

livestock producers raise and market their animals. That is especially important to Iowa due to the fact that we are the number one hog producer in the country and in the top ten producers for both cattle and turkey.

Mr. Speaker, I urge my colleagues to support the bill.

Another bill that we have taken up is H.R. 4366, Military Construction, Veterans Affairs and Related Agencies bill.

The Department of Veterans Affairs' mission, as listed on their website, is to fulfill President Lincoln's promise to care for those who have served in our Nation's military and for their families, caregivers, and survivors.

As a 24-year military veteran and a family of military veterans, that mission is one that I wholeheartedly agree with, and I understand the importance the VA has for so many former service-members in our Nation.

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Very importantly, this bill provides \$299.496 billion for the Department of Veterans Affairs. It fully funds the healthcare programs, fully funds veterans benefits and VA programs, and also includes funding for electronic health record modernization initiatives.

Most importantly, what I would like to point out is, in contrast to what the Secretary of the VA said earlier this year when he politicized the VA by sending emails to veterans service organizations, saying that the Republicans were going to cut funding, this cuts no funding to veterans or veterans benefits. That still remains on the VA's website and should be removed, and an apology should be issued.

The appropriations bill that the House Republicans passed this week fully funds the VA and prohibits the use of funds for anything that is not beneficial to running a smooth and efficient Department.

Veterans in my district are experiencing enough struggles accessing care from the VA. The President's politicization of the Department is not alleviating those concerns.

We did the right thing by passing this bill, and I am proud of the Republicans for both cutting spending and fully funding our veterans benefits.

Mr. JOHNSON of Louisiana. Mr. Speaker, I thank Dr. MILLER-MEEKS for clarifying the record, for her expertise, and for 24 years in the U.S. Army as a nurse and a doctor. I really appreciate her good word on that.

Mr. Speaker, I yield to the gentleman from California (Mr. KILEY), who is overqualified to be serving in Congress, one of the brightest we have.

Mr. KILEY. Mr. Speaker, I rise today in strong support of prioritizing veterans in our Federal budget by fully funding VA programs, fully funding healthcare for veterans, and fully funding veterans benefits. The veterans funding bill before us this week accomplishes each of these three objectives.

First, the bill fully funds VA programs. It actually increases the VA

budget by \$18 billion over last year's funding level. In concrete terms, this means more tax dollars spent on critical care for veterans, including fully funding care for vets exposed to Agent Orange, burn pits, and other environmental toxins while serving our Nation.

The bill also provides the necessary funds to revamp and enhance the effectiveness of the suicide hotline for veterans and provides funds for the electronic health modernization initiative, which will ensure a seamless transition between receiving care at a DOD facility while on Active Duty and receiving care at a VA facility after discharge from the military.

Second, the bill fully funds healthcare for veterans, and \$138 billion is allocated to address the healthcare needs of our retired service-men and -women, including over \$20 billion for veterans to receive quality care at non-VA facilities.

Finally, the bill fully funds veterans benefits. Mr. Speaker, \$181 billion is allocated to ensure that every benefit that was promised, every commitment that was made, is fulfilled by the Federal Government.

Mr. Speaker, we have an obligation to ensure our veterans receive the care they need and the benefits they have earned. Today's bill achieves exactly that by prioritizing veterans in the budget, and as a result, it has my support.

#### PLUMAS BROADBAND PROJECT

Mr. KILEY. Mr. Speaker, I rise today in support of H.R. 4368, which directly benefits my constituents in Plumas County by funding a critical high-speed broadband project in the A-15 corridor and Valley Ranch communities in eastern Plumas County.

In the 21st century, access to the internet is essential. It is essential for students to participate in online learning and access educational resources, for patients to receive needed telemedicine services, for workers to find job opportunities and engage in remote work, and for citizens to engage in open dialogue and participate in our representative democracy.

Too often, our rural communities are neglected and lack the basic telecom services necessary in today's economy and society.

That is why I prioritized funding rural broadband for my constituents in the Federal budget, and I am proud to report that a project I submitted to provide \$4.2 million in funding to the Plumas-Sierra Rural Electric Cooperative is included in the funding bill that will be voted on by the House this week.

This funding will enable the Plumas-Sierra Rural Electric Cooperative to construct middle- and last-mile fiber-optic networks to provide high-speed internet to rural residents in the Valley Ranch and A-15 corridor communities in eastern Plumas County.

Rural households will finally be able to participate in online education, tele-

medicine, and remote employment opportunities that are out of reach for too many today.

Emergency personnel who are dependent upon internet-based communications will be able to communicate with one another to strengthen emergency response services.

Perhaps most importantly, high-speed broadband service will attract new residents, homeowners, and businesses to the region to continue to ensure the vitality of Plumas County for many years to come.

