

any other revenue increase. It would mean that the entire burden of Social Security solvency would fall on the backs of retirees and the disabled through benefit cuts. That is not a fair solution for the vast majority of Americans.

Here is the bottom line. Since my days as codirector of the Oregon Gray Panthers, I have a long record of working on a bipartisan basis to fix this problem and protect retired people from missing out on their hard-earned benefits. We can do that by updating Social Security to reflect the economy of America today, by ensuring that billionaires pay into Social Security with each paycheck, like teachers, nurses, and firefighters.

Supporting a scheme like this—a fast track to rip away Americans' hard-earned benefits while shutting them out of the debate—is just plain wrong in my judgment.

If Republicans had any real interest in wanting to shore up Social Security, they would be putting forth their own ideas and working with Democrats to protect the program rather than to undermine it. Democrats have several concrete proposals to protect and strengthen Americans' earned benefits without raising the retirement age, cost-of-living haircuts, or means-testing benefits. It all starts by finally requiring billionaires to pay what they owe, just like the rest of us.

Billionaire wealth has skyrocketed to over \$9 trillion this year while working people struggle to scrape enough money together to pay for rent, gas, and groceries. This proposal, in my view, is effectively a wolf in sheep's clothing. It does nothing to protect Social Security and, instead, hands Republicans the key to the castle to start their work of ripping away Americans' hard-earned benefits.

For these reasons, I object.

I yield the floor.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The objection is heard.

The Senator from Louisiana.

Mr. CASSIDY. Mr. President, it grieves my soul that once again politics and political rhetoric trumps that which we need to do for the country. Let me address the nature of the objection.

Actually, this is a Senate resolution, but it invites the House to participate; and the Constitution requires that anything raising taxes originates in Ways and Means in the House. And so, therefore, they would have to participate. That is the protection of our Constitution.

It is a bipartisan—by the way, this is a bipartisan proposal to set up this process. There is nothing partisan about it. DICK DURBIN set up the PROMISE Act.

The House, unfortunately, left July 23 so we could not pass it. This is the best we could do with the House out of session in a bipartisan-initiated process.

DICK DURBIN who is a senior Member of the Democratic caucus is the one who is my collaborator.

There is nothing in here to cut benefits. That is absurd. It sets up a process by which a solution can be considered. It does not dictate an outcome. And to suggest that what this does today is dictate an outcome is not telling the truth to the American people.

There is no fast track here. There is 2 months of open dialogue with the American people, and then it goes to the Senate Finance Committee and to Ways and Means for it to then be considered in regular order.

This is basically a time agreement, and time agreements are what we do all the time around here.

I agree with updating Social Security, but we are not going to get there if we say every time one side offers it: Oh, we can't do it because the other side is angling for advantage. Let's be good Senators, not be good politicians.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from Oregon.

Mr. WYDEN. Mr. President, just to respond just for a brief minute. You can't originate taxes in the Senate. So what that means is this proposal gives the billionaires a free ride.

I yield the floor.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from Louisiana.

Mr. CASSIDY. Mr. President, one more time. The resolution invites the House to participate. The resolution says: Please Speaker, please, minority leader, appoint people to participate.

We recognize that Ways and Means have to originate this bill. I wish we could have passed the PROMISE Act, but there were objections to passing the PROMISE Act which would have had to have been passed by the House as well.

So in this, working as well as we can, knowing that Social Security is getting worse and worse by the day, we invite them to participate with the understanding that they could put in whatever they want.

The argument of my colleague from Oregon is that we somehow have a solution baked in. That is not true. This is only a process bill. And if the House wants to advance a bill which taxes billionaires, by golly, they can do it. They can do it under this bill.

Right now, they can't, because there is no mechanism for that bill to advance. We are creating a mechanism by which it can advance. And so, if you want to tax the billionaires, we create the opportunity. If you want to do nothing, you vote against this bill.

I have got limited time left, and I don't feel like sitting back and being a good politician when I should be a good Senator, working to fix Social Security because every day it gets worse and every day the law-required cut-in benefits to beneficiaries increases.

It doesn't get better by waiting 2 years; it gets worse. And opposing this resolution is like basically turning a blind eye to that deterioration.

I yield the floor.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from New Hampshire.

