

his hard work with the Historic Arkansas Museum in Little Rock. Currently, Gordon serves as the secretary of the Historic Arkansas Museum Commission. This year will mark Gordon's 50th year on the museum's board.

For half of those years, I have been fortunate to work alongside Gordon, an exceptional attorney and civic leader. He has devoted his adult life to preserving Arkansas' rich heritage for our kids.

I am proud to have served at his side in this worthy mission. I have seen firsthand the impact that he has made on our State and the legacy that he is preserving.

Congratulations, Gordon, on 50 years educating Arkansans about our rich history and preserving it for the next generation. I am thankful for your service.

TEMPLE BETH AM WELCOMES JEWISH PEOPLE FROM ALL WALKS OF LIFE

(Ms. SALAZAR asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute.)

Ms. SALAZAR. Madam Speaker, I rise today, on the fifth day of Hanukkah, to give special recognition to my Jewish community in Florida's 27th Congressional District.

As their Congresswoman, I have the distinct honor of representing one of the largest Jewish communities in the country, which includes Temple Beth Am, one of the largest congregations in the southeast United States.

For over 65 years, Temple Beth Am has welcomed Jewish people from all walks of life to worship, to study, and to seek refuge. For over six decades, the synagogue has provided spiritual guidance and served the Miami community in so many ways.

Much of this would have never happened without the leadership of Beth Am Senior Rabbi, Jeremy Barras. There are so many great spiritual Jewish leaders in our community along with Rabbi Barras; Rabbi Yitzi Zweig of the Talmudic University Yeshiva in Miami Beach; Rabbi Yossi Harlig of the Chabad Center of Kendall and Pinecrest; and Rabbi Eliot Pearlson of Temple Menorah in Miami Beach. They are esteemed local leaders and pillars of the Miami Jewish community, and I call them my friends.

Over the next few days, our Jewish brothers and sisters all over the world will continue to celebrate the Festival of Lights, God permitting. I offer my best wishes to all of them.

GUN VIOLENCE IN OUR SCHOOLS

(Ms. JACKSON LEE asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute and to revise and extend her remarks.)

Ms. JACKSON LEE. Madam Speaker, I have been here since the Columbine tragedy, which is more than 20 years ago. I have faced a mountain of trage-

dies in schools with children dying at the hands of guns.

I offer my deepest sympathy for the loss of the beautiful, precious people in Michigan. I think a simple addition to this whole idea of the gun safety discussion—I intend to introduce a bill that is in tribute to Kimberly Vaughan who died in Santa Fe at the hands of a young gunman. I want to just simply say, Store your guns.

This storage act in honor of her name responds to the tragedy that just happened as well because it requires manufacturers and retailers to sell guns with storage safety devices to ensure that those penalties for not doing so are ahead of the loss of life; providing tax credits for those who do that; and as well, providing grants for more information about safety devices.

We have to do whatever we can to save the lives of our children.

TASKS TO DO OVER THE RECESS

(Mr. GROTHMAN asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute.)

Mr. GROTHMAN. Madam Speaker, I think after next week we are going to spend about 3 weeks back in the district. It would be nice if people would go down to the southern border, as I did, and look at the path into Yuma, Texas, in which all the photo IDs are being thrown aside by the people who want to forget their past and start a new life in America.

I also hope when people go back home, they spend some time with the farmers and with the manufacturers that make our country run. They will find that the cost of metals used in manufacturing—and I have a big manufacturing district—are sometimes going up five or six times. Not 5 or 6 percent, five or six times.

They will find that mucking around with the free market of trucking in California has resulted in huge shortages of various different things that we need, including chemicals needed for agriculture, for things like planting soybeans and corn. Some farmers are afraid that sometime in the next year we are going to have a food shortage.

They will find out that the goal of taking away fossil fuels is going to result in significant increases in heating oil, which is particularly a problem in northern Wisconsin.

THE NEED FOR BETTER FOREST MANAGEMENT

(Mr. LAMALFA asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute and to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. LAMALFA. Madam Speaker, as we reflect upon yet another horrific fire season in California and the West, we cannot allow ourselves to forget or get complacent.

This week, we have had several good meetings here in D.C. with various groups talking about the need for better forest management.

This is more or less what the average forest looks like that is unmanaged. You can hardly see through it. You could never ride a horse through it. An owl can hardly fly through the thing. So what does this mean, an overcrowded forest? It means fire danger.

These trees compete for a limited amount of water supply. Insects attack and weaken trees because they don't have enough water and soil nutrients.

The right amount of trees per acre would look something like this. See, we are not cutting all the trees from Mexico to the Canadian border, we are leaving some behind, a healthier more sustainable forest. We will have much more success and much less fire danger.

Indeed, over a million acres in my district burned this year—a million acres. That is terrible for water quality, air quality, for the wildlife, and for the habitat. We could do so much better and put people back to work managing our forests in a way that is better for everybody with access to the forest. Let's get on it.

CANCEL STUDENT LOAN DEBT

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Ms. STRICKLAND). Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 4, 2021, the gentleman from New York (Mr. BOWMAN) is recognized for 60 minutes as the designee of the majority leader.

GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. BOWMAN. Madam Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members have 5 legislative days in which to revise and extend their remarks and include extraneous material on the subject of my Special Order.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Is there objection to the request of the gentleman from New York?

There was no objection.

Mr. BOWMAN. Madam Speaker, today, we are focused on Federal student loans.

