

Their Armed Forces Committee has tirelessly continued a decades-long tradition of walking the Halls of Congress and knocking on doors to promote mutually beneficial and responsible military growth in Guam.

As someone who has spent many years in the private sector and proudly sat on the board of directors of this prestigious organization many years ago, it is my honor to stand here in these sacred Halls of democracy to congratulate the Guam Chamber of Commerce on their historic milestone of celebrating 99 years.

On behalf of a thankful nation and island, I commend them for their many services toward both Guam's business community and the people of Guam.

HONORING AND RECOGNIZING GUAM'S
CENTENARIANS

Mr. MOYLAN. Mr. Speaker, as our island and Nation celebrate and honor our senior citizens, or manamko, as we refer to them back home, I will to take this time to recognize a handful of centenarians on Guam, who will be celebrating a birthday spanning 100 years or older this year.

This list includes:

Ms. Rosario Flores Leon Guerrero, who is celebrating her 103rd birthday.

Ms. Teodora Andrada, who is celebrating her 102nd birthday.

Ms. Josefina de la Concepcion Diaz, who is celebrating her 101st birthday.

Ms. Lillian Leon Anderson is celebrating her 100th birthday this year.

Also celebrating birthday No. 100 is Ms. Magdalena Perez Taitano Fausto.

Sadly, we recently lost Ms. Victoria Robeniol Rebugio, who would have celebrated her 101st birthday in December of this year.

On behalf of a great nation and a loving island community, and from these sacred Halls of democracy and history, please join me in honoring Guam's centenarians and wishing them a happy birthday.

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DANGEROUS RAIL

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

Ms. KAPTUR. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to speak about an extremely dangerous situation in rail corridors across America. This includes the busy mainline rail corridor between Pittsburgh and Chicago that cuts across northern Ohio, including most of my district.

In northern Ohio, rail is the spine of our economy. To stay competitive in today's economy and avoid expensive supply chain delays, industrial and agricultural America must think big about modernizing rail solutions. Our Nation must prioritize rail safety, give people more transportation options, and expand access to national and international markets.

In the past year, three significant train derailments by Norfolk Southern have taken place in Ohio. In October 2022, a 21-car derailment occurred in

my district at Sandusky, where Norfolk Southern has dragged its feet for over half a year in cleaning up the mess. That job is still not finished. This rail corridor again drew national attention with the major derailment earlier this year in East Palestine, Ohio.

The imperative topic of rail safety has many clear and sometimes deadly impacts on students across our Nation.

□ 1030

I include in the RECORD a recent ProPublica news article which highlights the risks for students in Hammond, Indiana.

[From the ProPublica]

AS RAIL PROFITS SOAR, BLOCKED CROSSINGS FORCE KIDS TO CRAWL UNDER TRAINS TO GET TO SCHOOL

(By Tophers Sanders and Dan Schwartz, ProPublica, and Joce Sterman, Gray Television/InvestigateTV)

Jeremiah Johnson couldn't convince his mother to let him wear a suit, so he insisted on wearing his striped tie and matching pocket square. It was picture day and the third grader wanted to get to school on time. But as he and his mom walked from their Hammond, Indiana, home on a cold, rainy fall morning, they confronted an obstacle they'd come to dread:

A sprawling train, parked in their path.

Lamira Samson, Jeremiah's mother, faced a choice she said she has to make several times a week. They could walk around the train, perhaps a mile out of the way; she could keep her 8-year-old son home, as she sometimes does; or they could try to climb over the train, risking severe injury or death, to reach Hess Elementary School four blocks away.

She listened for the hum of an engine. Hearing none, she hurried to help Jeremiah climb a ladder onto the flat platform of a train car. Once up herself, she helped him scramble down the other side.

ProPublica and InvestigateTV witnessed dozens of students do the same in Hammond, climbing over, squeezing between and crawling under train cars with "Frozen" and "Space Jam" backpacks. An eighth grade girl waited 10 minutes before she made her move, nervously scrutinizing the gap between two cars. She'd seen plenty of trains start without warning. "I don't want to get crushed," she said.

Recent spectacular derailments have focused attention on train safety and whether the nation's powerful rail companies are doing enough to protect the public—and whether federal regulators are doing enough to make them, especially as the companies build longer and longer trains.

But communities like Hammond routinely face a different set of risks foisted on them by those same train companies, which have long acted with impunity. Every day across America, their trains park in the middle of neighborhoods and major intersections, waiting to enter congested rail yards or for one crew to switch with another. They block crossings, sometimes for hours or days, disrupting life and endangering lives.

