

In this difficult time, my thoughts are with her husband, Joe; her sons, Joe, Jack, and Alex; and her family, friends, and the people of Hoboken who adored her.

In her memory, let us live by the example that she set: compassion, generosity, and care for others.

□ 1500

#### ADVOCATING FOR PROGRESSIVE POLICIES FOR OUR VETERANS

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mrs. LESKO). Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 9, 2023, the gentlewoman from Illinois (Mrs. RAMIREZ) is recognized for 60 minutes as the designee of the minority leader.

##### GENERAL LEAVE

Mrs. RAMIREZ. Madam Speaker, I ask unanimous consent for all Members to have 5 legislative days to revise and extend their remarks and include extraneous material on the subject of my Special Order hour.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Is there objection to the request of the gentlewoman from Illinois?

There was no objection.

Mrs. RAMIREZ. Madam Speaker, today, I want to take a moment to remind us why we are here.

On my first day of Congress, which feels like so, so many years ago but was about 23 months ago, I made a commitment to represent, advocate, defend, and fight for the people. I made a promise to legislate with a vision for a better future for the constituents of my district. That includes veterans.

As a proud member of the Committee on Veterans' Affairs, my goal continues to be the same: Advance policies that improve the lives of veterans and ensure that they have access to every benefit they have earned and that has been promised to them.

However, I continue to be disappointed with so much extreme rhetoric from many of my colleagues to the right of me who choose to put politics over the lives of veterans, effectively watering down the protections and stonewalling progress on bills that would assist them.

The Congressional Progressive Caucus and I remain determined to do what is right for our veterans. That means advocating for better access to healthcare, fighting for our veterans experiencing or at risk of experiencing homelessness, and advocating for our women veterans and their unique needs. Above all, when our veterans come home, we ensure they can lead a happy, fulfilling life after service.

Madam Speaker, we have delivered. I am proud to say that since Representative TAKANO's Honoring our PACT Act was signed into law, the Department of Veterans Affairs, the VA, has delivered more than \$6.8 billion in PACT Act benefits to veterans. Over 5.7 million veterans have received new toxic exposure screenings. Over 740,000 new veterans have enrolled in VA healthcare.

This means that more veterans are getting the care and benefits they rightfully earned.

The success of the PACT Act demonstrates what is possible when Congress prioritizes people over partisan politics, and it shows what can be done for veterans when Congress and agencies work together to deliver for our constituents.

Where the Department of Veterans Affairs succeeds also provides us with a broader vision and useful roadmap for what we can achieve for all Americans. The VA provides a basic housing allowance, population-specific healthcare, job assistance and training, and targeted interventions to prevent and address homelessness.

I believe that Congress can and should replicate the most promising parts of the VA to ensure the same base level of material and social support for our everyday working families. I believe we can eradicate poverty, prevent and end homelessness, and ensure that no person goes hungry or lives without essential healthcare.

It is actually possible for all Americans to lead a happy, fulfilling life and to retire with dignity. It starts with legislating with compassion and a commitment to the flourishing of our neighbors.

Despite Republican efforts to stop progress and turn the clock back 100 or more years, let me just say the Congressional Progressive Caucus and I will hold the line. We will defend our veterans. We will ensure they have every single benefit that veterans deserve, and we will honor their service with action.

I want to talk about the last 23 months and the work that I have done here in Congress. When I became an elected official, first as a State representative and now in Congress, I made a commitment. That commitment was to remain rooted in the community that I was elected to serve. Since joining the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs, I have seen how critical it is for veterans and the families of veterans to receive the full benefits of our Nation's promise to them and what they have earned.

I am proud to say that during my freshman year—no longer a freshman in a couple of months—I have advocated for and introduced pieces of legislation that expand veteran access to education, healthcare, and housing.

Last year, I introduced the Student Veteran Benefits Restoration Act, which would reinstate GI benefits for students who pursued a degree at a college or university that defrauded them. I am proud to say this bill was voted on and passed by the House in April.

While the final negotiated bill is more limited in scope than I would have wanted, I do think it represents an ongoing commitment to work to ensure that veterans receive full access to the educational benefits that they have earned. I am committed to building on this momentum and continuing this fight into the 119th Congress.

This year, I am proud to have introduced the Servicemember Student Loan Affordability Act, with Senator DURBIN leading this effort in the Senate. What this bill would do is amend the Servicemembers Civil Relief Act to limit the interest rate on student loans incurred by servicemembers before they go into military service. It will consolidate and refinance it during military service.

