

Finally, I thank the volunteer firefighters, first responders, and linemen from our PUDs. We are all so proud of them.

I hope they are all able to take some time off, go to a swimming hole, and relax with their families. The path to rebuilding is long, but folks like them are the reason that our community is worth the fight.

STEIGERWALD RESTORATION

Ms. PEREZ. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize the Steigerwald Restoration Project in my district. In 1960, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers built a levee along the Columbia River to protect communities from flooding.

In doing so, they cut off Steigerwald Lake and created flooding from Gibbons Creek and destroyed a wetland. This wound up decimating the ecosystem and introducing new floods.

In 2013, the Lower Columbia Estuary Partnership began the Steigerwald Restoration Project. This project took 10 years. It was a massive undertaking. The team removed miles of the existing levee and built two new setbacks to protect the community from floods.

Thanks to their painstaking effort, port and city infrastructure, State Route 14, and nearby private residences are no longer at risk of flooding, and the natural habitat has been restored.

A few weeks ago, I was able to visit and see how the area was transformed. It is now being used as a recreational space.

I appreciate any chance to get my boots a little muddy and plant a couple of trees. Investments in our ecosystems are investments in our future.

RECOGNIZING SMALL COMMUNITY BANKS

Ms. PEREZ. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize small community banks. Small community banks often serve as lifelines for local businesses and individuals.

Banks like Raymond Federal and Security State Bank have a finger on the pulse of their community and are often able to lend to members in the community when the big guys can't see the value these guys provide.

These small community banks are also able to respond quicker to local events, like a strike at a local lumber mill, by offering automatic loan modification to striking workers.

Small banks are facing a number of pressures like high interest rates and capital consolidations that benefit the big players in the financial world such as big banks, insurance companies, and companies like Apple and Amazon entering the banking space.

That is why I believe when we talk about supporting rural areas, we need to add regional community banking to the list of critical services to protect.

RECOGNIZING NASCAR DRIVER ERIC JOHNSON, JR.

Ms. PEREZ. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize Eric Johnson, Jr., a 20-year-old race car driver from Woodland, Washington, who made his NASCAR debut in early June.

Eric placed 10th at the Portland NASCAR Xfinity Series. He competed in a field of 24 racers, most of whom were older and had years of experience on him.

Inspired by his father who was a former NASCAR driver, Eric began exploring his passion for racing and cars.

Eric actually started driving race cars before he started driving on normal residential streets, going 100 miles per hour on the racetrack before going 20 miles an hour in a neighborhood. Eric began building cars when he was just 15, before he got his driver's license.

As an auto repair and machine shop owner myself, I know this meticulous, hands-on work requires a lot of attention to detail and creativity.

I congratulate Eric on his impressive debut at such a young age. I look forward to seeing where his career takes him.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Members are reminded to direct their remarks to the Chair and not to a perceived viewing audience.

CONGRATULATING BRYAN HEALTH

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

Mr. FLOOD. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to congratulate Bryan Health on being named one of America's most trustworthy companies by Newsweek.

Bryan Health is a pillar of Nebraska healthcare, notably serving Lincoln and many communities around the State with locations in 45 of our State's 93 counties. Bryan cares for over 2,100 trauma patients a year.

Their work is helping grow Nebraska by ushering in the next generation. The Bryan Family Birthplace delivered more than 3,000 babies in 2022, including 58 sets of twins and three sets of triplets.

Now they are plowing new territory in behavioral healthcare. They report they are the first medical center in the Nation to have a designated behavioral health emergency department.

Bryan Health isn't just a business. They are a key community stakeholder, giving back more than \$200 million of charity care last year.

On behalf of the people of Nebraska's First Congressional District, I extend our sincere congratulations to the team at Bryan Health. I thank them, and they should keep up the great work.

COLUMBUS COMMUNITY BUILDING

Mr. FLOOD. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to congratulate the City of Columbus on their new community building.

The Columbus Community Building is a \$32 million project that will provide 75,000 square feet of space for housing a new Columbus Public Library, City Hall, City Council chamber, and community room.

This project, which took about 3 years, required over 150,000 hours of labor and 1 million pounds of steel.

