

the married couple (or previously married couple) applies under subparagraph (A), in a case in which—

“(I) the individual borrower certifies to the Secretary that such borrower—

“(aa) has experienced an act of domestic violence (as defined in section 40002 of the Violence Against Women Act of 1994 (34 U.S.C. 12291) from the other individual borrower;

“(bb) has experienced economic abuse (as defined in section 40002 of the Violence Against Women Act of 1994 (34 U.S.C. 12291) from the other individual borrower; or

“(cc) is unable to reasonably reach or access the loan information of the other individual borrower; or

“(II) the Secretary determines that authorizing each individual borrower to apply separately under subparagraph (A) would be in the best fiscal interests of the Federal Government.

“(iii) REMAINING OBLIGATION FROM SEPARATE APPLICATION.—In the case of an individual borrower who receives a separate consolidation loan due to the circumstances described in clause (ii), the other non-applying individual borrower shall become solely liable for the remaining balance of the joint consolidation loan.”.

(b) CONFORMING AMENDMENT.—Section 428C(a)(3)(B)(i)(V) of the Higher Education Act of 1965 (20 U.S.C. 1078-3(3)(B)(i)(V)) is amended—

(1) by striking “or” at the end of item (bb);

(2) by striking the period at the end of item (cc) and inserting “; or”; and

(3) by adding at the end the following:

“(dd) for the purpose of separating a joint consolidation loan into 2 separate Federal Direct Consolidation Loans under section 455(g)(2).”.

AUTHORITY FOR COMMITTEES TO MEET

Mr. CASEY. Mr. President, I have seven requests for committees to meet during today’s session of the Senate. They have the approval of the Majority and Minority Leaders.

Pursuant to rule XXVI, paragraph 5(a), of the Standing Rules of the Senate, the following committees are authorized to meet during today’s session of the Senate:

COMMITTEE ON ARMED SERVICES

The Committee on Armed Services is authorized to meet during the session of the Senate on Wednesday, June 15, 2022, at 9:30 a.m., to conduct a closed business meeting.

COMMITTEE ON ENVIRONMENT AND PUBLIC WORKS

The Committee on Environment and Public Works is authorized to meet during the session of the Senate on Wednesday, June 15, 2022, at 10 a.m., to conduct a hearing.

COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN RELATIONS

The Committee on Foreign Relations is authorized to meet during the session of the Senate on Wednesday, June 15, 2022, at 10:30 a.m., to conduct a classified briefing.

COMMITTEE ON THE JUDICIARY

The Committee on the Judiciary is authorized to meet during the session of the Senate on Wednesday, June 15, 2022, at 10 a.m., to conduct a hearing.

COMMITTEE ON THE JUDICIARY

The Committee on the Judiciary is authorized to meet during the session

of the Senate on Wednesday, June 15, 2022, at 2:30 p.m., to conduct a hearing.

SELECT COMMITTEE ON INTELLIGENCE

The Select Committee on Intelligence is authorized to meet during the session of the Senate on Wednesday, June 15, 2022, at 2:30 p.m., to conduct a closed briefing.

SUBCOMMITTEE ON INTERNATIONAL TRADE, CUSTOMS, AND GLOBAL COMPETITIVENESS

The Subcommittee on International Trade, Customs, and Global Competitiveness of the Committee on Finance is authorized to meet during the session of the Senate on Wednesday, June 15, 2022, at 3 p.m., to conduct a hearing.

REPORT OF THE SECRETARY OF THE SENATE

JUNE 15, 2022.

Hon. KAMALA HARRIS,
President of the United States Senate,
Washington, DC.

MADAM: I have the honor to submit a full and complete statement of the receipts and expenditures of the Senate, showing in detail the items of expense under proper appropriations, the aggregate thereof, and exhibiting the exact condition of all public moneys received, paid out, and remaining in my possession from October 1, 2021 to March 31, 2022, in compliance with Section 105 of Public Law 88-454, approved August 20, 1964, as amended.

Sincerely,

SONCERIA A. BERRY,
Secretary of the Senate.

