

Securing our economy means we will have safeguards in place to help prevent another economic disaster like the one brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic, from which countless Americans suffered.

The COVID-19 pandemic and resulting economic fallout caused significant hardship. In the early months of the crisis, tens of millions of people lost their jobs.

While employment began to rebound within a few months, unemployment remained high throughout 2020.

Improving employment and substantial relief measures helped reduce the very high levels of hardship seen in the summer of 2020.

Nonetheless, considerable unmet needs remained near the end of 2021, with 20 million households reporting having too little to eat in the past seven days and 10 million households behind on rent.

In early 2022, some 3 million fewer people are employed than before the pandemic, though steady progress has been made, including in recent months.

Hardship in 2020 and 2021 would have been far worse without the extraordinary steps taken by the federal government, states, and localities to respond to the pandemic and its economic fallout.

Key hardship indicators showed strong improvement during early 2021, aided by job growth and government benefits.

Hardship rates fell especially fast thanks to the American Rescue Plan enacted on March 11, 2021, which included \$1,400 payments for most Americans as well as other assistance to struggling households.

Food hardship among adults with children also fell after the federal government began issuing monthly payments of the enhanced and expanded Child Tax Credit, which was first distributed on July 15, 2021, along with improvements in food assistance.

While those measures taken by the Biden Administration were swift and, I believe, life-saving, much of the suffering the American people went through could have been mitigated through extensive planning.

This bill provides those means, which drives my support. No more Americans should suffer because the federal government refused to plan in the case of a disaster.

The DHS Trade and Economic Security Council Act of 2021 is a legislative embodiment of that understanding, so I am proud to support it. I urge my colleagues to as well.

RESILIENT ASSISTANCE FOR MITIGATION FOR ENVIRONMENTALLY RESILIENT INFRASTRUCTURE AND CONSTRUCTION BY AMERICANS ACT

SPEECH OF

HON. SHEILA JACKSON LEE

OF TEXAS

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, April 5, 2022

MS. JACKSON LEE. Mr. Speaker, I rise in strong support of H.R. 5689, the Resilient Assistance for Mitigation for Environmentally Resilient Infrastructure and Construction by Americans Act or the Resilient AMERICA Act.

This bill bolsters U.S. disaster resilience and expands resources and strategies for hazard mitigation by state, local, tribal, territorial governments, and some nonprofit organizations.

The bill permits the redistribution of hazard mitigation funds that are unclaimed or unobligated for use in addressing a future major disaster.

The legislation also increases from 6 percent to 15 percent the estimated aggregate amount of grants made for national public infrastructure pre-disaster mitigation assistance so that we're better prepared to respond to disasters.

It also makes private nonprofit facilities eligible for technical and financial assistance in the implementation of cost-effective pre-disaster hazard mitigation measures.

The overall effect would be to expand the use of hazard mitigation assistance to cover certain activities pertaining to wildfires, tsunamis, and ice storms.

Additionally, the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) must set aside 10 percent of the funds annually to update relevant building codes on which consensus has been reached.

FEMA must also carry out a pilot program through which states and localities award grants to individuals for retrofitting their residences with appropriate hazard mitigation measures.

This legislation will build on the resilience initiatives contained in the recent bipartisan infrastructure law and provide additional tools to reduce risks posed by the changing climate.

For every dollar invested in resilience and predisaster mitigation, the taxpayer receives anywhere from \$3.00 to \$11.00 in return.

The Resilient AMERICA Act returns unspent funds from the Hazard Mitigation Grant Program to the Disaster Relief Fund (DRF), which ensures that these expiring and unspent funds will still help our communities prepare for and respond to disasters.

This bill doubles the funding stream dedicated to FEMA's Pre-Disaster Mitigation program and extends eligibility for Pre-Disaster Mitigation (PDM) to include private nonprofits (PNPs), which ultimately will reduce the impact and damage from a disaster.

It also expands the reach of the post-disaster Hazard Mitigation Grant Program (HMGP) to prevent utility outages in the face of extreme wildfire, wind, tsunami, and ice events.

It additionally funds residential resilience retrofit block grants to states, tribes, and territories to strengthen homes for maximum protection and safety.

It is clear that climate change is making extreme weather more intense and severe.

The snow and ice that unleashed a cascading effect of power and water outages in Texas and surrounding states was caused by a series of rare winter storms in 2021 and 2022.

My constituents were without potable water weeks after the storm, a lot of this damage was a direct consequence of a decades-long failure to maintain and upgrade our essential infrastructure.

We cannot leave our constituents living in mold-ridden homes, in the freezing cold, awaiting implementation of better, large-scale infrastructure.

We need our federal agencies and state governments to be proactive, anticipating potential infrastructure failures and working quickly to resolve them before Americans pay the price of our aged infrastructure.

This will reduce risk, save costs and encourage long-term planning and proactivity, rather

than on-the-fly response to the impending challenges to our infrastructure.