Ensuring our households are equipped with high-speed internet is imperative for an increasingly technological society. Leaving behind those in rural communities is a detriment not just to our local economies but it is also a disservice to our youth and the vitality of their education.

Today's bill is an important step forward in addressing the existing gap in broadband services for my Plumas County constituents, and it will have direct, tangible benefits on their lives. For that reason, I support H.R. 4368.

Mr. JOHNSON of Louisiana. Mr. Speaker, I am happy to have had so many of our colleagues here tonight to share not only about these important appropriations bills but also to recount some of the many really important legislative victories and oversight responsibilities that we have fulfilled here in the first 7 months of this Congress.

As I said in the opening, when we all go home now for this August district work period, we have a very important story to tell the American people.

We will continue to share the facts. We will continue to encourage them by the good work being done here.

The other thing we have to do, of course, is to continue to defend and support their faith in our institutions because, right now, faith in those institutions is at an all-time low.

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

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

#### HONORING MIKE WILLIAMS

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 9, 2023, the gentleman from Florida (Mr. SOTO) is recognized for 60 minutes as the designee of the minority leader.

Mr. SOTO. Mr. Speaker, I rise tonight to recognize an incredible, long-time labor leader in Florida, a man who spent so much of his life to improve the lives of working families throughout the Sunshine State, and a man I call a dear friend.

Robert Michael Williams, or, as we knew him, Mike Williams, was born on October 27, 1950, in McIntosh, Florida, to Bob and Martha Williams. Mike's father worked in the paper mills and relocated his family to work in North Carolina and St. Marys, Georgia, where

Mike graduated from Camden County High School in 1968.

Mike lettered in football and basketball during all 4 years of high school. He was a pretty tall guy. He excelled in academics, represented his school at Boys State, participated in debate club, and, in his senior year, served as the student council president and “Mr. CCHS,” along with several other superlatives.

After attending Georgia Tech and Abraham Baldwin Agricultural College for a brief time, Mike packed his acoustic guitar, backpacked Europe, and then returned home only to head west to Colorado.

To support himself, Mike worked several different jobs, reflecting, “I worked many temporary jobs in the service and construction industries, living paycheck to paycheck.”

Mike returned to Florida and began his career as a construction electrician with the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers, otherwise known as IBEW, Local 177 in Jacksonville. During his time at the local, he chased work for years, traveling around the country in a travel trailer.

For Mike, holding a union card meant having dignity and respect on the job, a living wage, healthcare, retirement benefits, education, and training opportunities.

Mike learned early on in his career that, for far too long, far too many middle-class families had difficulty with basic workplace rights and that those rights remained out of reach as they struggled to pay rent, put food on the table, and seek medical attention.

“Becoming a member of the union meant finally having my hard work pay off by creating an opportunity for achieving personal goals and being able to provide for my family the way I wanted to. And it meant having the opportunity to achieve the American Dream, a dream that so many want to take away today.”

After working his trade for 15 years, Mike decided to take on leadership roles with his union by running for and being elected to become the business manager of his local.

Eight years later, Mike went on to serve as president of the Florida Building Trades Council, increasing the presence of the Florida building trades during the legislative session in Tallahassee and building a powerful voice for construction trades statewide.

Mike understood the impact a voice on the job can make on the lives of working people, but it wasn't until his trip to Colombia with the AFL-CIO Solidarity Center that he understood the global imperative of worker solidarity.

During the trip, Mike witnessed the damage both corporate and government forces could inflict on the rights of workers and the dangers of living in a state lacking the institutions to help combat these abuses.

He saw violence and hatred directed at those who were trying to organize

for better living conditions and to make a better life for their families. The trip solidified Mike's commitment to fight for all working people.

In 2009, he was elected president of the Florida AFL-CIO. During his term, the Florida AFL-CIO expanded its powerful legislative and political advocacy by introducing Working Families Lobby Corps, a program where union members travel to Tallahassee daily during the legislative session and directly engage with their lawmakers.

This program continues to be a central force in building coalitions between labor and community organizations. His efforts are still thriving and carry on the vision that he saw for all working families.

Mike also extended the vision of labor to represent all workers by fostering new alliances with community, immigrant, and faith-based groups. To enact that vision, Mike spearheaded the creation of Fight for Florida to communicate the labor movement's message to the broader public.

Fight for Florida started as a website and blog that evolved to engage people and content creators outside of union membership on social and economic justice issues with the primary focus of informing the public that the work the Florida AFL-CIO does is for every working family.

As a Florida native, Mike understood the impacts that hurricanes can have on our communities and residents. Mike was hugely instrumental in organizing and participating in hurricane relief efforts in Florida and for other neighbors in the Southeast. He coordinated with various entities, including the Teamsters, to move goods, as well as FEMA and the national AFL-CIO to supply and staff these efforts, often traveling to the affected areas himself to distribute ice, water, food, formula, and diapers.

