

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

consideration. I further ask that the Cruz 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 ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Is there objection?

Mr. WYDEN. Reserving the right to object.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from Oregon. Mr. WYDEN. Mr. President, earlier this week my home State set a new devastating record: Over 2 million acres in Oregon have burned in wildfires across our State this summer. That is the most in recorded history with 2 more months of fire season to go. Thousands of Oregonians have been under evacuation orders or are preparing to be. Our whole State is blanketed in thick smoke, making for some of the worst air quality in the world. Many have lost their homes, their livestock, their businesses, and livelihoods. When you lose your home in a wildfire, the last thing you should be worried about is being hit by a massive tax bill. The bipartisan tax relief bill being considered on the bill today would give the people of my State affected by these blazes some peace of mind. It would lift a massive tax burden and deliver financial relief to every American impacted by a federally declared natural disaster.

It is going to get rid of a totally unfair tax on settlement payments and ensure disaster victims can deduct losses after disasters.

This is an issue the Republicans created under Donald Trump in 2017, but Senator CRUZ' amendment would derail a bipartisan proposal entirely. His amendment threatens the lifeline assistance in this bill for Americans that lose their home during a natural disaster.

The Senator from Texas has repeatedly opposed funding for federally declared disasters like Hurricane Sandy. Now he comes to the floor to hold the bill hostage in order to send money to his State for his own priorities while Donald Trump holds up disaster funding for Oregon wildfire victims.

The House has already passed this bill that was negotiated on a bipartisan basis. Now the Senate must do its job, and that is why I am offering up this version of legislation that has already passed through the House.

So, Mr. President, therefore, I ask the Senator to modify his request so that the Finance Committee be discharged from further consideration of H.R. 5366 and the Senate proceed to its immediate consideration; further, that the bill be considered read a third time and passed, and that the motion to reconsider be considered made and laid upon the table.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Is there objection to the modification?

Mr. CRUZ. Reserving the right to object.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from Texas.

Mr. CRUZ. I would note that I agree with virtually every word that was said by the Senator from Oregon. I agree that this tax treatment taxing someone on a disaster relief settlement from, say, the power company that caused the fire—giving someone a big tax bill for that relief that they are entitled to, it is unfair; it is wrong. I am enthusiastic about passing this bill and passing it now.

What I am not enthusiastic about is leaving thousands of Texans out because just like the citizens of Oregon who suffered devastating losses, just like the citizens of California, just like the citizens of Washington State who suffered devastating losses, there were also thousands upon thousands of Texans who suffered devastating losses. And my proposal is very simple: Let's be fair. Let's not exclude the Texans. Let's provide the relief that is right and just to everyone who has been impacted by these devastating wildfires.

I will point out also the Senator from Oregon said there is an urgency to pass this. I want you to understand that—everyone watching—there are two paths that we can go down. One path is when I decline to make this modification, the Senator from Oregon could say nothing, could just be quiet, and then the Presiding Officer would say, "No objection is heard," and this bill would pass the Senate with the Texans included so it would be fair. It would not be excluding people that are similarly situated. It would be treating everyone fairly, and it would go to the House.

The House will be back in September, and we have a commitment from the chairman of the Ways and Means Committee, the committee that has jurisdiction over this, to take this up and pass it. So if the Senator from Oregon chooses simply to say nothing, this bill moves on its way, and it is substantially closer to being signed into law and giving actual relief to the victims of these wildfires. However, the other path—and folks in the Gallery should listen for two words the Senator from Oregon says, "I object." What will happen is the bill dies. It doesn't pass. The victims in Texas get no relief; the victims in Oregon get no relief; the victims in California get no relief; the victims in Washington State get no relief.

I don't understand why that is a good outcome. I think that is a terrible outcome. But the Senator from Oregon has complete control over which of those two paths we go down.

I will not modify my request.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The objection to the modification is heard.

Is there objection to the original request?

Mr. PADILLA. Reserving the right to object.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from California.

