

lose faith in our ability to back them up, we willingly cede the field to an enemy who seeks our destruction.

It is now, unfortunately, a moral imperative to find a way to expedite the safe passage of the very people who stood by us for nearly two decades. They have been loyal to our shared vision and have sacrificed so much to the pursuit of democracy. Their safety must be an absolute priority for this administration.

So far, we have not observed sufficient urgency in developing an inter-agency plan to do this and in requesting the necessary resources and authorities from Congress. If we don't do this, the Afghans who helped our military will be hunted down and murdered by the Taliban.

We must ask ourselves: Did we learn anything from our clumsy withdrawal from Iraq in 2011?

The only thing more expensive than maintaining a moderate level of stability in a country like Afghanistan is the bloodshed and cost we will bear if we are forced to return.

This is not an academic, hypothetical consideration, nor is it a partisan issue. Like many others on this side of the aisle, I repeatedly and publicly expressed my deep concerns over President Trump's impulse for a hasty withdrawal.

The Taliban is still allied with al-Qaida. If the Taliban prevails after our withdrawal, it is very likely that al-Qaida will once again have a safe haven to conduct terrorism, and this is the very reason we invaded Afghanistan in the first place.

Fortunately, pushback from Congress and the previous administration slowed the withdrawal process while retaining negotiating leverage and key counterterrorism capabilities. Unfortunately, from my vantage point, this latest decision has abandoned any semblance of strategy. It is a retreat.

This hasty withdrawal is a tragic mistake, and we are going to regret it. I urge the President to change course before it is too late.

□ 1045

HONORING MICHAEL LECIK

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

Ms. SPANBERGER. Madam Speaker, I rise to remember the life of a courageous, kind, and selfless Virginian, Mike Lecik.

Service was an unwavering part of who Mike was. Throughout his career, Mike served as an Air Force firefighter, an assistant fire chief with the U.S. Department of Defense, and the assistant chief at the Huguenot Volunteer Fire Department in central Virginia.

As an Air Force firefighter, Mike deployed twice to the Middle East. After coming home to Powhatan County, he was proud to serve in his local volun-

teer fire department. He cared deeply for his community and his country. A few years ago, Mike was diagnosed with multiple myeloma, a blood cancer linked to the dangerous conditions of his service as an Air Force firefighter.

I first got to know Mike because the VA did not recognize this connection, and he wanted to do something about it. He wanted to learn more about how the system could be changed for the better and for the benefit of his fellow servicemen and -women.

This fight was not just about getting the support that he needed; rather, it was about the thousands of firefighters just like him who faced this challenge. Mike truly wanted every veteran firefighter to get the care they deserved.

Mike passed away earlier this year at the age of 41.

Mike was dedicated to his community, the safety of his neighbors, and, above all, his family. It was my honor to have him as a constituent.

Mike leaves behind a family and a community that deeply cared for him, and he leaves behind a cause that is worth championing.

Across the board, firefighters are more likely to be exposed to certain carcinogens. They are more likely to suffer certain diseases and illnesses because of their career. And they experience higher rates of cancer than the general U.S. population.

This connection is well-documented by scientific research, but it is yet to be recognized by the VA, the Federal agency entrusted with caring for those who have borne the battle.

Military firefighters put their lives on the line each day—not just to defend our country but also to selflessly defend their fellow servicemembers. But to this day, thousands of veteran firefighters are left uncovered by the VA for certain types of cancer treatments.

Earlier this year, I reintroduced the Michael Lecik Military Firefighters Protection Act in Mike's name to fix this longstanding issue. This bipartisan legislation would make sure diseases like Mike's are recognized as presumptive service-connected disabilities.

By recognizing the long-term effects of military firefighting and the diseases that can arise from this career over time, our bill would provide much-needed peace of mind and security to thousands of veteran firefighters and their families. It would lift an undue burden off thousands of veterans experiencing severe and often-terminal illnesses.

Right now, the VA doesn't cover significant treatment costs like those faced by Mike, as the VA, in many cases, does not recognize the direct service connection between firefighting and cancer as a presumptive service-connected disability beyond 1 year following Active Duty.

Our legislation would establish the presumption that veteran firefighters who become disabled by serious diseases, including heart disease, lung dis-

ease, and certain cancers like Mike's, within 15 years of separating from Active Duty contracted the illness due to their service in the military.

