

to clean up our fiscal house. Let's work together to end the Federal Government's out-of-control spending once and for all.

This challenge is not going to be easy, but America is worth it. The future of our country is worth it. The next generation of Americans is worth it.

I know that we can do it. We are going to have to do it together, and our brightest days truly are yet to come.

UNITED STATES SUPPORT FOR AFRICA AND THE CARIBBEAN

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentlewoman from California (Ms. LEE) for 5 minutes.

Ms. LEE of California. Mr. Speaker, I rise in support of strengthening United States' relationships with Africa and the Caribbean.

The history and culture of the United States is inextricably linked to Africa and the Caribbean. The brutal history of colonialism, slavery, and the middle passage has shaped our shared destinies.

As people of African descent in the Americas and Africans on the continent, we commemorate all of our tragedies and triumphs of the last four centuries. We know that there is strength and comfort in celebrating our shared Black ancestry and identity.

These vital historic ties are an opportunity for the United States. As I travel in Africa and the Caribbean, I hear from many people, business leaders, and government leaders. They are actively seeking to partner with the United States. They specifically want to work with Americans to tackle global challenges that impact us all. Yet, Washington too often ignores or cannot hear these voices. We fail to invest the time, resources, and energy into building true partnerships.

We have entered a new era of global competition. Governments like those of China and Russia openly seek to be the partner of choice. There is a void, thanks to our neglect, that they are filling.

People in Africa and the Caribbean want to work with America as the partner of choice. If their partner of choice is not listening to them as sovereign countries, they will make decisions on their bilateral and multilateral alliances which exclude those countries which have all but ignored them.

America needs to step up our game if we want to build the true and deep partnerships that will advance our shared goals.

In these countries, respect, development assistance, trade, and investments go a long way. For example, in 2005, Hurricane Dennis devastated the Caribbean, causing billions of dollars in damage. I worked very hard to get a small amount of reconstruction assistance, which was \$40 million, for Grenada. When I visited Grenada later,

there were signs everywhere for the first time that read: Thank you, USA.

It is also important that Members of Congress get out and visit African and Caribbean countries. China shows up, believe me, every day in Africa and the Caribbean. Members of the United States Congress need to show up.

I remember once, when I visited Grenada just a couple of years ago, I stopped by the United States State Department Office there. I saw a picture on the wall of myself, the former chair of the Western Hemisphere Subcommittee, Congressman Eliot Engel, and several Members of Congress from a codel when we visited Grenada in 2007.

I asked if that codel had made an impact, and I was told, in fact, that 2007 was the last time there had been a congressional delegation to Grenada. That is outrageous.

I believe that this work can and should be bipartisan. Two decades ago, I worked with George Bush to designate June as the Caribbean American Heritage Month. Today, that commemoration is still celebrated among people in the Caribbean and Caribbean Americans here in the United States. It is a useful tool for building bridges with our Caribbean neighbors.

I am proud that, during my term leading the House Committee on Appropriations Subcommittee on State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs, I have worked substantially to increase American investment and partnerships with Africa and the Caribbean.

As the chair of the Subcommittee on State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs, I managed to increase the development assistance account by more than \$800 million. We were able to invest that increase in important priorities, like Prosper America, to grow jobs and incomes in Africa and the United States; Power Africa, which seeks to connect 60 million Africans to reliable electricity; and the United States African Development Foundation, which invests directly in African entrepreneurship and the Young African Leaders Initiative, which seeks to lift up and strengthen the brightest flowers of African youth.

In the Caribbean, I created a program to invest in inclusive economic growth for the first time and worked with the State Department to expand our Caribbean diplomatic presence. One of our embassies in Barbados is responsible for seven countries. They don't even have a plane. They can't travel to those seven countries they are responsible for, so we are expanding our presence there.

We expanded support for small-island states coping with sea-level rise and invested in the Caribbean Base and Security Initiative to tackle transnational security challenges, like crime and drug trafficking.

Mr. Speaker, these investments are crucial, not only to support American security and interests, but to build an

equitable and inclusive world which we seek.