This global pandemic, which is very much still with us, has been hard on Americans in so many ways. One source of relief the Federal Government has been able to provide is the pause on Federal student loan payments. That pause is scheduled to end after January, and tens of millions of Americans will have to resume monthly payments on their loans.

Millions of people will yet again be faced with terrible choices between paying off their loans and putting food on the table, paying for childcare, or paying medical bills. Student debt is a national crisis. It was a crisis before the COVID-19 pandemic and it is an even bigger one now.

I can't think of a better opportunity to cancel student loan debt. Today, over 40 million borrowers owe a combined \$1.8 trillion in loans, and the share of people who are able to make payments high enough to reduce their principal balance has been rapidly declining. That means for years people have been doing all they can to make

monthly payments but can only afford to keep up with the interest that accrues.

If someone took out a \$30,000 loan to go to a public State university but can only afford the minimum monthly payments to cover interest, they can be paying hundreds of dollars every month for years without seeing the total amount they owe go down at all. In fact, many borrowers see their debt increase because they can't even keep up with the interest.

□ 1845

Far too often it can take a borrower over a decade to pay off their loans, and many borrowers end up defaulting because they simply cannot make ends meet with such high payments. This can have lasting impacts on a person's financial, mental, and physical health which taken all together makes it harder for people to fully participate in the economy over the long-term.

For example, Madam Speaker, you can't get a Small Business Administration loan if you have defaulted on any loan in the past 7 years. So many of our family members, friends, and neighbors face additional barriers to starting businesses because of student debt. They face additional barriers to save for retirement, buying homes, taking care of their health and putting off doctors' visits or necessary prescriptions, starting families, or pursuing a career they are passionate about.

Students took these risks in their pursuit of the American Dream through obtaining a college degree. Students across America are doing exactly what we asked them to do; work hard, study and learn deeply, grow your mind, develop your skills, and expand your world view. Students across America took these steps because we told them that education, particularly higher education, would be the great equalizer. We told them their hard work would open doors for the rest of their lives.

Instead, we have shut those doors in their faces one by one, and we have disproportionately done this to Black and Latino, indigenous, and poor students. We have preyed upon our most vulnerable kids.

The student debt crisis is a racial justice issue, and we cannot talk about the problem nor the solutions without centering the experiences of students and families of color and others who come from marginalized communities.

Canceling student debt would mean putting money back into people's pockets and improving the overall economy. This is money that can be used to pay for childcare so that parents can reenter the workforce and actually use the degree they went into debt for in the first place. This is money that can be used to start a business or buy a house or pay for necessary healthcare.

This newfound freedom will open the door to pursue a passion or a purpose like teaching, nursing, or public serv-

ice rather than one that just pays the bills. This freedom will improve one's quality of life and provide the self-determination necessary for quality, long-term planning.

Canceling student debt would go a long way in reducing the racial wealth gap and the racial homeownership gap and would help address many of the systemic barriers Black and Brown families face.

It is time to cancel this predatory student debt to give the American people a fresh start and accelerate both the economic and social well-being of our Nation. Our predatory debt is an unfair and unjust burden that has been hanging over the heads of borrowers since they decided to pursue an education.

That is why I, along with many Members you will hear tonight, Madam Speaker, have been calling on President Biden to use his executive authority to cancel Federal student loans. This authority is already being used right now to cancel the interest owed on all Federal student loans during the pandemic. Now it is time to use that same authority to cancel all Federal student debts.

Madam Speaker, I yield to the gentlewoman from Washington (Ms. JAYAPAL), who will highlight many ways canceling students loan debt is urgently needed. Congresswoman JAYAPAL will address this House on this very important issue.

Ms. JAYAPAL. Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague, Representative BOWMAN, for his incredible leadership. It has been a true honor to serve with the gentleman in the Progressive Caucus, this Special Order hour has always been the Progressive Caucus' Special Order hour led in his very capable hands and also to be able to serve with him on the Education and Labor Committee. The gentleman brings tremendous power to the actual experience of education through his own background. I am so proud to serve with the gentleman.

Madam Speaker, I, too, am here to talk about the need to cancel student debt. This is a tremendous crisis for 36 million Americans who are being crushed by \$1.8 trillion in student loan debt.

When I first ran for Congress in 2016, the number was \$1.2 trillion; then it was \$1.3 trillion, \$1.5 trillion, now it is almost \$1.8 trillion in student loan debt. Working families and students are counting on this administration to build us all back better.

But many families like those I represent in Seattle cannot thrive with the crippling burden of student loan debt holding them back at every single turn.

With the student loan moratorium expiring at the end of January, borrowers are literally just a few weeks away from resuming to pay substantial amounts of their income toward student loan payments and the crises that they are facing, the trauma that they

are facing as they think about what they are going to do when this moratorium expires and how they are going to make these payments. Over one-quarter of borrowers expect at least one-third of their income will go toward student loans once the pause ends, and they are terrified. Eighty-nine percent of full-time employed borrowers are expecting to be financially insecure come February 1.

While that number is concerning, it should not be surprising. The economic toll of the pandemic has made it tough for one-quarter of all adults to pay their bills. To make ends meet, people have stayed afloat by using the money that would have gone to student loan payments on all the other essential costs that they have. Eighty-seven percent of borrowers report using these savings to pay off other bills.

