

Indiana High School Basketball Tournament, the Indians of Milan High, enrollment 161, versus the Bearcats of Muncie Central, enrollment 1,660. Fifteen thousand fans are in the bleachers, with thousands more Hoosiers listening over the radio. It is the fourth quarter. The game is tied at 30; 18 seconds on the clock. Milan inbounds. Senior Bobby Plump gets the ball. He fakes left, dribbles right, pulls up, knocks down a 14-foot jump shot just as the clock expires. The nets come down. The celebration starts.

The next morning, the new State companions headed home. They are in a fleet of Cadillacs along Indiana's county roads. There was no interstate or highway connecting Indianapolis to Cincinnati, the closest city to Milan.

Hoosiers were awaiting along the way in Greensburg, in Shelbyville. They were holding signs. They were waving. State Road 101, which led back home, was lined with cars and cheering fans for 13 miles. And 40,000 people were waiting in little Milan, IN, even though at the time, the town had only 1,100 residents. This is Hoosier Hysteria. This is what the people of Indiana are so excited about every March.

That year, in 1954, as the players from Milan rolled into town, two members of the team, Ray Craft and Kenny Wendelman, hopped on the roof of their Cadillac with the championship trophy between them. The procession ended near Milan High. That is where that trophy remains today.

The next morning, the crowd was gone. The small town, its quiet had gradually returned. In the days that followed, members of the team graduated. They went off to college, pursued careers. They drifted apart. Coach Marvin Wood took a job up in New Castle.

The passage of time brought other changes—not all of them welcome, of course. Little Milan, like so many towns across the country—it is facing challenges. And the single class basketball tournament system that gave small town teams like Milan a shot at the title is no more.

Some of the schools that played in the 1954 tournament are gone. Milan, it hasn't won another championship. Though, it must be said they made it to the semi-State back in 1973.

Despite this—or possibly because of it—the Milan Miracle is as inspiring as ever. Yes, it is the tale of the little guy, the underdog, David versus Goliath, the smallest school to ever win the single class tournament. Literally, in fact, Muncie Central's average height was 6-foot-4. Milan was 5-foot-11.

This story is so much bigger than that, so much bigger than basketball or even Indiana, for that matter.

Milan's players always note that their championship run in 1954 wasn't a lightning strike. It wasn't even a stroke of good luck. No, the Indians made it to the final four the previous year. Most of the players had known and practiced with each other since

grade school. They played tough. They were coached well. Perhaps most importantly, they had faith—faith in their teammates, faith in one another, faith in that community that they represented, faith that merit and hard work would be rewarded, faith that, just maybe, their dreams would be satisfied.

Bobby Plump's last shot is still talked about around the country, really, but certainly, back home in Indiana. That is the moment we remember. But it was the culmination of a lot of hard work, dedication, and teamwork. And it happened because of the support of families, friends, and neighbors.

Milan was a place where, when a student needed a winter coat, locals—they took up a collection at the drugstore. They bought that coat. It is the place where the kids who didn't have a lot of money could eat for free at Rosie's. The ones from nearby Pierceville who often had to walk to school, they could count on rides from friends.

In a different era, when the world seemed so much smaller, the local basketball team was, at least for the month of March, the world—the world—every one of these teams, the celebration of your togetherness, your community, your opportunity to show your stuff.

Even a water shortage in the spring of 1954 didn't dampen Milan's or Ripley County's excitement for the Indians. In fact, as an area newspaper reported: "water or no water, Ripleyians want Milan to bring home the crown."

Apart from what happened on the hardwood at Hinkle Fieldhouse, the memory of Milan lasts because—because their team and town symbolizes what keeps all of our communities together, what lifts our hopes and fuels our dreams, even when it feels like hopes and dreams are all we have.

That trophy that I mentioned, that trophy in the newly refurbished lobby of Milan High's gymnasium, today is a symbol of more than just a State championship. Oh, it is so much more.

