

FLOODS

Mrs. MILLER-MEEKS. Madam Speaker, I rise today to bring attention to the recent floods impacting Iowa currently. After the recent supercell storms, Iowa suffered widespread damage, debris, and record flooding. Some areas received up to 15 inches of rain, and at least 1,900 properties were impacted, with hundreds destroyed. Over the weekend, at least 250 water rescues were conducted.

Rivers all across Iowa will be impacted with extra water moving downstream and cresting to come. With the potential for possible more bad weather tomorrow and this weekend, the entire Hawkeye State is keeping a watchful eye.

I urge my constituents to prepare in the event of flooding and bad storms impacting our communities. The entire Iowa delegation is working closely with Governor Reynolds and local officials during this difficult time.

Finally, Madam Speaker, I am grateful to the first responders working around the clock to help Iowans in need.

UNIVERSITY OF IOWA BOASTS THE THIRD SMALLEST BABY BORN IN THE WORLD

Mrs. MILLER-MEEKS. Madam Speaker, I rise today to recognize the Eilers family of Solon, Iowa. Emily and Ted Eilers are parents to Evelyn Eilers who was born at the University of Iowa in September of 2023.

Evelyn was tied as the third smallest baby born in the world. Thanks to world-class care available at the University of Iowa, Evelyn was able to come home as the size of an average full-time newborn.

Evelyn's survival and the survival outcomes for other extremely premature infants at the University of Iowa Health Care Stead Family Children's Hospital are among the best in the world. This is yet another demonstration of the phenomenal care available to Iowans through the university's hospital.

As a former doctor at the University of Iowa Hospital, I am proud to celebrate the incredible work and the recent homecoming of Evelyn Eilers, and, more importantly, support a culture of life.

God bless the Eilers family.

CONGRATULATING UNIVERSITY OF IOWA TRACK AND FIELD ATHLETES

Mrs. MILLER-MEEKS. Madam Speaker, I rise today to congratulate the seven athletes from the University of Iowa track and field program on their appearance at the Olympic trials this past weekend.

I would like to give a special congratulations to Kalen Walker, the brother of one of our legislative interns. Kalen Walker is a three-time, all-American record-holding athlete who competed in the 100-meter dash at the semifinal round at the Olympic trials this weekend.

Kalen is from rural Iowa and graduated from Eddyville-Blakesburg-Fremont High School in 2020. He attended

Indian Hills Community College in Ottumwa, Iowa, and then transferred to the University of Iowa as a walk-on.

Kalen embodies what it means to be a true, hardworking Iowan. He came to the University of Iowa to fulfill his dream of running as a Hawkeye, and this weekend was a step toward fulfilling his dream of being an Olympian.

I am proud to congratulate him and his teammates on their honor of representing Iowa and America.

As always, go Hawks.

Mr. BERGMAN. Madam Speaker, in closing, I am extremely grateful for all of my colleagues who have spoken here today and shared their stories and also celebrated the people who have gone through tough times, whether it be, if you will, something as simple as weather related, but, more importantly, the stresses related to life.

We are the greatest nation in the world because we treat people right, and we expect the same in return.

I am grateful to have had the opportunity to raise awareness of post-traumatic growth, and I want to repeat that: post-traumatic growth, a positive way forward and not a negative ending.

It is my sincere hope that those of us in Congress and Americans across our country can work to help those who have experienced trauma, that they can find growth, purpose, and connection.

I say as a veteran and a marine: Our veterans never quit on us. We will never quit on them.

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

PRIDE MONTH

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

GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. TAKANO. Madam Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members have 5 legislative days to revise and extend their remarks and include extraneous material on the topic of this Special Order.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Is there objection to the request of the gentleman from California?

There was no objection.

Mr. TAKANO. It is an honor to host this Special Order hour in collaboration with the Congressional Progressive Caucus and the Congressional Equality Caucus. As Congress' first out person of color, it is an honor to lead this time on the floor.

As we near the end of Pride Month, it is important to celebrate the LGBTQ+ community's contributions to our country, our fight for equal rights, and the work that still has to be done.

I am proud to be joined by several of my colleagues in this House, and I appreciate their commitment to the LGBTQ+ community.

Last year, I was joined by Leader HAKEEM JEFFRIES, the co-chairs of the

Congressional Equality Caucus, and the LGBTQ+ activists to reintroduce the Equality Act. We stood together in solidarity and on the shoulders of many pioneers of the LGBTQ+ movement to demand equal protections for LGBTQ+ people. Former Congressman David Cicilline entrusted me with this landmark piece of legislation that would prohibit discrimination based on sex, sexual orientation, or gender identity, and I take that responsibility very seriously.

The Equality Act was passed twice under the leadership of Speaker Emerita NANCY PELOSI, and today it has the support of every House Democrat.