This is personal. My office recently heard from a mother and a veteran in the Seattle area who was delinquent in her payments even before the first case of COVID-19 hit our country. She is glad that the pause has given her a chance to catch up on payments, but she is concerned that very soon she will have to choose between paying her mortgage and repaying her student loans after January. Not having to make student loan payments has helped her and her family. But should this pause end without student debt cancellation, she and her children will be on the path to financial ruin. We have the power to make sure that does not happen. This administration has the power to make sure that does not happen.

The good news is that this administration does have, as my colleague said, the authority to do what is right for families like hers and like so many that I have been hearing from. Clearly, if the pause on student loans and interest was necessary to help families sustain themselves through the pandemic, then ending it without any form of permanent student debt relief would be harmful, especially as many families are continuing to struggle during this ongoing crisis.

Consider the tremendous strides the Biden administration has made toward reviving our struggling economy: low unemployment, reopened businesses, and vaccinations driving consumer demand. Eliminating \$50,000, at least, of student debt per borrower would increase average yearly pay by \$3,000 which in turn would increase GDP by \$1 trillion.

Cancelation would also solidify access to important paths for building the middle class which have been delayed due to student loan debt. More than 80 percent of borrowers with student loan debt report that that debt is holding them back from being able to afford a home. Many would be in a better position to begin saving for homeownership as well as retirement or starting a business.

Student loan forgiveness would also help close the wealth gap, as Mr. BOWMAN pointed out, especially in communities of color. Black, Latinx, and Native borrowers are more likely to struggle with repayments and consequently default on their loans at higher rates. Further, it is estimated that Black borrowers on average owe nearly \$53,000 in student debt, the highest compared to other communities. In fact, the average student debt for Black households tripled in the 12 years following the 2008 recession with student debt held by Black borrowers being triple what White borrowers owe just 4 years after graduating.

So, yes, this is clearly a matter of racial and economic justice.

Low-income and middle-class Americans are encouraged to pursue higher education as a tool for economic and social mobility. But here is the catch, the enduring weight of student loan debt negates opportunities for many borrowers to truly transform their lives and our country.

As the lead sponsor of the College for All Act in the House and a proud co-sponsor of the debt cancellation bill from Representative OMAR, I know that eliminating student loan debt will better ensure that earning a degree remains a strong path to social mobility and economic security, particularly during this pivotal moment for our recovery. That is why the administration should cancel student loan debt.

They can start with immediately eliminating at least \$50,000 in student loan debt per borrower before the payments begin again. It is a single action that can cement progress for an entire generation of Americans and those who come after that. So let's deliver that financial breathing room. Let's deliver on racial equity and economic security by canceling student loan debt.

Mr. BOWMAN. Madam Speaker, I thank Congresswoman JAYAPAL for her remarks, and I thank her for her congressional leadership as the chair of the Congressional Progressive Caucus. I thank the gentlewoman for lending her voice and vision to this very important issue.

Madam Speaker, I yield to the gentleman from New York (Mr. ESPAILLAT), who represents the Boogie Down Bronx right next door to me.

Mr. ESPAILLAT. Madam Speaker, I thank Representative BOWMAN for yielding. Don't forget, I also represent Manhattan. I am a Latin from Manhattan.

Madam Speaker, I thank the gentleman for giving me the opportunity to address this incredible issue.

Madam Speaker, I rise today in support of canceling student debt for over 43 million Americans. In fact, Madam Speaker, student debt for some time now has surpassed credit card debt for America. It is mind-boggling to consider that for many Americans they could be indebted for a significant period of their adult lifespan. Those who have children and then choose to help

them out could be indebted for an entire life. So this is not the way a country should move forward.

For more than a decade, mounting student loan debt has made it difficult for many Americans to purchase a home, to start their own business, to move forward and aspire to be part of the middle class or the advancement that this Nation should promise all its people.

They have difficulties saving for the future of their families, so this is a transgenerational crisis. It is far beyond one generation.

Recent data shows that borrowers in the United States owe collectively \$1.6 trillion in Federal and private student loan debt. With the surge of the coronavirus cases and the rise in unemployment claims, the student loan crisis only worsened. It became a very deep crisis not only impacting American futures but putting in jeopardy the immediate needs and well-being of American families.

As a strong proponent of student debt cancellation, I was proud to join my colleagues in responding to the growing crisis. Democrats in the House of Representatives led a bipartisan effort to provide economic assistance and relief to student borrowers in the CARES Act which was extended in the American Rescue Plan. So we have a record, Madam Speaker, of trying to throw a lifeline to all these borrowers who are drowning in debt.

Earlier this year I was proud to join my colleagues in calling for a bold plan to tackle the student loan debt crisis and cancel up to \$50,000 in student loan debt for Federal student loan borrowers.

Failure to cancel student loan debt will continue to greatly affect the quality of life for millions of Americans. Like the coronavirus pandemic, student debt disproportionately affects low-income, working class, and communities of color. We must work to create a more equitable outcome for everyone.

Student loan cancellation isn't only relief for debt holders, it is also one of the most effective ways to stimulate our economy. Let's be smart about this, Madam Speaker. Let's be smart about this. Let's unshackle and unsaddle people from their debt so they can have just a little bit more money in their pocket and spend it in local businesses.

□ 1900

They will not run away on a European vacation. They will not go to the South of France. They will go to the local store and spend their money there on emergency items, milk, Pampers, and food. So let's help them out.

When Americans aren't burdened by student loans, they are more easily able to start businesses and help their families. Removing the financial barriers allows Americans to more easily join the workforce, as well.

So not only will it stimulate local businesses and small businesses, which

continue to be the biggest employers in America, but it would also help people come back to the workforce.