Columbus is known as the city of power and progress, and their work over the last decade and a half is helping grow the community and setting it up for long-term success.

From their health department to the Columbus Wellness Center to their STEM program, the community is building the infrastructure they need to attract families and the workforce that employers rely on.

Since 2000, the community has grown about 15 percent as companies like BD Medical have invested millions to upgrade their operations.

Columbus, indeed, has a bright future ahead. On behalf of the people of the First Congressional District, I congratulate the City of Columbus, Nebraska, on their new community building and all their recent success.

RECOGNIZING COLONELS THOMPSON AND HOWARD

Mr. FLOOD. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to extend my sincere gratitude to Colonel Kristen D. Thompson for her service as Commander of the 55th Wing headquartered at Offutt Air Force Base.

Colonel Thompson recently completed her time as commander. During that time, the 55th Wing returned flight operations to Offutt after the base's runway was rebuilt.

I thank Colonel Thompson for her work and leadership through the years.

As Colonel Thompson transitions to New York, I also give a hearty congratulations and welcome to Colonel Mark Howard, who is now taking over.

Colonel Howard comes to the 55th Wing as a 22-year veteran pilot with almost 4,000 flying hours, 700 of those in combat.

Colonel Howard also brings years of experience as the 55th Wing's deputy commander, which will serve him well as he takes on his new role.

On behalf of the First Congressional District, I extend our sincere gratitude to both Colonel Thompson and Colonel Howard for their leadership of the 55th Wing.

SUPPORTING THE NDAA

Mr. FLOOD. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to support the passage of the National Defense Authorization Act. The NDAA is a pillar of the House Republicans' commitment to America in building a Nation that is safe.

Our U.S. servicemembers protect our country every day, and they deserve the best quality of life. This NDAA provides a much-needed pay raise, access to healthcare, and critical oversight, all while saving American taxpayers billions of dollars and making key investments in innovative technologies and our defense industrial base.

One of the most important facets of this NDAA: its provisions to counter communist China's aggression. It builds up projection forces, increases funding for essential military construction projects, and provides more funding for innovative new technologies needed to stop the CCP.

The NDAA makes critical investments in our national defense while

honoring the Fiscal Responsibility Act's spending levels.

It accomplishes this by capturing \$40 billion of savings by cutting inefficient programs, obsolete weapons systems, and unnecessary Pentagon bureaucracy.

This bill also ensures that the taxpayer dollars being spent in Ukraine have proper oversight. Under our NDAA, a new inspector general will direct and coordinate an audit of all aid provided to Ukraine by the United States.

Additionally, the NDAA protects our military from weaponization by liberal activists by stopping our DOD resources from subsidizing President Biden's Green New Deal and banning the military from teaching critical race theory.

I applaud the work of the committee in preparing this year's NDAA, and I strongly urge my Republican colleagues and friends across the aisle to come together and pass this critical legislation this week.

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ECHOES OF OUR PAST

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

Mr. JACKSON of Illinois. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to discuss the echoes of our past resonating deeply in the present, echoing in a way that should give us pause, concern, and impetus to change.

Recently, the Supreme Court rendered a decision that threatens the principles of equality and justice we so ardently strive to uphold. By overturning affirmative action, they ruled that the admissions policies of Harvard University, founded in 1636, and the University of North Carolina, founded in 1789, violated the Equal Protection Clause of the 14th Amendment, ratified in this Chamber in 1868, an amendment born from the ashes of a divided nation after a Civil War.

"Born or naturalized in the United States" is what the 14th Amendment tried to ensure that there would be equal protection under the law even for those who had been formerly enslaved.

In interpreting this amendment in the case of affirmative action of which we speak, we are brought face to face with an ominous specter of our past: The infamous decision of *Plessy v. Ferguson* in 1896, a case about a man seven-eighths White, one-eighth African American in Louisiana who had purchased a first-class train ticket who was then removed because of his race.

In that case, the Supreme Court decided that, indeed, separate but equal facilities satisfied the 14th Amendment. That decision left a dark legacy falsely equating enforced segregation with equality. Today, we find ourselves in an eerily similar situation, with the dismantling of affirmative action policies echoing the disheartening tones of separate but equal.

