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DEFENDING RIGHTS OF
ESSENTIAL CAREGIVERS

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentlewoman from New York (Ms. TENNEY) for 5 minutes.

Ms. TENNEY. Mr. Speaker, the COVID-19 pandemic exposed so many vulnerabilities in our communities, our economy, and our healthcare system. None of us were prepared for the endless virtual meetings, school closings, and weeks spent in quarantine. Nor could we have been ready for the tragic loss of our neighbors and loved ones who were living in long-term care facilities across the Nation.

Mr. Speaker, I rise today about the grave impact the negligent policies implemented during the COVID-19 pandemic had on the most vulnerable in our communities.

Over the past nearly 2 years, we watched our grandparents in nursing homes and our family and friends in group homes struggling to maintain their health, dignity, and will to go on as they were left without the care and attention they deserved over long periods of isolation.

When I was sworn in to serve in the 117th Congress, one of the first bills I introduced was the bipartisan Essential Caregivers Act. This bill is a critical step to ensure that residents of long-term care facilities are not left to suffer in isolation during this or any future public health emergency.

While shut out from their family and loved ones in isolation, many long-term care residents began suffering from depression, extreme loneliness, and a major decline in mental and physical health. It is the injustice of this century that this is going unaddressed by Congress.

Since introducing the Essential Caregivers Act, we have started a coalition of passionate and tenacious fighters across the country. It is the Essential Caregivers Movement.

With me today, I have a book authored by Karla Abraham-Conley, an amazing constituent of mine who also was prohibited from providing the needed care for her mother because of negligent policies in place by our former Governor. This is her great book. It is absolutely beautiful. "Protecting Them to Death" is the title.

Folded into each page of Karla's book are harrowing stories from individuals who either lost a loved one in a long-term care facility or witnessed from a distance as their loved ones suffered from serious declines in their mental and physical health.

These are not just the stories of New Yorkers. These are accounts from all across the Nation as you go through each part of this book. I could flip every page of this book and tell you a story from every single State. They are heartbreaking. They are cruel. Most importantly, they motivate those with the power and responsibility to make a meaningful change for our future.

When I see this book, I see the ways our laws have failed our constituents. I see the pain, but I also see the opportunity on every page, a chance for this Congress to stand up on behalf of these hurting Americans and boldly say: I will act. I will defend your rights as an essential caregiver.

Before I close, I would like to share an excerpt from Karla's personal story. "I was my mother's essential caregiver every single day prior to the lockdown. Suddenly, I wasn't there anymore, and she was incapable of understanding why."

Karla continues by saying her mother "was left to die alone in her bed, and not from COVID-19. She said to me via a virtual visit, 'Get me outta here. They're going to kill me,' which is exactly what happened."

When Karla was shut off from her mother, her mother's state of health rapidly declined. Karla's mother developed sepsis, renal failure, high sodium levels, swelling of the brain, and other symptoms that went unnoticed. After Karla fought tooth and nail to admit her mother to the emergency room, her mother passed away a week later.

Mr. Speaker, what you have heard is unacceptable by all standards, but it is just one of thousands of stories I wanted to share.

I thank Karla and so many essential caregivers, including our own VoicesForSeniors, another advocacy group in New York State, for sharing this dark chapter in their lives.

Not many people can turn grief into action and start a nationwide movement. Yet, in a time of incredible sadness and loss, so many strong men and women chose to stand up and do just that. I applaud their courage, their bravery, and their tenacity in this fight. I introduced the Essential Caregivers Act for each of them and their loved ones.

Mr. Speaker, I am honored to lead this fight in Congress, but I am not leading it alone. I am joined by our colleagues from both sides of the aisle, including the bill's cosponsor and co-lead, Congressman JOHN LARSON of Connecticut. We are so grateful for his advocacy as well.

Mr. Speaker, I urge more of my colleagues to join us to pass this bill, to make it a reality and help these people who are advocating across the Nation to protect those who could be in this jeopardy in the future. I will remain committed to this fight for so many families who were forced to comply with the careless policies that prevented them from caring for their loved ones.

BENEFITS FOR BURN PIT-EXPOSED
VETERANS

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

Mr. RUIZ. Mr. Speaker, I rise in support of my bill, the Burn Pit Registry

Enhancement Act, which passed the House unanimously yesterday, and to urge a vote in the Senate.