You see, it is proof of how much we all can achieve when we work together towards a common goal and resolve to hold our own, no matter the odds, no matter how insignificant others might say we are or think we are. It is an inspiration still across small towns and struggling places waiting on their own miracle, where the basketball team brings people together and makes them feel proud of the places they call home. This—this is why we still celebrate little Milan beating mighty Muncie Central 70 years on. It is why we will, I believe, for the next 70 years too.

Of course, for those who haven't already figured it out, this is the story that inspired "Hoosiers," a beloved movie written and directed by a pair of Hoosiers.

You see, visitors regularly come to Indiana in search of the movie's fictional Hickory, hoping to find the small town epicenter of Hoosier Hysteria. But what they are really

searching for is right there in Ripley County. It is an actual town with a real history and a tradition to be proud of and, dare I say, replicated.

They will recognize it by the basketball goals in driveways, the backboards on barns, the black water tower with white lettering, prominently reading: "STATE CHAMPS 1954"—it is still there. I have seen it many times, the historical marker commemorating the Milan miracle and that museum that celebrates it right there in the center of town.

As a newspaper declared back in 1954: In basketball, Little Milan is the new capital of Indiana.

I think that is about right. Well, 70 years later, it is still the capital, and the Indians will always be champions.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from North Carolina.

Mr. TILLIS. Mr. President, I want to compliment my colleague from Indiana on those wonderful remarks and reflection on history.

I will reflect, in the present day, North Carolina has three teams in March Madness.

UNANIMOUS CONSENT REQUEST—S. 3237

Mr. President, I am here for, actually, a serious subject. At the end of my comments, I am going to ask unanimous consent.

I want to talk about a bill that my office sponsored—actually, something I thought of several months ago. It is S. 3237, the Patriot Bill of Rights.

My office was very much involved in the PACT Act drafting. By that, I mean that we were primarily responsible for leading the language that led to the Camp Lejeune toxic act. There was also a TEAM Act in there, but I am here to talk Camp Lejeune toxics.

In full disclosure, when that bill went to the floor, I voted against it, which was a very difficult decision for me to make. I was one of only about nine people who voted against it. It wasn't because I was opposed to the bill; it was because I was opposed to whether or not it was ready to come out of the oven; that there were things that we needed to work on. That has actually proven to be true.

We have got a lot of work to do, because I think we went just a little bit too soon. I know we did on the Camp Lejeune toxic act. There is probably not a person in the United States who has ever watched the TV or listened to radio who has not seen the advertisements right now for: If you worked or lived in and around Camp Lejeune for more than 30 days, call this hotline.

That hotline, in many cases, is not even a lawyer. It is an aggregator. It is somebody who is advertising, trying to convince a veteran to call this hotline so that they can help you get the benefits you deserve.

The fact of the matter is, the Senate voted to make sure that veterans got the benefit that they deserved if they were exposed to a toxic substance down in Camp Lejeune. It is in my State, down in the eastern part of the State.

What they don't tell you is that if you were a veteran and served in and around Camp Lejeune, there are a variety of ways that you could get compensation without ever talking to a lawyer. Now we have ads where we have, literally, a cottage industry of people harvesting potential veterans, getting them to sign retainers, charging them double-digit fees in many cases, at the expense of all that money, all the money that a veteran is entitled to, going to the veteran.

So I was a bit frustrated with the way the ads were going in this cottage industry and the millions of dollars that are not actually going to the veteran. But it was a hearing about a year ago about veteran suicide that made me think that maybe we have a wonderful opportunity to fix something.

This morning, I looked up the number of days that I have been here. I was sworn in on January 6, 2015. And I learned a startling number today. The number is 67,240. That is the number of veterans who have taken their life through suicide since the day I was sworn in here. That was in 2015—67,240. To give you a concept of what that is, that would fill Bank of America Stadium, where the Panthers play. That would actually—we would have 7,000 people waiting in line to get into Soldier Field. That is how many veterans have committed suicide since I entered office—about an average of 20 a day.