ORDERS FOR THURSDAY, JUNE 16, 2022

Mr. KELLY. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that when the Senate completes its business today, it adjourn until 10 a.m. on Thursday, June 16; and that following the prayer and pledge, the morning hour be deemed expired, the Journal of proceedings be approved to date, the time for the two leaders be reserved for their use later in the day, and morning business be closed; that upon the conclusion of morning business, the Senate resume consideration of Calendar No. 388, H.R. 3967, postclosure; further, that all time during adjournment, recess, morning business, and leader remarks count postclosure, and that all time be considered expired at 11:15 a.m.; further, that upon disposition of H.R. 3967, the Senate vote on the motions to invoke cloture on the Alba and Boyle nominations, and that if cloture is invoked on either nomination, all postclosure time be expired and the confirmation votes occur at a time to be determined by the majority leader or his designee, in consultation with the Republican leader.

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

ORDER FOR ADJOURNMENT

Mr. KELLY. Mr. President, if there is no further business to come before the Senate, I ask unanimous consent that it stand adjourned under the previous order, following the remarks of Senators SULLIVAN and LANKFORD.

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

The Senator from Alaska.

HONORING OUR PACT ACT OF 2021

Mr. SULLIVAN. Mr. President, I am going to talk a little bit about the bill that we have been debating here all week on the Senate floor, the Sergeant First Class Heath Robinson Honoring our PACT Act of 2022.

Now, it is a very important bill. It is named after Sergeant First Class Robinson, an Ohio National Guard soldier who died in 2022 as a result of service-connected toxic exposure.

This bill that we are going to be voting for final passage on tomorrow would deliver immediate access to healthcare for toxic-exposed veterans, direct the VA to evaluate diseases for presumption of service connection, and streamline the process for toxic-exposed veterans seeking disability compensation for their illness that they gained while serving overseas defending our Nation.

I have supported the intent of this bill for years, and I intend to vote in favor of this bill tomorrow when it comes up for final passage.

There is nothing, in my mind, that is more important than taking care of our veterans, but I do want to raise some concerns about how we got to this point, the process of this bill, which, in my view, undermined the likelihood of this massive new program being implemented in a way that benefits all American veterans so we can take care of all American veterans.

Let me explain. Since my time here in the Senate, I have focused on these issues. I serve on the Veterans’ Affairs Committee that was responsible, in large measure, for many aspects of this bill. I serve on the Armed Services Committee. I still serve in the military myself, in the Marine Corps Reserves, and I am honored to represent the State in our great Nation, Alaska, that has more veterans per capita than any State in the country.

So veterans and military affairs and their families have been a core focus of mine since I arrived in the Senate in 2015. And in particular, I have been focused on this issue of toxic exposure of our service men and women during wartime. In fact, one of my commitments as a candidate for the U.S. Senate in 2014 was to work to ensure passage of the Blue Water Navy Vietnam Veterans Act, which I cosponsored when I got here and was signed into law in 2019.

That was an outstanding commitment to our Vietnam veterans exposed to Agent Orange during their time, but it was belatedly fulfilled—years, even decades, after their service in Vietnam.

And I took lessons from that. As a matter of fact, I think many Senators took lessons from that, that when the next generation of veterans served overseas and were exposed to toxins during their service, that we needed to act.

So that is what I have done in my career here. I have worked, taking the Vietnam veteran experience, particularly with Agent Orange, to make sure we don't repeat that—the mistakes of Agent Orange where those exposed to toxic substances overseas during their service and later came down with diseases and suffered, that we needed to take care of them.

We know that toxic exposure during military service can add serious complications to a veteran's health, years and even decades after their service has concluded.

And there is science that can correlate certain diseases and symptoms to exposure. That is the model that we want. Veterans suffering from potential exposure understand too well that getting the VA to even recognize and concede exposure can remain a challenging bureaucratic and incredibly frustrating process that leads to denials often from the bureaucracy.

So early in my time here, I have been a relentless advocate on these issues. I will give you a few examples.

