

# 9/11 victims bill stalls as Republican senators seek conditions for funding

By **Devlin Barrett** –[Washington Post](#), July 17, 2019.

A **Republican senator** moved Wednesday to stall for the moment **legislation** providing compensation to 9/11 workers, sparking an emotional appeal on behalf of those sick and dying after responding to Ground Zero. Although lawmakers for several weeks generally declared broad support for the measure to extend a victims' compensation fund, the objections of two conservative senators suggest its Senate passage may stall or require more political muscle to enact.

Sen. Rand Paul (R-Ky.) spoke out on the Senate floor Wednesday after Sen. Kirsten Gillibrand (D-N.Y.) proposed that the bill be approved by **unanimous consent**. Under Senate rules, an objection from a single senator can block a measure offered via unanimous consent. Paul said he objected because any program that would last decades "should be **offset by cutting spending** that's less valuable. We need, at the very least, to have this debate," he said, adding that he would offer an **amendment** on the cost of the bill when it reaches the Senate floor.

Sen. Mike Lee (R-Utah) also has placed a hold on the legislation, according to **advocates**. Paul's objection angered Democrats, who have been able to muster bipartisan support for the bill, which has 73 co-sponsors in the Senate.

"I am deeply disappointed that my colleague has just objected," Gillibrand said. "Enough of the political games. Our 9/11 first responders and our entire nation are watching to see if this body actually cares. Do we care about the men and women who answer the call of duty?" At times, Gillibrand's voice cracked with emotion as she made a case for the measure's quick passage. "Thousands of those men and women have died," she said. Others, she said, still have to "face the terrifying reality that they are going to die, because of what they did on 9/11 and the months thereafter."

A **spokeswoman** for Paul said the senator wasn't seeking to block the bill, but rather to add a provision to pay for it. Paul's office said he is proposing cutting \$2 billion a year from other federal programs, including agriculture, housing, and mandatory spending. The head of the Fraternal Order of Police, Chuck Canterbury, called Paul's objection to the legislation "disgraceful." The International Association of Fire Fighters wrote to Lee on Wednesday urging him to lift his hold on the legislation, which the House passed overwhelmingly last week.

"On behalf of the nation's 317,000 professional fire fighters and emergency medical responders, I insist that you immediately lift your hold," IAFF President Harold A. Schaitberger wrote to Lee. "The fact that you choose to make these brave men and women wait another day to pass this critically important legislation is simply unconscionable."

A spokesman for Lee said the senator "fully expects the 9/11 compensation bill to pass before the August recess and he is seeking a vote to ensure the fund has the proper oversight in place to prevent fraud and abuse." Senators often place **holds on bills** in an effort to add or remove something, or to force a concession from fellow lawmakers on another issue.

The 9/11 victim compensation bill passed in the House, 402 to 12, following the death of a former NYPD detective, Luis Alvarez, who testified last month about the urgent need to replenish the fund. Officials say that money is fast running out, leading to pay-out reductions of as much as 70 percent for recent applicants.

**Senate Majority Leader** Mitch McConnell (R-Ky.) has pledged to bring the measure to a vote soon, but it now appears he has some resistance. "Senator McConnell is living up to his commitment made to 9/11 responders when they handed him Luis Alvarez's badge, and he appears to be trying to get this passed as quickly as possible under Senate rules," said Ben Chevat, executive director of Citizens for the Extension of the James Zadroga Act, a group that advocates for the legislation. McConnell's commitment came after he was publicly attacked by Jon Stewart, former host of "The Daily Show," who lambasted lawmakers for dragging their feet. Stewart has become the celebrity face of the effort to make the 9/11 fund permanent, and has said he plans to return to Congress when the Senate votes on the issue.

The fund provides money to those who have contracted diseases that have been linked to exposure to toxic debris. Lawmakers created it in 2011. It has paid about \$5 billion to approximately 21,000 claimants. About 700 were for deaths that happened long after the attacks. With more than 19,000 additional unpaid claims, the fund is running out of money. Rupa Bhattacharyya, the special master overseeing the funds, announced that pending claims, including those that were received before Feb. 1, will be paid at 50 percent of their prior value. Subsequent claims are being paid at just 30 percent. Under current law, the fund is scheduled to stop taking claims in December 2020. The new legislation would extend the program for seven decades, at an estimated cost of \$10.2 billion for the first decade. A searing **congressional hearing** last month, featuring testimony from Stewart and the dying Alvarez, refocused public attention on the plight of the sick workers and the faltering fund.

**Questions:** 1. Look up the meaning of the words highlighted in **Bold** & establish how they relate to the topic at hand.

2. In what ways do Senator Rand Paul's objections to the passage of the bill fit in with the ideas of Robert Nozick?

3. Examine the article's source. Should you consider the Washington Post to be a reliable source? Why/why not?

4. Investigate the role of former 'Daily Show' host, Jon Stewart, and comment on the effectiveness of his activism.

5. Write an extended response to the following statement:

*"It is far easier to see the 'footprint' of Robert Nozick's idea when it comes to America than in Ireland."*