

knowing that my doctor in that moment would make the decision she felt best to provide the treatment necessary based on the standard of care without fear of punishment from politicians if things went wrong.

Thankfully, that delivery was successful and many of you have come to know my daughter, Samantha, as a thriving, precocious, healthy little girl.

However, when she reaches child-bearing years, will she have fewer rights than I did when I gave birth to her?

That very thought makes me furious. It makes me livid that I am the first member of my family to lose a constitutional right in my lifetime. That reality has motivated me more than ever to protect reproductive freedom just as I did as a State legislator, passing legislation that makes Virginia the only State in the South without an abortion ban or extreme restrictions post-Dobbs.

I will continue to fight for reproductive freedom for patients and providers to make the choice they believe is best given their necessary circumstances without interference from Washington or State legislatures.

CRISIS UNFOLDING AT SOUTHERN BORDER

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentlewoman from Texas (Ms. DE LA CRUZ) for 5 minutes.

Ms. DE LA CRUZ. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to address the crisis unfolding at the southern border, a crisis that has been grossly neglected by the Biden administration.

Let's be clear: Texas is stepping up to the plate, because under President Joe Biden's failed leadership, the Federal Government has abdicated its responsibilities.

Under the Constitution, it is the Federal Government's job to secure our borders. If the Biden administration did its duty, Texas law enforcement officials could focus on local issues, not Federal issues. However, President Biden won't even acknowledge the crisis at our doorstep, and that is why Texas is leading the charge on border security.

This was entirely avoidable. How do we know this? Due to President Biden's decision to roll back effective border security policies it has sparked an unprecedented increase in illegal immigration, leaving Texas in the untenable position of having to manage this crisis.

The Biden administration's current lawsuit against Texas underscores its own failures.

In south Texas, we are on the front lines of this crisis, witnessing the chaos and the strain that illegal crossings are causing to local communities. This isn't just a policy failure; it represents a clear and present danger to our local communities, to extremely vulnerable immigrants, and really to all Americans.

Let me also address some of the other nonsense we are hearing from the other side.

My name is MONICA DE LA CRUZ. I am the granddaughter of Mexican "campesinos," "farmers," and I am from Hidalgo County, which is over 90 percent Hispanic. In fact, no one would ever confuse my children or me as anything other than Hispanic. We are very proud of our Latino heritage, so this entire notion that concerns over border security are somehow anti-immigrant or racist is itself racist.

The bigotry of low expectations that assumes that just because we are Hispanic, we do not care about this country's laws, and that we do not care about having safe and secure borders is simply not true. In fact, it is just ignorant.

Mark my words, the Biden White House's refusal to address this crisis and its insistence on labeling those who are concerned with border security as racist will cost this administration dearly.

We do not like this mess. Guess what? It affects our neighborhoods, our bodegas, our kids' schools. They are all on the front lines of this crisis, along with those of the millions of other patriotic Americans.

We are sick and tired of weak border policies being misrepresented as compassionate. No, Mr. Speaker. True compassion is enforcing our country's immigration laws, requiring people to come here legally and safely, and protecting Americans from the dangers posed by weak borders.

As a Congresswoman, I refuse to stand idly by. The situation we are facing is detrimental and it is inhumane, not only to Texans, but also to the American people and those who are being exploited by the coyotes and the cartels.

This crisis demands immediate and effective Federal attention, which we have yet to see under the Biden administration.

WE NEED TO FIX OUR OUTDATED, BROKEN IMMIGRATION SYSTEM

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

Mr. VASQUEZ. Mr. Speaker, I rise to speak today about a place that I love, and a place that is vitally important to our Nation.

I am a proud product of the U.S.-Mexico borderlands, a culturally rich binational community, full of opportunity, which helps power international trade and is key to bringing down the costs of goods for all Americans.

I understand how disillusioned Americans have become when it comes to addressing our broken immigration system and the challenges that we currently face at the border.

I am frustrated myself. That is why I stand here today saying that both

Democrats and Republicans have not done enough to fix our outdated, broken immigration system. The administration should look to the leadership and the experience of border House Representatives, like myself, on immigration reform and border security.

