

respect to one of the land transfers in this bill.

Specifically, regarding the Department of the Interior lands available for transfer under section 5 of the bill, it is the intent of the committee and the bill sponsor that only Department of the Interior Bureau of Land Management lands managed under the Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976 be available for potential inclusion in any transfer authorized under this bill. This transfer is not intended to be made for Park Service land.

Mr. Speaker, I support this bill. I urge all my colleagues to do the same, and I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. BOST. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Mr. Speaker, I rise today in support of S. 4949. S. 4949 would improve VA's burial benefits for veterans and their families. First, the bill would ensure that VA can reimburse a Tribal organization for the cost of burying a veteran in a VA grant-funded Tribal cemetery. This would close a gap that existed before the enactment of the Consolidated Appropriation Act of 2022.

Previously, a State could receive a plot allowance from VA, but some Tribal organizations did not have the same eligibility.

Furthermore, S. 4949 would permit the Secretary of the Army and the Secretary of the Interior to transfer lands under their possession to VA for establishing or expanding national cemeteries. I believe this will help VA further its goal of providing veterans with reasonable access to a national cemetery.

Lastly, the bill would help preserve the reputation of our national cemeteries as a hallowed final resting place.

Under present law, VA cannot bury an individual who has fled to avoid prosecution of a capital crime. Currently, in these cases, VA must provide the family due process before denying the benefit.

Additionally, someone who commits a Federal tier 3 sex offense but flees to avoid prosecution is barred from burial in a national cemetery. However, there is a loophole that prevents VA from denying this benefit if the State charges the individual with the same crime.

A tier 3 sex offense is the most serious classification. These offenses include sex crimes against children and aggravated sexual abuse. No veteran or their family should have to worry about seeing their attacker being honored in a VA cemetery. We must close this loophole.

I thank Senator TESTER and Senator ROUNDS for leading this effort.

Mr. Speaker, I ask all of my colleagues to support S. 4949. I have no further speakers, and I yield back the balance of my time.

Mr. TAKANO. Mr. Speaker, I have no further speakers. Again, I ask my colleagues to join me in passing S. 4949, and I yield back the balance of my time.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The question is on the motion offered by

the gentleman from California (Mr. TAKANO) that the House suspend the rules and pass the bill, S. 4949.

The question was taken; and (two-thirds being in the affirmative) the rules were suspended and the bill was passed.

A motion to reconsider was laid on the table.

### COMPREHENSIVE IMMIGRATION REFORM

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

Mr. GREEN of Texas. And still I rise, Mr. Speaker. And I rise saddened because I find myself on a mission of mercy. I rise to explain the circumstance that causes one Mr. Jaime Avalos to find himself separated from his wife and his baby in another country.

Mr. Avalos came to this country some 27 years ago, and he was brought here by his mother. His mother was here to seek a better life for herself and her young baby. He came to this country as a child, and for 7 years he was only in this country. He was being educated in this country. This was, in fact, the only home that he knew.

His mother decided that she would marry a man whom she met, and this man loved Mr. Avalos as a baby to the extent that he wanted to adopt him. The mother took Mr. Avalos—Jaime is his first name—she took Jaime back to Mexico. She took him to Mexico for the purpose of registering his adoption.

They were there for a brief period of time, and then they returned to the United States where he for some 20 years educated himself here. He went to a school in Houston, Texas. He worked, and he stayed within the law. For all moral purposes, he is a citizen of this country. But lawfully, of course, he is not. Jaime met a woman, a beautiful lady, Yarianna. He and Yarianna are married. They now have a child, Noah. Noah celebrated his first birthday just recently.

Yarianna, wanting her husband to become a citizen, and Jaime wanting to become a citizen because he has a child who is an American-born child and, as a result, a citizen, his wife is a citizen, he wanted to do that which would put him in good standing in this country, to come out of the shadows.

He is a DACA recipient, so he had the privilege of staying, but he did not have a pathway to citizenship. He came at the age of 1 and left at the age of 7 because his mother took him to Mexico to register his having been adopted, brought him back to this country, he meets Yarianna, they are married, and they now have a 1-year-old child.

