

the Senate—they were taken aback that there was this enormous vote and success only a few months later to see another bill authored by Senator HAWLEY that I was proud to work with him on with the advocates. The advocates should be at the table as we are having these deliberations. Where are their voices?

Sixty-nine votes said yes. Now it sits in the U.S. House of Representatives, where recently even Speaker JOHNSON's office commented on taking action to make sure that this program will not die. I appreciate that.

I certainly hope that the families I have had the honor of meeting with, that I know Senator HAWLEY has met with, that all Senators share and agree that we should take further action on the Radiation Exposure Compensation Act meet with them as well.

I hope the Senators start with Mary Dickson. Learn her stories. Invite her in. Get to know her, her advocacy, her plight because by learning her story, we are going to help countless others all across America. I strongly urge my colleagues to stand with all the victims.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Missouri.

Mr. HAWLEY. Mr. President, for a year now, Senator LUJÁN and I have been coming to this floor and warning—warning—that the Radiation Exposure Act is going to expire. And that is why this body took action, not once but twice, in overwhelming bipartisan fashion to expand and extend RECA in a way that does justice to every American, every veteran who has been poisoned by their own government. And now it is incumbent upon the House to act.

I want to be clear. I will not consent to any short-term stopgap, any half-way measure. I will not give my consent to it.

It will not pass this floor with my consent. This body has acted. This body has spoken. And there can be no turning back now. We are not going to turn our backs on the victims, not any longer. It has been 50 years in the State of Missouri. It has been just as long in New Mexico. It has been just as long for the Navajo Nation. It has been just as long for the uranium miners, our veterans.

There can be no going back now, and so I object.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The objection is heard.

The Senator from Utah.

UNANIMOUS CONSENT REQUEST—S. 4403

Mr. LEE. Mr. President, I deeply appreciate the insights offered today by my friends and colleagues, and that they truly are. The senior Senator from Missouri and the junior Senator from New Mexico have made an impassioned plea—an impassioned plea that I am deeply sympathetic to for a variety of reasons, including and especially the fact that they are both right as to their respective States. The folks in Mis-

souri deserve to have this coverage, and so do people in New Mexico. There are also additional people not covered by the existing program in Utah who need to be covered.

In all three instances with respect to Utah, New Mexico, and Missouri, we need to get this done. You know, taking into account all of the arguments that they have made and the evidence that I have reviewed, I am prepared to do what it takes, and I am prepared to get this done today.

As I mentioned, this isn't just an abstract concept to me; this is near and dear to my heart. Many people I know and love have had their lives altered and, in many cases, ended by exposure to downwind radiation.

One of those people was a loving husband and father who raised seven children, who was taken at the prime of his life, at the peak of his career, just days after his 61st birthday, as he was surrounded by his wife and their seven children, one of whom stands at this desk today.

My father died from this in 1996, just 28 years ago, and we didn't know at the time—didn't know until years after that he had, in fact, been a victim of and then died of a cancer linked to his exposure as a child growing up in eastern Arizona, spending his summers in Reserve, NM, a small sawmill camp where his family lived each summer. He was exposed to downwind radiation, and that led to his untimely death.

My dad would be nearly 90 if he were alive today, and I can only imagine the youth and the vitality we would still see in him. I am convinced he would still be practicing law. I am convinced he would still be a runner. His life and that of so many others in Utah, Missouri, and New Mexico have been cut tragically short by this exposure, which is why we need to get this done.

So, look, in light of these concerns and the political realities we face, again, I want to make sure that RECA doesn't lapse, and so I want to offer an updated version of the Downwinders Act.

This bill would extend the benefits of the program to those in Missouri exposed to the hazards of improperly stored nuclear waste, while also addressing the historical oversights in New Mexico and in parts of Utah.

When we look at this, we have to do this to make sure that we are following the science, and in all three of those areas, the science is backed up, and in all three of those jurisdictions, not only does the science back it up, but there aren't other government programs that may overlap with it that provide this compensation.

Remember, if this were not the U.S. Government doing it, this would ultimately be some species of tort law. But because it is the U.S. Government and the U.S. Government, as a sovereign entity—you can't just sue it unless the U.S. Government makes itself amenable to suit, and that is really where RECA came in. Because of the fact that

we are uniquely situated, both by virtue of what the science currently backs up and the absence of other programs to do it, I think it makes sense to accord that to these States.

The other States covered by the legislation now pending in the House, that is stalled out in the House—it passed here, and so that is done. It has moved on from this Chamber. One of the reasons that I understand why it stalled out in the House is because of cost.

Now, I am not aware of the full context of the quote provided by my colleague from Utah in that quote. I don't know whether there was more context there or not. But if that was the whole context, I don't share that approach. I don't share that sentiment. In other words, we don't not do this just because it is expensive. The whole thing is expensive. The loss of life is expensive, and we need to address that.