I was in my district on Veterans Day with veterans and veteran-serving organizations, and I heard how much they need for us to invest in them and address the issues of homelessness. As a matter of fact, I heard that, in the last year, we have seen another increase in homelessness among the veteran community.

Madam Speaker, I am proud to announce that I am introducing a new bill to create permanent housing opportunities for our veterans. The bill would expand the services that the grant per diem providers give to include prevention services and also allow for capital grants to be used to convert units into permanent housing.

I am eager to work with the committee around the bill introduction, and I am excited to be able to share more details on the bill very soon.

I voted to advance critical legislation that will bring solutions to the policy failures that leave our veterans and their families desperate and frustrated. During every hearing and every markup, I remain intentional in my efforts to ensure that we fulfill the promises our Nation has made to our veterans.

That work has to continue next Congress. In my opinion, that is how we honor service through action.

I want to talk a little bit about healthcare. One of the most pressing issues our veterans face is access to quality healthcare. Healthcare is a basic need that we must deliver for our veterans. Accessible healthcare for veterans shouldn't be considered a privilege but a right for those who have served their country.

Expanded health services will allow veterans to receive timely treatments for various medical conditions without having to worry about financial burdens or lengthy waits for appointments. Improved access to mental health services is also critical to address issues such as PTSD and other psychological conditions caused by military service.

Expanding healthcare for veterans will also help reduce the long-term costs associated with providing care for aging veterans, ensuring they receive the care they need in later life.

Veterans should be provided access to high-quality medical treatment, regardless of economic status or geographic location, so that they can all benefit from high-quality healthcare services without undue financial burden or delays in treatment.

To show appreciation and respect for their sacrifice and service to their country, our Nation is responsible for

providing vital care for veterans. It is why, during the October recess, I convened veterans. What they have said to me is that the gaps that they continue to experience are unacceptable, gaps like dental care and dental coverage, wait times for physical and mental health appointments, challenges to healthcare enrollment, and a greater need for outreach to underserved veterans.

It is why I co-led the Expanding Health Care Providers for Veterans Act with Representative TLAIB, to make it easier for the VA and State veterans homes to hire employees on H-1B visas when they cannot find a suitable applicant in the United States. Specifically, the bill designates the Department of Veterans Affairs and State veterans homes as cap-exempt institutions for the purposes of the H-1B visa program.

I am also proud to cosponsor numerous bills around veterans healthcare, including the 9-8-8 Implementation Act. Madam Speaker, 988 is the new nationwide suicide prevention line, and the 9-8-8 Implementation Act would offer more Federal support to the crisis line, including resources to veteran-specific departments of the crisis line.

Providing quality, accessible healthcare is how we honor our veterans with action.

To hear a little bit more about this work that many of us are doing to ensure that our veterans are getting the services they deserve, we will hear from some of my colleagues very soon.

Madam Speaker, while we do that, I want to talk to you a little bit more about some of our veterans who currently continue to see so many challenges.

I want to make sure that I am clear. I am here to represent all veterans, especially the veterans who are most vulnerable. That means first-generation veterans. That means women veterans. That means veterans of color. That also means veterans who, we don't want to admit, have been deported after having served this country, after nearly dying for this country and experiencing PTSD. They have lost their green cards and, today, are separated from their families.

As the evidence has shown, veterans of color have served this country honorably for decades. Due to intentional segregation and racism, they were unable to use the benefits promised to them. That is why I commend my colleague, Congressman CLYBURN, for putting forward the VA Housing Loan Forever Act, to do the right thing and restore equity to veterans of color.

Similarly, women veterans were locked out of receiving the benefits they earned due to their service not being properly recognized. That is why, when I go back to my district and when I sit in those hearings, I always center the voices of our veterans, particularly those most impacted. As a member of the Committee on Veterans' Affairs, ensuring that our women in uniform are recognized for their contributions

and sacrifices. Having full access to their benefits must be a priority.

It is why I was proud to offer and have passed an amendment to the Jax Act out of subcommittee. What does this amendment do? It directs the Department of Veterans Affairs to submit a report regarding gender disparities and covered claims for traumatic brain injuries and post-traumatic stress disorder, particularly among those who have engaged in combat since 1990.

I also want to shed light on an issue that I hold close to my heart, and that is our veterans who are seeking legal pathways to citizenship. You heard me a few moments ago talk about those who have been deported and are now separated from their families after having served their country. To me, it is unimaginable that they are at risk of deportation or have been deported because, despite their service and sacrifice, too many undocumented veterans have faced deportation due to a failed immigration system that does not honor who we say we are as a nation.