They lawfully petitioned the consulate in Juarez, Mexico, for the opportunity to come in for the interview that allows a person with the standing

of Jaime Avalos to ask for a visa lawfully. He is living here as a DACA recipient, and he only leaves because this is a part of the process of acquiring the visa.

He goes to Juarez, Mexico, and at the consulate, they process him. In the course of processing him, they discovered that he did come to Mexico at the age of 7 with his mom. He has little to no recollection of this, but they discover it. When they discover that he came to Mexico, left America with his mom, they then point out to him that there is a law that will not allow him to return to his 1-year-old son, Noah, and to his wife.

He is now banned from the United States of America for 10 years.

Some things bear repeating. His wife is here. He is banned from the country for 10 years. He is banned from his home, and he cannot return to his work. He is literally living in a country that he knows very little about. When he leaves the place in which he is residing, he is always in the company of someone who can assist him.

Understanding his circumstance, I decided to travel to Juarez, Mexico, to visit him. I did. I was there, I met with him, and I had an opportunity to have his wife and his child with us. I saw him interact with his young son. It really does cause tears to well in one's eyes to see a baby grasping for his father, hugging his father, holding on to his father, and loving his father and the father reciprocating.

It was a wonderful thing to see, but I was saddened upon looking at it because I knew that at some point we would leave—the wife would leave, the baby would leave, and I would leave—and Mr. Avalos would be left in Mexico.

The experience has caused me to conclude that I must do anything and everything that I can to unite this family—reunite this family. This is unbelievable that we have a law that will not allow him to come back into the country merely because his mother took him out of this country as a DACA recipient—he is a DACA recipient now. She took him out of the country in order to register him as having been adopted. A man loves him. He adopts him as a 7-year-old child, and this law will not allow him back into the country.

There is something wrong when we have laws that will ban husbands from their wives and from their babies because they left the country, came back, and have always been law-abiding. There is something wrong.

When we talk about comprehensive immigration reform, we don't talk about the Jaimes of the world, people who are entrapped in these arcane laws, these laws that only make sense to those who somehow conclude that if we could find any way to bar a person or ban a person from coming into the country that is a great thing to do. I am not one of those people. I don't want to see this happen to this man, this baby, and this woman.

We have a necessity to engage in comprehensive immigration reform and to engage in immigration reform that goes beyond the walls at the border. I am amenable to discussing walls at the border, but we have to go beyond walls. There are those who want to do more at the border. I understand. I am amenable to having that conversation.

□ 1630

We also have to talk about the other aspects of comprehensive immigration reform that will include Jaime Avalos and the many others who find themselves in similar circumstances.

It is a very painful thing to know that we have within our power to bring Jaime home or to allow him to come home, yet we have not done it.

You see, there is another aspect of this law that allows a person who has the circumstance that Jaime Avalos has to negotiate to be returned home on what is called humanitarian parole.

This is where you make your appeal. You make your appeal to our country. You make your appeal, and you explain that this is going to create a hardship.

Our law allows for this appeal to be granted—it is discretionary—if we conclude that there would be a hardship by virtue of a person such as Mr. Avalos being separated from his wife and baby.

Well, it is intuitively obvious to even the most casual observer that there will be a hardship when a husband is separated from a wife and child, when they have a mortgage, and when he is the breadwinner for the family. Yes, there is a hardship.

We have made our appeal. I am making the appeal tonight because I want the world to know, and I want my record to show, that I left no stone unturned when it comes to trying to get this family reunited.

I am making the appeal tonight, and I will be sending a letter to the Secretary of Homeland Security asking for the Secretary, by and through his good offices, to use his awesome power that has within it the discretion to grant Mr. Avalos, to grant Jaime, the opportunity to return home to his wife and baby. It is within the Secretary's discretion.

Now, the Secretary doesn't handle all of these cases himself. There are people in the office who acquire the materials, review the cases.

I am asking for the people who understand this and who know that this is not a case where a foreign power has one of our own and is refusing to release one of our own. This is not the case. He is not being held by a foreign power. This is not the case. If he is granted the right to return, he won't need transportation. He can get here.