The story of LGBTQ+ equality is not complete without the passage of this legislation. From the Stonewall riots in 1969 to protest the over-policing and criminalization of the LGBTQ+ community, to the lives lost to the AIDS crisis, to the heroes of this movement like Marsha P. Johnson and Harvey Milk, our community has endured adversity, prejudice, and bigotry.

Unfortunately, the ugliness of hatred persists. Discrimination against LGBTQ+ people is still active, and violence against more vulnerable members of our community is increasing.

The Equality Act would send a message to all LGBTQ+ Americans that their government wants to ensure their dignified existence while honoring those who came before us. In a political moment where the LGBTQ+ community is used to stoke fear and distrust, the Equality Act stands as a way to unite us under principles that this country was founded: liberty and justice for all.

I am proud to come to the floor to during Pride Month to highlight this legislation and to send a message to not only the LGBTQ+ people who are living as their authentic selves and who have enjoyed the celebrations and festivities that this month has to offer but, also, those who, for whatever reason, cannot live or love in a way that is true to themselves out of fear of retaliation.

To those individuals, I want to say: you are not alone, and you have allies in places you may not expect. You have allies in the nine out Members of the House of Representatives, and you have allies in all of the vice chairs and members of the Congressional Equality Caucus.

□ 1715

We cannot wait for the day when LGBTQ+ people don't have to make the impossible choice of choosing safety over living authentically. While I cannot remedy every situation or make every American understand the fear many LGBTQ+ people live in, I can ensure the Federal Government does not stand in their way.

That is why we need the Equality Act, for dignity for a group that has historically been suppressed and continues to be the target of attacks.

We will not stop until this goal is achieved. We will not go back. We will keep fighting.

Madam Speaker, I yield to the gentleman from Illinois (Mr. GARCÍA), a deputy whip for the Progressive Caucus and Equality Caucus member, as well.

Mr. GARCÍA of Illinois. Madam Speaker, today, I rise in celebration of Pride Month and the LGBTQ+ community and to raise awareness on National HIV Testing Day.

Queer, Latino, and Black communities have been disproportionately impacted by the HIV/AIDS epidemic and continue to make up the majority of newly diagnosed people compared to their White counterparts.

For many, this disparity is compounded by obstacles like poor transportation access, language barriers, racial discrimination in healthcare, lack of family support, and the fears of deportation if they seek treatment, to name a few.

Make no mistake, comprehensive and inclusive care is a matter of life and death for our communities. While we celebrate the resilience and beauty of the LGBTQ+ community, I am proud to join my Democratic colleagues in opposition to Republican attempts to gut funding for lifesaving HIV/AIDS programs and in solidarity with organizers fighting for a pro-equality agenda across America.

Mr. TAKANO. Madam Speaker, I yield to the gentlewoman from Michigan (Ms. TLAIB), the vice chair for member services for the Progressive Caucus and also an Equality Caucus member.

Ms. TLAIB. Madam Speaker, there is a mental health crisis among our LGBTQ+ youth in our country. Far too many of our young people are struggling right now to access the care they need and deserve.

We know that rightwing politicians, including many in this Chamber, continue to carry out relentless attacks, just unbelievable attacks, on our LGBTQ+ people and push for discriminatory policies. This constant fear-mongering, rejection, and discrimination have real human consequences.

According to the Trevor Project, nearly half of our LGBTQ+ youth have seriously considered suicide in the past year alone. At least one of them attempts suicide every 45 seconds.

This is the heartbreaking reality that we are facing, so our words matter. The bills that we introduce matter.

These young people, like all people regardless of how they identify or who they love, deserve the opportunity to grow up and to live with human dignity and equal rights free from discrimination.

Our fight for LGBTQ+ rights is connected to our fight for human dignity for marginalized people everywhere. We must pass the Equality Act to protect LGBTQ+ people from discrimination at work, in housing, and in public accommodations and guarantee them equal protection under the law.

Madam Speaker, we must also pass legislation that increases access to mental health care like the Pride in Mental Health Act, which would fund mental health resources, training for our caregivers, school bullying prevention, and more.

To my residents in 12 District Strong, your Congresswoman sees you and loves you. I will continue fighting for the collective liberation of all of our people.

Mr. TAKANO. Madam Speaker, I yield to the gentlewoman from Vermont (Ms. BALINT), the Equality Caucus co-chair and Progressive Caucus vice chair for new members.

Ms. BALINT. Madam Speaker, I rise today to start with a reflection.

When I was in high school, I knew exactly what I wanted to do. I wanted to go into politics. I was good in front of a room. I loved talking about policy. I wanted to make a real difference in the lives of Americans. It was so clear. I knew my path.