By creating this presumption, the VA would be required to provide equitable disability benefits and treatment cost coverage to veteran firefighters like Mike.

This legislation has the support of Democrats and Republicans from across the political spectrum, including many who have served our country.

Specifically, I would like to thank my Republican colleague, Congressman BACON from Nebraska, himself an Air Force veteran of nearly 30 years, for his continued partnership in leading this bill. I thank Congressman BACON for recognizing that this issue should unite us all because we all represent veterans with stories like Mike's.

Even as he was engaged in the battle of his life—for his life—Mike was eager to make progress on this issue. When I first reached out to Mike to ask whether he would like to be involved with the legislation, he never hesitated.

Mike had already been in touch with our team about some of his issues with the VA. And when asked if he wanted to take up this challenge and make a difference through the legislative process, he said: "Absolutely." He was ready to take up the mantle for his fellow vets. It was his honor.

Even as his illness progressed, he stayed apprised of new developments on this legislation, and my team was humbled to work with him. He showed incredible strength and determination that we will never forget.

The Michael Lecik Military Firefighters Protection Act is about a fundamental question: How do we show our gratitude and appreciation to those who served, to those who have put on the uniform, and to those who have worked under hazardous and dangerous conditions to keep their countrymen and fellow servicemembers safe?

The answer is found beyond platitudes. It is found beyond spoken promises. It is found in action. And it is found in delivering the benefits our veterans have earned through their sacrifice.

No veteran who puts on the uniform should repeatedly have to make the argument that their injury, their illness, is connected to their service when the evidence is so apparent—to the degree that the majority of our States have already recognized the link between these serious diseases and the occupational hazards of firefighting and have enacted presumptive disability laws.

In the case of Mike and thousands of firefighters like him, no veteran should experience a VA that refuses to help cover the costs of treating their service-connected cancer.

As I urge my colleagues to recognize the urgent need to pass the Michael Lecik Military Firefighters Protection Act, I am thinking of his wife, Tiffany, and his three daughters, Amery, Aubrey, and Addy. He loved them deeply, and I work in his honor.

STANDING WITH ISRAEL

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

Mr. CLINE. Madam Speaker, I rise today to express my unwavering support for the United States' greatest ally in the Middle East and the region's only democracy, Israel.

When I visited the region, I saw firsthand the proximity of the danger Israelis face on a daily basis.

With the Gaza Strip controlled by the Iranian-funded terror group Hamas, rockets are always pointing at the Jewish state. It is estimated that the militant group has more than 30,000 rockets and mortars at their disposal.

For the past week, Israel and its people have been bombarded by more than 3,000 rockets launched from within Gaza. Thank goodness for the Iron Dome, which, despite being overwhelmed, saved countless lives.

While some on the other side of the aisle and in the media attempt to draw a moral parallel between Hamas and Israel, there is simply no comparison to be made.

As Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said: "You cannot equate a democracy that values life with a terror organization that glorifies death."

Israel has an absolute right to defend itself, and while they make every effort to keep Palestinian civilians from harm, Hamas continues to intentionally target population centers, seeking death and destruction.

Hamas is not interested in peace. They are not interested in working toward a lasting solution. Their only objective is to eliminate the Jewish state.

Why some would choose to back Hamas despite its atrocious human rights record is beyond me. Why back a regime that stifles free speech, prosecutes and assaults the press, treats women as second-class citizens, and has laws on the books that condemn its own citizens to death simply for selling land to a Jewish person?

Madam Speaker, it is mind-boggling.

I stand with Israel, and in doing so, I stand for peace.

CONGRATULATING GRACE CHRISTIAN GOLF TEAM

Mr. CLINE. Madam Speaker, author and avid golf fan P.G. Wodehouse once remarked: Golf "is the infallible test. The man who can go into a patch of rough alone, with the knowledge that only God is watching him, and play his ball where it lies is the man who will serve you faithfully and well."

Fittingly, I rise today to recognize Grace Christian School of Staunton, whose golf team won its first Virginia Association of Christian Athletics State championship.

The Warriors shot an 18-hole total of 355 in the championship tournament at the Club at Ironwood to overcome its closest competitor by 32 strokes.

