

able to dictate how each person expresses their individuality, and no government ought to be able to use children as pawns to punish and intimidate others.

I am committed to supporting LGBT individuals under siege in Chechnya, and through the combined efforts of wonderful organizations like the Council for Global Equality, Human Rights First, Human Rights Campaign, Freedom House, and so many NGOs in Russia, we will continue to raise the alarm about Chechnya and Russia's declining human rights record and help find a safe haven to those facing persecution.

Living in a free society and a truly blessed nation like ours, it reaffirms our moral obligation and our unique responsibility to speak for those who find themselves under the shadow of oppression and tyranny.

Mr. Speaker, I am against any actions that undermine the human rights of any person, and, in the coming days, I will introduce a resolution that condemns these reports of violence and persecution in Chechnya. It calls on its officials to immediately stop the abduction, the detention, and the torture of individuals based on their sexual orientation. It is just unbelievable.

It urges further our U.S. leadership to continue to condemn Chechnya's ongoing human rights violations and demand the release of individuals wrongfully detained. We remain steadfast in our commitment to protect and promote the human rights and dignity of all people.

Mr. Speaker, it is my hope that our colleagues would join me in this worthy endeavor.

NATIONAL INFRASTRUCTURE WEEK

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from California (Mr. COSTA) for 5 minutes.

Mr. COSTA. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to urge my colleagues to act together in a bipartisan fashion to improve the state of our Nation's infrastructure. It is long overdue.

This week is National Infrastructure Week where we recognize the challenges we face in addressing America's transportation systems, its water systems, its ports, its harbors. Sadly, what we have to recognize isn't particularly positive.

This year, the infrastructure grade that we received from America's Society of Civil Engineers, a national organization that is made up of some of the best and the brightest engineers in our country, gave our Nation a D-plus. That is not a good grade. Never has been.

As a matter of fact, this same organization has estimated that, to rectify our Nation's infrastructure, we need to invest over \$1 trillion, \$1 trillion of new investments, to provide the sort of transportation, water and ports and harbors, that our Nation needs and deserves.

So we must do better than a D-plus. Literally, we are living off the investments that our parents and our grandparents made a generation and two ago, and it is an aging infrastructure.

We know from our country's history that the infrastructure projects that move forward most effectively are those combined with local, State, and Federal funding; all the governments doing their part with private participation.

We, in California, are no strangers to infrastructure problems caused by a lack of investment, but we are stepping up to the plate to make the necessary crucial improvements.

In my own district, the counties that I represent, Merced, Madera, and Fresno Counties, have all increased their local sales tax in order to pay for crucial road repairs, new road projects, highways, and other essential transportation needs.

Last month, the California legislature enacted legislation that Governor Brown signed into law to increase the State's gas tax and vehicle fee to pay for roads, bridges, and other transportation improvement projects.

Clearly, these are tough decisions, and they come with policy implications and political risks. I mean, let's face it, it is never popular, whether it is your local, State, or Federal level, to raise taxes to pay for these much-needed improvements, but it must be done. The last time we increased the gas tax nationally was 1994.

In California, Governor Brown's decision to pursue high-speed rail, among other efforts, is a long-term commitment in the 21st century to do what is necessary to create the inner city rail and auto and air transportation, the interconnectivity that comes with that.

There is a reason why we must do this. California has 40 million people today. By the year 2030, it will have 50 million people; the sixth or seventh largest economy in the world.

So why are we not doing this on a national level? It is simple. What is lacking is the political will—the political will to come together on a bipartisan basis. Now is the time for the Federal Government to face this challenge head-on in a bipartisan fashion. And we know we can do this.

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Not only has the process begun in California, but many other States across the Nation have stepped up to the plate to put in resources to rebuild their infrastructure, and we must get serious about that. President Trump has made a proposal for infrastructure, and I think we need to ensure that that infrastructure proposal also includes water.

Water is critical not just in California but in Western States and throughout the country. We need to significantly improve our water storage or water delivery and our drinking water systems. We have taken initial

steps to meet these challenges by acting at the State and Federal level.