We are not looking at having to get him through harm's way with some form of transportation that would necessitate the Federal Government having to make an expenditure.

This is not the case where if he comes to this country, returns home, where he will need assistance. He won't

need food from the government. He won't need the shelter of the government. He won't need to be clothed by the government. He can provide his own food, clothing, and shelter, as well as his transportation.

He only has to be given a document that says he can return to the country that he has lived in for more than a quarter of a century, the country that he knows as home, where his wife resides, where his child lives, where he was living.

He only needs a document that is within our discretion—"our," meaning our country—to allow him to return to the life that he has known in this country for more than a quarter of a century.

I believe that we can all, at some point, put ourselves in the shoes of another person. I believe that if we say to ourselves: What would we want if this were your son or your daughter?

There are times when we ought to examine circumstances from a personal perspective. This is not a criminal. This is a law-abiding person who has a baby and wife in this country.

What would you want? What would you want for your son were the circumstances similar?

There will be those who say, well, he came to this country illegally. Well, let's examine this. Did he really come, or was he brought to the country?

He was approximately 1 year old. As a 1-year-old child, he had little to say—and I think most persons would agree—about where his parents would take him.

He wasn't brought here by some third party, some person who was paid to bring him in. His mother brought him to this country.

There are those who would say, well, his mother was not right for bringing him. She broke the law.

I thank God that I have not always been as blessed as I am today because it inculcated in me a sense of caring, a belief and an understanding that I haven't always had what I have now and that, but for the grace of God, but for the grace of God, I wouldn't have what I have now.

I am not who I am because I am so smart. Most of the people here are not here because they are so smart. Most of the people are here because somewhere along life's way, they were afforded what we would call a break. It happens.

But for the grace of God, I am not sure I would be here, but I thank God I was born in this country. I love this country.

I am not a guy who puts the country down, doesn't salute the flag, won't sing the national anthem, and doesn't say the Pledge of Allegiance. That is not me, but I do defend those who choose not to pledge allegiance, who choose not to sing the national anthem.

I think that is what makes this country great. Every person has the right. Every person has the right to choose. I choose to do these things.

I also understand that I am fortunate. I didn't control where I was born. I understand that if my mother had been born on the other side of this southern border, I believe that my mother would do everything that she could to get to this country so that her young child could have opportunities and not be in fear of harm from various and sundry circumstances that are occurring across the border, on the other side.

But for the grace of God, it could be me or you or any of us, and I am thankful that I have been granted this sense of understanding the plight of others.

I am not a guy who says that we ought to open the borders and bring everybody that wants to come into the country into the country. That is not me.

I think that we ought to have comprehensive immigration reform so that we can make decisions about immigrants and migrants, people who simply want to come to work and people who want to come to make a life here.

We ought to do this. This is what comprehensive immigration reform should be all about.

Yes, we ought to talk about what is happening at the border. I am not shying away from that. But I do believe that we ought to talk about some other things that are exceedingly important.

I want to talk about what we are going to do with the Jaimes of the world. I think that we have to have comprehensive immigration reform because we need to know who is going in and out of the country. We ought to know who is coming into and going out of our country.

I am not one of the persons who believes that we just ought to have an open border, to come and go as you please. That is just not me, but, look, I respect the opinions of those who do believe it.

I think that we ought to have comprehensive immigration reform so that we can establish standards, policies, procedures, methodologies, so that we can have all the things that would make it acceptable for those who qualify to come. Those who do not? Well, they can't make it this time if they don't.

So, I am not an open borders guy, but I am a person who has great sympathy and empathy for people who are not as fortunate as I happen to be.

As a result, I am making this appeal for Mr. Avalos, Jaime Avalos. I think that we don't have to wait until we get comprehensive immigration reform to allow him to return to his wife and baby.

I don't think we have to wait. I believe we can do this under the discretion that is accorded the Secretary under the law.

I believe that comprehensive immigration reform is something that we ought to work on immediately, if not sooner. I think that we can see a need, but there are other needs that we don't

see. They are not as visible. Mr. Avalos happens to be one of the persons who is in that invisible zone and won't be seen, won't be heard of, just suffer.

