

Maryland, ends in just 3 days. That is Saturday, December 15.

I have often said that voting for the Affordable Care Act was the most important vote of my career. When Congress passed the Affordable Care Act in 2010, we enshrined into law the promise that all Americans have a right to accessible and affordable health insurance coverage in this great country.

By strengthening the individual health insurance market, protecting people with preexisting conditions, and expanding Medicaid, we brought this promise closer to reality. We promised that individuals would not have to worry about affording health insurance or paying outrageous rates because of preexisting conditions. We safeguarded access to care for people who need it by preventing health insurance providers from placing limits on their coverage.

Because of the ACA, individuals and families across this country do not have to live with the daily fear of financial disaster they could face if they got sick while they were uninsured. In total, approximately 20 million Americans gained health insurance coverage as a result of the ACA.

During the November election, the American people reminded us that they want their elected officials to protect their access to affordable healthcare. In my home State of Maryland, the uninsured population is at an all-time low of 6.1 percent. As more people have gotten coverage, the cost of uncompensated care in Maryland hospitals has gone down by \$400 million from 2013 to 2017.

The open enrollment period that is quickly coming to a close in many States is the only time during which people can act to protect themselves and their families by purchasing coverage through healthcare.gov or their State health insurance marketplace.

Quality health plans for 2019 are more affordable than many people may realize. Eight in ten people using healthcare.gov qualify for financial assistance, meaning that most people can find a health plan with a premium of less than \$75 per month.

According to data released by the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services through December 1, enrollment is down 11 percent on the Federal exchange compared to last year.

I am proud that Maryland has embraced the ACA to help people in our State secure the coverage they need to keep their families healthy and safe. I am proud of all the hard work the Maryland Health Connection continues to do to make it easier for people to get enrolled.

The Trump administration has focused their efforts on sabotaging the ACA by making it harder for Americans to sign up for coverage through actions such as shortening the enrollment period, slashing funding for marketing and outreach programs, and lowering spending by more than 80 percent on local in-person assistance through the navigator program.

Because of these efforts, there is fear about the future of ACA. I want to make one thing very clear: The ACA is not going anywhere, despite the efforts of the Trump administration to sabotage this law. Please know that I intend to do everything in my power to keep the ACA intact and to make sure that people have health coverage that is meaningful, affordable, and accessible.

So, Mr. Speaker, I urge everyone in the next 3 days to discuss your options and find out how to get the best plan for you as an individual and for your family.

Everyone deserves access to healthcare that will improve their lives. Healthcare is a right, not a privilege, and I pledge to do my part to protect that right.

WHY OUR BORDER MATTERS

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

Mr. McCLINTOCK. Mr. Speaker, every nation has a natural right and a fundamental responsibility to determine who is admitted within its borders. This is what defines a country and ultimately determines whether its culture, customs, and institutions will endure.

The unique qualities that develop within each country's borders naturally make some countries more desirable places to live than others. These differences drive immigration patterns. The more successful a nation, the greater the demand to immigrate to it, and ours is the most successful in human history.

Most of the world's 7½ billion people live in violent and impoverished conditions, and it is no wonder that they find the United States an attractive alternative. Yet uncontrolled and indiscriminate immigration from those countries to ours risks importing the same undesirable conditions that encouraged their immigration in the first place.

History offers us many examples of great civilizations that have succumbed to this paradox, and the current crisis on our southern border poses a fundamental test of whether ours may join them.

America has traditionally welcomed the truly persecuted who have escaped to our shores, but what is unfolding today makes a mockery of our asylum laws. This was not a peaceful caravan of asylum seekers, as many have attempted to portray. A caravan is a group of people traveling legally and peacefully through a foreign land. An invasion is a group of people attempting to violate a nation's border by force, whether by military or mob action.

The vast majority camped on our southern border are military-aged males. Authorities have already identified roughly 600 as known criminals,

and Mexican law enforcement has reportedly arrested roughly 100 for crimes committed in their country. The fact that this force has attacked both Mexican and U.S. law enforcement, with several injuries reported, contradicts any claims that, as a group, they come with peaceful intent.