I introduced with Senator MANCHIN of West Virginia the Veterans Burn Pits Exposure Recognition Act, which was previously passed out of committee in the Veterans' Affairs Committee and enjoys broad bipartisan support. Close to half of the Senate—Democrats and Republicans—was cosponsors of our bill, and almost all of the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee were.

This bill would recognize and concede exposure to toxic substances for those veterans who were deployed in areas where burn pits were in use: in Iraq, in Afghanistan, in Uzbekistan—all of these different areas and more.

This bill would do away with the paperwork that made it almost impossible to prove exposure by these veterans. It put the onus on the VA and that bureaucracy.

When crafting this bill with Senator MANCHIN, our offices worked extensively with the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee and many of the veterans service organizations, particularly the Disabled American Veterans organization; and we worked with the VA on the language to make sure we were not getting ahead of the science, making sure that what was exposed and what were the diseases connect with science—not always easy, but the VA does have expertise in that area.

I then cosponsored with Senator BLUMENTHAL the K2 Veterans Advocacy Act. This bill moved the needle on three things that are known systematically now: that toxic substances at the base that we call K2 in Uzbekistan, the medical conditions that K2 veterans have—and they are serious; something really bad was going on at the K2 base in Uzbekistan—and the links between the two.

Now, we worked with the Trump White House before President Trump left office in 2020, before our bill passed here on the Senate floor, to get them

to issue an Executive order for the VA to essentially do those things for K2 veterans.

I introduced and had passed the bipartisan Burn Pits Accountability Act with Senator KLOBUCHAR, which directs the Pentagon to include empirical health assessments and evaluation of whether a servicemember has been exposed to open burn pits or toxic airborne chemicals in their deployments. This bill was included in the fiscal year 2020 National Defense Authorization Act.

And I sponsored the Pandemic Care For Burn Pits Exposure Act of 2020 to ensure that servicemembers and veterans with previous exposure to burn pits received the care they needed during the COVID-19 pandemic.

I am listing these bills and the work and time and the bipartisan nature of them because on the Veterans Affairs' Committee there has been no issue I have been more focused on.

We are going to take the lessons from Vietnam, Agent Orange, and not say: You are going to wait three or four or five decades while you die of cancer.

And I am committed to this issue, and I have been. But I am also committed to passing legislation that is worthy of all veterans that we are serving. So I have had some reservations about the current bill and the process by which it has come to the Senate floor, because the process has thwarted opportunities to make this a better bill, to make it serve our veterans in a better, holistic way.

And, again, this is an issue I have been focused on since my first days in the U.S. Senate.

So what are the issues?

Well, as I mentioned, some of the things in there—a lot of the things in this bill are very necessary. The bill that I just mentioned that I cosponsored with Senator MANCHIN, the Veterans Burn Pits Exposure Recognition Act, was incorporated into the PACT Act that we will be voting on tomorrow, the Sergeant Robinson Honoring our PACT Act.

In fact, many bipartisan bills from the Veterans' Affairs Committee were included in this bill that we are going to be voting on tomorrow.

But ultimately, what we had going on in the Veterans' Affairs Committee was an agreement that when we brought this big bill—and it is big—to the Senate floor, we would have the ability to bring amendments to try to improve it, to try to make it better for all veterans in the entire VA system, a system that we know has challenges implementing sweeping mandates from Congress.

This is a sweeping mandate from Congress that we are voting on. As I mentioned, the issue of toxic exposure, which I have been focused on since my first year here in the U.S. Senate, has always been a bipartisan bill. Four bills I just mentioned that I have led on have all had Democratic cosponsors leading with me as well. But what hap-

pened this week and last week was the bipartisan nature of trying to tackle one of the biggest issues facing our veterans was shut down. For whatever reason, and I don't know why—somebody should ask the majority leader—all the amendments that we were going to bring to the floor to make this bill better were shut down. We have not had one amendment on this comprehensive bill, and, like I said, a number of us have been focused on this issue for years.

What were we trying to do with these amendments? We are trying to make this a better bill. Bring your ideas to the floor, debate them, vote on them. Why wouldn't we want to do that? Why wouldn't we want to do that? Don't we owe it to all of our veterans to do that?