News accounts chronicle horror stories: Ambulances can't reach patients before they die or get them to the hospital in time. Fire trucks can't get through and house fires blaze out of control. Pedestrians trying to cut through trains have been disfigured, dismembered and killed; when one train abruptly began moving, an Iowa woman was dragged underneath until it stripped almost all of the skin from the back of her body; a

Pennsylvania teenager lost her leg hopping between rail cars as she rushed home to get ready for prom.

In Hammond, the hulking trains of Norfolk Southern regularly force parents, kids and caretakers into an exhausting gamble: How much should they risk to get to school?

The trains, which can stretch across five or six intersections at a time in this working-class suburb of 77,000, prevent students and teachers from getting to school in the morning. Teachers must watch multiple classrooms while their colleagues wait at crossings; kids sit on school buses as they meander the streets of an entirely different city to be dropped off a half-hour late. Brandi Odom, a seventh grade teacher, estimates that at least half her class is delayed by trains multiple times a week.

The adults entrusted with their safety—parents and teachers, police and fire officials, the mayor—say they are well aware of the pressures on students' minds when they face a blocked crossing on foot. They know some are hungry and don't want to miss breakfast; the vast majority in this 86 percent Black and Latino district qualify for free or reduced-price meals at school. And they know that many of their parents commute to work an hour away to Chicago, trusting older brothers or sisters to pick up or drop off their siblings.

"I feel awful about it," said Scott E. Miller, the superintendent. His district has asked Norfolk Southern for its schedule so that the schools can plan for blockages and students can adjust their routines. The company has disregarded the requests, school officials said.

Mayor Thomas McDermott Jr. said that his experience with the rails has been similar, and that company officials have reminded him the rails "were here first," running through Hammond before it was even a city. "To them, I am nobody," he said. "They don't pay attention to me. They don't respect me. They don't care about the city of Hammond. They just do what they want."

In written responses to questions, a spokesperson for Norfolk Southern said children climbing through their trains concerns the company.

"It is never safe for members of the public to try to cross the cars," spokesperson Connor Spielmaker said. "We understand that a stopped train is frustrating, but trains can move at any time and with little warning—especially if you are far from the locomotive where the warning bell is sounded when a train starts."

He said trains routinely sit in Hammond for a number of reasons: That section of track is between two busy train intersections that must remain open; Norfolk Southern can't easily move a train backward or forward, because that would cut off the paths for other trains, which could belong to other companies. And Hammond is a suburb of Chicago, which is the busiest train hub in the nation, creating congestion up and down the network.

He said Norfolk Southern is working to identify an area where trains can stage further down its line and to have less impact on the community. The company will also review its procedures to see whether its trains can give louder warnings before they start moving. (ProPublica reporters witnessed trains in Hammond start moving without warning.) Spielmaker said that train schedules vary so much that giving Hammond one might not be helpful. He said that the company is in "constant communication" with local officials, and that representatives will discuss any proposed fixes with Hammond.

Rail companies around the country could better coordinate their schedules, parking trains far from schools that are in session.

They could also build shorter trains that fit into railyards so their tail ends don't block towns' crossings. Hammond essentially serves as a parking lot for Norfolk Southern's trains, creating a problem so pressing that Indiana plans to spend \$14 million—about \$10 million of which is coming from federal grants—to build an overpass for cars. The bridge won't help many students, who would need to walk at least a mile out of their way just to reach it. Norfolk Southern, the multibillion-dollar corporation causing the problem, is contributing just \$500,000 of the bridge's cost, despite the city asking for more.

Norfolk Southern did not respond directly to questions about whether it should chip in more to the upcoming project, but the company said it contributes to many safety projects and maintains more than 1,600 grade crossings in Indiana alone. Read the company's full response here.

On three separate occasions during the fall and winter, reporters witnessed Norfolk Southern trains blocking intersections leading to an elementary, a middle and a high school for four, six and seven hours. ProPublica and InvestigateTV showed footage of kids making the crossing, including an elementary student crawling under a train, to representatives of Norfolk Southern, lawmakers and Secretary of Transportation Pete Buttigieg, whose remit includes rail safety.

He was shocked.

"Nobody," Buttigieg said, "can look at a video with a child having to climb over or under a railroad car to get to school and think that everything is OK."

