

From an early age, Matt's love of baseball was apparent. He would spend hours and hours practicing and throwing a ball against a wall; and once on the field, his eyes and smile reflected his unbridled enthusiasm and deep-rooted passion for the game. On the field, he was in complete control and nothing else mattered. Simply to be there in uniform along with his teammates was a great feeling for him.

Then, in seventh grade, he developed a tumor on his spine. After three extensive surgeries, Mr. Speaker, he was told he could not play the game anymore. For most kids, that heart-wrenching gut punch would be a pivotal moment in their life, one in which they would give up in defeat. But not Matt Gruda. Faced with a challenge and the unknown, he decided to seize on the opportunity, becoming the youngest assistant coach and umpire in the history of the league. He confronted his adversity, not viewing it as a stumbling block, but as a stepping stone to success. He has continued to build stepping stones to success with every challenge he has faced.

In speaking with the people who know Matt best, they described him as someone who does not hold a grudge; someone who is always looking on the bright side of things; someone who is kind, considerate, and is always eager to make you smile; someone who is a good friend, a caring brother, and a wonderful son; and someone whom you would always want on your team.

I know that I am grateful to have had Matt on our team for the past 2 years. He will always have an honorary spot on our bench. As a mentor, Mr. Speaker, I stand here today very proud of what Matt has accomplished and so excited for him to take this next chapter by storm. He is a bright, talented, and determined young man, and I look forward to seeing all that he will accomplish in life.

On behalf of our entire team and our entire community, we thank Matt.

INFRASTRUCTURE

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. COSTA). The Chair recognizes the gentlewoman from the Virgin Islands (Ms. PLASKETT) for 5 minutes.

Ms. PLASKETT. Mr. Speaker, during times of crisis and upheaval, societies have a unique opportunity to reimagine themselves, to fix wrongs, and to make themselves better than they were previously. The pandemic of 1917 created the Roaring Twenties. The aftermath of the Civil War brought railroads, canals, and bridges to connect us. The Great Depression gave us the New Deal.

After the devastation of the COVID pandemic and the truth reveal of our systemic problems of racism, economic inequality, wealth and healthcare disparities, we must use this time and this opportunity to not only forge forward, but to correct wrongs. While the American Rescue Plan is changing the

course of the pandemic and delivering relief for working families, this is not the time to build back the way things were. This is a moment to reimagine and rebuild a new economy.

The American jobs plan is an investment in America that will create millions of good jobs, rebuild our country's infrastructure, and position this United States to outcompete China and other nations. The American jobs plan will invest in America in a way that we have not invested since we built the interstate highways and won the space race.

The United States of America is the wealthiest country in the world, yet we rank 13th when it comes to overall quality of our infrastructure. Public domestic investment as a share of the economy has fallen more than 40 percent since the 1960s. After decades of disinvestment, our roads, bridges, and water systems are crumbling. Our electric grid is vulnerable to catastrophic outages. Too many lack access to affordable high-speed internet and to quality housing.

The past year has led to job losses and threatened economic security, eroding more than 30 years of progress in women's labor force participation. It has unmasked the fragility of our caregivers' infrastructure. It has never been more important for us to invest in strengthening our infrastructure and our competitiveness, and in creating good paying union jobs of the future.

This must include a 21st century infrastructure—deployment of broadband and closing the digital divide in this country—creating the modern bridge that will unite and create more economic and opportunity equity in our country.

Unlike past major investments, President Biden's plan also prioritizes addressing longstanding and persistent racial injustice. The plan targets 40 percent of the benefit of climate and clean infrastructure investments to disadvantaged communities. The investment of \$100 billion in broadband internet will be the component that will make America a leader, an innovator, once again.

Broadband internet is the new electricity. It is necessary for Americans to do their jobs; to create jobs; to participate equally in school learning, healthcare, and to stay connected. It is estimated, however, that 10 percent—over 30 million Americans—live in areas where there is inadequate or no broadband infrastructure. Americans living in rural areas, on Tribal lands, and in the territories particularly lack adequate access. Even in our urban areas, many have stark differences in access to internet and to jobs.