UNANIMOUS CONSENT REQUEST—H.R. 5345

Ms. HASSAN. Mr. President, I want to thank Senator CASSIDY and Senator WYDEN for the colloquy we just heard because we do need to tackle a number of challenges in the Social Security system.

The most important job of government is, of course, to keep people safe. And increasingly, some of the most constant threats that Americans face are scams and identity theft.

There has been a sharp rise in identity theft and online scams, including the theft of Social Security numbers. Identity theft is more than an annoyance; it can cost people their savings, jeopardize their credit, and more.

This is a danger that we need to take seriously, just as we stopped highwaymen from menacing people on our streets, we similarly must stop the outlaws of the digital age from preying on our people.

Unfortunately, even as criminals steal Social Security numbers, their victims, ordinary Americans, feel as if they have no one to turn to for help. It is not as simple as finding a police officer on the corner to retrieve a stolen wallet or purse.

Criminals have modernized their methods. So the U.S. Government must modernize its response too. That is why I have introduced a bipartisan bill with Senator GRASSLEY. Our bill would streamline the process for victims of identity theft to get help when their Social Security number is stolen, giving Americans a single point of contact at the Social Security Administration so that they can get the help that they need.

When someone's Social Security number is stolen, when they are at risk of losing their hard-earned Social Security benefits, they deserve better than to have to navigate a never-ending maze of hold times and transfers as they try to find someone within the government who can help.

This bill is only one step in the work we have to do to fight scammers, but it does mark a commonsense step that Americans from across the political spectrum can certainly get behind. This legislation will help keep more Americans safe, combat fraud and abuse, and makes our government work better for the American people.

Families are already struggling enough right now with high costs. They deserve to be able to keep the money and benefits that they have earned without being threatened by online criminals. And when they are threatened, they should have access to a straightforward and prompt process to get help.

Now, the House has already passed this bill on a strong bipartisan basis. So I hope that we can send this legislation to the President today.

Mr. President, therefore, as if in legislative session and notwithstanding rule XXII, I ask unanimous consent that the Committee on Finance be discharged from further consideration of

H.R. 5345 and the Senate proceed to its immediate consideration; that the bill be considered read a third time and passed, and that the motion to reconsider be considered made laid and upon the table.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Is there objection?

The Senator from Texas.

Mr. CRUZ. Mr. President, reserving the right to object, on the merits, there are no substantive objections to this legislation. However, we do have a challenge between the two Chambers of Congress.

The Senate is doing its work. The Senate is taking up important pieces of legislation, reaching bipartisan agreement, and passing them; and they are going to the House of Representatives where right now they are simply sitting and languishing.

House leadership has decided to adopt a strategy that is, frankly, indefensible. It is a strategy where they pass bills that originate in the House; they ignore bills that originate in the Senate, and they let them die.

More than two-thirds of the bills to date that are passed into law have been bills that originated in the House of Representatives. There are numerous bills that this body has passed, often unanimously, 100 to nothing, that arrive in the House that no House Member has any substantive objections to them at all, and they simply put them in the freezer and do nothing.

My colleague knows sometimes if you want to change the behavior of another Chamber, the only way to do so is to exercise leverage. And so, I have placed holds on all House bills coming over here unless and until they start taking up and passing Senate bills. Both Chambers need to do their work.

Our Congress does not work if one of the two Chambers refuses to even consider legislation that has passed the other Chamber. I am in active negotiation with House leadership for them to start picking up and passing legislation here.

One of those bills is a bill I authored called TREY'S Law. TREY'S Law was named for a young man in Texas just outside the Dallas area who was a little boy that was sexually assaulted at a summer camp repeatedly.

He brought litigation. That litigation was settled, but as part of the settlement, he signed an NDA. He signed a contractual commitment to never tell anybody about the horrible sexual assault that he suffered.

He lived with that grief, with that sorrow for the rest of what turned out to be his very short life. At age 28, Trey took his own life. TREY'S Law, which is named for him, is passed in the State of Texas; it has passed in numerous other States like Missouri and Alabama.

It very simply says that NDAs are not enforceable to silence a victim of child sexual assault, that you cannot enforce contractual right to tell a child who has experienced that assault: You may not speak; you have no voice.