The video also stunned state officials who had long known about the problem. "That takes my breath away," said Indiana state Rep. Carolyn Jackson, who represents the Hammond area and has filed a bill attempting to address blocked crossings every session for the past five years. None has ever gotten a hearing. "I hope that they will do something about it and we won't have to wait until a parent has to bury their child."

The blocked crossing problem is perennial, especially in cities like Hammond that are near large train yards. But in the era of precision scheduled railroading, a management philosophy that leans heavily on running longer trains, residents, first responders, rail workers and government leaders told ProPublica it is getting worse as trains stretch farther across more intersections and crossings. "The length of the long trains is 100% the cause of what's going on across the country right now," said Randy Fannon, a national vice president of the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers and Trainmen. "No engineer wants to block a crossing."

The Federal Railroad Administration, the agency that regulates rail safety, started a public database in late 2019 for complaints about blocked crossings and fielded more than 28,000 reports of stopped trains last year alone. Among them were thousands of dispatches from 44 states about pedestrians, including kids, crossing trains. Someone in North Charleston, South Carolina, summarized the situation in three letters: "Wtf."

A rail administration spokesperson said the agency shares the data monthly with companies. "When railroads fail to act quickly," and if a crossing is reported as blocked three days in a calendar month, officials will contact a company to determine the cause and try to work out solutions, Warren Flatau said. "We are receiving various levels of cooperation . . . and welcome more consistent engagement." Read more about what the agency says it is doing here.

Buttigieg said that this spring or summer, he expects to announce the first grants in a new U.S. Department of Transportation pro-

gram designed to help alleviate blocked crossings. The federal government is putting \$3 billion into the program over five years.

State lawmakers have tried to curb blocked crossings by restricting the lengths of trains. Since 2019, in Arkansas, Iowa, Kansas, Georgia, Nebraska, Virginia, Washington, Arizona and other states, lawmakers have proposed maximum lengths of 1.4 to about 1.6 miles. (There is no limit now, and trains have been known to stretch for 2 or more miles.) Every proposal has died before becoming law.

Opponents, including the nation's largest railroad companies, claim that the efforts are driven by unions to create jobs and that the measures would violate interstate commerce laws. As ProPublica has reported, train length has been essential to creating record profits for rail companies in recent years.

The industry has also sued to block more modest measures. In Hammond, for instance, police used to be able to write tickets for about \$150 every time they saw a train stalled at a crossing for more than five minutes. Instead of paying the individual citations, Hammond officials told ProPublica, Norfolk Southern would bundle them and negotiate a lower payment.

"We weren't getting anything," McDermott, the mayor, said, "but it made our residents feel good." An Indiana court took the industry's side—as many courts in other states have done—ruling that only the federal government held power over the rails. "We can't even write tickets anymore," the mayor said. "It was more of an illusion, and we can't even play the illusion anymore."

He said the blockages have forced Hammond to keep more firefighters and stations than would normally be needed for a city its size. "I have to have a firehouse fully staffed on both sides of the rail line so that we can respond in a timely manner to an emergency, which is very expensive," McDermott said.

The problem has become so endemic in Hammond that getting "trained," or stalled at crossings, has become a verb.

Police officers are delayed several times a day, said Hammond Police Department spokesperson Lt. Steve Kellogg. Last October, an officer couldn't get backup as he confronted a man who was holding a knife, bleeding and not responding to commands. The officer pulled his weapon and the man ultimately cooperated, but someone could have died, Kellogg said. Hammond's powerlessness over the rails is frustrating, he added. "They're all controlled by the feds, and they do whatever the hell they want to do."

Spielmaker, the Norfolk Southern spokesperson, said: "We work with first responders on a daily basis to assist however we can. For example, there was a situation in Georgia where a train was stopped on a crossing due to a broken down train ahead. The train could not be moved, so we worked with the first responders to make sure the train was safe for them to maneuver through with it in place."

In his 24 years fighting fires in Hammond, Mike Hull, president of a local union, said not once has he seen railroads do that for first responders. "They've never come back and said, 'We're going to move this train for you,'" he said.

State and local officials grew hopeful on March 20 when the U.S. Supreme Court invited the federal government to comment on a petition from Ohio seeking the authority to regulate how long a train can block a crossing. The high court will likely hear the case if the solicitor general recommends it, said Tom Goldstein, publisher of

SCOTUSblog, which is widely seen as an authority on the court. Nineteen other states have signaled their support for a Supreme Court case. Goldstein expects the solicitor general to respond in November or early December. A favorable court opinion could allow other states to finally enforce their laws on blocked crossings.

