

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.

□ 1130

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.

What do we have instead? The work that has been done through the three strikes and you are out, in order to keep violent prisoners in prison, pay the price, has been undone by defund the police and by watering down sentencing laws. It is absurd.

We have all the anti-gunners here saying we have gun violence, yet they take away the sentence enhancements for “use a gun, go to jail.” When using a gun in a crime, there used to be special enhancements in my home State. They have basically eviscerated those.

How does that make an ounce of sense, when you are anti-gun on one hand, yet you don’t want to have the enhancements because you don’t want people sitting in prison? Indeed, there is more and more legislation all the time to figure out how to let prisoners out sooner; some very violent offenders, to release them, those on death row who have been downgraded because they got rid of some of the death penalty requirements for certain people on death row. Governor Newsom in California has completely done away with the death penalty during his time in office by executive action. It is still on the books; he is just not enforcing it.

How is this going to deter criminals? When you see the crimes that are happening right under the noses of clerks in retail stores, jewelry stores, and they are told by their corporate officers, don’t dare say anything, don’t even take pictures of them. Someone lost their job because they took a picture and video of a crime happening inside their store because we have these lily-livers at the CEO level who don’t want them to help enforce their own goods, therefore, driving the cost of everything through the roof because we don’t enforce against crime.

AFFIRMATIVE ACTION DECISION

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentlewoman from Texas (Ms. JACKSON LEE) for 5 minutes.

Ms. JACKSON LEE. Mr. Speaker, this morning I rise to share with my colleagues both pain and a sense of remorse, sense of fear that many Americans will face, and attempt to have a dialogue and an understanding as will be reflected in the CONGRESSIONAL RECORD.

I am a student of the Constitution. I have served as a senior member of the Judiciary Committee, former chair or ranking member of most of the subcommittees, covering everything from immigration to administrative law to criminal law.

I love this Nation. I would argue with anyone on any assessment other than that I am a patriot, one who views the Bill of Rights as an anchor of our uniqueness, who appreciates every day the men and women who put on the United States uniform, and who has had the privilege—obviously to my dismay—to visit every war zone during my tenure, to acknowledge those in combat, to honor and respect them

and, yes, to attend funerals of those who gave the ultimate sacrifice and to acknowledge those of years past in our veterans cemetery in Houston, Texas.

As I begin this discussion, I want it to be known that these are wonderful documents, the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution of the United States of America.

If we look at the beginning of the Constitution, it is really poetry, but it is truth. As we are reminded of the Pledge of Allegiance, these words are equally potent: “We the people of the United States, in order to form a more perfect Union . . .” They remind us of the backdrop of these pioneers fleeing persecution themselves. Many listening today may be the progeny, the descendants of these people. “. . . establish justice, insure domestic tranquility, provide for the common defense, promote the general welfare, and secure the blessings of liberty to ourselves and our posterity, do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America.”

Our Founding Fathers, who recognized that slavery was an abomination, and that all Americans deserve equal protection of the laws, in essence determined that the Bill of Rights was appropriate. All of us know the First Amendment, but I don’t know how many know the functioning of the 14th Amendment, which guarantees equal protection of the laws and allows all of us to live in liberty and prosperity.

I come here today to argue vigorously against the wrong-headed decision that was made by the United States Supreme Court on two issues and more to come. Citizens, law, and precedent, and the Constitution were completely ignored in the wrongheaded affirmative action decision.

Let me be very clear. This is not about words; it is not about enforcing wrongness against my fellow Americans. It is an affirmation of affirming everyone. Whether your history is embedded in Pilgrims’ pride, that your ancestors came here that way, or you are part of the Irish who came because of the famine and the lack of food in Ireland, or you came early in the 1900s as Italians or many, many other ethnicities, or maybe you are now Ukrainians who are fleeing the persecution of a horrible war and the lack of democracy, you are an American who desires freedom, democracy, and opportunity, as the laws of this land will allow you to enter.

We are a potpourri. We are a place where people said this will not work, these people come from all places, but our ancestors realized in the Bill of Rights that slavery was wrong and abolished it in the 13th Amendment. However, every day we continue to fight slavery that still exists around the Nation.

Then we put in place the 14th Amendment of equal protection of the law, and you could look at that and say, well, isn’t it equal protection to let someone trump over someone else if

they indicate that they have reasons to do so? No, it is not.

Affirmative action has come about through the death of many people, and it wasn’t the death of the Civil War, which was the dastardly war where brother was against brother which caused the greatest loss of life and one that we remember in pain, but we also remember the heroes.

I say to you that the affirmative action decision did not affirm anyone. It took away that affirmation from the LGBTQ community. It will take it away from race, away from religion and ethnicity. Realize that equal protection of the law is a vital point. It is lost by the Supreme Court’s decision on affirmative action.

□ 1145

EXPAND SAFE TRUCK PARKING

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

Mr. BOST. Mr. Speaker, I grew up in a family trucking business, a company that I worked with for years, and I spent my years driving over the road. I knew the challenges our truck drivers faced: Time pressures, lack of sleep, and nowhere to stop for the night.

When I came to Congress, I joined the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee and made it a top priority to expand access for safe truck parking.

Now, I knew we had a threat to public safety when exhausted truck drivers pushed that extra mile just to end up sleeping on the highway shoulder on an off-ramp because there is not enough space in our rest areas. Critics who didn’t understand the issue said it wasn’t a priority, and they asked why they should care.

Well, early yesterday morning, a Greyhound bus traveling from Indianapolis to St. Louis veered into the shoulder of an off-ramp in Madison County, Illinois. Parked on the off-ramp were three tractor trailers and the drivers resting inside.

Three passengers on the bus were killed. Over a dozen were injured. It is a tragedy that didn’t have to happen.

I have introduced legislation to direct existing Federal funding to build more truck parking spaces. I am hopeful that we get the Truck Parking Safety Improvement Act signed into law. Let’s act before we have another tragedy.

My prayers are with the families and the victims of this accident.

RECOGNIZING THE COURAGEOUS ACTIONS OF FLUVANNA COUNTY LIFEGUARDS

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

Mr. GOOD of Virginia. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize the courageous actions of three young lifeguards in