

hinders too many Americans from accessing the medications and the treatments that they need. Across the country, patients and providers alike are increasingly frustrated by prior authorization requirements imposed by insurance companies. Too often, these requirements override the medical judgment of doctors who know their patients best.

I have had oncologists, cardiologists, psychiatrists, and many other medical professionals visit my office to share their ongoing concerns and how prior authorizations are disrupting care. They are trained experts; yet their decisions are being second-guessed by insurers.

The result is deeply concerning. Many patients are denied or delayed access to the medications and services that their physicians have prescribed because they know those treatments are effective based on their many years of medical education and clinical experience.

And the delays are not minor. Patients are often forced to wait days, weeks, or even months for critical care which, in many cases, will still be denied in the end. There are simply too many unnecessary hurdles standing between a patient, the doctor, and the care that they need.

I am a proud cosponsor of the Safe Step Act, which would allow patients to access appropriate treatments more quickly by bypassing dangerous or ineffective "fail first" prior authorization requirements.

I have also cosponsored the Improving Seniors' Timely Access to Care Act, which would modernize and streamline prior authorization for Medicare Advantage patients. This timely access legislation would deliver realtime decisions for routinely approved treatments, increase transparency around CMS approvals and denials, and replace outdated paper-based systems with electronic prior authorization.

These are practical bipartisan solutions. In fact, 68 Senators have already joined me in support of this effort.

Despite this, the issue persists. We must act with urgency. Every day we delay is another day patients are left wanting for care, waiting for care that they need and deserve. I urge my colleagues and the administration to prioritize this issue and move swiftly to address it.

Every day we delay is another day that insurance companies will continue making decisions on behalf of medical professionals, which they have no business doing whatsoever.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Connecticut.

UNANIMOUS CONSENT REQUESTS

Mr. BLUMENTHAL. Mr. President, I am here to talk about the costs of war. The United States is at war at this moment.

I am here to talk about the costs of war that should include the costs of caring for our veterans because they are the ones who fight our wars and keep our Nation strong and free.

We are failing to pay the costs of war for more than 50,000 combat-injured veterans. These veterans were forced to medically retire or they are undergoing medical separation because of combat-related injuries, and now they are receiving a dollar-for-dollar reduction in their military retirement pay from their VA disability benefits. That practice is wrong. It must be ended. It should have ended long ago.

In fact, last year, when I introduced the Major Richard Star Act, which now is cosponsored by 80 Members of this body—obviously, both sides of the aisle.

And the Major Richard Star Act is named for Richard Star. Unfortunately, he has passed away, but his brother David is with us today, and I thank him, his family, the veterans service organizations that have been tireless in their advocacy for the Major Richard Star Act, in being the voice and face of advocating for our veterans. The Major Richard Star Act is our legislation to fix this injustice and finally deliver combat-injured veterans their full military benefits.

Our bill has, rightfully, received large swaths of bipartisan support—not only the 80 cosponsors in the Senate but 334 in the House. And there is a bipartisan discharge petition signed now by 203 Members of Congress.

Not only has this measure received bipartisan support from the U.S. Congress, but in a hearing where I questioned him, the Secretary of Defense joined in supporting us and said very simply: We support the Major Richard Star Act.

"We support the [Major] Richard Star Act," without an offset because the Major Richard Star Act has no offset.

Now, he referred to the Major Richard Star Act, not to any offset, but the 80 cosponsors are supporting a bill without any offset. There should be none. There is no reason that we should correct this injustice by taking benefits away from other veterans, which is one of the proposals that has been made; that veterans who suffer from sleep apnea or tinnitus should be forced to sacrifice their benefits.

And despite all this overwhelming support, the House leadership and the Senate leadership has blocked my attempts to advance this legislation twice. I am here for a third time. And blocked also have been my requests for a simple vote on the bill. Why?

Opponents have claimed that our Nation cannot afford this bill and demand that we offset it by cutting benefits from other disabled veterans. And they are acquiescing in spending billions of dollars a day on the President's war of choice in the Middle East.

Right now, the Armed Services Committee—literally, later today—will

begin marking up a \$1.5 trillion request from the White House—\$1.5 trillion, not even including the reconciliation amount. That probably brings the total closer to \$2 trillion?

My point is: If we can afford \$2 trillion for the Department of Defense, we can afford doing the right thing for combat-injured veterans at a total cost of probably \$8 billion to \$10 billion over 10 years. So the yearly cost would be approximately what this Nation is spending per day on the Iran war, in the conservative estimate, and probably lowballing of this administration.

There are other excuses advanced by leadership. They have said veterans are "doubledipping." Our veterans community knows better. We all know better. They are entitled to both disability benefits and retirement pay.