In 2014, California passed Proposition 1, which authorized \$7.12 billion for water infrastructure projects. Late last year, after hard work by many of my colleagues in a bipartisan fashion, the California delegation passed the Water Infrastructure Improvement Act, or the WIIN Act, that was signed by President Obama last December. This law authorized vital new water projects across the State, including, in the valley, additional storage at the New Exchequer Dam, and San Luis Reservoir in Merced County, as well as funding for water recycling projects like the North Valley Regional Recycled Water Program, and it will provide 50,000 acre-feet of additional water for both Merced and Stanislaus Counties.

Although we have made some significant efforts to improve California's water infrastructure, this first good step indicates that we must build upon that and do more at all levels of government. That is what we must do on a bipartisan level. Let's take President Trump's suggestion and make this a bipartisan effort. This is an opportunity to invest.

DC CENTRAL KITCHEN HELPS THE UNDERSERVED

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Pennsylvania (Mr. THOMPSON) for 5 minutes.

Mr. THOMPSON of Pennsylvania. Mr. Speaker, earlier this week, I had the privilege of visiting the DC Central Kitchen, which is a nonprofit that fights hunger and poverty here in the Nation's Capital. But it fights hunger differently. Yes, DC Central Kitchen feeds people who are hungry. It also offers the training, empowerment, and career opportunities that allow people to finally be free from hunger and poverty.

As chairman of the Subcommittee on Nutrition of the Committee on Agriculture, this visit was especially important to me, and I am grateful that I could volunteer and tour the site with my colleague and subcommittee ranking member, Congressman JIM McGOVERN.

DC Central Kitchen is located in the basement of one of the Nation's largest homeless shelters. It focuses its services on addressing the deeper issues that have plagued generations: hunger, homelessness, incarceration, and, ultimately, poverty.

CEO Michael Curtin made it very clear that DC Central Kitchen isn't merely offering handouts to those in need. He said, "You can't feed your way out of poverty," and I wholeheartedly agree with him. DC Central Kitchen puts as much emphasis on training those who come through its doors to prepare them to earn living wages as it does to provide meals to Washington's marginalized citizens.

People who receive services there truly do have a chance to escape poverty. They find employment right at DC Central Kitchen or in Washington's hospitality industry. DC Central Kitchen is helping people find jobs that pay living wages and obtain lasting careers.

In 1989, a nightclub manager named Robert Egger founded DC Central Kitchen. He was frustrated with his volunteer experiences at traditional charitable responses to help end hunger and homelessness. His idea was to create a "central kitchen" where wasted food could be turned into balanced meals for shelters and nonprofits and jobless adults could be trained in the culinary arts.

Of course, the critics said it couldn't be done. It was unwise. It was unsustainable. The concept was just not possible, they said. Well, they were wrong. And Robert was ahead of the curve and ahead of his time.

DC Central Kitchen's successes have been celebrated nationally. Its story has been featured in outlets ranging from National Geographic to The Washington Post to The Chronicle of Philanthropy and many more places. It works every day to transform food that would otherwise be wasted into nutritious meals for homeless shelters and nonprofits. It serves farm-to-school menus to low-income schoolchildren, all while creating job opportunities for unemployed adults who have completed its culinary job training program.

The numbers are clear. Last year, 91 individuals graduated from the program; 88 percent of them found good-paying jobs. Fifty percent of last year's graduates received a wage increase within 12 months of being on that job.

DC Central Kitchen has also expanded access to healthy foods by making them available at corner stores in D.C.'s food deserts. Last year alone, it supported store owners in selling more than 207,000 units of affordable, healthy snacks and produce.

Mr. Speaker, DC Central Kitchen is a shining example of what can be done to truly help the underserved in our communities all across this Nation. By giving individuals career training and job skills, it allows them to break the back of intergenerational poverty that has hindered the lives of so many.

No one in America should go hungry. Everyone deserves a shot at living a full, healthy, and productive life. DC Central Kitchen shows us this is possible.

Mr. Speaker, I offer my congratulations to the staff, to the volunteers, to the students, and to all those who had this vision with DC Central Kitchen.

THANK YOU, LAW ENFORCEMENT

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentlewoman from Missouri (Mrs. HARTZLER) for 5 minutes.