My primary concern, as I have mentioned, is making sure that not just the constituency impacted by this legislation, which we need—those exposed to toxic exposure primarily from burn pits are taken care of—but that the whole VA system remains robust and strong. And I think some of the amendments—I know some of the amendments that we were going to bring—as a matter of fact, on the Veterans' Affairs Committee there was a commitment to make sure we were bringing these amendments to the floor—would have made this bill better.

What are the biggest concerns? Well, I pressed the Secretary of the VA just yesterday in his testimony before the Veterans' Affairs Committee on one of the biggest concerns I have and one of the biggest concerns many Senators have and one of the biggest concerns our Veterans' Affairs Committee has, and it is this: This bill that I will be supporting tomorrow is estimated to bring an additional 2.5 million claims to the VA—2.5 million.

My question to the Secretary was simple but really important: Mr. Secretary, is the VA system ready to absorb the roughly 2½ million additional claims that are likely to be generated in the next 3 years by the PACT Act? Are you ready?

We have some ideas and amendments that we think can make it ready. But again, for whatever reason, the majority leader didn't want to hear about those.

In an already stretched VA, with a huge backlog already and challenges as we speak, the Secretary testified about them yesterday, about hiring qualified medical personnel across the country but especially in my State, in Alaska. The concern that I raised with the Secretary yesterday, the concern that we are trying to address with the amendment process here on the Senate floor is this: When you bring that many into a system that is not ready, you can collapse the whole system. You can collapse the whole system.

And then every veteran loses. A young marine with his legs amputated after an IED explosion in Afghanistan who needs help, he is going to be delayed. A Vietnam veteran who needs

care, he is going to be delayed. A Gulf war veteran, she is going to be delayed. If you are collapsing the whole system, every veteran loses. Every veteran loses.

Now, I have actually seen this in my State. And I know the Presiding Officer's State has had some challenges with the VA. Several years ago, I held a field hearing in Arizona on some of the challenges in the VA, but I have seen the system collapse in Alaska. In 2015, my first year in the U.S. Senate, due to legislation that had been passed the year before, we essentially had the system in Alaska collapse. Somehow, some way, legislation and ideas from the VA thought it was really smart to remove the ability to actually make appointments for veterans in Alaska not by officials from the VA who live in Alaska but somewhere in the lower 48—I think it was Louisiana or somewhere—not a good idea. The whole system cratered. I have seen it. And no veteran benefits. No one benefits.

In my first year here in 2015, it was my No. 1 priority to get the VA to fix the broken system in Alaska, and we have made huge progress. But I have seen it firsthand. When a system that is supposed to take care of veterans cratered, of course, every veteran suffers.

So we don't want that to happen with the implementation of this important bill. And the Secretary of the VA assured me, assured Senator TILLIS in questioning yesterday, that this won't happen, that the system won't be overburdened, that they are prepared for this.

Well, I hope he is right. I have my doubts, but I hope he is right.

But here is the point: A bipartisan amendment process, particularly from Senators—I will give you one example. Senator MORAN, ranking member on Veterans' Affairs, has been working this issue like me for years. Particularly from Senators who actually know the issue, a bipartisan amendment process would have helped ensure that this possibility would be much less.

I will give you a couple of examples of what, for whatever reason, the majority leader didn't want to bring up on this important legislation. We had amendments to make sure that the VA didn't get ahead of the science. You need to connect the science and exposure to the disease. That is simple. That is what is expected—it is not simple. It is a complicated process, but it is just the rigor of a bill that you want to make sure that those who are exposed and sick and with a disease are the ones who get the care.

Right now, in this bill, there are 23 respiratory illnesses and cancers that will be added to the list of presumptive ailments that will allow a veteran to be diagnosed with toxic exposure and qualify for benefits and any other disease the Secretary of the VA determines is warranted based on a positive association with certain substances, chemicals, or airborne hazards. Some

of those 23 presumptives, as we are calling them, are based on science. Some aren't. I have asked the VA; I have asked the Secretary: Hey, where did we get these 23? The answer, I am still waiting for.

