

I told my constituents I could not be at various events today, Friday, March 22, because I had to be here to ensure that our students had Pell grants, to make sure that small businesses are being supported, to ensure that Medicare and Medicaid were strongly enforced, and public health is still in place.

I wanted to make sure that we had the biomedical research that helps so many lives be restored.

And, of course, I am a champion and an advocate for mental health care. It is not enough for the families who suffer and try to help their loved ones.

I want to make sure we get rid of tax cheats and, of course, the drug of choice that kills Americans—fentanyl.

I want to be part of the fight as a senior member of the Judiciary Committee and to be sure that Ukraine and Gaza gets the appropriations and the dollars that they need.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The time of the gentlewoman has expired.

Ms. JACKSON LEE. We chose to keep the government open today.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The gentlewoman is no longer recognized.

COMMUNICATION FROM THE SPEAKER

The SPEAKER laid before the House the following communication from the Speaker of the House of Representatives:

WASHINGTON, DC,  
March 22, 2024.

I hereby designate the period from Friday, March 22, 2024, through Monday, April 8, 2024, as a “district work period” under section 3(z) of House Resolution 5.

MIKE JOHNSON,  
Speaker of the House of Representatives.

FOCUSING ON CUBA AND HAITI

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under the Speaker’s announced policy of January 9, 2023, the gentlewoman from Florida (Ms. SALAZAR) is recognized for 60 minutes as the designee of the majority leader.

Ms. SALAZAR. Mr. Speaker, President Ronald Reagan warned in 1985 that America has an unrelenting obligation to halt communist penetration in our hemisphere.

If we fail to meet this obligation, we will send the unmistakable signal that the greatest power in the world is unwilling and incapable of stopping communist aggression in our own backyard.

Right now we are facing that scenario in the islands of Cuba and Haiti.

History teaches us that the current threats in our hemisphere must be addressed with the utmost seriousness, for these issues go to the heart of American security and American history.

I stand here today to ensure that once again we learn from history and understand that the turmoil in our hemisphere in America’s own backyard

can and must be stopped or the price we pay will be dear.

Let’s focus on Cuba and Haiti. The stakes are incredibly high. The Cuban people live in a perpetual cycle of misery and despair at the hands of their communist oppressors.

They are deprived of basic necessities, like food and electricity, living in literal darkness for hours a day, a product of the communist regime’s intentional rolling blackouts.

The regime has adopted the slogan “patria o muerte” or “patriotism or death” while subjecting the Cuban people for the last 60 years to conditions that will surely lead them to the latter—death from deprivation.

A few days ago, Cuban protestors bravely took to the streets of Santiago and other cities on the island after once again being subjected to massive food shortages and blackouts for up to 18 hours a day.

Now the protestors are crying out “patria y vida” or “patriotism and life.”

In response, the Cuban regime did what they always do: blame us, the United States, for our embargo. But we fully understand the operations manual for the communist Cuban regime’s propaganda machine.

They have been exploiting, starving, imprisoning, and beating their own people for decades.

But we know the truth. We as a Congress, as an American people, can take several steps to ensure the protestors’ voices are not shouting in vain.

First, I am calling on President Biden and the administration to take a stronger stance against the Cuban regime and stand in solidarity with the brave freedom fighters pouring into the streets all over Cuba.

United States support of the Cuban freedom fighters is not a partisan issue. It is morally right and intimately linked to our own security and our own history, freedom, and democracy.

We know that information is power, so let’s provide internet access to the Cubans now so they can have a window to the free world.

Now, I am talking to the Cuban military commanders. I have a crucial message for you. History has its eyes on you. It is inevitable that peaceful protestors will continue to take to the streets in Cuba in the hopes of finding freedom. And there will come a time when your moral integrity will face the ultimate test, whether or not to raise your weapons against your own neighbors and your own friends.

My message from this floor is very clear to the Cuban military commanders: Make the right choice. Do not shoot at your own fellow citizens. Do not shoot at the Cuban people.

Myself as a Member of this Congress, the United States of America, and history itself will recount these days, and your own legacies will be a result of you holding your fire.

□ 1230

Now, it is not just Cuba that needs our attention. Another monster is looming large in our backyard to threaten American security: Haiti.

Haiti is crumbling, a completely failed state in anarchy, overrun by gangs, violence, and chaos. Haiti’s humanitarian, political, and security crisis grows worse by the second, while most people are on the brink of starvation.

There is currently a Haitian refugee crisis unfolding. Haitian refugees will pour into our own country by the thousands. For the last 2 years, the Biden administration has swept the problems brewing in Haiti under the rug, and now their worst nightmare has appeared.