Later in his tenure as president, the AFL-CIO appointed Mike to their Racial Justice Task Force Advisory Committee, joining other union leaders from across the country to help combat racism in the ranks of union members and their locals.

As someone born in the South who attended segregated schools, as a southern White gentleman, this left a profound impact on him, reinvigorating his resolve for equality and justice for working people facing hardships due to discrimination.

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Mike leaves behind his loving partner, Jeanette “Jet” Netwal; daughters, Amanda Williams of Saukville, Wisconsin, and Suzanne Williams of Asheville, North Carolina; grandchildren, Zane Tinney, Ethan Williams, and Hailey Wilson; sisters, Jane Buffkin of Locust Grove, Georgia; and Beth (Tom) Mason of Riverview, Florida; brother, Mike (Laurie) Williams of St. Petersburg, Florida; and many nieces and nephews.

Beyond his dedication to fighting for the rights of working families, Mike

was a man of diverse passions. Whether strumming his guitar or relaxing on his beloved boat, a 1985 Chris Craft Constellation, he found solace and joy in the simple pleasures in life, almost always wearing one of his iconic tropical, Florida T-shirts and button-down shirt.

Joined by his loving partner Jet, he cherished precious moments watching the mesmerizing Florida sunsets and embarking on unforgettable road trips. Never failing to advocate for his fellow union members, Mike often visited picket lines and organizational efforts in support of those in need. His absence reverberates through the labor community in Florida, as his unwavering commitment inspired a generation to carry forth his legacy and fight tirelessly for the rights of working families in Florida and beyond.

Mike will be sorely missed, but his transformative impact will continue to shine brightly and guide us in the pursuit of a fairer and more just society.

Mr. Speaker, I had the honor of serving nearly 10 years in Tallahassee, both in the State house and State senate, and Mike and I worked on a lot of battles together. We worked to help those who served our State in administrative capacities. We worked for first responders like our cops, firefighters, and EMTs, our teachers, and so many other civil servants to protect pensions so that they can retire in dignity. We fought for better pay, better benefits, and for safer working conditions throughout the Sunshine State.

When I got here to Washington in 2017, I made sure to always remember our roots, and I would go back to visit them every year in Tallahassee during session. Some years were good. Some years not so much. However, we always fought side by side to improve progress.

I remember so many issues starting to happen while we were here in Congress that we would work on together. When the SunRail was being expanded and plans were made to expand it, as well as Brightline, a high-speed rail coming from Miami to Orlando, and when we worked on Amtrak issues together, I remember being the first one to sit in his office and let him know that high-speed rail was coming to Florida and how we needed to make it safe and economical, and make sure that people were being paid fairly and had the opportunity to unionize should they want to.

Then, Mr. Speaker, after a tough couple of years, Mike got to see President Biden sworn into office after 4 years of tough situations with labor. He saw us have the most productive session in 50 years. We passed giant laws out of this very Chamber: The American Rescue Plan, the infrastructure law, the CHIPS Act, the PACT Act, and the Inflation Reduction Act.

We got to talk about so many of those issues, but particularly for him as an electrician, as an IBEW guy, as a building trades guy, the infrastructure

law was of particular importance to him.

A generation of so many Americans, from sea to shining sea, will have work to do to upgrade America, to make sure all of our bridges, all of our roads, all of our highways, all of our water systems, all of our utility systems—which Mike would be most particularly proud about—as well as rural broadband and so many other areas. So many jobs, such a way to invest in the future. There are also a lot of clean energy projects coming to Florida and around our Nation to help boost solar, wind, nuclear, hydro, so many areas he cared deeply about. The CHIPS Act, which is bringing a record number of manufacturing starts in our Nation. In fact, we have seen a doubling, year over year, of new advanced manufacturing centers coming across the Nation.

The good news, Mr. Speaker, it takes thousands, hundreds of thousands of construction workers to help make these visions for our country a reality.

Mike always remembered our veterans. We have so many members of the AFL-CIO who served in the military. I remember getting to talk to him proudly about when we passed the PACT Act, helping so many veterans coming back from Iraq and Afghanistan, those facing terrible injuries from burn pits, and the veterans from Vietnam who still weren't getting their benefits, finally done in this critical landmark legislation to help our veterans.

Of course, he definitely had a smile as President Biden talked about these major laws and that they are going to provide good-paying union jobs. Of course, this is a fight now for the next generation.

I am going to miss him, Mr. Speaker, and I know so many of my colleagues will as well.

I also have some remarks from Representative WASSERMAN SCHULTZ that I will read into the RECORD:

Mr. Speaker, with a heavy heart, I rise to honor the remarkable life of the recently departed Florida AFL-CIO President Mike Williams.