The fact is, we are not talking about a new benefit. We are talking about these combat-injured veterans receiving existing benefits to which they are entitled. They have earned them. It is not an act of generosity or charity that we would correct this injustice. And the simple result and easy outcome here should be for us to approve this measure today.

Let me just say, finally: Veterans deserve action. This measure is long overdue. No more excuses, no more meaningless rhetoric, or continued cowardice. Let's have a vote.

If you won't approve it today, give us a vote. Let us express the will of the vast majority of veterans, the vast majority of the American people. Pass the Richard Star Act.

Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Committee on Armed Services be discharged and the Senate proceed to the immediate consideration of S. 1032.

I further ask that the Blumenthal substitute amendment at the desk be considered and agreed to; that the bill, as amended, be considered read a third time and passed; and that the motion to reconsider be considered made and laid upon the table.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

The Senator from Kentucky.

Mr. PAUL. Mr. President, reserving the right to object, there are 40 trillion reasons why new spending should be offset by cuts elsewhere.

We are approaching \$40 trillion in debt. The interest is a trillion dollars a year. Interest rates are rising. Likely the biggest threat to our country is our national debt.

No one disputes that our veterans deserve to receive the benefits they earned through years of service to our Nation, but we should offset it. There is waste in abundance throughout our budget. There is no reason why we shouldn't cut waste to pay for this.

What I proposed is a simple amendment to this legislation that would basically get rid of money that hasn't been spent over the last 10 years in welfare for refugees. They keep allocating a couple billion dollars more

every year. The fund now has \$26 billion in it.

Refugees shouldn't be getting welfare. You should be coming to our country for the American dream. This is not the American dream to come here for welfare. We should not have welfare for refugees or anybody—legal or illegal—coming into this country.

In fact, it is the law of the land that if you come here legally, you are not eligible for welfare for 5 years unless you are a refugee and then we say: Oh, well, they can be on welfare, and many of them continue on welfare. In the Somali population, well over 80 percent of the Somalis are on welfare 10 years after they get here.

So what I am proposing is, if we want to do this, if we think this is fair to add the disability spending to the retirement spending and not have any kind of canceling out, pay for it. Why don't we end this refugee program? That is all I am asking.

If you want to help and provide more money for soldiers who are retired or disabled, do that, but pay for it by not giving money to refugees.

So it is easy. We should do it. But when people say around here: "Oh, we don't need to do this" and "this is too important to offset with a cut," that is why we are \$40 trillion in the hole.

Interest rates over a trillion. That is paying at about 2.5 percent, on average. The latest Treasury sales of 30-year bonds was 5.2 percent. If we roll over the debt and pay all of it at 5 percent, then we are talking about \$2 trillion in debt payments each year.

So, yes, we have to be responsible. Money doesn't grow on trees. We can't simply say: Well, this is for a good cause; therefore, we are just going to explode the debt.

I mean, ADM Mike Mullen was the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and he said that the biggest threat to our Nation was not from without, but it was from within. It is from the debt we are accumulating.

So just saying something is a good cause is not enough. We have to pay for it. There is waste up and down and all throughout our budget. And for goodness' sake, we should use this as an opportunity to say: We have this and it is a good thing and we can go ahead and do this, but we will do it by getting rid of bad spending.

You know, we still have nearly a billion dollars that we are doling out to Afghanistan.

We wasted trillions of dollars on that war. We were there for 20 years. We have gone. And there is an allegation that money from that reconstruction fund goes to NGOs and that it still winds up in the hands of the Taliban, to this day.

There are all kinds of money throughout government. There is said to be \$180 billion worth of improper payments in government.

Should we let people keep writing checks to people who are ripping off the system? Did you not see what hap-

pened in Minnesota? Nine billion dollars is being stolen. They set up a daycare, and nobody really comes. They set up a center for autism. They had a "Learning Center." They left out the "n": L-e-a-r-i-n-g. And they were taking your money.

Why shouldn't we just cut that out? Why shouldn't we quit doing that? Why shouldn't we save money if there is something better to be done with the money? But just spending money, no matter how good the cause, is not what we should do.

I object.
The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. ARMSTRONG). Objection is heard.

The Senator from Connecticut.
Mr. BLUMENTHAL. Mr. President, reserving the right to object, I understand that my colleague from Kentucky is offering an amendment—or perhaps not. In any event, if there is no request to modify, I just want to say that there should be no need to modify. There should be no need for any offset. The cost of war should include the cost of caring for our veterans.

But if there is going to be an offset—and I share my colleague's concern about the national debt—it ought to be from that \$1.5 trillion that has been requested by the administration for the Department of Defense, when, in fact, the Secretary of Defense—or Secretary of War—has said he supports it. It is a DOD program or Department of War program. The offset should come from the DOD. It should not come from veterans. It should not come from another government program.