We must call for a coalition of our allies in Latin America to help restore order in Haiti and halt the threat before it impacts additional countries like the Dominican Republic.

America’s enemies, hostile countries like China, Iran, and Russia, would love nothing more than to force communism onto our small neighbors like Haiti, just like they did in Cuba 60 years ago. We cannot sit idly by, nor afford to ignore the flames that are growing. We must take action now.

I urge the Biden administration to pay close attention to my warnings. We need a clean strategy on the situation in Haiti, and we need this Congress to lead the way.

We must extinguish the flames of instability and communism burning in our backyard. If we don’t, they will surely continue all the way through to our own American kitchen. We cannot ignore Haiti or Cuba.

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

HAITI: ANOTHER MISSION OF MERCY

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

Mr. GREEN of Texas. Mr. Speaker, and still I rise, a proud, liberated Democrat, unbought, unbossed, and unafraid. In the spirit of Shirley Chisholm, I rise, a great and noble American.

Mr. Speaker, I rise today on another mission of mercy. I rise today because this morning, at approximately 4:30 a.m., I was reviewing a news story. In this news story, there was an indication that there was death in Haiti. I had an opportunity to see on the screen of my television the horrors that were emanating from the story.

Mr. Speaker, I saw a person lying in the street who was apparently without life. It is not a pleasant thing to see someone without life, but to see a person lying in the street without life, with only a portion of the body discernible, was quite an experience.

As I saw this person lying in the street, Mr. Speaker, I also saw persons passing by. Most of them were on vehicles of the two-wheel variety. As they passed by, some of them looked but others barely glanced. Among those passing by were young and old, but also there was a person who was with law enforcement who passed by a body lying in the street.

Someone was interviewed, and it was explained by the person interviewed that this person had been attacked, had been attacked by people who were of the opinion that they were defending themselves. They attacked this person with machetes and severed limbs from the body. At least that is the way it appeared to me as I viewed this on my TV screen. It was quite shocking and appalling to see this body lying in the street with people just simply passing by.

Haiti is a country in turmoil. If you believe that injustice anywhere, as Dr. King put it, is a threat to justice everywhere, you have to be concerned about what is happening in Haiti. You have to be concerned. The statistical information related to the atrocities that are occurring can stir the soul, can literally cause persons to come to tears, if you truly care about people.

I would like to share some of the information. Hopefully, those who believe that injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere will have some concern about the injustice that is taking place in Haiti.

According to the U.N. Special Representative for Haiti, more than 8,400 people were victims of gang violence in Haiti in the last year. The last year alone, more than 8,400 people have been victims of gang violence.

Now, Haiti is a country with a population of a little more than 11 million, perhaps about 11,500,000. Haiti is a country that is closer to the United States than Houston, Texas, is to El Paso, Texas. Haiti is just off of our shores. We ought to be concerned.

Haiti, last year, including killings, injuries, and kidnappings, had about a 122 percent increase over 2022. The U.N. Commissioner for Human Rights, Volker Turk, warned that across Haiti, last year, at least 3,600 people had been killed, 1,432 injured, and 2,951 kidnapped in gang-related violence, and this was as of November.

The number of injuries in Haiti, according to United Nations quarterly report on human rights, situated in Haiti, lynchings—lynchings are something that causes me a good deal of concern with my history. My history is one that has suffered great lynchings—lynchings have left at least 76 people dead across the country. At least 1,634 people were killed or injured as a result of violence by criminal groups. Gangs of people killed 1,634 people.

At least 693 people were kidnapped in the last quarter of 2023, an increase of 18 percent over the previous quarter. At least 53 children, some as young as 6 months old, were kidnapped, killed,

or injured during the last quarter of 2023.

This ought to cause people who believe that injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere to have some concern.

Almost 500 children had no time to escape from a school they were trapped in and had to remain in that school for some 2 days.

The healthcare situation in Haiti has greatly deteriorated. According to the Guardian, Haiti's healthcare system has all but collapsed amid the ferocious gang insurrection that is taking place. Hospitals have been set ablaze. Doctors have been murdered. Even basic medical supplies have dried up. Currently, only one public hospital in Haiti's capital, Port-au-Prince, remains operational, but it is expected to shut its doors.

Mr. Speaker, a summary of the food situation can bring one to ask how we could allow such circumstances to exist. According to NPR, since the COVID virus took its toll, at least 4 million people in Haiti have been acutely food insecure. Now, out of those 4 million, 1 million are one step away from famine.

According to the Washington Post, there were disturbances in January, and food prices jumped 25 percent in the south where roadblocks came up and trucks weren't able to get to Port-au-Prince with basic necessities.

