

Testimony of Jon Stewart
House Judiciary Committee
June 11th, 2019

Chairman Nadler, Ranking Member Collins and Members of the Committee, thank you for letting me join these 9/11 responders and survivors, these heroes, today on this panel.

And thank you for this hearing today on the September 11th Victim Compensation Fund and the legislation Never Forget the Heroes: Permanent Authorization of the September 11th Victim Compensation Fund-- that would fully fund the program and extend its authorization.

You have just heard in agonizing detail why you need to act on this legislation.

Many talk about 9/11 and how the country responded to it, but frankly the response on the impact of the toxins at Ground Zero, as these men and women have outlined, has not been as good as it should have been-- to say the least.

First, the issues these heroes face is squarely the fault of terrorists. But in the rush to get Wall Street open again and move people back in, mistakes were made.

People—local residents, students and commuters into the area (as well as responders)—were told that the air was safe. But it was not. Children were brought back to school next to a toxic pit--and then it was denied-- for *years*-- that there was a health problem. Those who responded and worked in the pit—and had the most exposure-- were of course the first to feel the effects. But soon residents became ill, too—with persistent coughs or rare cancers.

So, for many years since 9/11, these responders and residents had to walk the halls of Congress, looking to see if “Remember 9/11” is more than a cheap twitter slogan senators and representatives use to nod in the direction of empathy without having to do anything.

They had to work to get Congress to provide Health care for these injuries from toxins; they had to work to get compensation for the injuries so that their families would not suffer.

First responders, firefighters, police, construction workers, Red Cross volunteers, transit workers, FBI agents and schoolteachers have had to go door to door down your gold- and marble-lined hallways, because 17 years after the attacks on 9/11, they and their families are still dealing with the impact of the toxins at Ground Zero.

They are in every state and 433 out of 435 Congressional Districts.

The fact that they have had continue to do this is beyond my comprehension.

But I have to say that my impression of Washington might be changing.

Some things *are* getting done.

Just a few weeks ago I said that the Trump Justice Department was doing a good job running the program, I would never have thought that I would say it, but I did because it is true.

The fact that this hearing is happening in this committee today is heartening. I understand there has been some recent unpleasantness.

This legislation has over 300 bipartisan sponsors. 300 members of the House agreeing to take action is pretty good.

I want to thank Ranking Member Collins for his support today; he and Mr. Nadler have set an example that the parties can come together. All of the support gives me some hope.

There seems to be a general understanding and agreement that compensating the 9/11 heroes through this bill needs to happen. I thank all of you—Republicans and Democrats—for that.

These people can't wait—the cuts to them or their survivors are happening now.

I know that this is going to cost a lot, but you need figure out how to pay for it.

It is not their job to tell you how to pay for it--they did their job.

I ask you to move this bill and get it to the floor.

Two weeks ago, I was at Ground Zero for the dedication of the National September 11th Memorial, for the dedication of a new memorial glade, with ragged stone monoliths that honor those who have become ill and those that have died from 9/11 related illnesses.

The space will never bring closure to those who have lost so much and continue to suffer so deeply, but it recognizes the great courage and strength they gave so willingly and the price they continue to pay.

But they need this bill. Please help them.