I urge my colleagues to listen carefully to African and Caribbean voices. We have millions of people of African descent in our own country. We have to continue to build these bridges toward a shared just and prosperous future for all people.

FEDERAL HIGHWAY SAFETY STANDARDS ARE NOT OPTIONAL

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

Mr. LOPEZ. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to address an issue that affects all of us deeply: the safety of our roads and the lives of those who travel on them.

Each year, preventable tragedies unfold on our highways. Families are shattered, lives are cut short, and dreams are lost. This is not because of chance, but because, somewhere along the way, safety standards were neglected, corners were cut, and human lives were undervalued.

This isn't just about statistics or regulations. It is about people: fathers, mothers, daughters, sons, friends, and neighbors. These are people who trust the system in place to protect them, such as the Federal highway safety standards, which exist for one purpose: to save lives.

These guidelines are not arbitrary. They are the result of decades of research, real-world testing, and collaboration among safety experts, engineers, and policymakers. We know what works to prevent accidents, protect construction zones, and keep our roads safe. Yet, in Colorado, time and time again, we see these safeguards disregarded, with devastating consequences.

Think about the mother driving home from her nightshift who never made it to her kids because her car was rear-ended in an improperly managed construction zone. Think about the newlyweds, full of hope and plans for the future, killed when a semi overturned due to inadequate lane shifts and insufficient traffic controls.

These are not just accidents. They are preventable failures to prioritize safety, to honor the trust of those who use our roads, and to follow the very standards designed to prevent these tragedies.

Federal highway safety standards are not optional. They are essential safeguards meant to ensure that every person who steps onto a highway has the best chance of getting to where they are going alive and uninjured. Cutting corners on these standards isn't just irresponsible, but it is unacceptable. Every poorly designed lane shift, every missing warning sign, every unfunded safety measure represents a choice to put cost or convenience above human life.

The Colorado Department of Transportation has a responsibility and a moral and professional duty to follow

these standards without compromise. This is not about bureaucracy. This is about humanity.

The failure to adhere to these safety guidelines is a failure to uphold the sacred trust we placed in them every time we step onto the highway. It is a failure to protect the workers in construction zones, who deserve to go home to their families at the end of the day. It is a failure to protect the people who rely on these roads for their livelihoods, their loved ones, and their lives.

Mr. Speaker, we cannot stand idly by as construction-zone fatalities in Colorado reach record highs. We know that CDOT receives over 40 percent of its funding from Federal programs. Yet, it continues to operate with a lack of transparency and accountability.

Legislators seeking answers to basic safety questions through CORA requests have faced roadblocks. Meanwhile, Colorado's construction-zone deaths have increased year after year, making 2024 the worst year since 2020. This points to a systemic failure not just within CDOT, but within the leadership overseeing transportation in our State.

This is not just a Colorado issue. It is a regional one. Colorado is part of the Department of Transportation region 8, which includes Montana, North Dakota, South Dakota, Utah, and Wyoming. If these issues persist in Colorado, how can we be certain they are not happening across the region? Competent leadership, from the regional director to the executive level, is critical to ensure that safety is not an afterthought, but a priority.

Federal oversight must demand adherence to safety standards and hold agencies accountable for every dollar spent and every life put at risk.

Today, I call on all lawmakers, transportation leaders, and community members to demand better and demand that Federal highway safety standards be followed to the letter. There is no excuse, no delay, and no corner worth cutting when lives are at stake. Every life matters, and every injury prevented is a victory for humanity.

Together, we can ensure that our roads are places of safety, not sorrow. We owe it to every driver, every worker, and every family to make this a reality. There is no need for loss of life on our highways because we know better and because we can do better.

SNAP REPLACEMENT

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentlewoman from Virginia (Ms. McCLELLAN) for 5 minutes.

Ms. McCLELLAN. Mr. Speaker, I rise today in support of the millions of Americans across the Nation who depend on SNAP benefits.

In recent months, reports of SNAP benefit theft has skyrocketed at an alarming rate, leaving many families hungry. In the city of Richmond, Virginia, alone, there has been about a

2,000 percent increase in SNAP theft over the last month. Food banks are stepping up to meet the need, but they are seeing record numbers of families relying on their services as we enter the holiday season.