I also thought that was just a pipe dream because, first of all, I knew nobody in my family had ever run for office. I didn't know the first thing about doing that, but I also knew at that time in high school, I had no role models for how to serve as an openly gay leader, a politician, so I put that away.

I actually didn't run for office until I was in my forties because I didn't see a way forward. There was just so much homophobia, so much vitriol from within my community, sometimes within my own family.

I want to reflect on the fact it is incredible that I am standing here today in this Chamber, the House of Representatives, as the first woman ever to represent Vermont in Congress, as the first openly LGBTQ person to represent my State in Congress. I never imagined that I would be here. I take it very seriously that I am a leader for all Vermonters, regardless of how they identify.

Pride—which is what this month is about—is about celebrating love. It is about celebrating families of all kinds, including my own. I have a wife and two teenagers. It is about celebrating the joy that comes from living your authentic self and making genuine connections with other people.

Pride is also a reminder that we must remember the history that brought us here today, of the political struggle that secured so many of our rights, and also the path we still must walk in order to get to true equality.

Earlier today, I spoke in the Oversight Committee. I was waived onto that committee to talk about some of the really horrible rhetoric that has become all too commonplace in our committees and on the floor of the House of Representatives.

I know because I feel it, too. I know so many of us are feeling quite down about the state of the world and discouraged about the battles that we have fought. We thought we had that discrimination behind us. We thought

the hateful and hurtful rhetoric was something in the past.

I get it. We, as members of marginalized communities, understand the despair. We understand why it is so exhausting to think about having to fight these battles over again, but we do not have the luxury of losing hope or giving in to cynicism. As I say often, cynicism is the voice of the status quo. Cynicism tells you nothing can change, so, therefore, why even try.

I can say that I have been shocked at the constant attacks on my community that I have experienced in the last 1½ years in Congress, with the public debate and passage of so many dangerous anti-transgender, anti-LGBTQ bills, amendments, and riders. There is this sense that somehow our words don't matter, that they don't have an impact, that it is just an amendment.

I literally had people say to me in the hallway that they don't really believe this stuff, that they don't really hate gay people. That doesn't matter if what they do in the end is vote for those hateful amendments and riders in bills. My colleagues' actions matter.

It is not enough to say to me privately, hey, I know you, know you are a good person, and you know I don't mean you. That doesn't matter if what they do in the end is vote against my rights and freedoms and, more than that, demonize me within my community and, as the Representative from Michigan just said, contribute to the mental health crisis that so many youth in my community suffer from.

We can't allow our elected officials and leaders to continue to demonize and dehumanize other Americans, other Americans who have the rights that all Americans have to live their lives free from discrimination, to go to work and not have to face discrimination at work, to serve on a jury, and to be treated with dignity and respect. That is all we are asking.

We thought that the work was behind us because we are your friends, neighbors, and family members, and we have already fought these battles. The sky didn't fall when we passed civil unions in Vermont. The sky didn't fall when we passed same-sex marriage. The sky didn't fall when we passed anti-discrimination legislation.

All the terrible things that were going to come to pass by treating people with dignity, respect, and love, and affording them the same freedoms as everyone else in this country—the sky did not fall. We are still here. We are still a strong democracy.

The consistent stream of hate is a reminder that whenever you make progress, and my colleague here knows it so well, the backlash comes. We are in the midst of a furious backlash.

We cannot allow the attacks to go unchallenged. We must go toe to toe in committee after committee, debate after debate on the floor. We cannot normalize the dehumanizing rhetoric, the fear-mongering, the hatred.

We must every day call attention to the fact that what is happening in the

most powerful body in this country is that people are using their political platform to demonize and dehumanize and spread hatred and fear of other Americans who are worthy of dignity, respect, and freedom.

I hear from so many young people, both in my State and here on the Hill, people who work in this building, people who come to advocate on behalf of organizations and policies they believe in. They say: Thank you so much, Congresswoman, for being out about who you are and being open about your family because it is still really hard to live a life full of joy and promise in many pockets of this country.

We risk lives when we don't stand up clearly and loudly against discrimination against trans people, against queer people, against people who are just different. We have forgotten that everyone in our community, regardless of gender identity, regardless of background, is worthy of dignity and respect and should be afforded the same freedoms and rights as every other American.

We must be loud, and we must not give an inch. That is why we are here tonight. We are not going back. It doesn't matter how many amendments you bring up, how many riders, or how many bills that are attacking our community. We are not going back.

□ 1730

We are not going back into the closet. We are not going to stop being who we are. We are not going to stop showing up with courage and dignity and love, not just for ourselves, but for all the young people who are watching us, who see their leaders demonizing them, who tune in to C-SPAN and tune in to committee hearings and they say: I can't believe they are spending their time attacking our community again when all we want is to live a life of dignity and freedom. Why are they spending their time on this?

I have to say: I don't know. I don't know.