We in this country think that families ought to stay together. We encourage families to stay together. Yet, we find ourselves now with a baby being separated from his father while we have the authority to change it, knowing that he is not in the hands of a hostile power.

He is in the hands of people in this country who, with the stroke of a pen, can make a difference in the life of a law-abiding person who stayed in this country for more than two decades, more than a quarter of a century, and left lawfully but cannot lawfully return.

He left lawfully because he went to the consulate that I visited, by the way, in Juarez, Mexico. People at the consulate are not proud of the decision that they had to make to tell him that he can't return to his baby, his child.

They are not proud. They genuinely believe that this is something that is going to be reviewed, hopefully, and that maybe we will get a different circumstance.

I believe we can get a different circumstance. I just hope that it won't take us until we finally pass comprehensive immigration reform to have it occur.

□ 1645

I am honored to speak on behalf of Mr. Avalos, and I pray that we can get a Christmas miracle that he can come home for Christmas to his family. I am begging. I am pleading with the Department of Homeland Security and the Secretary to please let him come home to his family. Let him come home and spend this special time of the year with his baby and his wife. Please, let him come home.

Mr. Speaker, I have introduced legislation that can help those who find themselves similarly situated in the future, but that is not going to help him. The chances of our passing legislation between now and the end of the year are not good at all—not good. This has nothing to do with the mindset of a given person or personalities or the political philosophy of any given party. It has nothing to do with that.

It is just at this point in time very few things are going to pass this House. This is not casting any aspersions or any sort of negativity toward any other persons. It is just the facts. But I do believe that this discretionary act can make a difference.

I will talk to Mr. Avalos, I will talk to his wife, and I will talk to them within the next day or so. It is my hope to those who may be listening and can speak to the Secretary—it is my hope that the Secretary and those who are listening, that we can have this Christmas miracle, and that I can give them some good news. I can say to them, He will be home for Christmas.

Christmas is a holiday that he respects, that he celebrates. This is a family that celebrates Christmas. I want to give them some good news.

Mr. Speaker, I want to mention one additional thing before I leave this Chamber. It will probably be my last time to speak this year. I will mention a piece of legislation that I will be introducing next year, this too is very near and dear to my heart.

I don't expect everybody to understand this piece of legislation, but it is pretty important to me and pretty important to a lot of other people. And for many people who are not aware of the circumstance, it is pretty important to them, too.

In my research, we discovered that this House of Representatives on July 18, 1956, accorded Congressional Gold Medals to Confederate soldiers.

We live in a country where we revile the slaves, those who were enslaved, my ancestors. We reviled my ancestors who were enslaved, and we revere, by virtue of our actions—that is some proof of it, there is much more—but we revere those who were the enslavers. Revile the enslaved and revere the enslaver.

I refuse to accept it. There is something in the way I have been wired that just won't allow me to accept certain things. This is a wrong that has to be corrected.

When I say, "revile the enslaved," let's examine that statement, the statement of reviling the enslaved.

What does it mean to be enslaved?

What did it mean to be enslaved in this country?

It is almost a word for polite society to say enslaved because the truth of the matter is for this to occur someone was kidnapped, stolen—stolen from their homeland. By the way, a good many of them were sold into slavery by people from their own land—a good many.

We cannot cheat history; we can't overlook certain facts because they are uncomfortable. I don't feel good knowing that people of African origin sold other people of African origin into slavery, but it is the truth—the undeniable truth. I have to accept the truth.

I just pray that others will accept the fact that there were many that were kidnapped, put on a ship, and then brought across the vast ocean. But it wasn't just that simple. It is easy to say those words, but those words, when properly amended, would include those who didn't make it across the ocean, those who were thrown over to the shark-infested waters.

Sharks would follow ships waiting for bodies to be thrown over to feast upon. Just to say that they traversed the ocean doesn't include how they were shackled and chained, treated like lumber, treated like just another piece of property to be brought from point A to point B.