Let me be clear: Republicans haven't brought forward any real bipartisan solutions that could help alleviate the impacts of the humanitarian crisis that we are seeing today.

In fact, just this week, Republicans introduced a toothless resolution that only serves as a political statement that vilifies immigrants.

Further, Republicans did this in the same week that extreme rightwing immigration policies in the State of Texas led to the death of two migrant children who drowned in the Rio Grande. This is disgraceful. It is not who we are. It is un-American.

Trust me, I am tired of Congress kicking this can down the road for over 30 years. That is why I have introduced a package of commonsense legislation that could help solve this problem.

We can fix this crisis, but we can't do it while we lose our humanity. We can do that by securing our border, while also ensuring immigrants are treated humanely. After all, we are a Nation of immigrants.

That means investing in customs agents who work long hours and providing them with the tools they need to do their jobs. It means modernizing our legal system to match our needs. It means giving new Americans the opportunity to fill the jobs that our Nation and our communities desperately need.

I am a proud Democrat, but I am an American first, and right now that means holding everybody accountable to bring real solutions to the American people.

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SCHOOL CHOICE EMPOWERS FAMILIES

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mrs. STEEL). The Chair recognizes the gentlewoman from North Carolina (Ms. FOXX) for 5 minutes.

Ms. FOXX. Madam Speaker, Monday marks the beginning of National School Choice Week, a time to celebrate and explore the various education options available to students and parents.

Education is the cornerstone of opportunity in America, and we must spare no effort in laying the foundation for our students to prosper. Educational freedom is essential in these efforts and begets success for America's children while offering parents the resources to support their child's future.

No two students are the same, but that is the strength of school choice: empowering students and their families to select the environment that best supports their individual goals and specific needs.

Rather than assigning students to schools based solely on their ZIP Code, school choice places students and parents back where they belong, at the helm of decisionmaking concerning education.

Options like innovative charter schools, magnet schools, homeschooling, and scholarship programs personalize education and have revived new hope and opportunities for countless American families.

I would like to take a moment to commend and reflect on the progress achieved by the school choice movement in the last year. 2023 was a monumental year for expanding school choice across the country. A record 20 States implemented programs or legislation to make education alternatives available for millions of students.

Through these initiatives, these States have reasserted the rights of American parents to play a central role in selecting and pursuing the education model they believe suits their child.

I am proud to highlight that my home State of North Carolina was among these pioneer States and became the ninth State to pass universal school choice legislation. North Carolina and the 19 other States that passed legislation are amazing examples of putting students first.

However, too many of our Nation's students are kept from realizing their full potential because they do not have access to a high-quality education. The uncomfortable truth is that the one-size-fits-all approach to education is harming our students.

America invests over \$800 billion into education, yet the most recent National Assessment of Educational Progress found that reading scores declined to their lowest level since 1992, and math scores saw their largest decline since the initial 1990 assessment.

On the other hand, education choice has been proven to improve student achievement, attainment, and even character development.

We must fund students, not systems.

School choice puts education funding directly into the hands of parents. By allowing parents the discretion to use the funds already allocated for their child's education as they see fit, school choice ensures that students and schools are well matched and taxpayer dollars are used responsibly for programs and institutions that produce the best outcomes for students.

We were sent to Congress to represent the will of the American people, and 71 percent of Americans support school choice, according to recent polling.

I am proud of the advancements made for the parents who now have the rightful say in their child's education and for the students who can now unlock their full capabilities regardless of their financial situation, home address, or learning needs.

The next challenge we face is extending the promise of school choice to all 50 States. As Chairwoman of the Edu-

cation and the Workforce Committee, I am committed to promoting high-quality education for all Americans.

Madam Speaker, I wish everyone a happy National School Choice Week, and I look forward to celebrating more progress and milestones in 2024.

HONORING THE LIFE OF SONNY ADKINS, JR.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from South Carolina (Mr. NORMAN) for 5 minutes.