President Biden's American jobs plan is visionary and exactly what people across this country have been asking from our Nation's leaders for years, even decades. Representing the Virgin Islands, I am especially excited about his focus on building infrastructure that is resilient to our changing cli-

mate, electrifying our highway system, investing heavily in transit and other cleaner mobility options, and working to eliminate the digital divide.

In announcing his plan, the President has taken our voices—the voices in Congress—and has put those words into action. The American jobs plan will not only make bold transformational investment in our Nation's transportation infrastructure, it will do so with an emphasis on creating good paying jobs, supporting American manufacturing, and investing in rural and urban communities alike.

Earlier this year, the New Democrat Coalition unveiled our agenda for the first 100 days of the 117th Congress. The New Dems share the Biden-Harris administration's vision to build back better, and we will work together to move our country forward.

We must rebuild our communities and our economy better than before with the American jobs plan. Now is the time to think boldly with a once-in-a-century investment to create millions of good-paying jobs.

40TH ANNIVERSARY OF RC-135S CRASH IN ALASKA 2020

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

Mr. BACON. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to commemorate the anniversary of the tragic loss of a 55th Wing RC-135 Cobra Ball aircraft on the remote island of Shemya, Alaska.

Forty years ago last month, Cobra Ball tail number 2664 crashed on approach to Shemya Air Force Base, a rugged outpost on the far western tip of the Aleutian Islands. Six brave American airmen perished in the fiery crash that day, an eternal reminder of the cost of the Cold War and the price of vigilance we too often take for granted.

The RC-135 reconnaissance aircraft—designated Cobra Ball—is designed to rapidly collect telemetry and special intelligence on ballistic missiles in flight. Throughout the Cold War and to the present day, reconnaissance crews from the 55th Wing are dispatched on short notice around the world to fly the RC-135 to gather technical intelligence on weapons tests that cannot be obtained by any other method. This information is used to verify treaty compliance and to support the continuous development of America's strategic and theater missile defense capabilities.

Throughout the Cold War, the Strategic Air Command kept the Cobra Ball on a continuous 24-hour alert status on Shemya Island in the northern Pacific, affectionately known as The Rock. Their job was to launch at a moment's notice to keep a watchful eye on Soviet ballistic missile tests conducted from the Kamchatka Peninsula.

On March 15, 1981, the 24 crewmembers on board the RC-135 tail number 61-2664 were en route to Shemya

from Eielson Air Force Base, Alaska, where they had been waiting for the weather at Shemya to clear. Blizzard conditions and extreme crosswinds were ravaging the small exposed island. This weather was not uncommon, just another day at the office for 55th Wing aircrew. However, after receiving clearance to land, weather conditions deteriorated rapidly.

□ 1045

Firsthand accounts from crewmembers onboard describe the violent buffeting they experienced on descent as like being on the end of a yo-yo. The belly of the aircraft struck the edge of a cliff on the approach end of the runway, shearing off the landing gear. As the damaged aircraft slammed into the runway, engines three and four exploded and the fuselage broke in half. Flames engulfed the crew compartment as the disintegrating aircraft slid 2,000 feet, eventually careening off the runway and down a hill.

The scene was chaotic as crewmembers worked to free themselves and their teammates from the burning wreckage while the blizzard raged. Miraculously, 18 crewmembers escaped from the flames that day. Their bodies burned and broken, they worked feverishly to extract their fellow airmen from the fiery wreckage.

In the end, six men died on that lonely airfield that day. Their names were: Major William Bennett, Captain Larry Mayfield, First Lieutenant Loren Ginter, Master Sergeant Stephen Kish, Staff Sergeant Steven Balcer, and Staff Sergeant Harry Parsons, III.

We honor their service and their sacrifice and commend their spirit to the Creator. We pray for their families and loved ones who cherish their memory. We also honor the survivors of this tragic crash who will forever bear the scars of their service and the memory of that day. May we never forget what they gave to the cause of freedom, and that it was the dedication of warriors like these that won the Cold War. And may we pledge to honor their sacrifice by recommitting ourselves to eternal vigilance in the defense of freedom.

