

## BLACK WOMEN AND GIRLS

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentlewoman from New Jersey (Mrs. WATSON COLEMAN) for 5 minutes.

Mrs. WATSON COLEMAN. Mr. Speaker, I rise today on behalf of Black women and girls everywhere.

While Black women play one of the most active and essential roles in our economy, we continue to be left behind and are the ones who are hit the hardest by economic downturns.

Every day, Black women face seemingly insurmountable challenges ranging from structural barriers to systemic inequities that can hinder us from achieving full and meaningful lives.

According to "An Economy for All: Building a 'Black Women Best' Legislative Agenda," a comprehensive report that provides compelling and connective legislative policy proposals to improve the lives of Black women, when we center and uplift Black women, we are, in fact, uplifting everyone.

At its core, Black Women Best serves as a blueprint for economic, racial, and gender prosperity. Today, the Congressional Caucus on Black Women and Girls, which I cofounded and co-chair, released an updated report outlining a legislative agenda informed by the Black Women Best framework.

The report's policy proposals include everything from maternal health to criminal justice reform to food injustice and breastfeeding injustice, all of which demonstrate just how vital it is to craft legislation that benefits all communities.

Soon, I will reintroduce the Black Women Best resolution to address the systemic injustices Black women and girls face and to encourage Congress to craft legislation that benefits every American as laid out by the Black Women Best framework, which was developed by former Labor Department chief economist Janelle Jones.

These policies all have two things in common: They bring Black women from peril to prosperity; and they benefit the economy, as well.

Black Women Best is about giving Black women the freedom to thrive, the freedom to stay employed, and the freedom to continue driving our Nation's economic growth. Equity-focused legislation uplifts not just Black women but our entire economy.

If we are going to change anything, we need to start giving Black women and girls the very tools that they need to thrive. Black women and girls are the missing piece to securing our Nation's future, and I hope that every single one of my colleagues, Democrat and Republican alike, support the Black Women Best resolution. Every action we take towards bettering the quality of life for Black women and girls everywhere is a step in the right direction.

## HONORING BENJAMIN FRANKLIN BITNER

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentlewoman from Indiana (Mrs. SPARTZ) for 5 minutes.

Mrs. SPARTZ. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to honor our heroes who risk their lives for our freedoms and those who paid the ultimate sacrifice.

I share with you and the American people a memorial service note that my friend Lieutenant Colonel in Special Operations David Strysko wrote for his fallen brother, Master Sergeant Benjamin Franklin Bitner, who was killed in action in Afghanistan in April of 2011:

What does it mean to honor the fallen? In a word: Rise.

Rise to the occasion:

It is easy for us to conflate remembrance with honor, because we all want to honor the ultimate sacrifices made by our brothers, and the easiest way to do that is by remembering them. Undoubtedly, the greatest travesty of a free nation is when it forgets the sacrifices that keep them free. But remembering is only the passive aspect of honor. It is only when our suitable actions accompany our remembrances that we truly honor their sacrifice.

But what actions truly honor? Laying wreaths, rendering salutes, and pausing for moments of silence are all commendable, but they fall short of true honor when compared to the immense gravity of the ultimate sacrifice they recognize.

The actions that speak true honor are those that pick up where the sacrifice of our fallen brothers left off. And it is often a rare and fleeting occasion that we get an opportunity to honor our fallen through our own deliberate actions.

It is to these occasions that we rise to honor.

When faced with difficult decisions, withering opposition, physical and psychological peril, certain defeat, reprisal, hopelessness, chaos, and terror, we rise to honor the fallen.

When the occasion calls for sacrifice, we rise to honor the fallen.

Sacrifice can only be truly honored by sacrifice. Courage can only be truly honored by courage.

When it is our turn to honor those who have mortally proven their resolve, we must rise with courage to sacrifice.

It is in these moments, where courage and resolve are tested, that we can with conviction rise to honor the fallen.

And in doing so, we will stand as living testaments to those sacred words: "... that these dead shall not have died in vain."

Today, we remember Benjamin Franklin Bitner, but only our actions will honor him.

May God bless our heroes and our great Republic.