Now, you ask, how are they serving if they are not a U.S. citizen? You don't have to be a U.S. citizen to die for this Nation. You will get a green card, and you will be able to do that. If you come back to the country you love, the country you call home, and something happens, if there is a fight at a bar, if you are dealing with PTSD and there is something that happens to you, you can immediately lose your green card and be deported.

Let me say this to you: As we celebrate our veterans, we must remember those who today find themselves living in exile, separated from their families and often struggling to access the benefits and support they earn through their service.

Madam Speaker, it is time to return these veterans home and deliver justice and support. It is why I am proud to cosponsor Representative TAKANO's Veteran Service Recognition Act, which would allow noncitizen servicemembers to apply for naturalization during basic training, establishing a review process for those who are in removal proceedings, and provide an opportunity for a noncitizen veteran who has been removed or ordered removed and who has not been convicted of a serious crime to obtain legal permanent resident status.

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Today, I call my colleagues, Republican and Democrat, who say that they care about our veterans to stand with us and to cosponsor this incredibly important piece of legislation because that is how we honor every veterans' service with action for: Sergio Andrade, Jiji Thomas Kurian, Elsworth Alexander Smith, Mark Osmond Isaacs, Gerardo Emeterio Lopez Flores. The time to act is today.

In a moment, I will yield to one of my colleagues who every day fights like hell for our veterans, so you can

hear directly from them on the work that they are doing.

Madam Speaker, I yield to the gentleman from Pennsylvania, Mr. CHRIS DELUZIO.

Mr. DELUZIO. Madam Speaker, it is, of course, an honor for all of us to serve here, but, of course, maybe no greater honor than to stand up for our fellow veterans.

I think this country has a sacred obligation to care for all who served. I am proud of my time in uniform, and I often talk about a simple lesson I learned in the Navy: ship, shipmate, self. You put the mission and the country first. You put others before yourself. I think that is fundamentally at the heart of the ethos of service.

I come from western Pennsylvania where so many homes and families have a picture of someone who has worn the uniform, someone who has served or shares the values of hard work and patriotism and sacrifice. It is pretty common but becoming a little rarer for us maybe to talk about it as we should.

Madam Speaker, I thank the gentlewoman for convening us for this important fight for veterans. It is so central to our work here in the House and certainly in this Congress.

This work should be bipartisan in so many ways, and I think it often is, not always, but it often is. I introduced a bill with colleagues from both sides of the aisle, Saving Our Veterans Lives Act, which is about us putting together a coalition to tackle the crisis, the problem of veteran suicide. It has got a coalition that I think tells you it can succeed, from gun safety groups to the National Shooting Sports Foundation, and Veterans Service Organizations. That is a coalition that is broad, that tells you this is a serious effort.

What this bill would do is authorize a VA program to give free firearm lockboxes to veterans who want them. This is something that we know can save veterans' lives. We have seen that if you limit the ease by which someone at risk, someone in crisis can get to their gun, you prevent suicide deaths. We know that firearms are the most common means used by my fellow veterans to die by suicide. We should take some action like this.

Madam Speaker, 73 percent of male veteran suicide deaths and more than half, 52 percent of female, are with firearms. Those rates greatly exceed those for nonveterans.

A little bit more than half of veterans report owning one or more guns themselves. Of those, more than half report storing it loaded or unsecured.

I think this intervention can be one that can save veterans' lives and earn support on both sides of the aisle.

Madam Speaker, I was proud to introduce the Save Our Veterans Lives Act. It is a simple, straightforward, bipartisan idea, a commonsense one, to save lives and to fight back against veteran suicide. Something that I think we all share as a priority.

Madam Speaker, I thank the gentlewoman from Illinois for her leadership on these issues.

Mrs. RAMIREZ. Madam Speaker, as we talk about the faces of our veterans and the impact and challenges that they are going through at this moment, I am also reminded of so many of them who come back home and continue to provide public service, who continue to show up for their community and for their neighbors and families.

As we recommit to fighting for every single veteran, I will take the time to recognize a servicemember in my district, someone who is using her platform to advocate for the care and benefits of those who came before her.

Madam Speaker, today, I will honor my constituent, U.S. Army Major Karen Hernandez, who serves our country and our community with dedication and courage.

The daughter of Mexican immigrants and a proud first-generation college graduate, Major Hernandez embodies, like the daughters and sons of immigrants, the values of resilience, of integrity, and an enduring commitment to community and to service.

Since enlisting in 2008 as a medical service officer for the 108th Multifunctional Medical Battalion, Karen has commanded field hospitals and played a vital role in Illinois' COVID-19 response.