This legislation in the Senate was bipartisan. I authored it with Senator GILLIBRAND. It passed the Senate 100 to nothing. It is sitting in the House, and they have declined to move.

I say to my friend from New Hampshire, I am confident your legislation will pass and will pass the Senate as soon as the House ends its unreasonable blockade against Senate bills. I am in active negotiation with their leadership to get that result. We will get that result before the end of the year.

I hope we get that result soon. I would very much like to lift all these holds and pass important legislation the Senate has already passed.

However, because the House has not yet made that agreement, I have no choice but to object.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Objection is heard.

The Senator from New Hampshire.

Ms. HASSAN. Mr. President, I appreciate the efforts of the Senator from Texas to get legislation that we have passed here passed through the House of Representatives.

But I think it is really critically important to understand that while he is in these negotiations, people's identities are being stolen, people who need their Social Security benefits are going without as they try to navigate a complex and outdated Social Security system.

It is high time that we pass this bill. I am disappointed that we weren't able to send this bill to the President today. I understand the concerns of the Senator from Texas, but I really do think this is urgent for our people. I hope that my colleague from Texas and I can work together in a bipartisan way to get this over the finish line soon.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from Texas.

UNANIMOUS CONSENT REQUESTS

Mr. CRUZ. Mr. President, I rise today to speak about the critical need for disaster relief in my home State of Texas for a Texas community that was devastated by historic wildfires. I will seek to improve the pending Disaster Tax Relief Act being considered by the Senate to address that acute need in Texas.

No doubt the current version provides relief that is also badly needed elsewhere. I would like to speak directly to the families of Spokane, WA, who have lost their homes, their livelihoods, their sense of security. The people of Texas stand with you, and we are profoundly grateful to the firefighters and first responders risking their lives to protect their neighbors. That is a pain families in Texas know all too well.

In 2024, Texas witnessed truly horrific wildfires. The Smokehouse Creek fire was the single largest wildfire in the history of the State of Texas. It killed two people. It burned more than 1 million acres. It destroyed more than 500 homes and businesses, and it killed approximately 15,000 cattle.

The Windy Deuce fire was among the most destructive and fast-moving wildfires ever to strike the Texas Panhandle. It burned more than 140,000 acres. Despite the horror and the destructiveness of these fires, they were not treated as qualified wildfire disasters under Federal law.

One result is that any relief payments are subject to Federal income taxes, which dramatically reduces the scope and effectiveness of the badly needed relief. Victims of other catastrophic wildfires do not incur such penalties on the relief they receive.

Disaster relief is important. I am proud to support disaster relief. Americans step in and help their fellow Americans in times of crisis. But disaster relief must be fair. Disaster relief cannot demonstrate favoritism, choosing some recipients as more worthy or luckier than others.

My amendment does something very simple. It includes in this disaster relief bill the worst wildfire in the history of the State of Texas. On any reasonable argument on the merits, the Texas Panhandle wildfires deserve to be included.

I would note also that the score of this provision is, in congressional terms, quite small: \$31 million is what this addition costs. In this body, \$31 million is a sum that is usually too small even to be written down. Moreover, the House of Representatives and, in particular, the chairman of the Ways and Means Committee has explicitly committed that if and when we add this disaster bill, that the House, in September when they return, will take it up and pass it.

So this is the path, No. 1, to passing this disaster bill—which I very much want to do—but No. 2, to doing so in a way that does not unfairly leave out the Texans, the victims of the largest wildfire in the history of Texas. We have got to do both.

And so I will now propound a unanimous consent request to take up and pass my amendment to the Doug LaMalfa Federal Disaster Tax Relief Certainty Act to designate the Smokehouse Creek fire and the Windy Deuce fire as qualified wildfire disasters, ensuring that relief payments to those affected receive the same Federal tax treatment as victims of other qualified wildfires.

I urge my colleagues to pass this commonsense amendment today so that Texans receive the same treatment as other victims of wildfires. And I would note that if my colleagues choose not to accept the amendment, the alternative is going to be that nothing passes. That is not an alternative that is good for anybody, and so my hope is that common sense will prevail.

Mr. President, as if in legislative session and notwithstanding rule XXII, I ask unanimous consent that the Finance Committee be discharged from further consideration of H.R. 5366, and the Senate proceed to its immediate