Mr. PADILLA. Mr. President, colleagues, this disaster bill, this disaster

tax bill includes important bipartisan legislation that I introduced with Senators LUMMIS, WYDEN, and SHEEHY to extend a critical tax provision for disaster survivors that we enacted into law last Congress. Two years ago, my Protect Innocent Victims of Taxation After Fire Act made an important update to our Tax Code.

It made sure that individuals, families, and entire communities who suffered from wildfires received the full compensation that they were awarded in courts to rebuild their lives.

But, unfortunately, every year more devastating disasters take place, and so Congress must extend the same important financial protection to survivors of more recent wildfires.

That is what the House-passed version of the bill would do. But to be clear, disaster settlement funds are not income. They are not a financial windfall. They are certainly not winning the lottery. What they are is compensation, partial compensation in most cases, for what has been lost.

They are meant to give survivors an opportunity to begin to rebuild not just their homes but their lives.

This bill is not just for my constituents in California that have been impacted by the Eaton and Palisades fires 1½ years ago; it is also for those victims in Oregon and Hawaii and other communities across the country that have experienced similar disasters.

Our bill would ensure that all recent wildfire victims throughout the country have access to the full value of their settlement without any unfair tax burden. It is common sense, and it is a bipartisan solution to protect Americans at the most difficult time of their lives.

We should pass this legislation now. Let's not keep survivors waiting, worrying, and wondering about their financial future any longer.

I want to thank Senators LUMMIS, WYDEN, and SHEEHY for their partnership, as well as my colleague Representative MIKE THOMPSON in the House for his steadfast leadership on this issue.

I also want to recognize that the late Representative Doug LaMalfa was such a critical part of this effort. The House fittingly named this bill in his honor because it reflects the tireless leadership he brought to these issues impacting disaster-stricken communities throughout his career. He and I first served together in the California State Senate and then again here—he in the House; I in the Senate.

I would urge all of our colleagues to support the House-passed version of the measure and allow survivors to begin to rebuild their lives without unnecessary fear or delay.

Thank you.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection to the original request?

The Senator from Oregon.

Mr. WYDEN. I object to the Cruz request, and I want to take note of the floor right now because our proposal

has bipartisan support on the floor this morning. In other words, talking about who has been trying to bring people together and the like, our proposal on this floor—the Senator from Florida, the Senator from California, the Senator from Oregon—is a bipartisan proposal. The Senator from Texas is not on the floor with bipartisan support.

I hope he will work with us over the course of the morning to get this worked out.

That is why I object to the Cruz proposal, and I object again.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The objection is heard.

The Senator from Florida.

Mr. SCOTT of Florida. First off, I rise to recognize all my colleagues that have spoken about the importance of disaster relief, and I think we all want to make sure we help our States. Right now, I rise in support of the Doug LaMalfa Federal Disaster Tax Relief Certainty Act.

Florida is no stranger to natural disasters. As we speak, we are in the middle of hurricane season, which started June 1. When I was Governor, I wanted Florida to be the national model for disaster relief. We prioritized preparedness, safety, and quick action. But once the storms pass, you know, like anywhere else, Florida is in the same position. Floridians had to rebuild. Families lost homes. Some lost everything they had.

When you are in that position, one of the worst moments of your entire life, you shouldn't have to worry about a rising tax bill. That is why I helped lead this bipartisan bill and previous bills to provide not just Floridians but all Americans all across this country tax relief after disaster strikes, including Texans and Oregonians.

Our citizens need certainty when they are piecing their lives back together; they don't need the government taking a cut of the money they need. This bill just gives certainty of necessary tax relief to victims of natural disasters so they can focus on getting back on track and not worrying about the IRS.

This bill is very critical to my State, but it is also about more than hurricanes. It is not just about hurricanes; this bill helps families affected by all natural disasters, including wildfires, tornadoes, earthquakes, and any other scenario that can be declared a Federal disaster.

It is good for the entire country. It is a bipartisan bill, and it is a tribute to Doug LaMalfa, who passed away earlier this year.

This passed the House unanimously earlier this year, so if we pass this today, it will become law.

Americans don't need extra worries when the worst happens, and we shouldn't be an obstacle to their recovery. By passing this bill, we will make it easier to rebuild the American dream when hardships strike.