We can spin a wheel or we can throw darts and say that is where the money should come from. But, logically, as a matter of principle and as a matter of what is right, it should come from the Department of Defense, which has more than adequate resources to do it.

So I am disappointed that my colleagues on the other side of the aisle are blocking this unanimous consent, and I am going to ask that, at the very least, we have a vote on it. I think it is only right that this body be permitted to vote, and we have been asking for a vote for more than a year.

So, Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that, at a time to be determined by the majority leader in consultation with the Democratic leader but no later than August 7, 2026, the Committee on Armed Services be discharged and the Senate proceed to the immediate consideration of S. 1032; further, that there be up to 2 hours for debate on the bill, equally divided between the two leaders or their designees; and that upon the use or yielding back of that time, the Blumenthal substitute amendment at the desk be considered and agreed to; that the bill, as amended, be considered read a third time, and the Senate vote on passage of the bill, as amended, with 60 affirmative votes being required for passage, all without further intervening action or debate and no amendments or motions in order to the bill prior to the vote on passage.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

The Senator from Kentucky.

Mr. PAUL. Mr. President, reserving the right to object, when we are told that we need to spend billions of dollars on a new program and yet we are unwilling to cut any spending from anywhere else, we should say: Well, aren't there some areas that we could all agree with?

So there is an Agency called the National Science Foundation. They have an \$8.6 billion budget. About \$8.5 billion is spent on crazy stuff. William Proxmire first started talking about the National Science Foundation in the 1970s, when he would give a Golden Fleece Award. One of the first awards was for a project that was \$50,000. This was a while ago. It was only \$50,000, but they were going to study what makes people happy. Does anybody think that is a good use of your money? What makes people happy?

Why do people fall in love—another 50 grand. Now, that might be a fun or interesting article in *Cosmopolitan*, but when we have a \$40 trillion debt, maybe we should cut some of their money.

One of my favorite studies was this: They wanted to determine whether tequila or gin made people more feisty, more cantankerous, more likely to commit violence. So they got codfish, and they guzzled—you know, they poured the tequila down the mouth of a codfish and then the gin. And I will bet you we can just poll the audience: Tequila, of course.

But that is the kind of crap your money is going to. And if we are not willing to cut any of that, even for a good cause, why are we here?

Why does it get worse every year? Because nobody cuts.

For the National Science Foundation, we doubled their budget a couple of years ago. Not more than 2 or 3 years ago, there was a study—it was about a million dollars—and they wanted to know: Are Japanese quail more sexually promiscuous when they are on cocaine? We can probably poll the audience on that one.

Another one of my favorites is—this was three-quarters of a million dollars, and they wanted to know: What did Neil Armstrong say when he landed on the Moon? So if you ever remember this from 50-some-odd years ago—the crackly sort of audio and the black-and-white video—and he says, "One small step for man." Or did he say, "One small step for a man"? So we spent 750 grand to study and listen to the old tape of Neil Armstrong to see: Did he say, "One small step for man," or "One small step for a man"?

To make matters worse, to make it even more insulting, this was \$750,000 that had been designated for autism research; and instead of it going to autism research, it was secondarily contracted out to study what Neil Armstrong had to say.

Two million dollars was spent studying whether or not, if you go to the cafeteria and the person in front of you

sneezes on the food, are you more or less likely to take the food that somebody just sneezed on. This is crazy. It is insulting, and it is ridiculous.

Why shouldn't we cut some of that waste and use it for this new veterans program. And this isn't a veterans program where there is or there isn't money. There is money being spent. This is to allow more money for a veterans program. This isn't to supply money to people who aren't getting any money.

I am for—we are a rich country. We should do it. But we should cut spending from where we are wasting it, and there are plenty of alternatives. If the Senator has another alternative where he would like to cut spending, I am your guy. I am for cutting spending across the board. There is waste everywhere.

But rather than come forward with programs that are feel-good and that have sympathetic people you want to help, come forward with these programs and say: But I am conservative. I worry about the debt. I worry about the trillion dollars in interest. And this is how we will pay for them.

Until that day, I will object.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Objection is heard.

The Senator from Connecticut.

Mr. BLUMENTHAL. Mr. President, we can agree or disagree with what my colleague from Kentucky has just said. It is entertaining, but it is deeply irrelevant to what I have asked to be done here. I am asking for a vote. The speech that he made could be made when we have time to vote, when this measure is put on the floor and we have a chance to express the will of this body. That is all I am asking.

We have 80 Members of the U.S. Senate cosponsoring this bill. The Secretary of Defense has endorsed it. Veterans service organizations are unanimously in favor of it.

The U.S. Congress pays for plenty of programs without demanding an offset. I am simply asking that a program for disabled veterans be treated in the same way.

