

deal with the big forces pushing them around, will no longer hover over our work on the Federal budget.

Not only did we permanently end that devastating sequester, which, by the way, the military hated, as well as people who wanted help on the domestic side—it slashed them as well. General Mattis was fanatic, almost, in a good way about this. I miss him. But we Democrats did this in an extraordinary fashion.

The agreement includes a significant increase in funding for critical domestic priorities, including an increase in the domestic budget authority that even exceeds the increase in defense by \$10 billion over the next 2 years. For those counting, yesterday's deal means that Democrats have secured over \$100 billion in funding increases for domestic programs since President Trump took office. At the same time, it ensures that our military is prepared to keep Americans safe around the world.

This \$100 billion sounds abstract. But let me tell you what it means: more funding to the States for opioid treatment. The States are desperate for more help. Young people are dying of these horrible drugs. Treatment works.

I held in my arms a father from Buffalo whose son had served in Iraq, had PTSD, and then got hooked on opioids when he came back here. Finally, the kid hit bottom. He said: Dad, I want to go to a treatment center.

Unfortunately, there was a 23-week waiting period, and the young man killed himself in the 22nd week. The father cried in my arms, a big steel worker with tattoos and everything else. He was devastated, as anybody else would be over the loss of a child. Now there will be more money for that. This is not abstract.

What about fixing VA hospitals? What about more money to help educate our kids properly? What about some money to make the burden of college less great, as heavy as it is? What about money for climate and clean energy? What about money for infrastructure and transportation? That \$100 billion is not abstract. It is for all of these things. It is going to mean jobs for the American people. It is going to mean ladders up for the American people. It is going to mean some hope for the American people.

I know that on the other side some on the right will say: This increases the deficit. Just a year ago they voted to increase the deficit by \$1.5 trillion—now, maybe \$2 trillion—with a deep tax cut, the overwhelming part of which went to the wealthiest people in America. So don't start hollering "deficit" when it comes to helping the middle class when you are willing to deepen the deficit when it comes to helping the wealthy. Of course, now, part of this is that the debt ceiling will be extended until the summer of 2021, preserving the full faith and credit of the United States.

Looking forward, I think we have laid the groundwork for legislation

that will hopefully avoid another senseless and harmful government shutdown. The House will now move quickly to put this agreement up for a vote, and then the Senate can follow suit and send it to the President's desk. I was glad to see that the President tweeted—I believe it was tweeted—and put out a statement that he supports this agreement.

#### 9/11 VICTIM COMPENSATION FUND

Mr. SCHUMER. Madam President, finally, there is something we can vote on today at long, long last—the 9/11 Victim Compensation Fund for those brave heroes who rushed to the Towers on 9/11. The light at the end of the tunnel of what has been a very long and sometimes very dark time is now only a few hours away. We have waited too long to settle this matter. Too many people have put up bipartisan roadblocks along the road.

Now we are here, about to exit the tunnel and guarantee once and for all that the heroes who rushed to the Towers 18 years ago will no longer have to worry about compensation for their families when they are gone. These men and women, many of them sick, some of them gravely so, will not have to return to Congress anymore to fight for the compensation they always should have been given. They will be able to go home, tend to their illnesses, their family members, and their friends. That is what they always wanted to do—just take care of themselves, their families, and their friends who got sick from the poisonous stuff that was in the air right after 9/11, when, bravely, these men and women rushed to the Towers. That is what we want. We have waited too long.

Now, we are going to have a few amendment votes first, and I warn my colleagues on both sides of the aisle: If you vote for these amendments, you will, at best, delay the bill but, at worst, kill it. Neither is a good choice, neither is a palatable choice, and neither is an acceptable choice. Let's defeat these amendments. I believe they will be defeated. Then, let's pass the bill overwhelmingly.

This body has come together to help veterans time and again. These people are just like veterans, and 9/11 seemed like a war. I was there. I was there the next day. I was in Washington the day it happened. In a time of war, these brave people selflessly risked their lives and rushed to the Towers to defend our freedom, just like our soldiers do and just like our armed services do. So we should sign this bill into law.

Now, I will have more to say on the matter before and after the vote, about what this means, and thanking the many people, particularly the first responders—names like Zadroga, Pfeifer, and Alvarez—who made this happen. Until then, let me just say it is hard for me to express how much I am looking forward to passing this bill here today.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. THUNE. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

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

#### RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the leadership time is reserved.

#### CONCLUSION OF MORNING BUSINESS

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Morning business is closed.

#### LEGISLATIVE SESSION

#### NEVER FORGET THE HEROES: JAMES ZADROGA, RAY PFEIFER, AND LUIS ALVAREZ PERMANENT AUTHORIZATION OF THE SEPTEMBER 11TH VICTIM COMPENSATION FUND ACT

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate will resume consideration of H.R. 1327, which the clerk will report.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

A bill (H.R. 1327) to extend authorization for the September 11th Victim Compensation Fund of 2001 through fiscal year 2092, and for other purposes.

#### NOMINATION OF MARK T. ESPER

Mr. THUNE. Madam President, later this morning we will be voting on the nomination of Mark Esper to be Secretary of Defense. Dr. Esper is an outstanding choice. I don't need to tell anyone how essential the position of Secretary of Defense is to our national security. The Secretary of Defense is key to ensuring that our Nation is prepared to meet and defeat any threat. Dr. Esper has the experience, the knowledge, and the character for the job. He has an illustrious resume: West Point grad, Gulf war veteran, Bronze Star recipient, Rifle Company commander, a total of 10 years on Active Duty, and an additional 11 in the National Guard and Army Reserve.

In addition to his practical military and leadership experience, he has extensive experience on the policy side of things as well. He has a master's degree from the John F. Kennedy School of Government at Harvard and a doctorate in public policy from George Washington University here in the Nation's Capital. He worked as a senior professional staff member on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee and the Governmental Affairs Committee, as policy director for the House Armed Services Committee, and as national security adviser to former Senate Majority Leader Bill Frist. He also served