In the meantime, Buttigieg believes federal lawmakers must intervene to give the Federal Railroad Administration the power to compel rail companies to keep crossings clear. This time of intense public interest in railroads has opened a window for action, Buttigieg said, but it is fleeting. "Any moment that the public attention starts to fade, the railroads are then once again in a position to assert themselves in Washington and to ignore some of the phone calls they are getting in the communities," he said.

Buttigieg said his staff is ready to participate in a federal hearing in which it can tell lawmakers what new authorities they would need to regulate blocked crossings.

U.S. Rep. Sylvia Garcia, D-Texas, said she is eager for new law. A fire chief in her district, which covers parts of the Houston area, told her the department has had to detour 3,200 times since 2019 because of blocked crossings. She and other congressional Democrats introduced the Don't Block Our Communities Act in early March, but it has not yet gained bipartisan traction. The proposed law would prohibit rail companies from blocking crossings for more than 10 minutes and would allow the rail administration to fine companies for repeated violations.

Like the other officials, Garcia said she was aghast, but not surprised, about the situation in Hammond. "That is outrageous, look at the little bitty baby," she said while watching a video of a young girl crawling under a train car. "That's what I mean about making sure we do more to protect the safety of our children. That happens too in Houston."

In Hammond, a public meeting is scheduled for Wednesday at 5:30 p.m. at Scott Middle School to discuss the overpass project. Among those who hope to voice their concerns about the blocked crossings are rail workers themselves who worry about the kids. "It's just a matter of time until there is a catastrophic incident," said Kenny Edwards, the Indiana legislative director for the nation's largest rail union.

Efrain Valdez, president of the parent teacher association, said he hopes officials can adjust plans to help students who need to walk to school. "To see our children in danger like that, that's just downright crazy," he said. "I'm just appalled and heartbroken that [the railroad] would think that's OK. That their money means more to them than a child's life."

Until there's a better solution, the ritual continues. Some parents act as de facto crossing guards, standing beside trains to help their children and others cross. Others ask their kids to call them before and after they make the climb, while warning them about the worst that can happen.

Rudy Costello tells his daughter, who is in high school, to be careful, because if the train moves she "could slip and then there goes your leg and your foot. Or you get pulled under the train and there goes you all together." He added: "That's been my biggest fear, her foot slipping off. . . . But what can you do? Because those trains are always stopping over there, for hours."

Akicia Henderson said she has tried to avoid making the dangerous climb with her 10-year-old daughter. "I called a Lyft," she said. "The Lyft driver actually canceled on me twice because he couldn't get around the train."

So she walks toward the tracks, picturing all that can go wrong—a jacket snags, a backpack tangles, the wheels begin to turn. She prays that this will be one of the days their path isn't blocked and that she doesn't hear the sound she has most come to fear, a horn in the distance.

"It's like, 'Oh my God, the train is coming.'"

Ms. KAPTUR. Mr. Speaker, children are forced to crawl over or under very long parked trains that block their path to school. ProPublica and InvestigateTV witnessed dozens of students in Hammond climbing over, squeezing between, and crawling under the train cars just to make their way to and from school.

Railroads of America, wake up.

In my district in northwest Ohio, I have also witnessed situations with students in extremely dangerous and deadly situations.

In December of 2009 along that same mainline rail crossing at McCord Road in Lucas County, Ohio, a train hit two students on foot in my district, killing one of them and putting the other in critical condition at Toledo Hospital where she underwent surgery.

Cody L. Brown, a 15-year-old freshman, was pronounced dead at the scene. Brianna Mullinger was taken in critical condition to Toledo Hospital. The students, both band members, were walking to school when that westbound Amtrak train struck them.

In the wake of this tragedy, our community constructed an underpass below the Norfolk Southern rail line at McCord Road to try to avoid future tragedies at this same rail crossing.

There are numerous such places across this corridor. Our effort protects students, pedestrians, and drivers without interrupting traffic or flow of trains, pedestrians, or cars that pass through this intersection.

These stories are emblematic of some of the longstanding and unaddressed real issues America continues to face to this day.

Railroads of America, wake up.

Let us use our bipartisan Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act to fix these rail problems that exist and take steps to address them coast to coast. Now is a pivotal point where our Nation can fix these challenges with funds available from the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act.

Mr. Speaker, I urge Transportation Secretary Pete Buttigieg and President Biden to pay particular attention to this regional corridor from Pittsburgh to Chicago. It is so dangerous. Help us convene rail stakeholders to relieve congestion and identify key infrastructure improvement projects.