I look forward to working with my colleagues in the Congressional Progressive Caucus to provide relief and economic justice to the millions upon millions of struggling debt owners under a mountain of student debt.

Madam Speaker, I thank my distinguished colleague from the Bronx, and from Mount Vernon, and from Rockland County, and all the other areas that the gentleman distinguishes and represents for yielding to me.

Mr. BOWMAN. Madam Speaker, I thank Mr. ESPAILLAT for his kind words. Before he goes, I want to underscore what he said about people investing in their own communities when they have more money in their pockets. The gentleman just made me think of all the young children who want to take art classes, drama classes, and swimming lessons, and receive tutoring, and all the things that families cannot afford because they are trying to pay down their student debt.

They can reinvest in their communities, reinvest in their children, and their children will be much less likely to commit harm to themselves or their communities because they have been developed and nurtured from an early age.

I thank the gentleman so much for his remarks, my brother representing the Bronx, Manhattan, and the historic Washington Heights. We cannot forget that, Brother.

Madam Speaker, I yield to the gentlewoman from Georgia (Ms. WILLIAMS), my sister and fellow freshman.

Ms. WILLIAMS of Georgia. Madam Speaker, I thank Representative BOWMAN for yielding.

I am here today with the urgent request that the Biden administration cancel the student debt obligations that burden 44.7 million Americans. I am one of these 44.7 million Americans who is still paying off student loans well after our college days.

I rise today to elevate the voices of the numerous constituents who continuously call me, Facebook me, and DM me to tell me their stories, including Natalie from Morningside and Jacob from Atlanta, both of whom told me that they are desperate for relief and that they only see heartache in their futures, all thanks to their student loan debt.

But we know that it doesn't have to be this way. During the COVID-19 pandemic, a financial lifeline was extended to the American people with emergency student loan relief. But that lifeline is going to end in just 2 short months.

Now that we have seen that being free of the burden of student loan debt is possible, we must deliver for the American people and cancel student debt permanently.

Student debt is disproportionately held by Black borrowers and continues to worsen the racial wealth gap. Nowhere is it more obvious to have this

vicious cycle of student loan debt exacerbate the racial wealth gap than with our historically Black colleges and universities. Not only am I a proud third-generation HBCU alum of Talladega College, but Georgia's Fifth Congressional District has more HBCUs than any other congressional district in this country.

HBCUs have been intentionally underfunded throughout their history. While the Build Back Better Act will partially rectify that injustice, HBCUs are still struggling to meet the needs of the more than 290,000 students enrolled in more than 100 HBCUs across America today. HBCUs' endowments are smaller compared to those of predominantly White institutions, and, in turn, that limits the aid that HBCUs can provide to our students, leading to larger student loans and smaller alumni donations, burdening grads with tens of thousands of dollars in debt and perpetuating the cycle for generations to come.

Student loan debt also prevents people from starting a family and building a better life. An Education Trust study found that of graduate degree holders who earn between \$75,000 and \$100,000 with \$94,000 in student loan debt, 55 percent of debtors delayed investments in retirement; 67 percent postponed buying a home; and 36 percent postponed having a child.

We live in the richest country in the world. We ought to be ashamed of these statistics. We shouldn't accept that people must choose between paying off student loans or having the family that they have always dreamed of. For generations, American students have heard that a college education is the key to unlocking the American Dream. Instead of unlocking the American Dream, we have only created a uniquely American nightmare.

We made a promise to the American people. We can deliver on that promise by canceling student loan debt so that everyone can thrive and not merely survive.

I thank Representative BOWMAN for hosting this Special Order hour, and I look forward to making sure that we deliver on the promise of America for everyone.

Mr. BOWMAN. Madam Speaker, I thank Congresswoman WILLIAMS for participating.

Madam Speaker, I yield to the gentlewoman from New York (Ms. OCASIO-CORTEZ), who represents the Bronx and Queens.

Ms. OCASIO-CORTEZ. Madam Speaker, I thank the gentleman for yielding. We are here, Bronx boogie down caucus checking in, yerr caucus checking in, student loan cancellation caucus checking in because this is getting ridiculous. This is ridiculous.

I am 32 years old. I am a first-generation college graduate on my mom's side, and growing up, I was told, since I was a child: Your destiny is to go to college. That is what is going to lift our family up and out. That is our fu-

ture. That is what we are here to accomplish.

I was 17 years old when college recruiters started coming to my high school saying: This is worth it.

We still do that today because it is teenagers signing up for what is often hundreds of thousands of dollars of debt, and we just do that, and our government allows that. We give 17-year-olds the ability to sign on and sign up for \$100,000 worth of debt, and we think that is responsible policy.

I am 32 years old now. I have over \$17,000 in student loan debt. I didn't go to graduate school because I knew that getting another degree would drown me in debt that I would never be able to surpass. This is unacceptable.

Not only that, but 65 percent of all jobs in this country require an education beyond high school; first-generation college students are two times as likely to report being behind on student loan payments; and 63 percent of borrowers who made payments with Navient during the COVID forbearance still owe more now than they originally borrowed. There are hundreds of thousands of people in this country who owe more on their student loans now than they did when they first took them out.

We as a country are profiting off of insurmountable and crushing educational debt, and it is wrong. It is absolutely wrong. Four years after graduation, 48 percent of Black students owe an average of 12.5 percent more than they originally borrowed.