Mrs. HARTZLER. Mr. Speaker, I would like to take this opportunity to

praise law enforcement across the Nation and the State of Missouri for their dedication, courage, and sacrifice in serving our communities.

This week is National Police Week. We should thank police every week, but this time of year provides a special opportunity to give honor where honor is due. Law enforcement officers deserve our deep appreciation and respect.

Police officers do an excellent job protecting the residents of my district, from Columbia to Waynesville, to Warrensburg and throughout Missouri. They stand ready to help wherever needed. That is why, today, I am introducing the Police Officers Protecting Children Act. This bill would allow schools that want to allow retired or off-duty law enforcement officers to be armed as a security measure to protect children in our schools. If a school wants to allow off-duty or retired police to protect their students, the Federal Government shouldn't stop them.

The Police Officers Protecting Children Act is even more important for schools in our rural communities where law enforcement may take a significant amount of time to respond to an emergency. A well-placed retired or off-duty officer could save lives.

Law enforcement in my district have shown their support for this bill because they know firsthand that police officers have the training and experience to protect our children when it counts. They have the trust of our communities and have years of experience carrying a weapon. I thank them for their service and their willingness to protect our children while they are at school.

Law enforcement officers live out the honorable duo of bravery and service. They put their lives on the line every day to protect our communities, often without the thanks they deserve. They work day in and day out patrolling our neighborhoods, getting drugs off the streets, and protecting us from criminals who seek to do us harm.

In Missouri, we honor the brave men and women who carry the badge as police officers. This National Police Week, I am glad to recognize those officers and their bravery and service protecting the people of Missouri.

So to the police around the Nation and in my home State of Missouri, I say to you: Thank you for your service. You make a difference every day, and we are so grateful for you.

GROWING UP IN A LAW ENFORCEMENT FAMILY

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. THOMPSON of Pennsylvania). The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Kansas (Mr. MARSHALL) for 5 minutes.

Mr. MARSHALL. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to give a very personal thanks to our men and women in uniform during this National Police Week.

I was raised the son of the chief of police and the head of the fire depart-

ment of El Dorado, Kansas, for some 25 years. In that time, he taught me discipline and values. He taught me there was right and there was wrong, that some things are black and white in the world, and my father represented what the law was in my community.

Today, I celebrate this week with him and the men and women who served with him who gave me a deep respect for the rule of law and those who serve daily to uphold it. Certainly, I am the person I am today because of what my parents taught me, my family, and the community, and they still do to this day.

I can remember growing up and the first day my dad brought home Rene, our trained police dog, and how that dog became part of our family, a very gentle dog until one morning, we were playing football in the backyard, and one of my friends tackled me. We watched that police dog climb a 6-foot-high fence to come to my rescue.

I remember my dad pulling people from fires. I remember riding in the back of an old Jeep that was overhauled from an Army Reserve to fight prairie fires and grass fires, something I am sure that kids wouldn't be allowed to do today. My dad took me to the firing range time and time again, and I would watch my dad shoot 25 rounds into a small circle the size of a quarter week after week, training to do his job right. I remember him getting called out to domestic disturbances and crime scenes. I remember him disarming people with weapons time and time again, putting his life on the line.

But it is just not my family, Mr. Speaker. Families across the country have loved ones who serve our communities, States, and country.

Earlier this week, President Trump gave a great message: "No one asked these selfless men and women to enlist in this righteous cause or to enroll as foot soldiers in the eternal struggle against crime and violence. They joined the cause because their hearts were big and full of amazing courage."

Mr. Speaker, I salute the men and women in uniform and thank them for their service.

MY RECENT TRAVEL TO AFGHANISTAN

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentlewoman from Alabama (Mrs. ROBY) for 5 minutes.

Mrs. ROBY. Mr. Speaker, I rise to offer a report on my recent travels to Afghanistan, where our Armed Forces remain engaged at a critical front of the global war on terrorism.

I have been a part of several congressional delegations to Afghanistan to survey conditions there, particularly as it concerns the progress being made by Afghan women and girls to attain equal rights. I was honored once again to lead a delegation of my colleagues to the region to conduct oversight of American operations and better inform our efforts here in Congress to fulfill