Just to say they were brought to this country does not acknowledge that

along the way women were raped, along the way they were dropped off at various ports, and that at some point they were sold, families were separated. To just say they were brought here or kidnapped doesn't speak to how many were brutalized.

Yet, they were brought here, forced into labor, and they served this country for centuries.

Here is a fact that ought to cause somebody to pause. We enslaved babies in this country. We enslaved babies. If you were born of parents that were slaves, then you were a slave at birth. Many were born, lived, and died, human beings, as slaves.

It is just not enough to say they were slaves without explaining their circumstance—forced into labor, forced to do unthinkable things. It was their humble hands that helped to facilitate the construction of the Capitol, the White House, roads and bridges, planted the seeds, perfected the harvest. Literally, in some cases, fed the masters. Yet, they are reviled, and the Confederate soldiers are revered.

Mr. Speaker, I am going to ask this House to correct the injustice to the extent that the injustice can be corrected. If we accord Congressional Gold Medals to the Confederate soldiers, then we can accord Congressional Gold Medals to those who were enslaved.

I believe that there is a certain amount of righteousness in this House. I have been told that it will never happen, but I believe there is a certain amount of righteous in this House for people to see the injustice in this. I just believe that there are people who will take a stand with me. I don't know how many, but I hope that we will have 290 because that is what it will take to pass this type of resolution. I hope that the Senate will take it up. I hope that the Senate will pass the resolution as well.

I would like to see a President of the United States place these Congressional Gold Medals in appropriate venues.

We have granted Congressional Gold Medals posthumously—yes, we have. There is nothing but the will that is missing. The way is clearly there. It is just a question of will.

The question of: Will we revere the slave to the extent that we revere the enslavers?

I believe there is a certain amount of righteousness that will allow this to happen. I don't believe that everybody that we assume will vote or not participate in a positive way in this type of debate—I don't believe that we should assume that everybody that we already assume will do this. I just think that there are some people, they have principle within that we have not necessarily seen, and that they will stand forward and that they will challenge those who would see things differently and conclude, no, we can't do this.

Why? We can.

So I just believe that there are people of good will who will take a stand for

the righteousness associated with giving those who worked, lived, and died as slaves, giving them a Congressional Gold Medal just as we gave the persons who sought to keep them in bondage Congressional Gold Medals.

Mr. Speaker, I will be asking for this next year. I have already prepared the "Dear Colleague." I have within my hands the "Dear Colleague" that we will be circulating. There will be some people who will be offended because I have said that the Confederate soldiers were enslavers. Well, they fought to maintain slavery.

Now, I know there are many who are going to say they were fighting for economic reasons. Well, that economic reason had to do with slavery. But whatever you choose to think, put that aside, if you would, and just look at what happened to the people. Let's try to correct this injustice.

I will be circulating the "Dear Colleague," and I will let the world know the progress that we are making. This is the kind of thing that you don't simply put in motion and then see if it will make its way to the finish line. I am not wired that way to just watch and see what happens.

I plan to announce the names of those who have signed on. Those who sign on, I plan to announce their name and I plan to thank them for signing on, thank them for doing a righteous thing hundreds of years after the event that occurred.

□ 1700

I will keep a log, and I will let the world know who is signing on to the legislation. I just believe that we need this kind of transparency.

By the way, it won't surprise me to know that there will be people who won't sign on, but I just believe that there are enough who will such that this can move.

My hope is that those who will have an antithetical view as it relates to this, who may be of the same hue as I—yes, there are some people who look like me who will have an antithetical point of view because there are some who are going to say, keep the medal, give us the gold. They will make this an issue associated with reparations and they will say, let's go for the reparations.

I am going for dignity. I want respect. Gold can't buy it. I am not opposed to those efforts, but I would hope that they wouldn't be opposed to these efforts. But I am addressing it now because I want people to understand that that will not deter me.

I believe that we have a duty to the people that helped this country become the great country it is. I call them the foundational mothers and fathers of the country; those who were enslaved, the economic foundational mothers and fathers because they helped to build the economy. They gave us the start that we benefit from to this day.