Nor are they asylum seekers in any conventional sense. No doubt many are nonviolent and simply caught up in the group dynamic of a mob. But poverty and violence in a country does not entitle every person in it to enter ours. Asylum is reserved for those who have been specifically targeted for harm by their own government based on their race, religion, nationality, political opinion, or social group, and who have entered directly into our country from their own.

In these instances, asylum is reached by crossing a border and accomplishing separation from that government. A Central American arriving in Mexico has already achieved this and, therefore, has no call on asylum in any other country. The appropriate request to make is to the Government of Mexico, a request some have already made and Mexico has granted.

Nothing succeeds like success. If this group is allowed to muscle its way into the United States, we can expect many and still larger groups to follow.

If anything, this crisis should emphasize the importance of completing the border wall that Congress first authorized in 1996 and President Trump is desperately trying to construct.

A forceful incursion of our border can be repelled only by applying equal or greater force. That is a recipe for violence and bloodshed. The physical separation provided by a wall can prevent that.

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It not only protects the officers who place their lives on the line in defense of our law, it also protects the lawbreakers themselves from the violent conduct that their behavior otherwise would make inevitable.

Orderly immigration, regulated by law and protected by secure borders, is a prerequisite to a civilized and prosperous nation. If our immigration laws are not enforced, then our borders become meaningless and America becomes a vast, open territory between Canada and Mexico susceptible to every social, political, and economic disorder brought to it.

This seems to be the ultimate aim of the American left and its powerful chorus in the media. We are fortunate in this crisis to have a President obedient to his constitutional command to "take care that the laws be faithfully executed." In the remaining days of this session, Congress has a responsibility to give him the tools to do so. It remains one of the great remaining tests of the 115th Congress.

GIFT TO AMERICAN PEOPLE

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentlewoman from Texas (Ms. JACKSON LEE) for 5 minutes.

Ms. JACKSON LEE. Mr. Speaker, today, I remind my colleagues of a President who reminded us of the shining city on a Hill. I remind our colleagues of a President who led us to a kinder and gentler society. So I am stunned to hear the President speak of claiming to be asking for the government to be shut down.

This is a season where many in our Nation draw together with families and worship and celebrate. It is a very honored time. People of the Christian faith are engaged in the recognition and acknowledgment of the birth of baby Jesus. It is a holy time. It is a time when families need resources. Government workers need to ensure that their families are provided for, but also we must ensure that our government is provided for. I thank the Speaker-elect and the Democratic leader in the Senate, the other body, for recognizing that we do not want a shutdown.

To those who speak of the necessity of a wall, let me speak as a Representative of a border State who has been to the border so many times, I cannot count. I count those on the border, among many of the States, as friends, having been to every border State. I will say to the American people: There is no foreign war or attack at the southern border.

We have a northern border as well, and I have been there. There is no wall there.

The only thing that is at the southern border are mothers and children living in desperate, devastating, and disgusting conditions, and unaccompanied children fleeing from the decapitation of their brothers or fathers, fleeing politically because they disagree with the viciousness of cartels and refuse to accept their membership.

That is where America's best angels come in, when we rise to the higher occasion of giving refuge and opportunity to those who are fleeing political persecution. Here is how we do it. We process asylum seekers. We do not undermine their process. They are fleeing for their lives.

To juxtapose a stagnant wall to the lives of those fleeing political persecution is untenable. It is crucial that we design a comprehensive immigration reform policy. It is crucial that the acknowledgment that barriers of certain kinds—technology and personnel—can be a successful formula to ensure the safety and security of the American people. But at the same time, I insist that we regulate or bring into regular order Dreamers, who are firefighters, soldiers, lawyers, doctors, and family members throughout the Nation. Where is the call for that?

It is important that we remain a nation that people flee to because of the wonderful values of democracy, the underpinnings of the dignity of all people. It is sad at this time that we have

not come to that conclusion in a bipartisan manner.

So I extend the olive branch. What are we doing for the Dreamers? Why is it not reasonable to construct a funding process or scheme or formula that ensures that kind of bipartisanship and security?