The Burn Pit Registry Enhancement Act would strengthen the registry by allowing a registered veteran's data to be updated by their family with his or her cause of death.

This data is crucial to identify the vast array of illnesses that are causing young burn pit-exposed veterans to die and will help doctors recognize early symptoms of life-threatening conditions and save lives.

As a Nation, we have a responsibility to provide our veterans with the benefits they have earned and deserve. We bear that responsibility even more heavily when the use of burn pits by our own military is causing veterans to develop rare pulmonary conditions and cancers.

Mr. Speaker, I urge the Senate to take up my legislation and uphold our commitment to taking care of our veterans.

ALEJANDRO CAMACHO'S STORY

Mr. RUIZ. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to tell the story of my constituent, Alejandro Camacho, of Palm Desert, a veteran who has been affected by our military's use of toxic burn pits, and to call for action.

After graduating from La Quinta High School, Alejandro served our Nation in the U.S. Marine Corps. From March to September 2009, he was stationed in south Sinjar, Iraq.

At great personal sacrifice to himself, Alejandro served as a member of the 3rd Light Armored Reconnaissance Battalion, even missing the birth of his own son, Jacob, while he was stationed overseas.

Every single day in south Sinjar, Alejandro breathed in toxic fumes, particulate matter, and carcinogens from the batteries, medical waste, and jet fuel that was burned in large burn pits on his base.

When he returned home, the effects of breathing in those toxic fumes started taking a toll on his body. In 2019, Alejandro was diagnosed with embryonal carcinoma, an aggressive form of testicular cancer. He and his doctor believed his diagnosis to be linked to his exposures to fumes from burning jet propulsion 8 fuel, a known human carcinogen.

When Alejandro underwent the excruciating chemotherapy process, his body fell apart. He lost 50 pounds. He lost feeling in his hands and feet, and he constantly heard ringing in his ears.

Despite being deemed 40 percent disabled, despite his repeated exposure to jet fuel fumes, and despite the diagnosis, the VA denied his claim for coverage. Do you know why? Because the VA said there wasn't "enough evidence" to establish a connection between his burn pit exposure and the cancer he developed.

Mr. Speaker, I am an emergency medicine physician and a public health expert, and in public health and in medicine, it is practice that if there is

a high enough suspicion based on the evidence available of a harm that causes a severe enough illness, then we need to act on that suspicion.

We can't afford to wait decades, like we did with Agent Orange, for that perfect study to establish a perfect causality between burn pit exposure and cancers and pulmonary conditions our veterans are developing and dying from right now. There is enough evidence to act.

We must act for veterans like Alejandro and help him get the healthcare and benefits he earned when we sent him to war for our country. Alejandro is now cancer free, but the fight continues to get him the benefits he deserves.

We are making real bipartisan progress on this front, with legislation like the Honoring our PACT Act, which takes an aggressive and comprehensive approach to the urgent healthcare crisis that veterans like Alejandro are facing.

This legislation will keep our Nation's promise to our veterans that we will take care of them after they serve our Nation. It contains my bill, the Presumptive Benefits for War Fighters Exposed to Burn Pits and Other Toxins Act. It creates a presumption of service-related illnesses due to burn pits in order to take care of our veterans.

Mr. Speaker, I urge this body to take up this bill to support Alejandro and the rest of our heroes in uniform.

INFLATION CRUSHING HOLIDAY BUDGETS

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

Mr. MEUSER. Mr. Speaker, Americans are feeling the pinch of rising prices as they are gearing up to both host and visit their families and friends this holiday season.

Thanksgiving is just around the corner, and it is shaping up to be the most expensive meal in the history of the holiday due to rising costs, largely from President Biden and Democrats' failed economic policies.

Inflation is at a 30-year high, crushing American holiday budgets from the cost of travel, food, and gifts. The price of gasoline, Mr. Speaker, is up 61 percent—nearly \$4 nationally—from a year ago, causing the price of driving and flying to see relatives skyrocket. Many Americans are now facing the decision to cancel holiday travel due to these rising costs.

Most holiday staple foods are significantly more expensive as well, if Americans are lucky enough to find them on the grocery shelves due to the supply chain crisis we are facing.

The cost of turkey is up about 20 percent. Potatoes are up about 15 percent. Carrots are up almost 50 percent. Cranberries and biscuits are up nearly 10 percent. And even pumpkin pie is way up.