So to those who would say let's just go for the gold, you do what you

choose. I am not getting in your way. But this is about dignity, and this is about Maya Angelou's commentary that some of us, she said, we are the hope and dream of the slave.

They never had what I have; but I have what I have because they survived and suffered such that my parents and my grandparents and those that I associate with my lineage, produced me.

Mr. Speaker, as I close tonight, perhaps for the last time this year, as a Special Order, I want to express my gratitude, not only to those in this House who have shown me kindness and have been of great benefit, but I want to express my gratitude beyond the walls of the Capitol buildings.

I want to express my gratitude to a country that has noble ideals, noble ideals. I am grateful to live in this country. I am proud to wear this necktie. I love this country. I love it because I believe that we can make real these noble ideals of liberty and justice for all; that we have, as Lincoln put it, government of the people, by the people, for the people. But we have to protect it.

I believe that all persons are truly created equal, and endowed by the Creator with these inalienable rights, among them, life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.

I love my country, I just want to make my country—help my country live up to these great ideals and, among them, as I thank the country itself and the people within it, among these great things that we can do would include honoring those persons who were brought here in chains, the foundational mothers and fathers, economic foundational, foundational economic mothers and fathers of this country, and babies, I might add as well.

This is my last opportunity to speak this year, but I will be back, if it is God's will. When I come back, I am humble, but I am not the person who is going to be so humble as to walk away from my duty. That is not me. I am not wired that way.

I will be back, and I will have these two—no, I am praying that Mr. Avalos will be home with his family and I will be presenting this piece of legislation for us to correct a centuries-old injustice.

Thank you, Madam Speaker PELOSI, for all you have done.

Thank you, Mr. HOYER. You have been a great help.

Thank you, Mr. CLYBURN, for the sage advice you have accorded.

All of the persons in leadership I thank. The newly formed leadership that is coming in, I appreciate and will celebrate and work with you.

But I also plan to appreciate and celebrate and work with persons across the aisle. I believe in compromise. I abhor capitulation. I don't want persons to capitulate as it relates to me and what I present; and I trust that they don't want me to capitulate as it relates to them and what they present.

I think cooperation and a certain degree of negotiation will allow us to get some great things done. So I look forward to working with all.

I am grateful.

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

#### ISSUES OF THE DAY

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. BOWMAN). 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. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman from Texas, and I wish him well and a very Merry Christmas with his family, and save travels home.

I too share his affinity for wanting to work across the aisle. I have done so on numerous occasions. I am fairly well known for speaking my mind on the House floor. But I am happy to work across the aisle, and also an equal opportunity basher of both sides when I disagree.

But I wish we would have vigorous debate here on the floor of the House. A lot of things that the gentleman from Texas talked about, I agree wholeheartedly. The immigrants he discussed wanting to come to the United States; I would like them to have safe passage under our rules and under our laws.

Right now we have a broken system that is endangering lives; lives of immigrants and endangering lives of Americans.

We talked about the ideals and the values of this country, and I share those ideals and values.

I would ask and inquire of my colleagues in the body broadly, how can we maintain those ideals if we are bankrupt?

How can we maintain those ideals if we are writing checks we can't cash?

I can give speech after speech after speech about this topic, but unless we change our ways on both sides of the aisle, this country will not survive.

I don't know what it is going to take to get the people who are entrusted to run this country—and that starts in this Chamber, the power of the purse, entrusted to the people's House, we are abusing it. We are conducting our duties irresponsibly, both sides of the aisle.

Today, the United States Senate, the Senate, supposedly, the "upper chamber," the House of Lords in the United States, if you will, sent us—or is in the process of sending us, after voting for it, a 4,155-page bill, unveiled yesterday morning at 1:30 a.m., that will cost \$1.7 trillion.

This bill will increase spending \$118 billion. This bill has \$45 billion for the country of Ukraine; 21 percent over President Biden's request, by the way.

\$40 billion for disaster relief. \$15 billion for 7,234 earmarks, with the senior Senator of Alabama, RICHARD SHELBY, walking out of the Senate with a legacy of \$670 million. I believe the senior