Mr. NORMAN. Madam Speaker, I rise today to honor the life of a truly great American, Mr. Sonny Adkins, Jr., who passed away on November 26, 2023.

Sonny was born in York County, South Carolina, and was the husband of the late Billie Jones Adkins, who was truly the love of his life.

In the early 1960s, Sonny started a business with his first sidekicks, as he called them, Billie Adkins and Sam Robinson. The name of his company was Adkins Oil Burner Service, later to become Adkins Heating & Cooling. Sonny ran his business every day focused on the care and love of his customers and built great relationships with all of the wonderful customers that he served.

Sonny ended up raising his own workers, as his children grew up and became the Adkins' employees. Sonny said many times, "I raised my own workers the way I wanted them to be." Each struggle he faced was a lesson to the family on how to live a full life.

In his recent days, he spent time riding his hay fields on a mule planning for the next hay season in his head. His planning included detailed instructions for the farmhands, also his family and friends, on what was needed to be done, and, more importantly, how to do it right, which was Sonny's way.

Sonny wore many hats. He was a God-loving man, a great teacher to his family, the land developer of Carrollton Place, and a farmer. However, the most important roles that he filled were being a wonderful son, brother, husband, father, uncle, paw paw, and friend.

At his funeral, there was a poem that was read that I think was so fitting for the life of Sonny Adkins. It goes like this:

Do not stand at my grave and weep.
I am not there; I do not sleep.
I am a thousand winds that blow;
I am the diamond glints on snow;
I am the sunlight on ripened grain;
I am the gentle autumn's rain.
Do not stand at my grave and mourn.
I am the dew-flecked grass at dawn.
When tranquil oceans meet the land
I am the footprints in the sand
To guide you through the weary day.
I am still here; I'll always stay.
When you wake up to morning's hush
I am the swift uplifting rush
Of quiet birds in circled flight.
I am the stars that shine at night.
Do not stand at my grave and cry.
I am not there; I did not die.

Many funerals we go to, the sermon doesn't match the man, but with

Sonny Adkins, the words definitely matched the man, and what a tribute to a life well lived.

CELEBRATING 100 YEARS OF ST. AUGUSTINE ART ASSOCIATION

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

Mr. RUTHERFORD. Madam Speaker, I rise today to recognize and celebrate the St. Augustine Art Association's 100th birthday.

Founded on January 18, 1924, 100 years ago today, the St. Augustine Art Association has now become the 13th oldest continually operating art association here in the United States.

The association plays an integral role in preserving and promoting the artistic heritage of St. Augustine, Florida, the oldest continuously inhabited European settlement in the continental United States and has been described as the epicenter of the local arts community.

The St. Augustine Art Association Art Center is open year round and is free to the public, welcoming over 10,000 visitors annually. The gallery hosts exhibitions, concerts, workshops, classes, lectures, and artwork from more than a thousand different artists of all backgrounds.

Thanks to the art center's involvement, these contemporary artists are able to keep St. Augustine's present day art colony alive and thriving.

The St. Augustine Art Association also provides outreach programs that serve several groups within the community, including the blind, local public school students, elder groups, and community businesses. These groups are all given access to the association's user-friendly gallery there in the heart of St. Augustine.

On behalf of Florida's Fifth Congressional District, I am proud to recognize the St. Augustine Art Association for its contributions to our community's local culture, history, and community. We wish them a happy 100th birthday.

RENAMING VA CLINIC IN HONOR OF ELWIN SHOPTEESE

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

Mr. LATURNER. Madam Speaker, I rise today in support of renaming the VA outpatient clinic in Kansas City, Kansas, after Captain Elwin "Al" Shopteese.

Captain Shopteese was born and raised in Mayetta, Kansas, and was a member of the Prairie Band Potawatomi Nation. Upon graduating high school, he enlisted in the Kansas National Guard and served as part of Company E, 137th Infantry Regiment.

He deployed to Europe during World War II and fought in both the invasion of Normandy and the Battle of the Bulge. Captain Shopteese received the