In our communities, as the executive director of Chicago Veterans, she helps servicemembers transition back to civilian life. She advocates for them to receive the promised benefits that they earned.

Whether it is supporting humanitarian efforts or empowering veterans, Hernandez leads with selflessness and Hernandez leads with courage.

On behalf of Illinois' Third Congressional District, I commend Karen Hernandez for her remarkable service and for her leadership, both in and beyond

the military. "Thank you, Karen." "Gracias, Karen."

As I wrap up, I thank all of my colleagues who are continuously working and looking past the partisan politics. I especially thank the Progressive Caucus and the Special Order hour because what the American people continue to ask of us is to stop talking at them. What the American people continue to say is, stop promising things. What the American people are saying is, we are tired of your darn fights online because you want to go viral. What the American people are saying is, we need you to move from words to action.

Madam Speaker, I will end with this: The future that we seek is possible. Accessible, affordable healthcare is possible. Every person having a safe, clean home is possible. A country where no one goes hungry can be possible. Quality education and jobs that provide living wages, a humane, assured, legal pathway to citizenship, all of this is what our veterans deserve and all of it is what our veterans have earned.

It is also what every person who has contributed to this country deserves, and that includes my friends, our neighbors, who for years have served our communities and our economies with the reassurance of permanent protections. I am talking about our Dreamers.

Right now, there are 530,000 DACA recipients, approximately 500,000 people eligible for DACA barred from applying, and 80,000 unprocessed applicants who, for years, have lived in a legal limbo, many of them here since the age of 2.

These Dreamers are not children anymore. Wesdin Hernandez, my brother-in-law, is not a child. He is actually 40 years old. They work, they provide for their families, and they invest in our economies, contributing at least \$2.1 billion to Social Security and Medicare every single year.

Today, we must be courageous and exhaust every avenue possible to keep

the 11.3 million Americans in DACA-impacted families together and provide a pathway to citizenship and security for Dreamers. Whether through passing the American Dream and Promise Act or through bold executive action, we must honor with action all who have put their lives in service to our Nation and our communities, and those are Dreamers and those are veterans, full stop.

As we near the end of the year, I am reminded why I stand on the House floor today. I stand here to amplify the voices of the people in my community who sent me here, to be the only Latina in the room representing veterans who look like they could be my family members, to be the person who lifts as she climbs, to be the person who never forgets where she comes from, to be the person who says proudly, it doesn't matter if one person is impacted or a million, it is the one that I am here fighting for.

Our veterans deserve better, and they demand urgency. Our country deserves better, and I refuse to stand down in the face of injustice and hate because I, "the Congresswoman," "la congresista" of Illinois' Third Congressional District, I choose to fight for the future we deserve. I choose to fight for a future that is possible. I choose to fight so that our veterans are honored through service and action.

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

ADJOURNMENT

Mrs. RAMIREZ. Madam Speaker, I move that the House do now adjourn.

The motion was agreed to; accordingly (at 3 o'clock and 24 minutes p.m.), the House adjourned until tomorrow, Friday, November 15, 2024, at 9 a.m.

EXPENDITURE REPORTS CONCERNING OFFICIAL FOREIGN TRAVEL

Reports concerning the foreign currencies and U.S. dollars utilized for Official Foreign Travel during the second, third, and fourth quarters of 2024, pursuant to Public Law 95-384, are as follows:

REPORT OF EXPENDITURES FOR OFFICIAL FOREIGN TRAVEL, DR. BRIAN MONAHAN, EXPENDED BETWEEN JULY 2 AND JULY 6, 2024

Name of Member or employee	Date		Country	Per diem <sup>1</sup>		Transportation		Other purposes		Total	
	Arrival	Departure		Foreign currency	U.S. dollar equivalent or U.S. currency <sup>2</sup>	Foreign currency	U.S. dollar equivalent or U.S. currency <sup>2</sup>	Foreign currency	U.S. dollar equivalent or U.S. currency <sup>2</sup>	Foreign currency	U.S. dollar equivalent or U.S. currency <sup>2</sup>
Dr. Brian Monahan .....	7/2	7/4	Estonia .....		703.78		(3)				703.78
	7/3	7/3	Latvia .....				(3)				
	7/4	7/8	Lithuania .....		1,437.31		(3)				1,437.31
	7/6	7/6	Poland .....				(3)				
Committee total .....											2,141.09

<sup>1</sup> Per diem constitutes lodging and meals.  
<sup>2</sup> If foreign currency is used, enter U.S. dollar equivalent; if U.S. currency is used, enter amount expended.  
<sup>3</sup> Military air transportation.