This month is about loving and living. That is what this is. This is life-affirming. Pride is about saying: We are here. We are your friends. We are your neighbors. We are your family members, and we deserve dignity and respect.

I remind my community out there: You be you. Keep being you. Keep being yourself. When we reach our full potential as humans, it does make the world a better place. It makes our communities more rich.

I tell you this because I know my 11-year-old self needed to hear that. I needed to hear that from the adults in my life and the leaders. My 11-year-old self was worried that just being me, just having my identity would limit what I would be able to do in life, which is why I didn't run for office until my forties.

I knew at 17 that I wanted to serve my community, but I felt limited because of the homophobia and because

of the hatred. I worried that my family would not love me. I worried that I would never be accepted in school because those were the messages. I worried and feared that I would lose friends, and I did.

Today, we have to remember where we have come from, and we cannot allow the rhetoric to continue in this body because it isn't just about the bills that we pass or don't pass. It is about the messages that we are sending to people across this country. Are we a Nation that believes that everyone is entitled to dignity and respect and humanity, or are we going to become a Nation that continues to scapegoat those in our communities that, for some reason, we don't understand?

I am here as a Member of Congress. I am here as a parent. I am here as a former teacher. It is the honor of my life to serve my State in the U.S. House of Representatives. I could not be more proud, and I am going to use my voice to stand up for any community that is in danger of having its rights taken away from it.

Mr. TAKANO. Madam Speaker, I thank the gentlewoman from Vermont, and I thank her for her most powerful and righteous voice.

Madam Speaker, I yield to the gentleman from Georgia (Mr. JOHNSON), my good friend, a member of the Equality Caucus and a strong advocate for LGBTQ+ equality, and a member of the Judiciary Committee.

Mr. JOHNSON of Georgia. Madam Speaker, I thank Representative TAKANO for all that he does in upholding human rights and civil rights for everyone in this country, regardless of what your sexual inclination might be.

When you really stop and think about it, we should be beyond judging each other based on who we love. That is why I am so happy to say happy Pride Month to all people out there because none of us are free if any of us are not free.

It heartens me this day and time, 2024, when we see a polling that shows that about 8 percent of adults in this country identify as LGBTQ. The reason why it is not more is because we have been conditioned and people are afraid to say who they are because, the older that you get, the more you have to lose by revealing who you are.

I will say it is also heartening that, in 2024, among the millennial generation, 30 percent of our millennials identify as LGBTQ. What that tells you is that, first of all, the older folks have made it such that the young people feel more comfortable in identifying as who they are. They are not steeped in how much I can lose if I come out.

They are young enough to not have anything to lose by coming out. It is actually so much healthier for them than it has been for the older people, who have tried to hide, who have felt the need to hide who they are and go through life unhappy and go through life miserable.

People should not have to live like that. We should be free. People should

be free to be who they are. That is what Pride Month is all about, is people being able to come out and say that this is who I am. I love me for being me, and I love you for being you, even though you may have a different sexual inclination than I have.

When we allow license to hatred in our lives, first it starts with: I don't like the Blacks. Then it goes to: I don't like the Jews. Then I don't like people who keep their hair cut short because they look like Nazis. Then it becomes: I don't like short people. I don't like people who like dogs.

The more that you allow hate and license hate in your heart, the easier it becomes for you to hate people who are different than you.

What gives you the authority to judge someone? What gives you the authority to hate on someone and to act in that way? It is just not human. The more we become human, the more we begin to love people for who they are and to recognize that they, regardless of their differences from me, are equal to me.

Pride Month is all about people feeling good about themselves. It is all about challenging folks who have hatred in their heart to remove that hatred, and it is all about sending the message that the march for humanity will continue regardless of whether or not you keep hating or not.

I will say I am happy to stand with my LGBTQ+ brothers and sisters throughout this country and the world. I am happy to stand with you in this month, which is Pride Month. Happy Pride Month.

Mr. TAKANO. Madam Speaker, I thank the gentleman from Georgia (Mr. JOHNSON) for his kind and warm and righteous words.

Madam Speaker, I now yield to the gentleman from New Jersey (Mr. GOTTHEIMER), my friend and a member of the Equality Caucus, a strong advocate for LGBTQ+ equality.

Mr. GOTTHEIMER. Madam Speaker, I thank the gentleman for yielding. Happy Pride to all.

Madam Speaker, I rise tonight in support of LGBTQ+ equality, a domain in which we have made so much progress. I am so grateful for that, but we have a long way to go.

I thank Congressman TAKANO for his phenomenal leadership, his friendship, what he does on the Equality Caucus as co-chair, and what he does in the Halls of Congress every day, standing up to hatred, fighting for doing right and for, of course, coordinating tonight's Pride Month Special. I thank the gentleman so much.