In both instances, our highest court has interpreted the noble cause of equal protection in a way that undermines the pursuit of real, substantive equality. Mr. Speaker, I assert that just as separate but equal in the *Plessy v. Ferguson* case was a misnomer hiding the reality of discrimination, the recent overturning of affirmative action similarly threatens to cloak and perpetuate the very disparities it sought to challenge. Affirmative action is more than a policy. It is a pledge, a commitment to an ongoing endeavor toward genuine, substantive equality and opportunity for all.

In parallel, another struggle for equality is taking place, not in our courts but in our classrooms. Across our Nation, books are being removed from shelves, banned from curricula, hidden away from young minds eager to explore the world through the written word. This chilling trend is reminiscent of the dark times in our history when we had antiliteracy laws and books were not just banned but also burned.

Consider the data: In the first half of the 2022-2023 school year, 874 unique book titles have been banned, a surge of 28 percent compared to the prior 6 months. These are not mere numbers. These are extinguished perspectives, silenced voices, curtailed visions.

What we face is a dual assault on opportunity and knowledge, an attack on the principles of equality and intellectual freedom that echo some of the most challenging times in our Nation's history. Yet, it is within these echoes that we find our call to action.

We must advocate for the continued need for policies like affirmative action that aim to level the playing field, to fight against the systemic biases that for too long have marginalized certain communities. We must stand against the banning of books, ensuring that the world of ideas remain open, vibrant, and accessible to all, that we resist the impulse to limit our collective intellectual growth.

Mr. Speaker, as we reflect on the interconnectedness of these issues, let us remember the words of our 16th President from the State of Illinois, President Abraham Lincoln: "The philosophy of the schoolroom in one generation will be the philosophy of government in the next." Let us ensure that philosophy promotes inclusivity, celebrates diversity, fosters critical thinking, and upholds the spirit of equality that is at the heart of our great Nation.

Mr. Speaker, I thank you for the opportunity to address and express my concerns today.

MIKE REYNOLDS LEAVES BEHIND INDELIBLE LEGACY

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

Mr. LAMALFA. Mr. Speaker, I rise to recognize and pay a heartfelt tribute to

Mike Reynolds of Fresno, California, who recently passed away. He has left behind an indelible legacy on our State and, indeed, for people who love safe streets and feel that it is proper to make those criminals pay the price for their activity.

Mike was a remarkable individual who exemplified resilience and dedication in the face of adversity which he and his family faced throughout his life.

He, indeed, was the driving force behind the three strikes law in California that many other States since picked up afterwards. This was after the tragic murder of his daughter, Kimber, by violent serial offenders during a robbery. She is pictured here. No parent should have to see the loss of their child, especially time and time and time again around our country with repeat offenders. We know better. We know better as a society how to treat crime, how to deal with it, yet this happens.

Mike was a champion for passing an initiative in California called the three strikes and you are out law to make sure that repeat offenders would do proper prison time and not be out on the streets subjecting our neighbors, friends, and families to these violent criminals, time and time again.

We hear conversations here about something called gun violence. Well, a gun is an inanimate object. It is people that do the violence. It is people who have to be held accountable.

Mike Reynolds was the driving force in California that helped change how crime is fought, and it is up to us to uphold his legacy for preserving what safety we have on our streets, which we don't have a lot of, especially in our urban areas.

What Mike created as an homage to his daughter, Kimber, and a way to make sure that other families wouldn't have to suffer as they had to has become a lightning rod for citizen groups. Indeed, over 20 States have enacted laws with the same purpose as the original three strikes in California that Mike drove.

I want Mike's family to know that we appreciate him as a good man who showed strength of character and turned an unimaginable tragedy into a force, indeed, for good.

We will miss Mike and grieve for him. I have had a chance to meet with him, and I enjoyed being able to work with him when I was a State legislator to ensure that we didn't lose ground on what we had gained.

At this time we grieve for him, we grieve for his family. We honor his memory and celebrate the, indeed, profound impact he had not only on the State of California but on the country.

Mr. Speaker, we talk about how do we keep our streets safe or how do we make them safer than they are. In our blue cities all around the country, they have some of the most aggressive anti-gun laws, and yet, the crime is the highest in those areas.