

RECESS

Mr. REID. Mr. President, I ask that the Senate now stand in recess under the previous order.

Thereupon, the Senate, at 12:38 p.m., recessed until 2:15 p.m. and reassembled when called to order by the Presiding Officer (Mr. CARPER).

PUBLIC SAFETY EMPLOYER-EMPLOYEE COOPERATION ACT OF 2007—Continued

Mr. ENZI. Mr. President, I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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 President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

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

Mrs. MURRAY. Mr. President, 46 years ago, President Kennedy designated this week to honor our first responders, particularly police officers who have lost their lives in the line of duty.

This week is National Police Week, and Thursday is National Peace Officers Memorial Day. Here in Washington, DC, and across the country, our communities are honoring the contributions of their public safety officers.

I think all of us in this body would agree that our police officers, our firefighters, paramedics, and all of our first responders are heroes. Their jobs are dangerous and they are extremely demanding. Unfortunately, they too often do not get the respect and gratitude they deserve. And that is why I rise this afternoon to urge my colleagues to support the Public Safety Employee-Employer Cooperation Act, which would take a small step toward repaying that sacrifice.

In most States around the country, our police and firefighters have the right to form unions. In fact, my brother was a firefighter in my home State of Washington. He is a proud member of his local union. But even so, there are still several communities in which our first responders do not have the ability to negotiate. They do not have the ability to bargain for better wages or hours or working conditions or benefits.

The bill we are considering on the Senate floor this afternoon would ensure all of our first responders have the power to organize and stand for their rights. And I believe it will make a real difference for our public safety officers and for all of our communities.

I thank Senator KENNEDY and Senator GREGG for their work on this legislation. Their work truly has been a bipartisan effort, and I hope it is a sign the entire Congress is willing now to come together to ensure our first responders have a right most workers in our country already enjoy.

I believe this bill will make our police and fire departments stronger and our communities safer. Everyone in our communities gains when our police and firefighters are working together with their employers. Having a voice in their work schedules, in their safety procedures, in their pay scales and benefits helps our police and fire departments. It helps them improve safety and reduce the number of deaths and injuries on the job, and it makes most departments more efficient. A department that is safer and more efficient is a department that is then better able to respond to a crisis.

I believe there is another reason we as Members of Congress should vote now to guarantee the right for all first responders to organize. Ever since the September 11 terrorist attacks, we have called on our first responders to play an even greater role in keeping our homeland safe.

Increasingly, as every one of us knows, our police, our firefighters, our troopers, our paramedics are the eyes and ears on the ground in our cities, counties, and States where they serve, no matter how large or small their communities.

So I think as we ask our first responders to do more for our entire Nation, we owe it to them to ensure that across the country they have the same collective bargaining rights.

This bill is pretty simple. The new law would only affect States that do not already allow their public safety forces to bargain collectively. It does not set up a new system of legislation. In fact, it is designed to ensure States have as much freedom as possible to decide how to implement this law. And it specifically allows States to keep enforcing their right-to-work laws. States that are affected would have 1 year to create a process for discussions with workers. If they have not acted by then, the Federal Labor Relations Authority would establish a way to give employees the ability to choose whether to form a union.

And that is it. Unlike some of the false rumors you may have been hearing, it does not encourage police and firefighters to go on strike. In fact, it specifically outlaws that. It does not require State and local governments to adopt any particular terms. It excludes our elected sheriffs and other policymakers, and it will not affect an employee's right to work part-time or prevent them from volunteering.

In short, this bill would be very good for our first responders and very good for our communities. But seeing this bill become law would not only be a victory for our first responders, it would be the first major victory for organized workers in the last 7 years. Unions have forged the way for millions of working families to share in the prosperity they helped create. Unions have helped balance the relationship between employers and employees. And they help to ensure that working families get their fair share of

the economic pie. I am very proud to stand with working families to protect their right to organize and advocate for on-the-job safety, job security, and fair pay.

As we recognize National Police Week, what better way to honor the sacrifice our police and other first responders have given us than by ensuring they have the right to collectively bargain. Allowing our first responders to negotiate with their employers is the fair thing to do, and it also happens to be the right thing to do.

I hope all of our colleagues will support them and our communities by saying yes and passing this legislation.

I yield the floor.

Mr. KENNEDY. Mr. President, I see my colleague from New York. I think he would like to speak on this issue, and then we will continue to balance off the speakers the best that we can to try to take into consideration the Members' schedules.

But we thank the Senator from New York. If he is prepared to speak, we would welcome his comments.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from New York.

Mr. SCHUMER. I am going to speak on this for a minute and then on one other issue that I mentioned to the Senator from Massachusetts. But first I thank him for his leadership.

The bottom line is, we have made progress in this country over the last 100 years because workers gather and bargain. Simply because somebody is in a life-threatening position, a position that saves lives—police and fire and emergency medical personnel—does not mean they should be deprived of that right.

The rules might not be exactly the same, and this bill is cognizant of that, but at the same time, for a policeman, a firefighter, to have the right to basically bargain and give his family a life with some decency and some dignity is extremely important. So I thank the leader from the Health, Education and Labor and Pensions Committee for bringing this bill forward. I think it will mark real progress.

I think, again, those who put their lives on the line for us, police and fire, should not be penalized because they are in those professions. The right to bargain is an important one. Many State and local workers have it. It is something I supported my whole career. I am proud to be a supporter of this legislation. I thank the Senator from Massachusetts for his leadership.

(The remarks of Mr. SCHUMER pertaining to the introduction of S.J. Res. 32 are located in today's RECORD under "Statements on Introduced Bills and Joint Resolutions.")

Mr. SCHUMER. I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Who seeks recognition?

Mr. KENNEDY. Mr. President, I thank my colleague and friend from Wyoming, Senator ENZI, for extending the courtesy, because we have had some speakers on our side, out of respect for their schedules. We have welcomed their comments at this time.