

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

Mildred C. Crump, a visionary leader and trailblazer from my beloved city of Newark, New Jersey, who passed away this past Sunday, December 1, 2024.

Mildred was a woman of many firsts. Her wisdom, guidance, and unwavering belief in justice helped shape my life and career and transformed the lives of so many others. As the first African-American woman elected to the Newark City Council and as the council's first woman president, Mildred broke barriers and demonstrated a steadfast commitment to equity, justice, and community empowerment.

Her dedication to improving the lives of others, whether through her pioneering work as New Jersey's first African-American braille teacher or her tireless advocacy for housing, education, and civil rights, has left an everlasting mark on our city, State, and Nation.

Council President Crump was more than a role model. She was a relentless advocate and champion for people and a brilliant community strategist. She blazed a path for so many and was always a source of unwavering support.

For those of us who had the honor of learning from her, we are grateful for her. Mildred's leadership, compassion, and vision will be profoundly missed. All Newarkers mourn the loss of this exceptional woman.

I send my deepest condolences to her children, Larry and Sheri, the rest of her family, and her loved ones.

I know Mildred's legacy and impact will live on. It lives in me and many others.

Mr. Speaker, I thank Mildred C. Crump on behalf of all the little Black and Brown girls she inspired and provided a light to shine. We will love her forever.

RECOGNIZING AUSTIN AREA SCHOOL DISTRICT'S CONTRIBUTIONS TO TREE LIGHTING CEREMONY

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

Mr. THOMPSON of Pennsylvania. Mr. Speaker, tonight is the beloved annual tradition of the National Christmas Tree Lighting Ceremony, and I rise to recognize the Austin Area School District's contributions to this display.

The Austin Area School District in Potter County, Pennsylvania, is the smallest public school in Pennsylvania. The school serves approximately 180 prekindergarten through 12th grade students from the surrounding communities and excels in creating innovative, personalized one-on-one experiences for their students.

This year, the Austin Area School District was selected to decorate the Pennsylvania tree, which is part of the Pathway of Peace, a display of 58 smaller trees representing each State, territory, and the District of Columbia.

The National Park Foundation and the National Park Service annually present the National Christmas Tree lighting on the Ellipse at the White House and President's Park.

This celebration began in 1923 and brings together families, friends, and communities to celebrate the holidays in one of America's national parks.

With collaboration from the National Park Service, Department of Education, and National Park Foundation, local schools from each State decorate their trees with ornaments honoring their unique traditions and heritage.

When tasked with creating ornaments for the trees, students were asked: "What makes your State beautiful?" Pennsylvania is rich in history and natural beauty, and Potter County has a distinctive lifestyle.

Austin Area School District's art teacher, Mrs. Bethany Brown, and English teacher, Mrs. Megan Walck, had students create a list of what makes our region feel like home. Students considered Pennsylvania's outdoor activities like hunting, fishing, kayaking, camping, and stargazing, as well as historic events significant to Potter County.

This attraction is open December 7 through January 1, and visitors viewing the Pennsylvania tree will see that our students showcase many unique attributes of Potter County.

The ornaments highlight a variety of experiences unique to Pennsylvania, such as our number one industry, agriculture, and Potter County's rich history of potato farming. Local farms in Potter County supply potatoes nationwide. Maple syrup production thrives in our region thanks to the abundance of forests and maple trees. Each year, at the annual Maple Festival, the county celebrates the maple season with pancake breakfasts and open houses at maple producers' facilities. There are many more ornaments that showcase Pennsylvania's natural beauty.

The Pennsylvania Wilds region is a remarkable resource for those eager to explore Pennsylvania's natural wonders. Unique attractions like the Coudersport Ice Mine, which produces ice even during the summer heat, add to the area's charm and are reflected in the students' ornament designs.

Potter County serves as the source of major river systems, including the Allegheny River, which is also represented on the Pennsylvania State tree.

Visitors will see that students also incorporated our State tree, flower, and various native animals into their design. The ornaments made by the Austin Area School District students promote some of Potter County's and Pennsylvania's proudest attractions.

When reflecting on this experience, Austin Area School District student Breanna G. said: "Having the opportunity to create a design that not only symbolizes me but my school and the area around me is so special. I feel so proud to have been given this chance,

and I hope that someone will see this ornament and agree with the beauty of Pennsylvania's land. I am also thankful to my teacher, Mrs. Brown, for introducing us to this idea and letting us be as creative as we want. This is a project that I will remember for a very long time."

Participation in the arts is wonderful for a young person's development. It can inspire confidence that often extends far beyond the classroom. Teachers like Mrs. Brown and Mrs. Walck nurture creativity and play a valuable role in shaping curious minds.

Mr. Speaker, I thank the Austin Area School District students, staff, and faculty for bringing Pennsylvania's Christmas spirit to our Nation's Capital and highlighting what makes Potter County such a special place to live and visit.

Mr. Speaker, as Breanna G. so nicely quoted, it is an experience we will all remember for a very long time. I am incredibly proud of our students and their contributions to this cherished national tradition.

PAC MONEY IN POLITICS

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

Mr. KHANNA. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to condemn the unholy alliance between soulless wealth and power that is stripping away Americans' freedom.

The reality is that, in 2024, 150 billionaires spent \$1.9 billion on this election. Seventy-two percent of Americans—Republicans, Independents, and Democrats—are outraged with money in politics.

We did not fight the Revolution to be spectators in a game of billionaires putting ads on our television sets and mobile phones.

We have more dignity. We have more power as American citizens. Our Founders would be rolling over in their graves if they saw what has become of modern American democracy.

There was \$2.7 billion of super-PAC spending—and let me tell you something, only 1 percent of Americans gave more than \$200. Who has more than \$200 to give to politicians? The money has become more important than votes.

Surely, we could agree in this body to ban super-PACs and overturn Citizens United. Short of that, surely we could agree with what Maine overwhelmingly did to restrict contributions to super-PACs. Why should it be that a politician can receive a contribution of only up to \$3,300, but somehow super-PACs should be allowed to get millions of dollars?

We need to make sure, like in Maine, in every State that, at the very least, super-PACs are restricted so billionaires aren't buying our elections. I founded the No PAC Caucus in the United States Congress. We need to end PAC money, the lobbyist money that is corrupting the soul of our democracy.