

# Jon Stewart: "They responded in five seconds", 9-11 first responders, Address to Congress - 2019

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I want to thank Mr. Collins and Mr. Nadler for putting this together, but as I sit here today, I can't help but think what an incredible metaphor this room is for the entire process, that getting healthcare and benefits for 9/11 first responders has come to. Behind me, a filled room of 9/11 first responders, and in front of me, a nearly empty Congress. Sick and dying, they brought themselves down here to speak to no one.

It's shameful, it's an embarrassment to the country, and it is a stain on this institution. You should be ashamed of yourselves for those that aren't here, but you won't be because accountability doesn't appear to be something that occurs in this chamber. We don't want to be here. Lou doesn't want to be here. None of these people want to be here, but they are, and they're not here for themselves.

They're here to continue fighting for what's right. Lou's going to go back for his 69th chemo. The great Ray Pfeifer would come down here his body riddled with cancer and pain, where he couldn't walk, and the disrespect shown to him and to the other lobbyists on this bill is utterly unacceptable. I would be so angry at the latest injustice that's done to these men and women, and another business card thrown away, as a way of shooing us away, like children trick or treating, rather than the heroes that they are and will always be.

Ray would say, "Calm down Joni, calm down, I got all the cards I need," and he would tap his pocket, where he kept the prayer cards for 343 firefighters. The official FDNY response time for 9/11 was five seconds, five seconds. That's how long it took for FDNY, for NYPD, for Port Authority, for EMS to respond to an urgent need from the public, five seconds. Hundreds died in an instant. Thousands more poured in to continue to fight for their brothers and sisters.

The breathing problems started almost immediately, and they were told they weren't sick, they were crazy. Then as the illnesses got worse and things became more apparent, "Well,

okay, you're sick, but it's not from the pile." Then when the science became irrefutable, "Okay, it's the pile, but this is a New York issue. I don't know if we have the money." And I'm sorry if I sound angry and undiplomatic, but I'm angry and you should be too, and they're all angry as well.

They have every justification to be that way. There's not a person here, there is not an empty chair on that stage that didn't tweet out never forget the heroes of 9/11, never forget their bravery, never forget what they did, what they gave to this country. Well, here they are, and where are they? It would be one thing if their callous indifference and rank hypocrisy were benign, but it's not. Your indifference costs these men and women their most valuable commodity, time.

It's one thing they're running out of. This should be flipped, this hearing should be flipped. These men and women should be up on that stage, and Congress should be down here answering their questions as to why this is so damn hard and takes so damn long. And why no matter what they get, something's always pulled back and they got to come back.

Mr. Johnson, you made a point earlier, and it was one that we have heard over and over again in these halls, and I couldn't help but to answer to it, which was you said, "Look, you know, you guys are obviously heroes, and 9/11 was a big deal but you know, we have a lot of stuff here to do, and, you know, we got to make sure there's money for a variety of disasters, hurricanes and tornadoes."

But this wasn't a hurricane. This wasn't a tornado.

By the way, that's your job anyway. We can't fund these programs, you can. Setting aside that no American in this country should face financial ruin because of a health issue. Certainly 9/11 first responders shouldn't have to decide whether to live or to have a place to live. The idea that you can only give them five more years of the VCF because you're not quite sure what's going to happen five years from now, well I can tell you, I'm pretty sure what's going to happen five years from now.

More of these men and women are going to get sick, and they're going to die. And I am awfully tired of hearing that it's a 9/11 New York issue. Al Qaeda didn't shout death to

Tribeca. They attacked America, and these men and women, and their response to it is what brought our country back, it's what gave a reeling nation a solid foundation to stand back upon, to remind us of why this country is great, of why this country is worth fighting for, and you are ignoring them.

You can end it tomorrow. Why this bill isn't unanimous consent and a standalone issue is beyond my comprehension, and I have yet to hear a reasonable explanation for why. It will get stuck in some transportation bill or some appropriations bill, and get sent over to the Senate, where a certain someone from the Senate will use it as a political football to get themselves maybe another new import tax on petroleum, because that's what happened to us in 2015.

We won't allow it to happen again. Thank God for people like John, thank God for people like Ray Pfeifer, thank God for all of these people who will not let it happen. They responded in five seconds. They did their jobs with courage, grace, tenacity, humility. 18 years later? Do yours. Thank you.

SOURCE: ABCNews

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