PROTECTING QUALITY OF LIFE OF VETERANS IS A TOP PRIORITY

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

Mrs. LURIA. Mr. Speaker, I rise today in support of H.R. 2368, the COVENANT Act, legislation to ensure our Nation's veterans can receive the benefits they deserve after being exposed to toxic substances in the course of their service.

Mr. Speaker, protecting the quality of life of our veterans is a top priority of this Congress, and particularly for my colleagues on the House Veterans' Affairs Committee, where I chair the Disability Assistance and Memorial Affairs Subcommittee.

One such veteran I have the privilege of representing, Master Sergeant Brian Graves of Virginia Beach, flew missions over the Middle East for the United States Air Force. Today, he lives with breathing problems after inhaling jet fumes and being exposed to other toxins during his time of service.

The COVENANT Act will dramatically streamline the VA benefits process for thousands of veterans like Master Sergeant Graves.

Between June 2007 and February 2021, we know that 13,900 veterans filed a disability benefit claim related to toxic exposure. Mr. Speaker, of those nearly 14,000 veterans, only 4,000 claims were granted. That is simply unacceptable. We cannot allow history to repeat itself. Veterans like myself watched our peers who served in Vietnam wait decades for the benefits they deserve.

The recent veterans who served in the Middle East, southwest Asia, east Africa, and the Philippines need our help today. Mr. Speaker, they are hurting and, in some cases, dying. Congress must not neglect them in their time of need.

That is why I urge my colleagues to join me in supporting the COVENANT Act, a comprehensive approach to securing benefits for veterans exposed to toxic substances overseas.

HONORING THE SERVICE OF CORPUS CHRISTI POLICE CHIEF MIKE MARKLE

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

Mr. CLOUD. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to honor Corpus Christi, Texas Police Chief Mike Markle on his career of public service, and to congratulate him on his upcoming retirement.

From his service in the United States Navy as a hospital corpsman to his 31-year career service at the Corpus Christi Police Department, Chief Markle has consistently placed the needs of others before himself. Enlisting in the police academy in 1989, he protected the streets for many years with courage and determination. He has served as a field training officer, on the Honor Guard, and on the SWAT team.

Corpus Christi turned to him to lead during the Police Department's transition in 2015. As head of the Corpus Christi PD, he pursued excellence in leadership and a commitment to learning. His priority was to improve community outreach and address the modern challenges of policing.

His legacy of helping others stretches beyond his police work, as he currently serves on the board of directors for the Wesley Community Center. There is no question that Chief Markle left a lasting impact on the Coastal Bend region, and he will be sorely missed.

I thank him for his commitment to protecting the citizens of Corpus Christi, and I wish him well in his future endeavors.

RECESS

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to clause 12(a) of rule I, the Chair declares the House in recess until noon today.

Accordingly (at 10 o'clock and 50 minutes a.m.), the House stood in recess.

□ 1200

AFTER RECESS

The recess having expired, the House was called to order by the Speaker at noon.

PRAYER

The Chaplain, the Reverend Margaret Grun Kibben, offered the following prayer:

Gracious God, we earnestly pray today to walk in Your presence. With You beside us, may Your nearness both inspire and compel us to take steps in response to Your divine mercy, in obedience to Your divine guidance, and in gratitude for Your divine compassion for us.

May each thought that comes to our minds be of Your will.

May each aspiration our souls conjure be worthy of Your blessing.

May every action we take reveal Your love to those who need it so desperately.

May every word we speak give honor to You.

It is our humble prayer that in everything we do today, we would be instruments of Your transcendent love in this place, of Your sacrificial love for all of creation, and of Your redeeming love for this world and for each of Your children.

We offer ourselves to You in the hope of Your mercy and in the strength of Your name.

Amen.

THE JOURNAL

The SPEAKER. Pursuant to section 11(a) of House Resolution 188, the Journal of the last day's proceedings is approved.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The SPEAKER. Will the gentleman from Iowa (Mr. FEENSTRA) come forward and lead the House in the Pledge of Allegiance.

Mr. FEENSTRA led the Pledge of Allegiance as follows:

I pledge allegiance to the Flag of the United States of America, and to the Republic for which it stands, one nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.