Contrary to what my colleague says, this is not a VA program; it is not a veterans program. This is a Department of Defense program: retirement pay, disability benefits. Secretary Hegseth supports this bill without an offset.

But if Republicans insist on treating the Major Richard Star Act differently, then, at the very least, the money to pay for the wounds of war—the wounds of war that are occurring right now—at least 400 members of the military have been injured in some way so far in the Iran war. It should come from the Department of Defense.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Tennessee.

SECURE AMERICA ACT

Mrs. BLACKBURN. Mr. President, I was doing a little bit of work this past

weekend when I was in Tennessee and talking with Tennesseans about what is important to them. They are very hopeful that we are going to get the price of gas and groceries down.

During the Biden years, that 9 percent inflation and elevated inflation rates every year really hurt the pocketbook. And we all want these prices to come down. And, indeed, we are working on making certain that life is more affordable. Right now, we have got a lot of people that are struggling to make ends meet. So we hear a good bit about that at home.

Another thing we hear about is public safety. People want to feel safe and secure in their homes, in their communities, in their States. They want to know that their children, as they are out and about and working, that they are going to be in a safe environment.

So, this past weekend, we had many people who mentioned the work we did last week with passing the Secure America Act. Now, the good thing about this is, it puts the American people first. It is vital legislation because it will fund ICE and Border Patrol for the rest of President Trump's term, making certain that we are going to have the funds that are necessary for Federal law enforcement to go track down criminals, stop the flow of drugs and fentanyl into our country, and to enforce immigration laws. Those are things that—wrapped into this bill—help make every single community safe.

People want to make certain that people that are in the country illegally are deported. They want to make certain that criminal illegal aliens are picked up, that they are detained, that they are going to be prosecuted for their crimes. They want these illegal alien gangs to be apprehended and removed from their communities.

So passing this bill last week was a victory for the American people. This is something they voted for: Close the border; make certain that the homeland is safe. And they like the fact that the Senate passed this legislation.

One thing that came up regularly, as I talked to Tennesseans this weekend, was, Why did every Democrat vote against this? Not one—not one—voted aye. Not one.

And I would remind them that we saw this as must-pass legislation because, for 76 days—76 days—the Democrats had thrown the Department of Homeland Security into a shutdown. That is kind of the 2026 version of “defund the police”: Abolish ICE.

They have not been able to get their way; so they said: Well, we will just take away their money.

Now, I think it is important to note what they do when they act like this. Childish? Yes. Ridiculous? Absolutely. Disrespectful? Of course. They should listen to themselves and how they sound because the American people are listening, and they don't like what they are hearing.

What the Democrats did was to say: OK. We are going to put you in a shut-

down because we want to abolish ICE. We want to defund law enforcement. So it doesn't matter to us that TSA, Secret Service, Homeland Security Investigations, FEMA, all of these are going without pay. They are going without pay.

So what we did by passing the Secure America Act is to really slam the door on these antics, and Republicans said to the Democrats: Nope. We are not going to let you get by with risking these hard-working Americans and many times putting their lives at risk.

I think it is important to note, too, while they object to immigration law being enforced, every single immigration law that is on the books has been passed by Congress, and it has been signed by a President of the United States; some Democrats and some Republicans. Every single one. That is how they became the laws.

But instead of standing with the rule of law, what the Democrats have done is to say: We are going to pick and choose some laws we like and some laws we don't like. So we are just going to ignore the laws that we don't like.

And when I talk to Tennesseans, they cannot believe that the Democrats would put our national security at risk, but that is what they have done.

You know, I have said many times—many times—the Democrats have worked overtime during the Biden years trying to find ways to make “illegal” legal because they don't like the law. So then they try to find a workaround. And then we know that what they do—circumvent the law and try to make an illegal activity legal.

Now, another area where we have seen this is in the election integrity issue. And we support fair, secure, open elections. That ought to be a bipartisan issue. We should all want that. We should all treasure one person, one vote. And election integrity should be something that is at the top of the list.

Now, part of this is making certain that we ensure that only citizens can vote. This is one of those things that is common sense. And you know what? It is the law. Only citizens can vote in U.S. elections.

Now, what has happened is some States have allowed people that are illegally in the country or people that are legally here but they are on a visa or a work permit or a student visa or they are a legal permanent resident—they are not allowed to vote in our elections. But in some States, they have been voting.

So there is a way that States can make certain that it is only a citizen that is voting, and that is to compare their voter rolls with the Department of Homeland Security's SAVE system, the SAVE database.

This registry allows Federal, State, and local government Agencies to verify the immigration status of anybody in their jurisdiction. It is useful when determining whether an individual should be registered to vote.

What we know is that 26 States check their voter rolls against the SAVE