Caleb Maas led the Warriors with an impressive 86, while Preston Fitzgerald and Maddie Helmick each shot a pair of 87s, with Isaiah Farlow carding a 95.

Maas, Fitzgerald, and Helmick were also named to the all-State team for their performances throughout the season.

Madam Speaker, I congratulate the athletes, coaches, and staff on an excellent season. I wish them all the best of luck moving forward. And keep hitting them straight.

NEW INFRASTRUCTURE AGENDA

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

Ms. BOURDEAUX. Madam Speaker, like so many of us in this Chamber, I spend a lot of time on the road driving from event to event.

As someone who represents the metro Atlanta area, I have spent far more hours than I care to admit sitting on I-85 in bumper-to-bumper traffic. My staff have all had the experience of being on the phone with me as I pull off the road and try to find a spot with a strong signal in order to call into events because there is just no way I will make it in time with all the traffic.

Congestion is one of the issues we all hear about with frequency. It is not a Republican issue or a Democratic issue. It is a question I get frequently, regardless of whether I am at a town-hall, speaking to a Chamber of Commerce, or visiting a small business: What is being done to ease congestion?

This question is particularly important as we continue to have a national conversation on infrastructure. Having spent my career in public policy and public finance, I know how important it is that we make smart investments today to set us up for success tomorrow.

That is why recently I rolled out my infrastructure agenda. I call it FutureFit The Suburbs.

FutureFit The Suburbs is a vision to address our growing needs in the suburbs to make smart investments now to prepare for the next century, from preparing for the impact of climate change to building the transit system of tomorrow.

This agenda focuses on the needs of fast-growing suburbs, recognizing the need for transit and congestion relief in order to maintain economic viability while addressing the climate crisis, and doing all of it in a way that leverages public-private partnerships in a fiscally responsible manner.

The key is to do well by doing good. This initial launch of FutureFit The Suburbs contains four initiatives.

First, I am proud to be introducing a new piece of bipartisan legislation today, the Build Up the Suburbs Act, along with Congressman CARLOS GIMENEZ from Florida, and my Georgia colleague, Congresswoman LUCY MCBATH.

Imagine a regional bus rapid transit system that would run along our major highways and express lanes, developing an electric bus equivalent of commuter

rail to help people get from suburban hubs to major commercial hubs while skipping the traffic. The Build Up the Suburbs Act would fund exactly that.

The next time you need to go to the airport, wouldn't it be easier if you didn't have to budget in an extra hour or two just to get there?

Tomorrow, I will be introducing the National and Regional Greenways Act to provide funding for the construction and expansion of greenways across the country, corridors of land connecting disparate communities with beautiful recreational space and environmentally friendly travel routes, thereby reducing congestion and emissions.

This program would support projects like the visionary Chattahoochee River Greenway, a proposed multiuse path that would run along the Chattahoochee River in Georgia.

Beyond immediate transit priorities, FutureFit The Suburbs focuses on how we can be smart in leveraging the power of public-private partnerships to maximize available resources. For example, as more and more shopping goes online, retail malls, and the large plots of land that they sit on, are going unoccupied and unused, taking up valuable real estate. Through low-interest and guaranteed loan programs, these areas can be restored in a way that serves the community.

Finally, creating a national infrastructure bank would provide Federal seed money to leverage significant private sector investment in major infrastructure projects. Private investment is on the sidelines and looking to invest in our roads, bridges, broadband, and electric charging infrastructure.

Change is coming, whether we like it or not. We can make smart investments now that enhance our quality of life, or we can spend a lot more time, money, and effort retrofitting the same projects years down the road.

By investing now, we can help slow the effects of climate change, create jobs, and position the suburbs for success in the years to come.

CELEBRATING JULIA TUCKER

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

Mr. BURCHETT. Madam Speaker, it is a pleasure being here today. As we say in east Tennessee, you class up the joint. Thank you for allowing me to be here.

Today, I rise to celebrate the 90th birthday of one of my dearest friends, Julia Tucker, 90 years old.

Julia has served the Knoxville community in many different ways over the years. Julia was the first woman to chair the Knoxville City School Board, where she served with my daddy.

Julia is a force to be reckoned with, and she fights for things that are important to her. Julia once saved her unconscious neighbors' lives during a gas leak by dragging them out of their house.