Storms are inevitable, but they don't need to become life, threatening disasters.

I ask my colleagues to join me in voting for H.R. 5689 because we all deserve better protection from the things we know are coming.

UPHOLDING THE FOUNDING DEMOCRATIC PRINCIPLES OF THE NORTH ATLANTIC TREATY ORGANIZATION AND ESTABLISHING A CENTER FOR DEMOCRATIC RESILIENCE

SPEECH OF

HON. SHEILA JACKSON LEE

OF TEXAS

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, April 5, 2022

Ms. JACKSON LEE. Mr. Speaker, I rise in strong support of House Resolution 831, which reaffirms unequivocal support for the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) as an alliance founded on democratic principles.

This resolution also calls on the President to use the voice and vote of the United States to adopt a new Strategic Concept for NATO that is clear about its support for shared democratic values and committed to enhancing NATO's capacity to strengthen democratic institutions within NATO member, partner, and aspirant countries.

Finally, the resolution calls on the President to use the voice and vote of the United States to establish a Center for Democratic Resilience within NATO headquarters.

First, I would like to commend all Ukrainians for their outstanding courage, resilience, fortitude, and bravery. It is truly inspiring for Americans, and for people around the world. America stands with Ukraine and the Ukrainian people.

Russia's launch of a premeditated war against Ukraine is an attack on democracy and a grave violation of international law, global peace, and security.

The fighting has sparked massive displacement and has forced over two million Ukrainians to flee their homes to neighboring states and has put women and girls at heightened risk of violence.

Although the world hopes for peace, Russia's invasion of Ukraine shows no signs of ending. Russian forces continue their bombardment of Ukrainian cities, including the capital, Kyiv, and the southern port city of Mariupol.

Additionally, as a body we must condemn the recent execution style killings of Ukrainians in Bucha.

It is abundantly clear that Russian soldiers were out to torture, rape, and kill innocent Ukrainian civilians. These actions amount to war crimes, and we must treat them as such.

Therefore, along with the President I believe we must hold Russian authorities and President Putin accountable before the International Criminal Court via a War Crimes trial.

This will bring the justice so greatly deserved to those families who lost their mothers, fathers, sons, and daughters to savagery. I additionally believe that this is a good first action under NATO's new Strategic Concept, which this bill seeks to redefine.

Considering the direness of the situation in Ukraine, it is absolutely critical that NATO

powers continue to bind together in opposition to President Putin's soulless actions.

Adopting a new Strategic Concept and establishing a Center for Democratic Resilience will further display to Putin and those like him that the West will not back down to autocrats and dictators.

I therefore am proud to support H. Res 831, and urge my colleagues to do the same.

IN SUPPORT OF H.R. 4738 COVID-19 AMERICAN HISTORY PROJECT ACT

HON. SHEILA JACKSON LEE

OF TEXAS

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, April 6, 2022

Ms. JACKSON LEE. Madam Speaker, I rise today in strong support of H.R. 4738, the "COVID-19 American History Project Act."

This bill directs the American Folklife Center at the Library of Congress to establish the COVID-19 American History Project which will collect and make publicly available individual stories and records of experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic in the United States.

The bill includes a requirement to collect video and audio histories and testimonials of those who were affected by the pandemic.

Madam Speaker, the United States will soon reach a grave milestone. As of 9 o'clock this morning, there have been 974,277 American deaths from COVID-19. In the coming weeks, we will reach 1,000,000 deaths.

However, I believe that only focusing on that horrific number, though nonetheless important, makes us forget about who we lost.

Therefore, with this time I would like to tell the stories of my fellow Houstonians who sadly passed because of this unprecedented public health crisis.

The stories I will be recounting are all courtesy of Houston Public Media, of whose journalists I have been a strong supporter.

Knowing that his daughter would be unable to walk at her college graduation commencement due to the COVID-19 pandemic, Dr. Carlos Araujo-Preza threw his daughter, Andreea Araujo, a belated graduation celebration with her close friends and family in late October. She said he really put in the effort to give her the best ceremony he could.

Dr. Araujo-Preza always went out of his way to make sure his daughter and her brother were taken care of, despite a busy work schedule at Tomball Regional Hospital. The siblings and their father spent their weekends together binge-watching movies and TV shows together.

But in 2020, Andrea Araujo was forced to spend her 23rd birthday without her father.

Araujo-Preza was two weeks away from receiving his first round of the COVID-19 vaccine before he passed away. He died Nov. 30, 2020, at the age of 51.

He knew at a young age he was meant to pursue a career in the medical field. Coming from a family of doctors himself, Araujo-Preza was viewed as a loving caregiver and someone his patients could always rely on.

Araujo-Preza was the leading doctor at his hospital who specialized in plasma research, while also distributing COVID-19 vaccines to nurses.

"His colleagues were fans of him," she said. "They loved when he came into work."