Let me also encourage my colleagues to join me in working in a bipartisan way to pass the Violence Against Women Act. We are reaching out. It is a crucial initiative. Right now, there are family members dying at the hands of domestic violence.

There are law enforcement officers, including my own chief, who asked me about the funding of the STOP grants that are utilized for organizations that will protect these families subjected to violence, such as Native Americans, with healthcare for VAWA victims and ensuring that the person who has already been convicted of abuse does not have random access to a weapon, which is the weapon of choice that kills a family member.

Finally, let me say I hope that we can bring, Mr. Speaker, conclusion to a sentencing and prison reform bill that I have worked very hard on.

Why not give a gift to the American people—not a shutdown, but a bipartisan step, one by one, to make America an even greater country than it already is?

EXPRESSING GRATITUDE FOR OPPORTUNITY TO SERVE

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentlewoman from Arizona (Ms. MCSALLY) for 5 minutes.

Ms. MCSALLY. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to give my final speech in the United States House of Representatives to express my gratitude for the opportunity to serve the people of Arizona's Second Congressional District.

It has been a tremendous honor to deploy here to the people's House over the past 4 years as an advocate and champion for Tucson, Sierra Vista, Douglas, Bisbee, and all the other amazing communities in southeastern Arizona.

I am grateful to my dedicated staff in Arizona, who were omnipresent in our community and fought for constituents who needed help with Federal bureaucracies. They were able to solve nearly 6,000 cases, returning nearly \$2.5 million to seniors, veterans, and others—money that was rightfully theirs in the first place. This is one of the most meaningful and impactful parts of our job.

My D.C. staff tirelessly helped push our legislative initiatives forward. Because of them, we saved the A-10 Warthog, put the Douglas port of entry project on the map, kept the Cherrybell postal processing facility open, fast-tracked our veterans for jobs at the border, opened Arlington again to our World War II female pilot heroes, improved mental health access, stopped a harmful tax increase on sen-

iors and the middle class, led bipartisan efforts to break the gridlock on healthcare, border security, immigration, and so much more.

A heartfelt thanks to all my staff, but especially those who were with me all 4 years: my chief, Justin Roth; district director, C.J. Karamargin; LD, Pace McMullan, and deputy district director, Rosa Ruiz.

As I reflect on my two terms in the House, I will cherish many memories from this time of service. I was honored to have a front row seat to history here in our Nation's Capitol.

I will never forget sitting next to an American hero, SAM JOHNSON, on the day I was sworn in, or being on this floor as two Presidents delivered their State of the Union speeches and when Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Pope Francis addressed a joint session of Congress.

I was blessed to pay final respects to American icons like Senator John McCain, Reverend Billy Graham, and President George H.W. Bush in the sacred grounds in the Capitol rotunda.

To my fellow Members of Congress on both sides of the aisle, those who have been here awhile and those who will be sworn in soon, I humbly ask that you never forget the privilege it is to serve here and why you are here. Membership in this body is a precious opportunity. Don't take it lightly, and don't squander it.

It is not about us. As soon as we leave here, this institution will move on and, candidly, few will remember us. Use the time wisely. We have been entrusted to solve our Nation's problems and chart its course for a better future. Do the right thing. Do it for the right reasons. And get things done. This is why we are here.

The people of our great country—the people each of us represent—often have very different views on how to solve our challenges, the proper role of our government, and the priorities for our limited resources. Reconciling these differences requires rigorous and robust debate, both in this Chamber and outside of it. Disagreements are inevitable, but we can and should set the example to disagree without being disagreeable.

Our challenge is, then, to find the sometimes very tiny sliver of common ground where we can agree and govern. I am particularly proud of the fact that every one of the five bills I introduced that were signed into law had bipartisan support.

Lastly, and most importantly, to my constituents: In my time as your Representative, I deeply valued meeting with you all over our incredible district—at schools, senior centers, small businesses, nonprofits, military bases, medical facilities, farms, ranches, and other places—to hear about the challenges that you have along with the opportunities to make an impact with your lives that only come in America. You inspired me and fueled my purpose here.