On average, a Thanksgiving meal this year will cost families between 15 to 20 percent more than it did just 1 year ago today. With the rising cost of energy and essential goods, nearly one-third of working families' earnings are going to food and energy costs.

Instead of finding ways to offset this, mitigate it, improve and fix the supply chain crisis, and bring domestic energy back to minimize these skyrocketing energy costs, President Biden and my colleagues in the Democratic Caucus in this House continue to push for a historically large multitrillion-dollar spending bill called Build Back Better that will raise taxes and seriously damage domestic energy production, which I completely don't understand, nor does anyone in my district.

As well, it has special interest tax cuts, and it will not cost zero. Can we please stop insulting the people? It will cost trillions, all the while suppressing our economy and opportunity.

When you are in a hole, Mr. Speaker, you don't keep digging, but our Democrat friends continue to push for far-left policies that will further drive inflation by creating excess demand with no building of supply, which hurts low-income and middle-class families the hardest.

Now is the time for Congress to pass pro-growth, free market legislation that will actually empower our economy and put more money into the pockets of the American taxpayer, not in the coffers of Washington.

Mr. Speaker, the solutions are actually kind of simple. We must follow our rule book, which is known as the Constitution. We must respect and abide by our oath to the Constitution, not with some crazy mandates coming out of Washington. We must strengthen our national security, including securing our borders.

We must strengthen our economy, not grow our government. No one in my district is saying, hey, the Federal Government is not big enough. Let's expand it by 30 percent.

We must continue to focus on making America the land of opportunity, the land of independence, not the land of dependence. That is not what we wrote way back when. This is done through education and through driving career opportunities.

Mr. Speaker, we, as well, need to have an understanding that it is our job to be the adults in the room and be fiscally responsible with the taxpayers' money. It is not our money; it is the taxpayers' money.

So the American people deserve better. They deserve better from this House. We need to deliver. Truly, the idea of America depends upon it.

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INFRASTRUCTURE INVESTMENTS IN THE STATE OF TEXAS

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

Ms. GARCIA of Texas. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to celebrate the critical investments coming to my home State of Texas.

This week, the President signed the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act. This bipartisan bill is bringing over \$35 billion to Texas for important projects that will rebuild our communities. The fact is, Mr. Speaker, that this is long overdue.

When I was a Harris County commissioner, I built a few roads. I saw firsthand how badly our roads and bridges had deteriorated. We regularly scored Cs and Ds on infrastructure that my precinct relied on every day, creating extra costs and putting lives in danger. In fact, roads in terrible condition have forced Texas drivers to pay over \$700 in extra costs each year. Since 2011, Texans have seen their commute increase to about half an hour because our roads haven't kept up with our growth.

In that same time, Texans were hit with 60 extreme weather events that cost taxpayers over \$200 billion. More than that, crumbling infrastructure has taken the lives of thousands in our great State. Just this February our electric grid nearly collapsed, and over 200 people—many of them seniors—froze to death in their homes.

We are past due in the work to improve our State's infrastructure. That is why I am proud to have voted for this jobs bill and for all of the investments coming to Texas.

The bill that we passed is over \$3.5 billion to weatherize our grid and prepare it for future crises. We also invest \$27 billion in our State's highways and bridges. We will also get \$3 billion to bring safe, clean water to every Texan, especially in our rural communities. This is not small potatoes.

We know how dangerous lead pipes are for growing children. Lead contamination can cause developmental problems, mental health issues, and serious medical emergencies. Because of this funding, we can remove lead pipes from Texas schools and ensure that every child can drink clean, safe water.

Thanks to all of these investments, Texans will have safer commutes, cleaner water, and lower bills for reliable electricity.

But this law does not solve just today's problems. It prepares us for tomorrow's opportunities. Thanks to this law, Texas will receive nearly half a billion dollars to expand the electric vehicle charging network. We will also receive over \$1 billion to improve our State's airports which are some of the Nation's busiest. We can also expect over \$100 million to bring internet access to 1 million Texans who currently lack it. This is especially important to rural Texans like my sister who has to drive all the way into town to get to the library to access the internet.

Mr. Speaker, it is time to solve these problems and create jobs for our community. That is what this law is going to do. The bill will create thousands of jobs in my State from construction