He would go out of his way to give his personal phone number to patients and would accommodate their needs at any time of day. Araujo said her father would wake up as early as 3 a.m. to go into work. Araujo-Preza would sleep in the hospital for days and sometimes weeks at a time to always be on call for his patients.

Now, Araujo said she tries to live by a saying her father used to share in Spanish: "The sun always rises the next day." Araujo-Preza would tell his children to not let daily challenges in life hold them back. Because, he said, as life goes on, you should too.

"I feel like people always say, 'with time, things get better', but I've noticed it's quite the opposite," she said. "Every day gets harder."

That story was courtesy of Emily Jaroszewski at Houston Public Media.

The next story is one that is especially close to my heart: Dick Cigler from the University of Houston.

Those who were mentored by Dick Cigler would tell you he left a lasting impression as one of the most influential staff members at the Daily Cougar—a highly regarded champion of free speech at the University of Houston's newspaper.

"He taught us about the importance of journalism," said Tanya Eiserer, an Emmy-award winning reporter for WFAA in Dallas and former Daily Cougar student editor. "He really taught us the importance of doing the right thing, doing it for the right reasons, and standing up for the underdog."

Nowhere was that more evident than when, in the 1990s, a group of UH journalists wrote a series of articles challenging the decreased university budget for UH downtown students and the increased budget for subsidiary campuses.

Dick allowed the students to voice their concerns brazenly.

"He didn't try to, you know, tell us to back down," Eiserer said. "He ran interference, and they knew that we were an independent news operation."

Eiserer remembers Cigler as being a listening ear and a guiding mentor when she transferred from Baylor University to UH. She regarded him as one of the people who helped her become the reporter she is today.

"I learned how to be a journalist at the Daily Cougar," said Eiserer. "I would not give that time back for all the money in the world."

Cigler worked as Director of UH's Student Publications department, now known as the Center for Student Media, for 23 years until his retirement in 2010.

His impact on the Daily Cougar can be felt to this day.

Cigler died on Jan. 24, 2021, at the age of 79. He leaves behind his two daughters Kerri Runge and Michelle Cigler.

That story was courtesy of Myraket Baker at Houston Public Media.

The last individual I want to mention is someone who is a local hero but should be a national one. That person was John Bland.

More than 60 years ago, a group of Texas Southern University students took seats at the lunch counter at Weingarten's Supermarket at 4110 Alameda Road, knowing they wouldn't be served.

It was Houston's first sit-in, and that spring, Black college students in cities across the country forced the beginning of an end to racial segregation—at lunch counters, department stores, and city halls.

One of the TSU students at the sit-in was John Bland, a 20-year-old who spent the rest of his life working to advance civil rights and equal opportunity.

Bland worked as a bus operator at HouTran, now called Metro, and he spent more than 50 years organizing with the Transport Workers Union. He served as a vice president of the Texas State AFL-CIO, a president of the Houston chapter of the Coalition of Black Trade Unionists, a precinct judge, and a member of the Houston Police Department Citizen Review Committee.

"When workers would doubt their ability to beat the odds and make change, Mr. Bland would say, 'When we fought for integration in the 1960s, they arrested me 27 times, jailed me, and fined me, but that didn't stop us,'" Hany Khalil, Executive Director of the Texas Gulf Coast Area Labor Federation, said.

Bland died on July 9, 2020, at the age of 80. He leaves behind his wife, Betty Davis Bland, and their two daughters and grandson.

That story was courtesy of Jen Rice at Houston Public Media.

I wish I could mention every Houstonian and honor their lives because they all deserve it. They were mothers, wives, fathers, husbands, sons, daughters, and so much more. They will all be missed and are not just another number.

It is for that reason, Madam Speaker, that I strongly support H.R. 4738 and urge my colleagues to support it as well.

IN MEMORY AND PRAISE OF GREGORY ALAN BERRY A PERSON DEDICATED TO EXCELLENCE IN SERVICE OF THE UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

HON. SHEILA JACKSON LEE

OF TEXAS

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, April 6, 2022

Ms. JACKSON LEE. Madam Speaker, as a senior member of this body and the Committee on the Judiciary, I want to offer praise and a message of appreciation for a beloved man, who served as a member of my personal staff in service of the constituents of the 18th Congressional District of Texas, located in the city of Houston.

He was a member of the baby boom generation that directly benefited from and was inspired by the work of President John F. Kennedy, President Lyndon Banes Johnson, Martin Luther King Jr., Rosa Parks, and many other leaders that worked for equality and justice for all.

I am proud but heart-broken to later today participate in a tribute to his service in the U.S. House of Representatives, because Gregory Berry is an American original, my friend and valued member of my staff who died on March 15, 2022, at the age of 66 years old.

Gregory Alan Berry, long-time legislative counsel in the U.S. House of Representatives, died unexpectedly from hypertension on March 15, 2022, at his home in Gaithersburg, Maryland.

Greg was born in Cleveland, Ohio, on February 16, 1956, the second son of Jesse Frank Berry and Bonnie Allena Berry. His father preceded him in death. He is survived by