Mr. Speaker, the World Food Programme survey found that as prices go up, household incomes are going down, because people can't go to work and are sheltering in place and aren't going to earn money.

If we truly believe that injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere, we have to be concerned about the persons in Haiti because many of them will want to leave and seek safety elsewhere. Some of them will make an attempt to come to this country.

Unfortunately, our country has a history of turning Haitians away. It wasn't that long ago that as the persons from Cuba were escaping Cuba and coming to this country, we had a policy that was styled as, known as, called, if you will, wet-foot/dry-foot.

This policy of wet-foot/dry-foot would allow a Cuban to get one foot on dry land in the United States of America and then move forward into the country, move forward on a pathway that would lead to jobs, that would lead to a better life, and possibly lead to citizenship in the country. Wet-foot/dry-foot was the name of the policy. It applied to Cubans.

At the same time Cubans were arriving in this country from Castro's Cuba, as we have called it, Haitians were arriving. Haitians were fleeing poverty, despair, hunger, and death. At the same time Cubans were arriving, the Haitians could get both feet on dry land, could acquire a job, but if they were discovered, they were sent back to Haiti.

There was one policy for persons coming from Cuba, known as wet-foot/

dry-foot. That is the way the policy was styled. There was another policy for persons coming from Haiti that would cause them to be returned to Haiti, back to despair, back to poverty, and some of them back to lives that are unthinkable as we envision life for human beings.

We have not treated Haiti fairly when compared to how we treated others within this hemisphere, a country that is closer to the United States than Houston, Texas, is to El Paso, Texas.

Mr. Speaker, if we truly believe that injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere, we ought to release the \$40 million that are available to help Haiti. We have \$40 million available that we could release if we only agree to let the money that has already been appropriated go to Haiti. We have \$40 million available. It is not enough, but more than they would have, and it would be of help to some.

Two people out of 435, plus 100 in the Senate, are holding up this money that could go to Haiti and help the Haitian people. If you truly believe that injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere, release the \$40 million, release the money to Haiti.

There could be any number of reasons why you would hold the money, but in my opinion, what is happening in Haiti, as I have explained it, would justify releasing the money. Release the money so that Haiti can get some of the help that it needs.

Voltaire reminded us that those who can make you believe absurdities can make you commit atrocities.

It is an absurdity to believe that holding onto this \$40 million is somehow going to benefit us and the people in Haiti. That \$40 million ought to be released.

It is an absurdity to think that holding onto this \$40 million is somehow going to improve conditions in Haiti. I don't believe anyone believes that.

□ 1245

Nonetheless, I also would hope that no one believes that holding onto the \$40 million is more important than helping those persons who are suffering in Haiti. We ought to release this \$40 million. It is an absurdity to hold onto this money, and, Mr. Speaker, those who can cause you to believe absurdities can cause you to commit atrocities.

In truth, our fingerprints now are on some of what is happening in Haiti because we could prevent some of what is happening in Haiti with the funds that have already been allocated, but because we refuse to send the \$40 million, people are going to suffer.

Not enough money is the \$40 million, but it is more than they have, and it can alleviate some of the suffering that is taking place.

I rise on this mission of mercy with an appeal to the two people who but with their signatures could release \$40 million to suffering people.

Use that pen to make a difference. Take your hand, Mr. Speaker, grab

that pen, and release that \$40 million to the Haitians who can benefit from it.

Mr. Speaker, I believe that injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere, and we have a threat that is imminent and can, unfortunately, take its place across the gulf and find its home here in this country.

Injustice does not stay within the confines of any one border if it persists long enough. It is time for us to help the people in Haiti and release the \$40 million.

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

#### COVID LOCKDOWNS HARMED OUR CHILDREN

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

Mr. KILEY. Mr. Speaker, COVID-era school shutdowns were the most consequential political failure of at least the 21st century. We are finally starting to see some recognition of that, yet we still have not fully reckoned with the sheer breadth and scale of the harm that was done to so many people and to our entire country.

We haven't had nearly the level of accountability for those who were responsible for these decisions, and we certainly haven't seen the fundamental change to public education in this country that what happened ought to have catalyzed. Nonetheless, at least we are starting to see some recognition of the harm that was done and the mistakes that were made.

Here is an article from The New York Times: "What the Data Says About Pandemic School Closures, Four Years Later."

"The more time students spent in remote instruction, the further they fell behind. And, experts say, extended closures did little to stop the spread of COVID."

Mr. Speaker, I would like to read a few excerpts from this article.