Yesterday was Equality Day, the anniversary of three Supreme Court decisions that transformed LGBTQ+ rights here in our great country: *Lawrence v. Texas*, *U.S. v. Windsor*, and *Obergefell v. Hodges*. In just over two decades, we made a century's worth of progress, unbelievable progress in a short period of time, decriminalizing homosexuality and guaranteeing marriage equality nationally.

Yet, in the midst of this monumental progress, there are forces here in the Halls of Congress and in State legislatures across our country that want to pull us backward and go after Americans for who they love.

So far this year, the ACLU is tracking 515 anti-LGBTQ+ bills in our State legislatures, embedding hate and cruelty into the letter of their laws. LGBTQ+ rights are personal for me, as they are for many people in Congress and for Americans across our country. For the sake of our brothers, sisters, sons, daughters, and friends, we can't, and we won't let extremists roll back the clock on the great progress we have made.

The monumental progress I highlighted just a minute ago originated in the courts, but it really came from the country, in homes, in communities, and people realizing that it is the right thing to do to make sure people can love who they want and live their lives.

I am deeply grateful the courts made the decisions on marriage equality, but we can't rely on the whims of Supreme Court Justices. We need to make these victories permanent through Congress.

That is why, in 2022, I helped pass the bipartisan, bicameral Respect for Marriage Act, which enshrines marriage equality into Federal law. We can and must do the same when it comes to discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation.

I am incredibly proud to be a member of the Equality Caucus and a cosponsor of the Equality Act, which will ban this discrimination outright. We have now passed the Equality Act twice through the House. I urge House leadership to bring it up for a vote once again.

Equal treatment isn't a partisan issue. We can send a message of acceptance to our country by sending this bill to the President's desk. This is a place where we can work together and come together.

Finally, we must stop the mistreatment of our LGBTQ+ community. That is why I am introducing the Elder Pride Protection Act with Congresswoman ANGIE CRAIG of Minnesota, an Equality Caucus co-chair, which will combat the runaway abuse facing LGBTQ+ seniors across our country. It is a real issue. I urge my colleagues to join me in supporting this critical legislation.

Let's never forget the words of the heart of our country found in the Declaration of Independence: "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness."

The best way that we can move forward and live up to the Founders' vision is by standing for LGBTQ+ equality and happiness. I mean equality for everybody here in the greatest country in the world. I know that, if we do that and stand together and work together,

our best days will always be ahead of us.

Madam Speaker, I thank the gentleman once again for yielding.

Mr. TAKANO. Madam Speaker, I thank the gentleman from New Jersey (Mr. GOTTHEIMER) for his commitment and the spirit which he brings to fighting for justice for LGBTQ people. Happy Pride to the gentleman.

Madam Speaker, I wish to turn my attention toward the world and the international stage. LGBTQ+ issues continue to be the topic of public debate globally. In every corner of the world, there has been movement, both good and bad. We have seen the struggle in many nations in the fight for equality and dignity.

On a very positive note, we see in the nation of Greece the legalization of same-sex marriage, making Greece the first Christian Orthodox country to pass such a measure.

Taiwan is making historic strides toward equal rights for the LGBTQ+ community. In 2019, on the International Day Against Homophobia, Biphobia, Interphobia, and Transphobia, Taiwan became the first country in Asia to legalize same-sex marriage.

Then, this past year, legislators from Taiwan extended the same-sex marriage act to grant adoption rights to LGBTQ+ couples. Now both individuals who are part of a same-sex couple with children are able to be acknowledged as legal guardians and can experience the parental rights enjoyed by all other couples.

□ 1745

This past October, Taiwan celebrated Pride with over 175,000 onlookers from all over the world gathering in Taipei to join the march. This year's theme was "stand with diversity," which sought to recognize the diversity of every person and respect different gender identities.

In January, Taiwan elected its first openly gay legislator, but the most promising sign of LGBTQ+ equality came earlier this month from Thailand when legislators approved a marriage equality bill, a move that puts the country on a clear path to becoming the first nation in Southeast Asia to recognize same-sex couples.

All of this is happening in the shadow of a more and more repressive People's Republic of China. The state authorities have continually targeted LGBTQ+ individuals and cracked down on pro-equality organizers. These groups lack legal support and are at the whims of an authoritarian regime that seeks to diminish and eliminate LGBTQ+ people. No person should live in fear because of their gender identity or who they love, and it is imperative that we protect the rights for LGBTQ+ people globally and hold governments with this anti-equality agenda accountable.

I commend Taiwan for their championing of equality for their LGBTQ+ citizens. It sets the example for other

countries in Asia and across the world that have yet to support freedom and equality for our community.

Madam Speaker, I will make a side note here that while I share my Republican colleagues' concern about the authoritarianism of Xi Jinping and the CCP, I have yet to see my Republican colleagues rise in indignation about the way in which the regime of China treats its LGBTQ+ citizens.

