001.

In 2001 there was a water war in Oregon. Some of you may remember that there was a bucket brigade to take water out of a canal ditch or to put water into the canal ditch. There were protests. There was great anger and frustration. Since then, in 2010, though, we had worked out partnerships between the competing constituencies. They worked together to try to develop a plan for the region so that when crisis hit, they could be in partnership rather than in conflict.

So 2010 didn't end up to be national news like 2001. Well, I am here tonight to say that part of that partnership was working with the Federal Government intensely to provide assistance, to provide assistance in funding that would help retire or disconnect the use of water rights for a given year and to pump water out of the ground—use groundwater—which is very expensive.

The Klamath Water Users Association says that, typically, 350,000 acre-feet of water is needed to fully irrigate the basin. Now, at the beginning of this season, farmers were told they would get a fraction of that, maybe 140,000 acre-feet of water.

So they went to work with that in mind. They have to charge the canals, get initial water into the canals to prepare for planting, prepare for the water that would come with summer. And they used about 25,000 of that 140,000 acre-feet.

But there was less water even than anticipated, unexpectedly low inflows from the snow pack—not enough snow, and it melted too fast.

So, now, it is not 140,000 acre-feet; it is 80,000, again, putting it on par with 2001 that generated so much tension and conflict and anxiety. That means that just 55,000 acre-feet remain. Compare that to the typical 350,000 needed to fully irrigate the basin.

So farmers are going to be cut off. Ranchers are going to be cut off. We need, here in Congress, to come to their aid. The basin and its 1,200 farmers are in deep trouble.

The impacts don't just stop with them. It will be felt up and down the economy. With no crops to harvest, our food chain takes a big hit. The workers who usually harvest these crops aren't going to have jobs to go to. Local businesses that supply things like seed and fertilizer and farm equipment, well, they are hit hard too.

So the farmers and the community—the economic community—need our help, and they need it now. The worst thing we can do is stand by and say that, in these times of trouble, we aren't here to help.

That is why, tomorrow, I will be introducing a bill that will give the Bureau of Reclamation flexibility and authority to utilize the \$10 million a year that has been previously authorized and appropriated to work with the farmers and the basin's ranching community.

Now, this money, as I mentioned, has already been authorized. It has already been appropriated. So why should I need to introduce a bill? Well, the answer is, a lot of bureaucratic redtape.

In 2018, Senator WYDEN and I worked here and GREG WALDEN worked on the House side—the congressman who represents this district—and we got a concept into the Water Resources Development Act, the WRDA bill, and it passed. That bill passed.

It went to the Oval Office. It had President Trump's support. But, after the bill was enacted, the lawyers at the Bureau of Reclamation said: We are sorry. The language we gave you isn't quite right, on further examination, and we can't release these funds.

So, last year, Senator WYDEN and I were able to work again in partnership with Congressman WALDEN, and in July 2019 we passed language here in the Senate to fix this.

Well, OK. That is great, except that bill didn't make it through the House. That technical corrections bill never made it to the Oval Office.

So there is \$10 million out there—authorized, previously appropriated—that needs a technical fix to be able to help out our farmers and ranchers right now. Now, I am not saying to all of you that this will be enough help in this incredibly horrific drought year. We may well need significantly more, but at least this first step should be taken right away.

That is the bill I will be introducing tomorrow with the full support, again, of my partners in this effort: Congressman WALDEN and Senator WYDEN.

Farmers and ranchers need help, and they need it now. This is not a silver bullet, but it is something easily within our reach. Let's do these simple things that are within our reach: Money that has been authorized, money that has been appropriated, money that hit a technical glitch at