But this isn't just an issue of a debt crisis. This is an educational crisis in the United States of America. If we want to remain competitive, if we want to remain innovative, and if we need the technological investments necessary to address things like climate change, we need an educated country.

The United States has a policy of actively disincentivizing higher education. We disincentivize people from getting a college or secondary education beyond high school. That is backward. The least we can do—we have a moral obligation, an economic obligation, a political obligation to cancel student loan debt in the United States of America.

We have seen the benefits that this has had during the forbearance alone. It has given people the breathing room to do what they need to do so we can stop writing these ridiculous articles that young people are killing diamond rings, that they are not buying houses, and that they are killing this industry or that, that we are not having children. It is because we are being crushed by immoral debt.

No person should have to go into debt, crushing debt, in order to get an education. It is wrong. It is backward, and it doesn't help us as a country. So I am greatly looking forward to that. I am greatly looking forward to the Biden administration canceling student loan debt and no longer advancing the false narrative that student loan debt is for the privileged.

What a ridiculous assertion. Do we really think that a billionaire's child is taking student loans? Come on. Come on. If you are taking on student loan debt, it is because you are likely a working or middle-class person.

So let's get real. Let's cancel it. It is in the interest of the people. It is in the interest of this country. It is in the interest of our future.

I thank the distinguished Representative from the Bronx and Westchester, JAMAAL BOWMAN, for yielding.

Mr. BOWMAN. Madam Speaker, I thank Congresswoman OCASIO-CORTEZ for taking me back to when I was 17, a senior in high school, trying to figure out what the heck I was going to do. I decided to go to college. We didn't have any money, so they offer you all this free money and say: There you go. You could take out as much as you want, as much as you need. Just come to our school, and we will take care of you.

Then what happens is, you take on all of this debt, and then you get out, and you are underpaid in terms of the employment you receive. Then the rent is too high, and the groceries are too high, and the childcare is too high.

Ms. OCASIO-CORTEZ. Will the gentleman yield?

Mr. BOWMAN. I yield to the gentlewoman from New York.

Ms. OCASIO-CORTEZ. And health insurance is too high.

Mr. BOWMAN. And health insurance is too high. It is unbelievable.

We need to cancel student debt and end the predatory practices on our young people, completely end the practice.

It is my honor to now yield to the distinguished gentlewoman from Massachusetts (Ms. PRESSLEY).

Ms. PRESSLEY. Madam Speaker, I thank Congressman BOWMAN for yielding. There is nothing freshman about him. He has hit the ground running since he has been here, and he has been a leader and partner on many issues, including this issue of student debt. I thank the gentleman for his partnership on our congressional resolution calling for President Biden to provide broad-based student debt cancellation.

Madam Speaker, I rise today on behalf of more than 45 million people in America crushed by the growing weight of the \$1.7 trillion student debt crisis. The grandmother—you heard me right, the grandmother—I have a 76-year-old constituent in the Massachusetts Seventh still paying student loans, all while on Social Security and a fixed income.

I rise on behalf of the new parents struggling to manage the skyrocketing costs of childcare for which Massachusetts is the second highest in the country, \$21,000 per child for center-based care; new parents struggling to manage the skyrocketing cost of childcare, rent, and their student loan payments; the teacher who fears losing their teaching license because they have gone into default and can't come up with that monthly student loan payment, not even the minimum.

The irony of it is that this is debt that they incurred in order to be an educator, in order to be a nation builder, to pour into our children, the next generation.

I rise on behalf of an entire generation of young people, young people I met with a couple of weeks ago who, when I asked them about their future, were despondent and expressed great hopelessness: Well, I don't know that I am going to go to college because I don't want to be in debt for the rest of my life, and I fear if there will even be a planet for me to grow up on.

I rise today on behalf of a whole generation of young people grappling with that sense of foreboding and despair, a generation of young folk who have been forced to hold off on pursuing education, starting higher education, starting a small business, purchasing a home because of record levels of student loan debt.

I rise on behalf of Black and Brown folk who, due to generations of precise and intentional what I would characterize as policy violence, have been forced to take on higher rates of student debt for just a chance at the same degree as our White peers.

□ 1915

Madam Speaker, the student debt crisis is one that disproportionately impacts our Black community. For too long, the narrative has excluded us and the unique ways in which this debt is exacerbating racial and economic inequities, compounding our gender and racial wealth gap. We have to borrow at higher rates just for a shot at the same degree as our White peers.

Black women, in particular, bear the largest burden, as they are forced to take on higher student debt loads, all while navigating a persisting wage gap that allows Black women to earn just 61 cents to every dollar earned by a White man. These are systemic barriers that make it significantly more challenging to repay this debt.

There are some who have questioned if this is regressive in impact, to cancel student debt of \$50,000. They have questioned the merit as to whether or not this is a racial justice issue. Well, ask the presidents of the historically Black colleges and universities who have been using ARPA funds to cancel student debt. Not regressive in impact. Important, necessary, and long overdue.

These are systemic barriers that have existed long before this pandemic and unjust pre-COVID status quo.

In this moment, as we work to build back better and do so equitably, President Biden has an opportunity and a responsibility and the authority to address the hurt and harm these communities are feeling by using his executive authority to cancel \$50,000 in Federal student loan debt.

Doing so is one of most effective ways he can provide sweeping relief to millions of families while helping to reduce the racial wealth gap to lay the groundwork for an equitable and just long-term recovery.

This is a crisis created through policy decisions, and we have a responsibility to address it head on. In this moment of ongoing crisis, our families need every bit of help that they can get.