Too many vulnerable families rely on SNAP to put food on the table. SNAP families often face precarious financial situations. When their benefits are stolen, they face the impossible choice of feeding their families or paying essential bills.

As the children go hungry, they struggle to learn in school.

This is not just an issue in our cities, but rural communities across the country are also facing SNAP benefit theft.

Congress has empowered the States to use Federal funds to replace stolen benefits, which has helped ease this suffering, but that authority will expire on December 20 without additional action.

That is why I am calling on House appropriators to extend this crucial authority through any funding bill that we pass and urge my colleagues to pass H.R. 205, the SNAP Theft Protection Act of 2023, introduced by the gentleman from Maryland (Mr. RUPPERSBERGER).

Hardworking families deserve to approach the holiday season with hope, not the looming fear of food insecurity. We must act swiftly to ensure that vulnerable communities are not left behind.

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WE ARE \$35 TRILLION IN DEBT

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

Mr. McCORMICK. Mr. Speaker, I will take the time to talk about the biggest threat to our Nation, our ability to thrive as a nation and an economy.

It is not really being addressed, even with the Herculean efforts of the DOGE and everybody else talking about what cuts we are going to make to the budget, which is around \$7 trillion right now. We need to have a realistic conversation.

We are \$35 trillion in debt. We bring in less than \$5 trillion per year to pay those debts and to pay for the entire budget. If we didn't have a budget, if we spent nothing on the United States, if we spent nothing for the military, Social Security, Medicare, Medicaid, or anything in our budget, it would take us over 7 years to pay off our debt. That doesn't count the trillion dollars of interest we are paying right now per year.

Let's have a realistic conversation. This problem is bipartisan. The real divergence of the debt-to-GDP ratio started about 2004, so about 20 years ago. It happened when we had a Republican President, and it has continued regardless of who was in control of the Presidency—or the House or the Senate, for that matter.

If we talk about the future, 75 percent of the budget is nondiscretionary. Some people call it mandatory, but we are Congress. There is nothing mandatory about spending. If we don't address these issues, we are in trouble as a nation. If we are out of balance and our debt-to-GDP ratio becomes too extreme, our currency will fail, and we will no longer hold the position we have in the world as an economic powerhouse.

If you think that I am threatening Social Security, not at all. As a matter of fact, it is just the opposite. I want to secure it because, quite frankly, if we don't do something about Social Security, it will be insolvent in less than 10 years. It will take an automatic 21 percent cut without a vote.

We have no control over that, or we can, as Congress, say no we won't just print a whole bunch more money and saddle our children and grandchildren with that burden in the future and increase our debt ratio, again threatening our currency.

If you think I am here to threaten Medicare, you are greatly mistaken. If we do nothing, within about a decade, it will be cut automatically by 11 percent, or we will have to make the emergency standard to print more money and, again, saddle our future generations with debt they cannot pay, debt that will saddle our economy, saddle our ability to function as a government, debt that will disrupt everything we know in America to be good: our abilities, our opportunities, all the things that make us thrive as a nation.

As Coolidge famously said: The business of America is business. Business cannot thrive if we don't have American currency as the standard of the world.

Therefore, I want us to have those serious conversations. I want us not to have those automatic cuts. I want to make sure that we do what we can to cut as much of the deficit spending as possible.

Remember, a 30 percent deficit per year cannot be conquered just by one budget, but we have about 2 years to take this opportunity because, quite frankly, so many times I keep hearing my peers in this Congress talk about the things we need to give away. That comes at a cost, a cost to all Americans, and it doesn't matter if you are Republican or Democrat.

We have to have real reform in not just our discretionary budget, which is only 25 percent of what we discuss, but we have to have an entire budgetary process that is bipartisan so we can have a solution for all Americans going forward.

CELEBRATING THE LIFE OF THE HONORABLE MILDRED C. CRUMP

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentlewoman from New Jersey (Mrs. McIVER) for 5 minutes.

Mrs. McIVER. Mr. Speaker, today, I rise to celebrate the life of Honorable