## CLIMATE CHANGE IS NOT A HOAX

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

Mr. ESPAILLAT. Mr. Speaker, I wear my mask in solidarity and support for the families, the children, the seniors being impacted by the Canadian wildfires. I rise today to call attention to the climate crisis, which we are all witnessing before our very own eyes.

Air pollution is spiking across the country from wildfires that have been raging in the Canadian provinces of Quebec and Nova Scotia.

To be clear, Mr. Speaker, this is just the start of the Canadian wildfire season, and it is evident that due to the human and societal impacts on climate, there is an increase in wildfire season, length, frequency, and burn area.

Mr. Speaker, climate change is not a hoax.

We are not only seeing the haze from these fires, we are also feeling it in our very own lungs. The environmental and public health impacts are very real, and we must do more to hold polluters accountable.

Thirty-seven percent of the total area of forest burned in the western U.S. and Canada since 1986 can be linked to emissions released by the world's 88 biggest fossil fuel producers and cement manufacturers.

Air pollution from wildfire smoke has become a significant health risk in the United States, and it is growing.

Mr. Speaker, climate change is not a hoax.

In my city of New York, we are being severely impacted, and we are taking extreme precautions, especially for children, older adults, and asthmatics.

Last night, the city's air quality index was 215, a score considered very unhealthy by the Environmental Protection Agency. This was deemed the second worst level of air pollution in the world.

The situation is so grave that Mayor Eric Adams forced schools to cancel all outdoor activities today.

Mr. Speaker, climate change is not a hoax.

Is this the future for our children? Let me remind you that millions of Americans die each year from air pollution-related health issues.

In 2016, around 4.2 million premature deaths were associated with fine particulate matter, according to the World Health Organization.

That is why I am insisting on passing my bill, the Green Climate Fund Authorization Act, which will authorize appropriations to the Green Climate Fund, ensuring that the U.S. is a leader in global solutions to combat climate change.

Again, Mr. Speaker, climate change is not a hoax.

Moreover, we know where the money goes. It matters. Join me in this fight in cosponsoring the Green Climate Fund Reauthorization Act.

Mr. Speaker, climate change is not a hoax.

## HONORING ERNEST SICKEY

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

Mr. CARTER of Louisiana. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to honor Ernest

Sickey, the revolutionary leader of the Coushatta Tribe of Louisiana. His passing leaves a void in the Native-American community. His legacy of resiliency and advocacy will continue to inspire future generations.

Sickey dedicated his life to serving his people and fighting for their rights. He played a pivotal role in securing Federal recognition for his Tribe, ensuring sovereignty, and the preservation of its rich, rich, heritage.

Sickey tirelessly worked to improve healthcare, education, and economic opportunities for Native Americans. His wisdom and leadership were recognized beyond Tribal boundaries, as he served on various boards and committees and left a lasting impact on the State and national levels.

Sickey's commitment to preserving and sharing Native-American culture and traditions helped bridge gaps between communities, fostering understanding and unity.

Mr. Speaker, I rise today to honor this great man and to ask everyone to remember the incredible work that he has done and to continue to foster the unity, the inclusion, the opportunities, and the education of our Native-American friends.

Ernest Sickey will be remembered as a trailblazer, an advocate, and a visionary leader. May his life inspire others to carry on this important work.

Ernest leaves behind a loving, strong, committed family to continue the great work of this great man.

Today, we honor Ernest Sickey.

#### GUN VIOLENCE

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentlewoman from Virginia (Mrs. MCCLELLAN) for 5 minutes.

Mrs. MCCLELLAN. Mr. Speaker, yesterday the students at Huguenot High School in Richmond, Virginia, celebrated their graduation.

Moments after the ceremony ended, as friends and family gathered outside for hugs and selfies, gunshots rang out. Panic ensued.

When the dust settled, a graduate, Shawn Jackson, was dead. He was 18 years old. Shawn's stepfather, who came to celebrate with him, Renzo Smith, was dead. He was 36 years old.

Five additional people were shot. Others sustained injuries, including Renya Jackson Smith, Shawn's 9-year-old sister, who was hit by a car while fleeing the scene.

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Richmond police have a suspect in custody. He is 19 years old. He knew the victim. He and Shawn were in an ongoing dispute.