It says: "Some schools, often in Republican-led States and rural areas reopened by fall 2020. Others, typically in large cities and States led by Democrats, would not fully reopen for another year."

"A variety of data—about children's academic outcomes and about the spread of COVID-19—has accumulated in the time since. Today, there is broad acknowledgment among many public health and education experts that extended school closures did not significantly stop the spread of COVID, while the academic harms for children have been large and long-lasting."

Dr. Sean O'Leary, a pediatric infectious disease specialist who worked with the current American Academy of Pediatrics, says: "There is fairly good consensus that, in general, as a society we probably kept kids out of school longer than we should have."

The article continues: "A growing body of research shows that pandemic school closures came at a steep cost to students. At the State level, more time spent in remote or hybrid instruction in the 2020-21 school year was associated with larger drops in test scores, according to a New York Times analysis of school closure data and results from the National Assessment of Educational Progress. . . ."

"At the school district level, that finding also holds, according to analysis of test scores from third through eighth grade in thousands of U.S. districts, led by researchers at Stanford and Harvard. . . . Learning remotely, they fell more than half a grade behind in math on average, while in districts that spent most of the year in person they lost just over a third of a grade."

The article continues that "larger gaps remaining among students that lost the most ground to begin with. Students in districts that were remote or hybrid the longest—at least 90 percent of the 2020-21 school year—still had almost double the ground to make up compared with students in districts that allowed students back for most of the year."

"As districts shifted toward in-person learning as the year went on, students that were offered a hybrid schedule . . . did better, on average, than those in places where school was fully remote, but worse than those in places that had school fully in person."

In particular, Mr. Speaker, young people in low-income communities suffered the most. The Times notes that "the combination—poverty and remote learning—was particularly harmful. For each week spent remote, students in poor districts experienced steeper losses in math than peers in richer districts."

The article continues that "other things were also associated with worse student outcomes, including increased anxiety and depression among adults in children's lives, and the overall restriction of social activity in a community, according to the Stanford and Harvard research."

Finally, Mr. Speaker, the article notes that closing schools did not appear to significantly slow COVID spread.

By the fall of 2020, "there were initial signs that children were less likely to become seriously ill, and growing evidence from Europe and parts of the United States that opening schools, with safety measures, did not lead to significantly more transmission."

That was clear in the fall of 2020 at the time when so many schools remained closed.

Dr. Noble, who directed the COVID response at the UCSF emergency department, said: "Infectious disease leaders have generally agreed that school closures were not an important strategy in stemming the spread of COVID."

In addition to The Times' acknowledgment here, Mr. Speaker, we also

have a new study out of Stanford's Hoover Institution that shows that because of the reduction in lifetime earning potential for students because of the learning loss they experienced, it is going to have a truly staggering economic impact on our country.

The study finds that our Nation will lose some \$31 trillion—that is trillion with a t—\$31 trillion during the 21st century because of this catastrophic policy.

Now, while this Times article is collecting data 4 years later, this was all very clear at the time from nearly the beginning of the pandemic. I said so myself when our Governor, Gavin Newsom, in early July of 2020 ordered California schools to be closed for the coming school year.

I released a statement saying:

Today's decision elevates the appearance of safety over actual student safety. A growing body of evidence suggests school closures do little to flatten the academic curve while they are a calamity for kids.

I certainly was not alone in saying so. On June 29 of 2020, the American Academy of Pediatrics said it "strongly advocates that all policy considerations for the coming school year should start with a goal of having students physically present in school."

I did a survey of my district at the time. This is June and July of 2020 heading into the 2021 school year. Mr. Speaker, 6,028 people responded, and over 80 percent said they wanted an in-person learning option to start the school year; yet, our Governor, like many others, did not abide by their wishes. He shut down schools across the State.

However, tellingly, he sent his own children to in-person private school at the exact same time that he was expelling millions of less fortunate kids from California public schools.

That tells us everything we need to know about the fact that he knew that his policy was the wrong thing to do.

While California was the very worst State in the country, dead last out of all 50 States in getting kids back to school, many States in this country reopened their schools far too slowly.

Although many did, in fact, open for the fall of 2020, and their children experienced very little learning loss. That is further evidence of what the data made very clear at that time.

Now, the Biden administration, for its part, was complicit in all of this. The administration, for example, had all of the wrong priorities. He went after the Governors who refused to do child mask mandates rather than criticizing the Governors who refused to open schools.

The Education Department even sued the Biden administration. They even sued States that opted not to do child mask mandates—mandates, by the way, that flew in the face of all available evidence and ran directly against what the WHO recommended in some cases and our counterparts in Europe.