The issue is, again, one, whether and to what extent claims are backed up by the science and whether and to what extent there are other programs that already cover it in one way or another, such that the bill adequately addresses that.

There are other States in that legislation pending in the House that deal with law in the Marshall Islands, Idaho, Kentucky, Ohio, Alaska, and perhaps one or two other jurisdictions. The claims of those States are not on equal footing. They are different from these claims. The Utah and New Mexico claims are very similar. They stem from the same sequence of events related primarily to exposure to downwind radiation from the atomic weapons testing. In Missouri, they are a little bit different, but they share enough of the same elements, and they are similarly backed by science. In these other jurisdictions, it is a little bit different.

That is where a lot of the—not all but a lot of the expense is accrued and a lot of concerns expressed in the House impeding its quick passage over there that might lead to it not being able to be passed at all.

But, again, look, to ensure we do our due diligence here, where there is uncertainty as to some of the other jurisdictions covered by that bill now pending in the House, my bill that I am offering now includes a requirement that the Federal Government must study and report on other regions that should be eligible for compensation.

We need to get this done. I will continue to fight for the recognition and compensation of all those exposed to radiation through no fault of their own because it is the right thing to do regardless of cost.

With the clock ticking down to just 18 days before RECA expires, every moment that jeopardizes benefits for those suffering the consequences of our Nation's past actions is significant. We can't ignore it. These individuals do not have the luxury of time that seems so abundant here in Washington; they need our help now. They deserve swift

and unencumbered continuation of access to the support that RECA provides.

So I urge my colleagues in Congress to pass the Downwinders Act, this expanded Downwinders Act, and send a clear message: America takes care of its own.

With this legislation, we will be able to take care of our own and expand the coverage to Missouri, to New Mexico, and to the previously unaddressed regions of Utah that have nonetheless been affected.

To that end, as if in legislative session, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate proceed to the immediate consideration of S. 4403, which is at the desk. I further ask that the bill be considered read a third time and passed and the motion to reconsider be considered made and laid upon the table with no intervening action or debate.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

The Senator from Missouri.

Mr. HAWLEY. Mr. President, I think now I have heard my friend from Utah change his position. Now he is saying he is willing to acknowledge that there needs to be an expansion of coverage for the people of Missouri, for the people of his own State, for the people of New Mexico.

I am glad we have gotten to this point. I am glad we are willing to acknowledge finally that indeed there are those who have suffered, Americans who have been poisoned by their government, who have never been compensated, and it is basic justice to compensate them. I think that is now the position that we are at. It has taken us a long time to get there, but I think that is what I now hear the senior Senator from Utah saying.

I think I also heard him say that cost should not be used as an excuse. Let's just be clear about something. The cost has been paid. It has been paid by the victims. Who is it who is paying the medical bills? The victims are. Who is it who is having to choose whether to do a cancer treatment or be able to afford school supplies for their kids? The victims are. Who are the ones who are having to decide whether they can afford the burial services or not for a loved one who has passed away from nuclear radiation? The victims are. They are the ones paying the cost.

The U.S. Government has gotten off scot-free. Fifty years, the U.S. Government hasn't paid a penny in my State, in New Mexico, the Navajo Nation in Arizona, to the miners, our veterans—nothing. Nothing. They are the ones who made the mess. In Missouri, it is still not cleaned up. As I stand here on this floor, Coldwater Creek is still poisoned, the Westlake Landfill is still burning, and Weldon Spring is not cleaned up. The government hasn't done anything.

I am glad to hear an acknowledgment finally that it is time for the Federal Government to take responsibility for what it has done. We can all agree on that.

We can all agree that the time to act is now, which is why this body has acted. It has done everything Senator LEE has just talked about. We have done it. We did it months ago—months ago. The Senator talks about getting this done today; it has been done. The Senate has done it. We passed this bill with nearly 70 votes months ago.

I urge the Senator to use his good offices in the House to speak to Speaker JOHNSON, who pledged, by the way, to the Congresswoman from Missouri, ANN WAGNER, in a public statement—he said the House would take this up and make sure RECA is renewed.

I believe the Senator is right. They have 18 days—18 days. He made a commitment. Let's keep our commitments.

I urge the Senator to use his good offices, now that we all agree, to get this done in the U.S. House of Representatives. That is where the obstacle is. But I reiterate, I will not be party to any attempt at some halfway measure, some short stopgap bill, or some effort to sweep this under the rug—not anymore. The victims have waited too long. They have waited too long.

I yield to my friend from New Mexico.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from New Mexico.