Recent events in Uganda have cast a harsh light on the global struggle for LGBTQ+ rights, and it is our moral duty to speak out against the draconian laws that criminalize same-sex relationships in that country.

More than a year ago, Uganda enacted one of the world's harshest anti-LGBTQ laws, criminalizing same-sex conduct with punishments that include life imprisonment and even the death penalty for aggravated homosexuality, whatever that might mean.

Sadly, the law was recently upheld by the nation's highest court. This law is not just a legal measure; it is an instrument of hate and repression, designed to persecute and dehumanize a segment of society simply for being who they are.

As someone who has experienced both the triumphs and challenges of being openly gay in public life, I can tell you that laws like these do more than legislate against behavior. They legitimize prejudice, foster environments of fear, and justify violence. They rip apart families, drive people into hiding, and erode the fundamental principles of equality and human rights.

We simply cannot and must not look away. Silence in the face of such opposition is complicity. We must use our voices, our platforms, and our influence to condemn these injustices and support those who are fighting for their right to love and live openly and freely in Uganda and around the world.

That is why I introduced a resolution condemning this recent regression of LGBTQ+ rights in Uganda. I look forward to my colleagues' support on this measure and to send a message to the LGBTQ+ community in Uganda that they are seen, that they are heard, and that they are not alone.

Madam Speaker, I also extend my comments to praise the Biden administration, which has sent a clear message to LGBTQ+ Americans that they deserve to live safely and with dignity.

Buried in the 2022 Dobbs decision that stripped women of their reproductive rights was an ominous and dangerous warning from the Justices that marriage equality may be next. Congress and the President were quick to act to protect equality by passing and signing the Respect for Marriage Act. Just imagine if we had a Commander in Chief who did not prioritize this sacred right.

We know that 169 of my House Republican colleagues voted against it, and their agenda has not changed, but thanks to President Biden, marriage

for everyone is safe from an extremist conservative court that has repeatedly shown that decades of old precedents can be overturned with the stroke of a pen in pursuit of their ideological aims. House Democrats, Progressives, and President Biden will always protect the right for anyone to marry who they love.

The President has also leveraged executive agencies to ensure that LGBTQ+ people are safe and healthy. President Biden has directed the Department of Health and Human Services, the Department of Homeland Security, and the Department of Justice to ensure that communities have the tools to curb violence against LGBTQ+ people.

The President's goal of ending gun violence is something that will help all Americans, including to ensure the safety of LGBTQ+ people as they continue to be targeted based on who they love, what businesses they go to, or how they present. We all remember the tragedies and lives lost from bigotry and fueled by gun violence at Club Q in Colorado and Pulse nightclub in Orlando.

Through Congress passing the Safer Communities Act and President Biden's establishment of the Office of Gun Violence Prevention, Democrats are ensuring that our community is safe to live our lives authentically and with dignity.

A part of living a dignified life is one where you don't have to worry about a doctor turning you away based on your identity. The Biden administration advanced civil rights protections for patients by barring health providers and insurers receiving Federal funding from discriminating against those seeking care on the basis of gender identity or sexual orientation.

Reversing this Trump-era license to discriminate comes as LGBTQ+ people face unprecedented attacks on their right to healthcare.

We have seen over 20 States across the country attempt to get in the middle of healthcare decisions concerning LGBTQ+ care, causing patients to move to States that do not have these hateful regulations or forego care altogether. This action from President Biden sends a clear message: No one should be denied care or coverage of care due to who they are or who they love.

Even this week, the President continues to reconcile the harm caused to LGBTQ+ people in the military. He announced pardons for thousands of former servicemembers convicted of a crime under military law based on their sexual orientation. The effects of these convictions have blocked those who served our country their benefits that they have rightfully earned. This is a meaningful step forward for us coming to terms with the institutionalized discrimination, targeting, and repression of LGBTQ+ people in the uniformed services.

This is a glimmer of hope in a political era when some of my Republican

colleagues and many State governments across the country have put some of the most vulnerable among us in the LGBTQ+ community in their crosshairs. Attacks on trans youth, particularly those who want to participate in sports, are the new bogeyman of the far right. No student, athlete, or young person should be the target of attacks from Members of Congress because they are living as their authentic self.

President Biden has responded to these attacks by strengthening Title IX protections. This update to Title IX stipulates protections from sex-based discrimination, which includes gender identity for the very first time.

All of these actions recognize the dignity of LGBTQ+ people and the community, a group that has experienced relentless attacks from my Republican colleagues in Congress.

We did not ask to be targets of the far right. We did not ask for our personal lives to be the topic of national debate. What we do ask for is respect and the privilege to live as we are without fear, something that non-LGBTQ people have never had to consider.