In just under 2 months, student debt payments are scheduled to resume for millions of families across this country. Families who have been struggling to make ends meet throughout this pandemic, through no fault of their own in this pandemic-induced recession, will have an additional bill to cover.

I have parents in my district in their fifties still paying on their student loans and now helping their children pay for their student loans. This is an intergenerational crisis.

This summer, we applauded the Biden administration for heeding the calls of many of us here tonight, heeding the calls of this movement, the movement that elected him, when they extended the pause on student loan payments. We fought hard for that.

This welcome action gave another layer of protection to the millions of borrowers facing a disastrous financial cliff. But our work here is unfinished.

This isn't a question as to whether or not he has the authority, because that authority has already been exercised. The same authority should be used to extend the payment pause. President Biden must now cancel at least \$50,000 in student debt to boost the economy and to close the racial wealth gap.

In this moment of a so-called reckoning on racial injustice, the only receipts that matter are policies and budgets.

The truth, Madam Speaker, is that this economic crisis is far from over. Families in the Seventh District of Massachusetts and all across the country are continuing to struggle to make ends meet. Failure to act would be unconscionable, so we must move with urgency.

As we continue the work of building a just and equitable recovery from the current economic crisis, broad-based, across-the-board, and permanent student debt cancellation must remain front and center.

The people, including the broad and diverse coalition that elected President Biden, demand, deserve, and require nothing less.

Mr. BOWMAN. Madam Speaker, I thank Congresswoman PRESSLEY for her words.

Madam Speaker, I yield to the gentlewoman from Michigan (Ms. TLAI B).

Ms. TLAI B. Madam Speaker, I thank so much Representative BOWMAN for hosting this critically important Special Order hour tonight.

Representative BOWMAN said something that really resonated with me. When I was a senior in high school, they really did make it sound like that money was free. That money was far from free, as we know.

Students in our country have become profit centers. They really, truly have, and it is ruining lives.

One of the first ever townhalls I had when I first got elected was in western Wayne, in Wayne County, Michigan.

A young lady, after I opened it up for questions, stood up. She stood up very strong and looked over at me and started crying, in tears, telling me just how incredibly hard it is to be able to survive, become a homeowner, to be able to move on. She told me about how much it felt like she was trapped, like she was hostage to the student loan debt, and the fact that all she wanted to do was give back. She wanted to get her degree and come back to the community that raised her, come back to the community and give back, and it was so incredibly hard.

Today, as we hear over and over again, 15 million of our neighbors across our country owe trillions in outstanding student debt. That alone should resonate with so many of my colleagues. This must become a national priority.

One of the things that I think is important, as we hear about these stories, is the human impact. I was the first in my family to graduate from high school. My father only went up to a 4th grade education, my mother, an 8th grade education. My father came here at 19 years old. They could have never imagined, of course, their daughter being able to graduate from high school and go on to college. Yes, I worked full-time Monday through Friday and took weekend classes to get my law degree and still had close to \$200,000 in debt. I still owe over \$70,000, and most of it is interest. Most of it was our own government making money and profit off of me.

And guess what? I didn't go to work for the for-profit entities. I went to legal aid. I worked at the nonprofit organization fighting for the right to breathe clean air, to fight for the worker that was getting their wage taken and stolen by their employer. I worked on immigrant rights and so much more.

All of that is to say, we have to stop treating folks paying for their education as if they bought some bougie car or something big, something beyond them. But, no, they were seeking an education.

As many of my colleagues will tell you, there is that counselor in the hallway that would pull us aside and say, Rashida, where is your application for college? You have got to apply. And I am like, I am the eldest of 14, Coach Watson—it was Coach Perry Watson at Southwestern High School. He still remembers pulling me into his office because he didn't get an application from me—and I said, I am the eldest of 14; I can't go—my parents are working-class folks; my dad worked on the line at Ford Motor Company—and say, Hey, dad, help me out here; I want to go to college.

So all of that is to say, yeah, they sat us down. Of course, there was the Pell grant and all of that. Of course, there was. But at the end, it was still a

struggle. It was still a struggle. Because guess what, some of that money you couldn't use for certain things. I remember this. They changed stuff a little bit after I graduated. But still, I had to work. I had to figure out how to pay for the gas to get to the school and so much more.

But I think it is really important to know, in my home State of Michigan, I think the average loan borrower now is close to \$35,000 in debt. You have to add on the healthcare costs, the rent, the utilities, car payments, and so much more to just really live your life.

So the majority of our American people, our neighbors right now, educated or not, live check by check. They literally live check by check. Add to that the average of \$250 or more for student loans, it is really holding people back.

When I look at my State—my district is the third poorest congressional district in the country. When I look at the eyes and look at the families that I represent and they come to our townhalls and talk about the struggles and “please help, make government about people, make it about us, put us first.” One of the things that I continue to hear, the common theme is: We didn't do anything wrong. We just went to go get access to higher education. They feel like they are being penalized. They feel, truly, that the interest rates—I read this—that the interest rates are one of the silent killers when it comes to debt repayment. They feel like they are being punished for doing something that they were taught to do, right? They go to college, do right, work hard, and they feel like they are being penalized.

The cost of education in our country just continues to increase. We all know that. We see it over and over again. So what sounds like something that can't be solved, that it is something impossible, it actually is not that complex.

President Biden has the ability, his administration has the ability, with the stroke of a pen, to help millions of our neighbors across the country to get out of student debt.