Mr. LUJAN. Mr. President, let me begin by quoting Senator Orrin Hatch, the primary author of the Radiation Exposure Compensation Act. In his final years, Senator Hatch said:

Updating this legislation is a moral imperative. RECA, as it is currently written, extends benefits only to uranium miners, millers, and transporters who worked until 1972. But an updated bill would extend benefits to those who worked after 1972, many of whom have developed cancer as a result of radiation exposure.

Let me repeat that. Senator Orrin Hatch said it was a moral imperative to provide justice to what are called Post-71 miners. And what does this bill offer to these Americans who have suffered for our country? Nothing. What does this bill offer to downwinders in Arizona, Nevada, Colorado, Idaho, Montana? Again, nothing. Instead, this exercise is an attempt to undermine the strong bipartisan coalition that passed historic RECA legislation.

I hope no one misreads what is happening today. There is a bipartisan coalition, there is a bipartisan group of advocates across the country that is growing and growing. There are more cosponsors in the House. The strongest vote that has ever taken place in the U.S. Senate has already passed this bill.

Let me be clear. Our bipartisan coalition will work with anyone who wants to meaningfully help the victims of all radiation and uranium exposure illnesses—including those that voted no when the Senate passed the RECA to the House just a few months ago. But we should help all of them, every one of these families that qualifies.

By the way, just because a community is included as a downwind county,

it doesn't mean all the people living there benefit from the program. They still have to fight and prove that they lived in this community for a number of years, that their critical illnesses and cancers are those that science shows were due to this exposure. They have to fight. It is not just given to them. There is a whole process associated with the science, and study after study continues to show how these families deserve this help.

As a matter of fact, in committee this week, we were having a hearing to help coal miners in America. And some of the experts that were in that room, I asked them about exposure with uranium and the kind of cancers that we should expect, and I asked them specifically about uranium mine workers. And it wasn't surprising when that witness told us that the same uranium mine workers who worked 1971 and before—their cancers—it turns out that the uranium mine workers that worked in 1972 had the same cancer as well.

Senator Orrin Hatch, through his wisdom and his words and in my conversations with this great leader, said: We have to fix these mistakes.

I will close with this. A few years ago, a Navajo elder—and I have shared this with our colleagues before—when she spoke before the House of Representatives, she asked an important question to a panel of Members that were not supportive of expanding RECA, and it was simple: Are you waiting for all of us to die so that the problem goes away?

With a simple vote in the House, taking up this Senate legislation that the Senate passed with 69 votes, authored by Senator HAWLEY, we can answer her question with a resounding: No, we are going to get help to families.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Missouri.

Mr. HAWLEY. Mr. President, I object.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The objection is heard.

The Senator from Utah.

Mr. LEE. Mr. President, we have got to keep our eye on the ball, our eye on the fact that the legislation, while pending in the House, is itself mired.

Now, I want to be clear in response to something, a comment made by the senior Senator from Missouri. This is not a new realization on my part. This is not a new willingness on my part to acknowledge the legitimacy of the claims and the suitability of the claims under RECA from Missouri and those from New Mexico. It is not new at all.

In fact, it is not just in this Congress that I support them. And 2 or 3 years ago, in the previous Congress, I introduced legislation because after reviewing the data, I concluded the beneficiaries—the would-be, need-to-be beneficiaries—in Missouri and those in New Mexico deserve to be added.

And so, to be clear, what I am offering here is not the whole thing that exists in the bill that is now passed by

the Senate and pending in the House but appears to be mired with no hope of passage over there. It is not the whole bill, but it is something, and it takes care of our three States. And it is not just because our three States are important and the others aren't. No, it is because the claims arising in our three respective States are materially different than those pending in other jurisdictions.

In most of those other jurisdictions, the scientific data isn't of the same caliber, drawing the same causal link between radiation exposure and liability on the part of the U.S. Government, and, ultimately, the conditions at issue, the types of cancers and related ailments that go along with it. They are materially different.

And so until such time as the science catches up, I think it is going to continue to have difficulty passing in the House. I could be wrong. That is how I see it. That is what I have heard from everyone I trust as to diagnosing the ability of that bill, or lack thereof, to pass in the House.

With respect to the Post-1971 uranium miners and millers, there is a distinction here. It is not a distinction that is necessarily impossible to overcome in every circumstance. But the Congressional Research Service looked at this for us, and we asked them to examine it. They concluded that the Post-1971 uranium millers and miners covered by the Hawley legislation now pending in the House were from the commercial sector. They were not doing this as contractors or as employees or otherwise as agents of the U.S. Government, but rather for private sector industry. And in those circumstances—in many of those circumstances, if not most or all—those can be addressed through tort law and/or through workmen's compensation law.

Now, for those that can't, there may well be an appropriate use of RECA. But if we are going to start expanding this into purely private sector activities, that changes the nature of this bill, and I suspect will continue to make it more difficult to pass in the House of Representatives.