This is a time freight companies like Norfolk Southern, CSX, and Amtrak should come together at the same table. Let us craft solutions to address longstanding issues regarding rail safety.

Communities are begging to work with these companies that never return phone calls to help fix these longstanding, solvable challenges. We must

look to the future and join together to protect the public: our students, our rail workers, and our communities.

Let us deliver both transformative and safe commercial and passenger rail solutions. The tools are at our disposal. The money is there.

Where are the rail companies?

The time is now. Let's do what we in the industrial Midwest do best. Let's get to work.

BIDEN'S STUDENT LOAN BAILOUT

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentlewoman from North Carolina (Ms. FOXX) for 5 minutes.

Ms. FOXX. Mr. Speaker, yesterday, the Education and the Workforce Committee passed H.J. Res. 45, a Congressional Review Act resolution to overturn Biden's student loan bailout.

I thank Representative BOB GOOD for sponsoring this crucial resolution.

If passed through both Chambers, the joint resolution being debated today would nullify President Biden's radical plan to cancel up to \$20,000 in student debt by executive fiat. For 2 years, President Biden has attempted to push a free college agenda through radical regulations including income-driven repayment, executive actions like blanket cancellation, and his permanent pause on repayment.

Student loan forgiveness is nothing more than a transfer of wealth from those who willingly took on debt to those who did not or had the grit to pay off their loans.

Just 13 percent of Americans hold student loan debt, and over one-half is held by graduate students. In other words, President Biden is forcing the very people Democrats claim to care about—low-income families, disadvantaged populations, and blue-collar workers who never stepped foot on a college campus—to pay someone else's tuition bill.

How much would it cost the American taxpayer?

President Biden's student loan bailout alone will cost taxpayers an estimated \$315 billion according to the Congressional Budget Office.

Coupled with his reckless income-driven repayment plan and other expansive regulations, his student loan scams could cost as much as \$1 trillion. In fact, at a cost exceeding \$3,500 per taxpayer, the President's income-driven repayment plan and mass cancellation represent the most expensive executive actions in American history, period.

These illegal actions also come at a time of rip-roaring inflation as Democrats' reckless spending sprees push our economy to the precipice of recession. The President's debt transfer plan alone could increase inflation by as much as 27 basis points, making it even harder for families to put food on the table and gas in their car. With our national debt quickly approaching \$32 trillion, a bailout for graduate students

and high-income households is the last thing we need on our Nation's credit card.

Our economy is a debt-fueled balloon waiting to pop, and this plan could be the proverbial needle. With all this spending, one would, at the very least, expect the broken student loan program to be repaired. Yet, even if the President is able to move forward with his debt transfer plan, we will be right back to \$1.6 trillion in outstanding debt in less than 6 years.

Why?

Because colleges will increase their tuition and force students to borrow even more because they know taxpayers will foot the bill.

The problems that plague postsecondary education cannot be solved by one-time debt jubilees. Solutions require hard work.

Specifically, it means addressing the lack of accountability for the hundreds of billions of dollars that flow to colleges and universities that charge far too much for degrees with little or no financial value and reforming our student loan program which Democrats are dead set on running into the ground.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Members are reminded to refrain from engaging in personalities toward the President.

ADOPTING THE CONSTITUTION OF THE VIRGIN ISLANDS

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentlewoman from the Virgin Islands (Ms. PLASKETT) for 5 minutes.

Ms. PLASKETT. Mr. Speaker, this week I was pleased to introduce legislation to adopt the Revised Organic Act of the Virgin Islands and its amendments as the constitution of the Virgin Islands of the United States.

My legislation provides for the adoption of the Revised Organic Act, as it has been approved by Congress, signed into law, and amended, as the constitution of our territory.

While the Revised Organic Act presently serves as the main governing document of the Virgin Islands, we have been unable to enact changes on a territorial level. If the Revised Organic Act and its amendments are adopted as the constitution by Federal law, it would then free the Virgin Islands to make further amendments without congressional engagement or approval.

As such, my legislation includes an amendment process to allow the Virgin Islands to revise the constitution once adopted.

In May of 2020, the Virgin Islands legislature passed bill 33-0292, which included a referendum on the general election ballot on calling a constitutional convention to adopt the Revised Organic Act. This proposal was approved by 72 percent of people voting on this measure.

There is a clear public preference for the adoption of a constitution for the