Starting as an apprentice, he became an electrician, working the temporary service and construction jobs, and living paycheck to paycheck, like so many workers do.

Seeing the critical value of job protections and livable wages, he devoted his life to the labor movement, first as a rank-and-file member for 15 years, before becoming business manager of his Jacksonville Local IBEW 177.

Later he became president of the Florida Building Trades Council, and in 2009 Mike was elected President of the Florida AFL-CIO, where he served distinctively until his death.

A natural born leader, Mike revitalized Florida labor by fostering new alliances with community, immigrant, and faith-based groups.

Tall, with a contagious smile, he told it to you straight and always brought a worthy cause and compelling case for workers to the Capitol.

Direct and trustworthy, he was a man of standards whose shoes will be hard to fill.

Mike's empathy, dedication, and compassion will be sorely missed, but his legacy and impact must never be forgotten.

May his memory be a blessing.

Mr. Speaker, I had lunch with him just in April, when I was there for legislative session. We talked about how he was looking forward to doing his summer boating that he would do every year. He would go all the way up the East Coast and then through the Great Lakes, down the Mississippi, and back out around. Other times he would go to the Keys or to the Bahamas or to other areas.

I am deeply saddened that he lost his life doing something he loved, but he got to see so much and meant so much to so many folks on my team and throughout the State legislature and the Congress.

Mike, I pray for you, and I hope you rest in peace. God bless your family.

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

#### ISSUES OF THE DAY

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 9, 2023, the Chair recognizes the gentleman from Wisconsin (Mr. GROTHMAN) for 30 minutes.

Mr. GROTHMAN. Mr. Speaker, we have a few issues that ought to be debated on the floor and brought to the attention of the news media to help them with articles that would educate the American public a little bit on issues of importance.

I haven't spoken on Ukraine lately, but I will point out that Congress has not received a briefing on what is going on in Ukraine since December. That is way too long to go on the first significant land war in Europe in over 70 years. I ask the Biden administration to send its officials over to allow Members of Congress to at least get their opinion as far as what is going on.

As I have said before, this war should not be that difficult to end. Ukraine has the second lowest birthrate in the world. The Ukrainians, who have such a shortage of young people, should be especially ready to end this war. The Russians also have a low birthrate, and even prior to the war a lot of young Russians were emigrating.

Over 2 years ago, before the war started, I was in San Diego, and in the San Diego sector the Border Patrol and the immigration folks told me during the prior 2 weeks or month or whatever, in that segment, only in the San Diego segment, the second largest nationality to be crossing into America was Russian. You have two countries with shortages of people. It should be ripe for reaching some sort of settlement.

I think the United States is perceived to be, maybe rightfully so, overly partisan in this war, but somehow we should be prodding the Israelis or Turks or French or somebody to reach a conclusion here, for one, on humanitarian terms. I mean, for whatever rea-

son, it is hard to find exact numbers of people who died in this war. I am old enough to remember the Vietnam war. They could give you the number of Americans who died right down to the individual digit, but for some reason you get wildly different numbers on the number of people who have died in this conflict.

However, either way, there are a significant number of people dying, and the Biden administration should be looking for a way to wrap it up. It wasn't that long ago that we seemed to have good relations with both of these countries. The longer it drags on, the more we drive Russia into the arms of China, which isn't in anybody's best interests, and it is a little frustrating that we are not getting a rationalization by the Biden administration why we wouldn't try to end this. The American press maybe ought to spend a little bit of time asking the Biden administration whether they feel there is any end to this war.

In any event, I call on the Biden administration to give us a new update in the auditorium, and I call on the press corps to start asking, is there any time when we are going to end this war.

The next issue I think I should bring up, because they keep talking about it on the news without giving us any new information, is the transgender situation. Usually when we talk about it, we talk about it with regard to biological men going into the women's locker room or biological men competing in women's sports.

However, I think a more significant question is: Why are there apparently more transgender people now than during the rest of my life? It seems to me the Europeans have reached the conclusion that one of the reasons for this wave of transgenderism is, people keep talking about it on TV and in academic settings. The more one talks about it, the more people begin to think that this is perhaps the route they should go.

I talked to someone about a month ago, 6 weeks ago, who, I guess I will call a recovering transgender, a woman, who now regrets it. She had the surgery, breasts removed at age 15, the whole ball of wax. It is not something that would have occurred to her, but she found something on the internet which informed her that maybe the reason she was unhappy is that she really was a boy. She went down the path. She went to the gender reassignment doctors, who apparently make a living on this. They talked her into the idea that, yes, the reason she was an unhappy little 13-year-old girl is because she was really a boy. She went through testosterone treatments, puberty blockers, and eventually even had her breasts cut out, which is a true tragedy, and now she regrets it.

□ 2000

I think the thing we ought to take out of it—and I have read this in another places, as well—people who are—