We are far from putting this pandemic behind us. It has been a struggle for many of us. Yes, these payments are going to be coming due. Folks are so anxious about it, even planning now. Folks are sending me messages on social media, What do I do about Christmas? Because I know around the corner, I have got to start repaying the student loans.

It is difficult to put into words just how big of a difference relieving this heavy burden would make in the lives of so many of my residents.

I am grateful to stand here with many of my colleagues joining in this fight. Rarely, if ever, in politics are you presented with an easy solution to such an impossible problem. But this one isn't. This one is pretty easy. We are the ones. The government is profiting off of people, and we have got to stop.

I think when we, again, make government about people and we put them

first, then I think it is going to be an easy decision for the administration and for President Biden to come up with the plan that is needed to really help that young lady that came to my townhall, and so many others, in making this a national priority.

I can tell you, they all know, and they were all doing what they were supposed to be doing and at the end, they are still struggling.

I know my colleague is not a millionaire, but I always like reminding people of this. The majority of my colleagues in this Chamber are. They don't understand the struggle of living check by check. They don't understand. Some of them may not be close in understanding the pain of that student loan debt that is really heavy on so many families.

So I stand here in solidarity with my colleagues in saying, let's do the right thing, let's make this a national priority, let's get an executive order done, and let's help millions of Americans that did nothing wrong except wanting to access a higher education which, as they were told, was access to a beautiful, vibrant life in our country.

Again, we can't continue to make them a profit center. We have to make them our priority, and they deserve to be able to live and thrive in our country.

Mr. BOWMAN. Madam Speaker, I thank Congresswoman TLAIK so much for her powerful words.

Madam Speaker, I yield to the gentlewoman from Texas (Ms. JACKSON LEE).

Ms. JACKSON LEE. Madam Speaker, I thank the gentleman from New York for both his leadership and his inspiration. He obviously cares. That is why he is on the floor tonight.

I think that is the point that I want to make. It looks as if we are lonely on this floor tonight. It looks as if we are in the eve of the day's work. It looks as if we could be somewhere else.

I can tell you, being from a district in Houston that is surrounded by universities, and I know that I will get someone in trouble for trying to call the roll of the universities around the 18th Congressional District, like the historic Texas Southern University, University of Houston, University of St. Thomas, Houston Baptist University, Lone Star College, Houston Community College, and San Jacinto College. I know someone is texting me right now. But I am full of college students, all of them working very hard.

I thought I would bring to the floor today the Constitution. I love the words of the Declaration of Independence, the opening words, that we are all created equal with certain inalienable rights of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.

Does that mean the students that are right now struggling to make ends meet—I think of that famous noodle meal that they eat because they just don't have the money to survive—does that mean that one person, that is still

the first person to go to college, in 2021, the single mother that has made it to 20-something hours, has to drop out?

America has always said that the American Dream is defined singularly by your presence here in the United States. Yet, we are finding that State and Federal policymakers are ignoring the \$1,730,000,000 plus of national student debt and that one-sixth of the American people, 47,900,000, about that number, are indebted to student debt. That is why we are here on the floor today, recognizing that it also is an imbalance.

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I thank Mr. BOWMAN, an educator, who has seen little babies grow up with little stars in their eyes. They can play a piano or they can play an instrument or he sees them playing on the field of recreation, and they are little scientists, scholars, but yet the hopes and dreams of the opportunity is somewhat denied.

Black families must take on more debt for the same degree as White students and often need to get several degrees in order to be in the middle class. The burden of student debt reaches deep into communities of color. Increasing evidence suggests that it is hampering the ability to build wealth.

One of the reasons my good friend and myself are also interested in the idea of the commission to study slavery and develop reparation proposals is to get a roadmap of some of the populations that are impacted negatively by student debt.

Default and delinquency rates on student loans remain appallingly high. 3.6 million students are in the State of Texas. The Nation carries \$1.7 trillion debt, and we know that 79 percent of Black students had student loan debt by their fourth year. We know it impacts our Latinx families and families that come from rural communities. We are concerned about them.

I hold in my hand the Constitution, as I said. I don't know how many students have time to even look in that direction, but I will tell them that the Founding Fathers, although not perfect, said that they came together to create a more perfect Union.

And what does that mean? I think it means, give us hope, give us a lifeline, let us breathe, and let us be able to buy the things that will help our families. Let us not, as a Black male borrower, default on loans within 12 years of beginning school.

This, of course, covers the gamut of all of America. It is not just the issue of people of color. It impacts older borrowers, 60 and older, whose numbers swelled from 700,000 in 2005 to 2.8 million in 2018. Their debt load was \$8.2 billion. Can you imagine being 60 and older and still paying debt?

I came here to the floor tonight because I have wanted to join the gentleman for people to see that in spite of the fact that we are here at a moment

into the evening, we care about getting this done. It must be the Congress and the administration that takes hold of this and determines that people who are now struggling to pay mortgages, to survive, to feed children, we hope the Build Back Better bill will be a lifeline, but right now we have got to deal with people who wanted to do right and are suffering.

I want to close on this note: To create a more perfect Union, the Constitution guarantees me that. The Declaration of Independence says that this Nation was created to ensure the inalienable rights of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.

And I want to say to those who have gained student debt but never completed their degree, they are not in any way bad people, defaulters, deadbeats; no, they are not. The Constitution applies to all. But they are people who are working in jobs just to survive. They wanted to finish school, but they were so overloaded; maybe they had to leave to take care of a sick mother or a sick father or maybe they had to leave to take care of younger brothers and sisters. I know those stories. But maybe they are now back in school struggling to just try to get that degree.