Now, why does that matter? Because we are constantly trying to find ways to connect veterans to the VA. And there is another sad statistic with those 67,240 veterans who have taken their life over the last little more than 9 years. Two-thirds of them are not connected to the VA. That means they have never applied for any sort of service through the VA. Two-thirds of those 67,240 people who have taken their life are not connected to the VA.

So I came up with an idea. I said: Why don't we actually kill two birds with one stone. Let's not cap fees or whatever on attorney's fees. Some of these cases are complex; they are very expensive. So we won't cap fees, but why don't we at least make sure that before a veteran signs a retainer agreement with an attorney, they understand what their rights are.

My office processes thousands of veterans' cases every year. We love processing veterans' cases. So I thought maybe we just have a bill of rights so that before that lawyer can actually get you to sign a retainer agreement, you have to know what your rights are.

Did you know that you can call your Senator, your State Congressman, that you have a variety of no-cost options to see if your case is one where you don't even need an attorney? You can call the VA. You can call the Department of the Navy. Let's get them all these contacts and say: Before you sign this retainer agreement, maybe you need to call them.

Now, part of it was to make sure that the simple cases people were not pay-

ing money for. A lot of the people who are calling these attorneys think that is the only way they can get this benefit.

So the idea was a simple document—that, incidentally, is endorsed by the VFW—that lets them know what their rights are. And maybe—just maybe—these thousands of people who are calling attorneys today will call the VA and get connected; and if they are connected, maybe they are one who is otherwise going to be in crisis and commit suicide. So it achieves two objectives at the same time. It, hopefully, prevents them, the veteran, from paying money that they don't need to, to get a benefit that we all believe that they deserve; and, as importantly, it potentially connects somebody who is at risk of committing suicide to the VA, to a crisis line, to possibly give them a lifesaving intervention.

I can't imagine what is wrong with it. Guess what. It can't be cost because it doesn't cost us anything. The CBO said it is negligible. It holds the legal profession accountable if they are charging exorbitant fees for simple cases. And it maybe provides a lifesaving connection point from the servicemember to the VA.

So that is my motivation for coming down to the floor. People who are watching this may not know: Unanimous consent means that any Member can come to the floor and say—and I will in a moment—"I request consent to move this out of this Chamber" and then hopefully have the House pick it up.

I am doing this today, and I probably will start doing it every week for the remainder of time between now and August when this enrollment period is still going on because every week another 140 servicemembers are going to die, and I have to believe, if some of them were connected to the VA, they may not. But I promised the VFW and I promised veterans groups when we had a hearing a couple of weeks ago that I was going to bring this to the floor.

We have addressed the concerns in the bill. And I believe, if we get it to the House, we can get it passed into law. So that is some background on why I make the following request.

Mr. President, as in legislative session, I ask unanimous consent that the Committee on the Judiciary be discharged from further consideration of S. 3237 and that the Senate proceed to its immediate consideration; further, that the bill be considered read a third time and passed and the motion to reconsider be considered made and laid upon the table.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Are there any objections?

The majority whip.

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, reserving the right to object, let me say at the outset that Senator TILLIS, though we may disagree on this particular issue, is a respected colleague, a friend, and a member of the committee which

I chair. I value him on the committee. I thank him for his friendship. Though we may disagree today, I hope we find room to agree tomorrow.

Mr. President, this bipartisan bill, the Camp Lejeune Justice Act, was signed into law in August of 2022, almost 2 years ago. It was part of what was known as the PACT Act. This was an important bill to provide a day in court, finally, for U.S. marines and others who were poisoned by contaminated water in Camp Lejeune, NC.

For over three decades, from 1953 to 1987, marines, their families, and others working and living in Camp Lejeune were exposed to a toxic mix of industrial solvents and other chemicals in their drinking water. As a result, as many as 1 million people are at an increased risk of cancer, Parkinson's, and other debilitating diseases.