So as to what we have got in Guam, the Marshall Islands, Idaho, Kentucky, Ohio, and Alaska, there may well be worthy beneficiaries there as to whom there exists adequate scientific research to justify the expansion of RECA and as to whom there is no other adequate recourse provided for by some other government program or through State tort law, workers' compensation law, or something else.

As to those, I would be happy to expand RECA, but we have to overcome those two issues. Those haven't been overcome. But they have been overcome as to Utah, as to New Mexico, and as to Missouri.

It is unfortunate that my friend and colleague from Missouri chose, rather than to allow the victims in his State and in New Mexico and the yet-uncov-

ered victims in the State of Utah to be taken within the protective boundaries of RECA today—we could have gotten this done today. I am confident we could have gotten it passed in the House right away. He chose to object to it.

In other words, unless you can have all of his bill passed, including the parts that are not scientifically backed—making it unpassable in the House—he is not going to let even the victims in Missouri or the victims in New Mexico get covered. That is most unfortunate.

We have got to deal with this. I will be back. We have to get this done.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Oklahoma.

BORDER ACT OF 2024

Mr. LANKFORD. Mr. President, three Senators started, about 8 months ago now, working to try to get some solutions on border security. It is for obvious reasons, because we have record high numbers over and over and over again at our southern border. We had a record high number in October, record high number in November, and record high number in December. In fact, December had the highest number of illegal crossings ever in the history of the country in a single day.

As of yesterday, we had about 5,200 people that illegally crossed yesterday. In fact, almost every day this year, we have had more than 5,000 illegally crossing day after day after day.

This is a very big issue that the American people want solved. It is a frustrating issue that we have not been able to get to a resolution on. It is an issue that people have been frustrated with President Biden because President Biden has not enforced the border the same way President Trump did or the same way President Obama did.

To be clear, this year we will have 2½ million people illegally cross the border. With the same law in place under President Obama, we had half a million people that illegally crossed that year.

And as I have raised over and over again with this administration, if they would just enforce the border the same way President Obama did, things would be very different. But they have chosen not to. They have chosen not to enforce it the same way President Trump did.

Instead, we have absolutely been overrun with people from literally all over the world. To put this in perspective, in the last 3 months, we have had more people illegally cross than any full year under President Obama.

They need to do what they can do. But Congress needs to do what we can do. We have got to change the definition of asylum. We have to change the appeals process. We have got to be able to speed up the process. We have got to provide more clarity so that we don't have people waiting around 8 years for a hearing. We can't just release people at the border, as what has happened day after day after day for years now. We can't have a brandnew parole pro-

gram that the Biden administration literally invented that no President has ever used to release thousands of people a day. We can't have that.

We need to solve this in the administration. We need to solve this in Congress. I wish that is what we were doing today, but we are not.

When Senator MURPHY and Senator SINEMA and I started working on this months ago, we were working to solve it. We were not able to get that done.

But today is not a bill. Today is a prop. Today is a political messaging exercise. Today is an opportunity to be able to have a vote that is sitting out there so people can send fundraising emails out later tonight and say, "Look, I tried to do something," when no work was actually done to try to get something done and completed and passed today.

In fact, I anticipate there will be fewer votes today than there were 2 months ago when this came up—on both sides of the aisle—because everyone sees this for what it is. It is not an effort to actually make law. It is an effort to do political messaging.

That doesn't help us as a country. We still have people that are illegally present here that need attention, and we are not getting it.

Now, we can say—Democrats can bring this bill up and say: Look, we tried to do something.

Well, so what. Republicans can do the same thing. We brought H.R. 2 twice. That has passed the House with a broad, sweeping piece of approval in the House to come over here to be able to change the way that actually asylum is done, the entire process. That has been voted down twice on a strictly partisan vote.

So we can have this vote today, and people can say: Well, Republicans voted against this; so it didn't pass.

Republicans can say: Democrats didn't vote for H.R. 2; so it didn't pass.

That still doesn't solve the problem. At the end of the day, the people in my State say: There is another 5,000 people that illegally crossed the border. Why aren't we sitting down and resolving this?

So, today, I am going to vote no on a bill that I think should pass, but there has been no effort to really get this to pass. Let's get us back to the table. Let's actually resolve this issue as we need to get done.

With that, I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Arizona.

Ms. SINEMA. Mr. President, I stand here today, yet again, as the border crisis continues to devastate my State.

On February 7, I stood here, angry that rank partisanship tanked the single most important piece of border security and immigration legislation produced in decades.

As we all remember, last October, I joined with Senators JAMES LANKFORD of Oklahoma and CHRIS MURPHY of Connecticut to craft this legislation. We worked every single day for over 4