Let's give them hope. Let's give them dignity. Let's help them with that default and turn it into success. Let's join in—Congressman, thank you—to cancel student loan debt. And we are not frivolous, big spenders. We are trying to put people on the right track so that they can contribute to this great economy and be givers, givers for what is good in America. I hope we can get the job done.

Mr. BOWMAN. Thank you so much, Congresswoman JACKSON LEE. You made me think of the hundreds or even thousands of students and families that I have met throughout my career in education who in elementary school have already made the decision that their children are not going to attempt to go to college despite their brilliance, despite them being artists and scientists and architects and engineers and athletes and musicians and all of those things.

Because of the crippling impact of student debt and cost of college, they have already made the decision when kids are as young as 5, 6 years old. That is unconscionable, that is un-American, and the President has the authority and the moral responsibility to cancel student debt right now. Thank you so much for your words.

I yield to the gentleman from California (Mr. GOMEZ), the last speaker of the evening. I thank him for being here.

Mr. GOMEZ. Madam Speaker, I thank Mr. BOWMAN for organizing this Special Order hour.

I like to describe the student loan debt crisis as a boot on the neck of the American Dream and on the neck of millions of Americans who make that American Dream a reality. And that is

because higher education is the one way that we achieve the American Dream. It is what I did.

I am the youngest of six of immigrant parents from Mexico. My two parents never made it past third grade. Both could read but not really write. One of the things that they knew is that coming here would give me that opportunity to change my life. I was fortunate enough to be born here. My brother Javier and I were born here, and I was one of the first to graduate from college.

It allowed me to believe that I could do more, to believe I could be part of this country, and about that American promise. You come here, you believe in our values, you work hard, you give back, you are going to have a place, and you are going to succeed; and the next generation, your kids and your grandkids, are going to do even better.

I am fortunate. I got to go to a community college after I worked at Subway and Target, and then I transferred to UCLA, graduated in the top 10 percent of my class. Then I got my master's of public policy from Harvard University.

I ended up walking away with \$15,000 in debt from undergrad, which wasn't bad. I thought it was a lot of money. When you graduate, and you are only getting paid \$24,000 a year, it was a lot of money. And I walked away with a little bit over \$65,000 from the Kennedy School for my master's degree. And don't forget, a lot of students also have credit card debt on top of that.

But you know what, I am fortunate that I got to go to school. I am fortunate that I have been able to change my life. I am fortunate that I have been able to get jobs that provide me health insurance for the first time in my family's history, and that my debt isn't as crippling as the current generation's debt.

The current generation's debt after the Great Recession ballooned to historic proportions. That is why you have trillions of dollars in student loan debt on the backs of 47 million Americans.

You know what? These are dreamers; these are people who believe in the American Dream, that say, you know what, I have been told, go to school, work hard. And you know what, it doesn't matter, if you get into the best school possible, take out that debt because it is going to come back tenfold. In the past, that was the case.

But we don't see that now. We see that the debt that has been put on the backs—because we underinvested in higher education, we underinvested in K-12—is crippling people to living their version of the American Dream.

It is so severe, and it pains me and it depresses me, that people are actually are deciding, I would rather not go to college because I don't want to have debt. Think about that. That is the decision people are making now, I would rather not have the best opportunity to achieve the American Dream because

the amount of debt will prevent me from living that American Dream once I graduate.

I think that is shameful because these are the folks that are renewing this idea to live a more just and perfect Union, to refresh that idea generation upon generation. And it is unfortunate because who does it impact? It often impacts immigrants, people of color, Blacks, Latinos, single mothers, single parents. They are the ones that are taking on higher and higher burdens of debt.

Then when they graduate, they sometimes get jobs that don't pay them that well because they want to give back. They care about their communities. We saw in a recent New York Times article that graduates from a school of social work were graduating with \$112,000 in debt but getting paid \$50,000. This is something that we see time and time again.

If people want to believe in the American Dream, then they have to care about canceling student loan debt; to refresh the potential of millions of Americans to buy their first house, to raise children, to start a business, to grow our economy. I believe that this is something that Americans from all sides of the aisle could agree on.

Madam Speaker, I am calling on the President to cancel \$50,000 of student loan debt in the next year.

Mr. BOWMAN. Madam Speaker, I thank Congressman GOMEZ for his powerful and inspiring words.

President Biden and his administration have made some important strides to improve student loan debt for many people who are enrolled in public service loan forgiveness. 30,000 people getting loan forgiveness is a big step in the right direction. Now we need loan forgiveness for the more than 40 million other people in this country.

Madam Speaker, I yield back the balance of my time.

THE UNITED STATES HOUSE OF FREE STUFF

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 4, 2021, the gentleman from Texas (Mr. ROY) is recognized for 60 minutes as the designee of the minority leader.

Mr. ROY. Madam Speaker, I am fascinated to learn that I serve in the United States House of free stuff because that is what I have been hearing nonstop this entire week.

There is an unlimited supply of money and resources apparently, an unlimited supply of dollars that we can continue to print while devastating our economy, devastating the American dollar, and transforming our society by encouraging Americans to believe that there is a free lunch. And there ain't no free lunch.

My wife is the product of a single mom growing up in Texas. Her mom worked multiple jobs to send her to college. She worked hard to be able to go to college. She left with 70-something thousand dollars of student loans