Had these individuals suffered the same harm in another place, they would have been able to go to court and seek compensation for their injuries, but unfortunately hurdles in the law locked servicemembers and their families out of the judicial system. For decades, they suffered without any ability to have their day in court, despite their injuries.

That changed with the Camp Lejeune Justice Act, which was led by Senator TILLIS—and I thank him for that—as well as Senator BLUMENTHAL, Senator Burr, and Senator PETERS. It finally allowed marines the opportunity, after literally decades of waiting, to seek justice by filing a lawsuit in Federal court if an administrative claims process did not reach a satisfactory resolution.

Now, there have been some problems with the implementation of this bill. I will be the first to admit that. We need to work—and I am happy to work with Senator TILLIS—on a bipartisan basis to address these problems just as we did with the Camp Lejeune Justice Act.

The bill was proposed by the Senators from North Carolina. The one he proposes aims to help veterans, but unfortunately it has several serious shortcomings. First, it would require attorneys to provide Camp Lejeune victims a written acknowledgement that they are required to sign. This acknowledgement would state that the victim—plaintiff—understands that they may seek guidance free of charge from veterans service organizations, the Secretary of Veterans Affairs, their congressional representatives, and the Department of the Navy.

But this acknowledgement won't be accurate in all the cases. For example, not all the Camp Lejeune claimants are veterans. Many are civilians who worked at the camp. For these individuals, it is inaccurate to say, as this bill does, that they get free guidance from veterans service organizations or the Veterans' Administration.

Second, the bill would require attorneys to submit a second written acknowledgement with the Secretary of the Navy stating that the client understands that legal representation by an

attorney is not required to file an action pursuing a Camp Lejeune claim. This is technically correct.

Depending on the facts and circumstances of the case, legal representation may be needed to have any chance at successfully pursuing your claim. Just look at the experience to date. Remember, this bill was passed 2 years ago almost. To date, almost no Camp Lejeune claims have been paid by the Navy. As of the end of February, 1,530 Camp Lejeune claims have been filed in the Eastern District of North Carolina, and 170,502 administrative claims are on file with the Navy. Of all those thousands of claims, only 48 cases have been determined to meet the government's criteria for settlement based on submitted documentation. Even there, the process for uploading what are known as the "substantiation documents" has been extremely difficult for families to understand.

And for cases that will ultimately be litigated, the process can be lengthy, complicated, and expensive. Toxic exposure cases are not easy to prepare or prove, particularly when they relate to conduct that happened decades ago. Victims will need to go through "discovery." For many of them, it will be the first time they have heard the word in that context. And they may need to retain expert witnesses to demonstrate causation.

While all of this can technically be done without an attorney, it is practically impossible to do so and have your claim succeed. So steering victims away from legal representation may eliminate any chance of recovery.

Finally, this bill contains a provision stating that a law firm that receives "veteran data" from an advertising agency must reduce their legal fee in an amount equal to the cost incurred to receive that data. It is unclear to me, in reading this bill, what the term "veteran data" even means. Additionally, this requirement would discourage attorneys from reaching out to potential plaintiffs who may have worked at Camp Lejeune years in the past and may not even know they are eligible for compensation.

After fighting so hard to make sure those poisoned by the water at Camp Lejeune can finally have their day in court, we should not now close the courtroom door all over again.

Let me be clear. If there are unscrupulous lawyers or nonlawyers who are deceiving veterans or running scam solicitations, I want to join in a bipartisan effort to crack down on them.

There is a bill, the GUARD VA Benefits Act, which has 42 bipartisan cosponsors, that is properly scoped to do just that. Current law prohibits individuals or businesses from assisting a veteran in preparation, presentation, or prosecution of a VA claim unless they are accredited by the Veterans' Administration. They are also prohibited from charging fees for this assistance before the VA makes a decision on the claim.

However, the VA and other Agencies are limited in their ability to enforce the law because criminal penalties were eliminated from the statute about 20 years ago. The GUARD VA Benefits Act would reinstate those criminal penalties.