We should not have to live like this. What should have been the happiest day of those kids' lives turned into every parents' worst nightmare.

Those kids saw their freshman year cut short by COVID. They should have felt the joy yesterday and last night of

graduating. Instead, their final memory of high school is marred forever by trauma.

The active shooter drills that they endured throughout their school years did not prepare them for a shooting at their graduation, or in a public park, in a grocery store, at a theater, at their house of worship, at a concert, at a mall, walking down the street, on a highway, in their home.

Where are they safe? My son asks me this every time that there is a shooting on the news.

Three months ago today, when I stood at this very spot to take my oath of office, you saw my son and daughter standing proudly beside me. You saw how excited my son was. You saw his dance moves.

Four days later, one of his classmates shot himself accidentally with a gun he was using as a prop to record a video. He died.

Last night, my husband and I had to tell our children that they are not going to school today and possibly for the rest of the year because of a shooting at a graduation less than a mile from our home.

Every time there is a shooting we go through this same routine. Every time my son is afraid, wondering will he be next. I hug him and I say, I am doing everything within my power to keep you safe.

As a State legislator in Virginia, I was proud to pass several pieces of gun violence prevention measures to do just that, including securing \$12 million in funding to invest in our communities to address the root causes of gun violence.

I was excited to see this Congress pass the first piece of substantive gun violence in 30 years in a bipartisan measure. So you can imagine my disgust and my sorrow when, after the Tennessee school shooting, one of our colleagues, one of our Republican colleagues in an interview on television said: We are not going to do anything.

That is unacceptable. We must take action to address the root causes of gun violence, to ban assault weapons, implement universal background checks, gun storage, among other commonsense measures that are popular with an overwhelming majority of voters according to FOX News polling.

I came here to solve problems. I came here to save lives. Thoughts and prayers are not enough. It is past time for action.

Today, I mourn the lives lost in my district, my city, my school division, my neighborhood. Today, I seek to comfort their loved ones and those traumatized by the terror they felt last night.

Today, I recommit to doing everything within my power to make sure that this never happens again. Enough is enough.

Mr. Speaker, I am begging my colleagues in this body: Do something.

#### HONORING THE LEGACY OF RUPAUL CHARLES

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

Mr. ROBERT GARCIA of California. Mr. Speaker, the House library is open.

I rise to commemorate the start of Pride Month by honoring the one and only queen of drag, RuPaul. An artist, a philanthropist, and a barrier breaker, RuPaul Charles has become an American phenomenon and an icon. Nobody has more charisma, uniqueness, nerve, and talent than RuPaul Charles.

Ru's career launched as a drag performer in New York, and then as a successful pop artist, releasing his first hit album, "Supermodel of the World." In total, he has released 15 studio albums.

RuPaul also became the first gay Black man to host his own talk show, "The RuPaul Show." He is most known, of course, for his multi-Emmy-award winning show, "RuPaul's Drag Race."

"RuPaul's Drag Race," and its many domestic and international spin-offs, has put drag in the global spotlight. The show has helped lunch and uplift the careers of thousands of drag queens and artists. But more importantly, the show has served as a critical space to discuss issues around inclusion, trans rights, mental health, and self-worth.

This message couldn't be more important as the LGBTQ+ community continues to fight for equality and acceptance. The world needs more love and, yes, more RuPaul. I thank RuPaul Charles for his years of leadership in our community and his activism.

This Pride Season, as we recommit to celebrating diversity, difference, and self-love, we must always remember what RuPaul so famously says: "If you can't love yourself, how the hell are you going to love somebody else?"

#### LEAD IN CHILDCARE CENTERS

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

Ms. PORTER. Mr. Speaker, in 2018, a State law required licensed childcare centers to test their water for lead every 5 years. Last month, we got the results and they are grim for California's children.

One in four California childcare centers has dangerously high levels of lead in their drinking water. Lead exposure seriously harms children's health, damaging their brains and nervous systems.

Frighteningly, children exposed to elevated levels of lead are often asymptomatic, but the damage is irreversible. Many of the worst facilities for lead levels are in low-income areas or communities of color.

Congress took a step in the right direction when we passed the bipartisan infrastructure law, which invested \$15 billion to remove and replace lead service lines. But there is more work to be done.