I am not going to give up. I look forward to continuing to work with my

colleagues, including with my friend from Texas, to get this bill across the finish line for every Floridian and every American. I recognize the issue he is dealing with, and I look forward to working with him to try to solve the issues Texans are looking at right now.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mrs. MOODY). The Senator from New Hampshire.

TRUMP ADMINISTRATION

Ms. HASSAN. Madam President, I rise today to speak about a broken promise, a promise that the President made to the country when he took office.

Time and again, the President promised that "starting on day one" of his administration, he would "end inflation"—his words. A year and a half into his term, it is clear that the President not only has broken his word but that he disdains the very notion that he should even try to make good on his pledge.

Now, for the vast majority of Americans of all ages and walks of life, of all political stripes, costs aren't a partisan thing, and it is simply clear: It costs more to be an American with Donald Trump as President.

Part of why I am speaking today is because, as a new Joint Economic Committee minority report details, American life has become more expensive under this administration. As of June, in my home State of New Hampshire, the average Granite State family has had to pay an additional \$4,400 for goods and services since President Trump took office. This toll is exacted from virtually every part of everyday life.

In Donald Trump's America, when a person wakes up and starts their day, they now drink coffee that costs around \$10 a pound, a 25-percent increase since the President launched senseless trade wars, launched without the support of the American people.

After they finish their coffee and drive to work or to drop their children off at school, they do so in a car that now costs more to fill up every time they stop at the pump. Each Granite State family has spent \$596 more on gas, in fact, since President Trump launched his reckless, illegal war against Iran—a war he launched without a plan to win.

Now, let's say our typical American has a doctor's appointment that day. Assuming that they are able to afford health insurance, they will receive care covered by a plan which premiums rose as much as 50 percent under President Trump. Why? Because the President let Affordable Care Act insurance premiums surge.

And at the end of the day, the average Granite Stater returns to a house or an apartment that is also more expensive, as families in our State have so far spent \$1,108 more on rent or mortgage payments since President Trump started his term—all because the President refuses to address our country's housing crisis.

And after my constituent gets home and goes to pick up her mail, she opens another electric bill. Electricity has gotten so expensive that people in New Hampshire have had to pay \$194 more so far this year than last year because the President caused a worldwide energy crisis and canceled clean energy projects.

Next on the list, my constituent goes into the kitchen to make dinner, where—you guessed it—the ingredients cost more than they did before Trump took office. Granite Staters paid \$310 more for groceries last year than they did the year before.

So what has been the cost of the Trump Presidency, a Presidency where food, healthcare, gas, rent, and more have all become more expensive? The costs can be summed up by the figures in this report, but it can also be put more simply. For many in our country, the cost has been nothing less than seeing their chance at the American dream fade before their very eyes.

A year and a half into his Presidency, my Republican colleagues are making excuse after excuse for the President's failure to address the American people's basic needs. They need to stop—stop trying to advance the fiction that the President cares about lowering costs or perhaps is trying to lower costs but is getting some bad counsel from his advisers. If the President actually wanted to help the American people, he would listen to them. He would hear that this economy isn't working for them and, for some, well, it is breaking them. If he cared, this man who was supposed to understand the economy, as well as the hopes and dreams of the American people, would acknowledge that he needs to take action to lower costs. And even if he doesn't care, if this President believed that, in America, Presidents are accountable to the American people, he would be working to make life more affordable.

But this President neither cares nor thinks he is accountable to anyone other than himself and perhaps his billionaire backers. Just consider, he has attacked and dismissed anyone who says that there is a problem at all. He has called inflation a "hoax" and dismissed the cost-of-living crisis as—his words—"made up." He says this despite the fact that virtually every American of every political perspective—at least those who live outside the splendor of Mar-a-Lago—knows that American life has become more expensive under President Trump.

So when the American people say that their costs have gone up and the President dismisses inflation as a "hoax," is he saying that American families are lying? Is he suggesting that they should not believe their own eyes, their own understanding of math, when they look at the numbers at the cash register or at the gas pump? Because it is one thing not to solve a problem for American families; it is quite another to essentially say that the American people are lying.