This bill is a top priority for veterans organizations that have been working for years to combat predatory practices of unaccredited entities who charge unauthorized fees while purporting to help veterans with their disability claims. These are the types of reforms that will actually help veterans from Camp Lejeune and others as they seek compensation benefits.

I will be happy to work with the Senator from North Carolina to make sure that veterans are protected from unscrupulous actors while ensuring that we don't inhibit quality advocates from helping veterans finally get their day in court, but I cannot support the bill in its current form, and I would object.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Objection is heard.

Mr. TILLIS. Mr. President, just briefly, again, I appreciate Senator DURBIN as the chairman of the Judiciary Committee. We have had many opportunities to work together.

First off, I would just like to point out—and I will because I do intend to do unanimous consent for this—there is a burning platform issue here between now and August. These ads are going on and on. Veterans are making a phone call. I am looking at ways to get to these veterans, and I am told that this will make a connection. So that is something separate from some of the substance that Chairman DURBIN talked about.

We have processed about 12,000 cases since I have been here, since 2015. We referred a number to veterans service organizations. Veterans service organizations are approved by the VA and do have attorneys. They can triage cases. And one thing that they do very well is say: This is an easy case; we can help you with this one. This is not an easy case; you need to seek legal representation.

As a matter of fact, we do that as standard operating procedure in my office. I am not saying that many of these cases may need them, but I know a lot of them don't, and I suspect many of them don't. And every dime that you pay an attorney is a dime that is not going to the veteran.

So what I am trying to do here is just to make sure they understand that they have these resources available. It is amazing to me how surprised people are that I have 25 people in the State dedicated to casework, full-time people dedicated to veterans work, a great relationship with VSOs. All of those are free, highly skilled options for veterans that these ads on TV are not making clear to veterans.

We have to do right by veterans. Like I said, I am disappointed with the objection today, but we will have plenty of time to talk about this every week

that we are in session between now and August.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from New Mexico.

Mr. HEINRICH. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to speak as in morning business.

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

TRIBUTE TO DR. JOSEPH SUINA

Mr. HEINRICH. Mr. President, I rise today to recognize Dr. Joseph Suina for his service to our Nation.

Dr. Suina is a former Cochiti Pueblo Governor, a University of New Mexico professor emeritus, and a Vietnam and Marine Corps veteran. Recognition of Dr. Suina's service is long overdue.

But before I speak about his military service, I want to take a moment to recognize what Dr. Suina's decades of leadership have meant for Cochiti Pueblo and for New Mexico as a whole.

Over the course of his life, Dr. Suina has served as a Governor for his Pueblo and a Tribal council member. He also served as the president and CEO of the Cochiti Community Development Corporation and as the chair of the Cochiti Language Revival Committee.

But before all of that, Dr. Suina grew up in Cochiti Pueblo, within the adobe walls of his grandmother's home. He has recounted the nights she would sing to him in their native language and tell him stories of her childhood, well before electricity and cars had made their way to the Pueblo.

As a young boy, he was shunned by his teachers for speaking his native language at school and experienced the stark contrast between the teachings of his grandmother and those of his nonnative teachers.

Through it all, Dr. Suina found strength in his culture, later leading him to become a champion for keeping indigenous language and culture at the center of Native American education policy.

Dr. Suina worked for decades as a professor in the University of New Mexico's College of Education, and he directed the Institute for American Indian Education, serving Tribes across the Southwest. His scholarship focused on how maintaining connection to tradition, culture, and language improves educational outcomes for Native students.

He also developed new methods for assessing student learning and training programs for educators who teach Native students. And over the years, Dr. Suina has mentored countless teachers whose work continues to make a difference for New Mexico's children and children throughout the entire Southwest.

You can see the results of his work in so many communities, but especially in his home community of Cochiti Pueblo and at the Keres Children's Learning Center. The center is an indigenous language revitalization school that has become one of the very best early childhood and primary education centers in the entire country. It