I am proud to come to the floor today to highlight the things this administration has done, but our fight is not over until no one is targeted or retaliated against for being who they are. That is why the Equality Act needs to be taken up, passed, and signed by President Biden to take an even larger step into the future of true equality for everyone regardless of the ZIP Code in which they live.

Madam Speaker, in the summer of 1974, I was glued to the television set in my grandfather's living room. My grandfather at the time lived across the street from where I lived. He was an immigrant grandfather. As we say in the Japanese language, his generation is known as the "issei" or "first generation."

I was watching on the public television station Representative Barbara Jordan give her remarks during the House Judiciary Committee's hearing on the Nixon impeachment. I believe I was 13 years old at the time.

Her eloquent and impassioned speech on the solemn nature of impeachment and the role of Congress in those proceedings made a deep impact on me as it did for many others.

She, in fact, became a national figure because of her role in giving her opening speech. She said in her very memorable speech that her "faith in the Constitution is whole; it is complete; it is total."

Her conviction was present to all, and it made an indelible mark on me. It inspired me to pursue public service and it inspired me to study the art of wordsmithing and rhetoric with the hopes of one day having the same command of language that she did.

That journey led me to pursue a career in education. I returned home to Riverside, California, and began teaching in the nearby community of Rialto

Unified School District in 1988. Ask any teacher and they will say it is their students, the young, curious minds that inspire them to strive for greatness in and out of the classroom. This is the same in my story when my students approached me to start the very first gay-straight alliance at that school.

Their bravery and clarity of purpose inspired me to run for Congress for the third time in 2012. I had run for the first time in 1992 and again in 1994. In fact, in 1994, I had been outed by my opponent.

When my students came to me in 2009, several months after the passage of Proposition 8—I might say that Proposition 8 was the statewide initiative that overturned the California Supreme Court decision that granted same-sex couples the right to marry. The people of California did this in the 2008 election at the same time that they gave President Barack Obama nearly a 20-point margin of victory. A much narrower victory was given to Proposition 8, which overturned marriage equality in California.

My students were in a slingshot moment. They surprised me. They came to me and said, Mr. TAKANO, many kids at our school are upset about the injustice of Proposition 8 and they are mad. They want to start a gay-straight alliance. What was amazing to me was that over 100 kids turned up in my classroom for that first organizing meeting.

□ 1800

It began to make me think that another run for Congress was something that I should start thinking about, that my experience in 1992 and 1994—in 1992 almost winning against my opponent and 1994 being a year in which I was attacked for being gay, and homophobic attacks were used.

I found that in 2012, I was surrounded by family, loved ones, and supporters as I was elected to Congress, making me the first out person of color to be elected to the House of Representatives.

My story is not all that unique. There are still LGBTQ+ people whose queerness is used against them, whether it is being outed or otherwise forced to stay in the closet for longer.

Pride Month and the idea of Pride reminds us that it isn't always the case that an out gay Asian man could come to the floor of the House of Representatives and stand alongside his colleagues to celebrate his identity.

It wasn't always the case that bills like the Equality Act could be introduced and nevertheless passed out of committee and out of a Chamber of Congress, let alone twice.

We have made so much progress, but there is still so much more to do. There are still members of our community being targeted, harassed, and diminished by those with hatred in their hearts.

While the journey to full equality for the LGBTQ+ community is long and

winding, I stand here on the floor of the House of Representatives with clear eyes, proud of the progress we have seen in the past decade and beyond, along with a faith in the Constitution that is whole, that is complete, and that is total.

Madam Speaker, just a few miles from here is the Congressional Cemetery. There is a silent protest happening. There amongst the tombstones of former Representatives, Senators, and former Cabinet members is the tombstone without a name that instead bears the message: "When I was in the military they gave me a medal for killing two men and a discharge for loving one."

Leonard Matlovich is laid to rest there, a Vietnam veteran who rose to fame in 1975 by becoming the first gay servicemember to publicly reveal his sexuality and challenging the military's longstanding ban on LGBTQ+ people.

After meeting with famed gay rights activist Frank Kameney in D.C., Matlovich hand delivered a letter to his commanding officer, declaring his sexual identity.

Despite years of exemplary service and multiple tours of duty in Vietnam, which included a Bronze Star and a Purple Heart that he had earned after nearly being killed by a land mine, he was discharged.

Madam Speaker, 13 years later, Leonard passed away from HIV/AIDS after years of advocacy, bravery, and being a voice for LGBTQ+ servicemembers serving during Don't Ask, Don't Tell.

Our Nation failed Leonard and the estimated 114,000 servicemembers who were discharged on the basis of their sexual orientation between World War II and 2011.

The repeal of Don't Ask, Don't Tell came 13 years ago, but the hurt, shame, and legacy of this rule lives on in the form of missed benefits and harassment.