That is what the amendment process is for, to make sure this bill has rigor to take care of all veterans.

Let me mention another amendment offered by Senator MORAN, an amendment that he was promised to get a floor vote on that didn't happen and I think would have made the bill stronger. It would have preserved the Trump-era gains on community care access standards and, importantly, serve as a relief valve for veterans to receive care as millions are going to be added into the system. So, again, if you have 2½ million additional claims and the VA is overwhelmed and now there is a giant backlog for everybody, this amendment would have said: Well, the veterans in the system can go out and get community care. That is a good idea. It is actually how it works in Alaska because we don't have a full-service VA hospital, one of only three States in the country. But that is a really smart idea, a safety valve. If the system looks like it is going to crater because it is overwhelmed, hey, let some doctors in town help the veterans. We couldn't bring that amendment up.

So I pressed the VA Secretary on this because I have seen it when a system collapses, and my veterans were really hurt in Alaska when it did—the VA system in my State. And I am going to take his word for it now that the VA can handle 2½ million more claims in the next 3 years. But I am going to be watching like a hawk—watching like a hawk in my oversight role. Like I said, there is nothing I care more about than our veterans, our military, and their family members. We had the opportunity on an important bill that I will be supporting to make it better. And we sat in the Senate all week and didn't bring up one amendment to even try.

The Secretary is assuring us. OK. All good. Good to go. Well, some of us had ideas to make sure it would have been better to go. We couldn't bring them up.

I hope there aren't problems with this implementation. If the system is in danger of collapsing as a result of this bill, I hope that whoever is majority leader at that time—2, 3, 4 years from now—understands that the care for all veterans is what the VA is all about, and I hope if we need it, we will have the opportunity to bring good ideas to the Senate floor to fix these kind of things because veterans are not a partisan issue in the Senate. They are not. I have seen it my whole career here. I sit on the committee. I sit on the Armed Services Committee. But for whatever reason, our ability, in a bipartisan way, to try to improve this bill that we are going to vote on tomorrow was not granted to other Senators. And I think that was a missed

opportunity because I think we would have made this a better bill.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. KELLY). The Senator from Oklahoma.

INFLATION

Mr. LANKFORD. Mr. President, I want to give today's reality check. The Federal Reserve today raised interest rates 75 basis points—three-quarters of a point—with a statement they may come back and do that again in another month.

A point and a half in 2 months is a pretty dramatic effect. It is going to be a situation where many people, 40 and younger, are about to face interest rates they have never faced in their lifetime. The cost of buying a car that is already high is about to get higher. The cost of buying a home that is already really high is about to get much higher.

Inflation is now at 8.6 percent. A lot of people are beginning to feel what that really means. This is not some strange anomaly. This is inflation over the last decade. It has bounced around about the same level, basically, for a decade until right there—March of 2021—and then it just skyrockets at that point.

This is the reality that we are facing at this point. What does inflation really look like when you say it is 8.6 percent? Well, people know what that feels like. The cost of eggs has gone up 32 percent in the past year—32 percent for eggs. The cost of milk is up 16 percent; the cost of butter, also 16 percent; the cost of coffee, 15 percent; the cost of baby formula, if you can find it, is up 13 percent.

And gas prices? Oh, hello. Gas prices—that really has had an effect. This is gas prices since January of 2017. Again, we look, and it stays about the same until January of 2021. I wonder what happened then.

And then look at this.

Then, with the conversation about gas prices that, per the administration lately, has been about, "Well, it is all Putin's fault," well, here are the rising gas prices since President Biden's inauguration—right there—and right there is the war that began in Russia. So this little increase right here is the part that is actually there.

This is our consumer price inflation. This is on gas prices. It is the same thing. To be able to see this flat line on gas prices, that spike—that is the invasion of Ukraine happening right there—and to be able to see what has been added onto it since then. So this is not just about the invasion in Ukraine. This has been ongoing since late January 2021.

The challenge now is, Is this something intentional or is this something accidental? Quite frankly, I think it is a bit of both.

We all remember very well this moment during the Presidential campaign. It was when President Biden was