As ranking member of the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs, I have heard stories from former servicemembers who either ended their service early or were discharged due to who they loved.

To date, there has been no congressional-led effort to investigate the historic and ongoing impacts of discriminatory military policies on LGBTQ+ servicemembers and veterans.

That is why I introduced legislation to establish a commission to collect facts and testimonies while also providing recommendations to Congress, the VA, and the uniformed services on how to move forward from these harmful policies.

There are currently 250,000 Active-Duty LGBTQ+ servicemembers and over 1.5 million LGBTQ+ veterans receiving healthcare from the VA, but there continues to be a pervasive lack of data collection on LGBTQ+ servicemembers and veteran populations and an absence of education on the LGBTQ+ community who serve in uniform.

I stand ready to pass this legislation so that even more veterans can experience the world-class care that all veterans are entitled to through the VA.

I say in closing that Pride Month is a time for celebration, but it is also a time for action. I thank all the speakers who joined in this Special Order hour to pay tribute to the LGBTQ+ community and to enunciate the work that is left to do.

Our speakers today have made clear the progress that we have made but also the work that we still need to do in order to achieve full equality.

This month and every month, the congressional LGBTQ+ Equality Caucus stands in solidarity with LGBTQ+ people throughout the country and around the world. We will never stop fighting for your rights.

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

CELEBRATING INDEPENDENCE DAY

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

Mr. ROY. Madam Speaker, as we will be recessing tomorrow for the week, next week many of us will be celebrating America's Independence Day back home in our districts and throughout the country.

Very few of us will be here. A few may, but we are rarely, if ever, on the floor of the U.S. House on Independence Day.

It is obviously a day not just worth celebrating but that the Founders intended specifically for us to celebrate.

I recall now 4 years ago in the summer of 2020 in the midst of some of the protests and riots and burning of buildings, tossing of statues and damaging of statues throughout the country in the summer of 2020, there was a lot of effort to tear down monuments and memorials.

I took my staff, and I drove to Philadelphia on July 2. We were here late right up through that day. I think we finished voting on July 1.

On July 2, I drove with my staff, I went to Philadelphia, and I went to Independence Hall and visited with the National Park Service there who were caring for Independence Hall.

Fortunately, there was nobody at that point threatening to damage Independence Hall. There were some rumors and concerns.

I recorded a video there and talked about the importance of Independence Hall. In that speech or in that video, when I recorded that, I pointed out that it wasn't the bricks and the mortar. It wasn't the building itself. It wasn't the structure.

That is all interesting to go see from a historic standpoint, but it was what those men did inside of Independence Hall that changed the course of history forever.

The National Park Service was very gracious. They allowed me and my staff, the three staff members with me, to go into Independence Hall on July 2.

We were alone. It was just us because it was closed down for public tours because you will remember, this was during the time of COVID.

We were able to be in Independence Hall on July 2. Now, why is that interesting? Because students of history will know that that was the actual monumental day.

That was the day that our leaders of the colonies, but the Founders of this country, the leaders broke away from the crown. That was the day that they voted.

On July 3, the next day, John Adams wrote a letter to his wife, Abigail, back home in Massachusetts. Remember, of course, he couldn't call her. He couldn't text her. He couldn't send her an email.

He wrote Abigail a letter that would get to her saying, "Yesterday, the greatest question was decided, which ever was debated in America, and a greater, perhaps, never was nor will be decided among men."

"A resolution was passed without one dissenting colony, 'that these United Colonies are, and of right ought to be, free and independent States, and as such they have, and of right ought to have, full power to make war, conclude peace, establish commerce, and to do all other acts and things which other States may rightfully do.'"

"The second day of July, 1776, will be the most memorable epocha in the history of America. I am apt to believe that it will be celebrated by succeeding generations as the great anniversary festival."

"It ought to be commemorated, as the day of deliverance, by solemn acts of devotion to God Almighty. It ought to be solemnized with pomp and parade, with shows, games, sports, guns, bells, bonfires, and illuminations, from one end of this continent to the other, from this time forward forevermore."

"You will think me transported with enthusiasm, but I am not. I am well aware of the toil, and the blood, and treasure, that it will cost us to maintain this Declaration, and support and defend these States."

"Yet, through all the gloom, I can see the rays of ravishing light and glory. I can see that the end is more than worth all the means, and that posterity will triumph in that day's transaction, even although we should rue it, which I trust in God we shall not."

Again, that was July 3, 1776, the day after those men voted in Independence Hall to separate from the crown.

They had not yet adopted the Declaration of Independence. That would occur the following day on July 4, 1776.

Obviously, Mr. Adams thought July 2 would be the day that would be celebrated. Of course, as it turns out, because the Declaration was signed and dated July 4, that became the day on which we celebrate our independence and all that flows from it.