

squandered this authority. Instead of using the reconciliation process to bring mandatory spending to heel, it was abused to achieve pet political projects, first repealing ObamaCare and next for tax cuts.

The first attempt resulted in a mangled mess of incomplete fiscal measures that collapsed in the Senate. The next budget year, the object was tax reform, but since it had to fall within the narrow fiscal parameters of reconciliation, most of the tax cuts could only be temporary and will soon expire. The result was no healthcare reform and only temporary tax relief.

The opportunity cost was to squander our last chance to prevent the fiscal debacle that our country now faces.

Last month, the American people gave Republicans a rare second chance to save our country from insolvency. We must not repeat the mistakes that have brought us here. Republican leaders in the House and Senate are, once again, proposing to use the budget and reconciliation process not as it was designed, to set spending limits and adhere to those limits, but rather to chase a variety of shiny objects including tax reform, energy development, and border security.

These are all vital reforms, and they need to be enacted. Indeed, some aspects of them can be realized as a by-product of the reconciliation process. However, that process cannot produce comprehensive policy reform. It can produce comprehensive fiscal reform at a moment when our Nation faces its greatest fiscal threat in its history.

I appeal to the Speaker to follow the success of the Gingrich majority. If we repeat the mistakes of the past, then we will lose the future. We are on the threshold of a sovereign debt crisis the likes of which this Nation has never seen and that few nations have ever survived. Let us not throw away this, the last fleeting chance to avert fiscal disaster.

The American people didn't save our country last month. They gave us the tools and the trust to save our country. Let us use the tools that they have given us, and let us be worthy of the trust that they have placed in us.

FAREWELL TO CONGRESS

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

Mr. BLUMENAUER. Mr. Speaker, I come to the floor for the last time I will address this Chamber after 28 years in Congress.

My goal as a Member of Congress was to leave this place a little better than I found it, and I am proud of what we have done. There are things that you are not going to see on FOX or MSNBC News, Mr. Speaker, and it is not going to rocket around the internet, but they are simple, commonsense efforts to bring people together to solve problems.

At the beginning of each Congress for the last dozen years, I have given each new Member, hand-delivered, my thoughts about what they need to know to be able to navigate these strange waters in Congress.

Together, we have been able to achieve some interesting things, as I say, items you don't see in the news necessarily, Mr. Speaker, but that have made a huge difference.

I am proud of the work we have done with international water and sanitation that has resulted in millions of people having their lives saved and reducing the burdens on 140 million women who struggle to get water, often dirty water, for their families every day.

I am proud of the work I have done in terms of agriculture reform because it is past time that we stop subsidizing a diet that makes Americans sick.

I am proud of the work we did in the midst of the pandemic to create the Restaurant Rescue Plan: 100,000 grants that have resulted in many independent restaurants that were able to stay in business.

I am proud of the work we have done with transportation and infrastructure to rebuild and renew America. Instead of having infrastructure week be a joke, we are actually doing it.

I am proud of the work that I have done, for example, in terms of bicycling, symbolized by the bike lanes in the middle of Pennsylvania Avenue, making it easier for people to burn calories instead of fossil fuel and transform the face of our communities.

I am proud of the work that we have done dealing in terms of saving the lives of Iraqis and Afghans who put their trust in us when they were helping our people in those troubled countries. You don't have to believe in the wars, Mr. Speaker, I didn't, but I worked to make sure that the men and women who were the drivers, the guides, and the interpreters were not left to the tender mercies of al-Qaida and the Taliban.

Together we were able, with Senator McCain and Senator KENNEDY, to pass a Special Immigrant Visa that has resulted in thousands of these people who worked with us to be able to live and, in many cases, to be able to seek safety in the United States.

As I say, these are not things that people necessarily see in the news or on the internet. They are not going to raise campaign money for their goals using them, but they are the things that make the difference.

I guess my last piece of advice that I leave to the people who are coming in the next Congress is to focus on things that bring people together rather than divide them and to look for ways to solve problems rather than to create new ones.

Over the course of the last 28 years, I have seen this formula work, and I hope in the new Congress people will employ it in ways that will make a difference.

Heaven knows we need to do it.

□ 1030

HONORING REPRESENTATIVE EARL BLUMENAUER

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

Mr. WOMACK. Mr. Speaker, I would be remiss if I didn't acknowledge the last speaker, my friend, EARL BLUMENAUER.

It was a source of pride for me to be here on the floor this morning and see the gentleman's last speech on the floor of the House of Representatives. Though we may disagree on policy, and we have many times, I count the gentleman as a dear friend and colleague. It has been a great honor to serve with my colleague EARL, and this place is going to miss him.

The gentleman has made me a better Congressman, and he has made me a better person. I congratulate the gentleman and wish him the best.

CONGRATULATING THE GREENWOOD BULLDOGS

Mr. WOMACK. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to honor Arkansas' 6A State football champions, the Greenwood Bulldogs, after a convincing 61-35 victory over Shiloh Christian Saturday at Little Rock's War Memorial Stadium.

The Bulldogs went back to back in winning their 12th overall State title. I commend Head Coach Chris Young and his staff and players for another thrilling chapter in Greenwood football with this perfect and magical 13-0 season.

Mr. Speaker, this title is not without tragedy. Earlier in the season, a house fire took the life of one of Greenwood's finest athletes, 18-year-old Isaiah "Ike" Arrington; his 46-year-old mother, Wendy Medrano; and his 5-year-old sister, Vivian.

This season was dedicated to the memory of Ike and his family. The motivation to make this a season to remember helped Greenwood not only bring home the trophy but record its 70th consecutive home win in the process.

I congratulate Greenwood. Their Bulldog pride is showing today, and they have made all of us Arkansas Proud.

CELEBRATING ALBANY PARK THEATER PROJECT

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentlewoman from Illinois (Mrs. RAMIREZ) for 5 minutes.

Mrs. RAMIREZ. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to celebrate the Albany Park Theater Project, a gem of Illinois' Third Congressional District, and to recognize their production of "Port of Entry," which reminds us all of an important lesson.

The story of our Nation wouldn't be complete without the sweat, without the tears, without the joy, and without the dreams and hopes of so many immigrants and children of immigrants.

They are the same stories that brought so many of us here to Congress.

Located in the heart of Albany Park, one of the most diverse immigrant communities in the Nation, the Albany Park Theater Project has long been a beacon of creativity, resilience, and hope. Through the power of storytelling and theater, this organization prepares and propels young people in Illinois' Third Congressional District to lead civically engaged and choice-filled lives.

Together, their team ensemble members and adult artists make world-class, award-winning, original theater that amplifies and illuminates the voices of immigrants and refugees, showcasing their struggles, triumphs, pain, and enduring humanity.

My husband, Boris, and I were fortunate to experience the production of "Port of Entry" together, and it was more than a performance. It was a profound journey in the daily lives of immigrant families from all over the world living in Albany Park.

As a "proud," "orgulloso," daughter of Guatemalan immigrants, I know firsthand how important it is for immigrant stories to be told authentically and celebrated unapologetically.

"Port of Entry," a collaboration with Third Rail Projects, takes audiences into a theater production set in a typical Chicago apartment building.

Audience members of "Port of Entry" are part of an immersive experience of the intimate lives of neighbors from Mexico, the Philippines, Russia, and beyond. Audience members share in the lived experiences and stories of immigrant families, celebrating their resilience, amplifying their voices, and showcasing the invaluable contributions they make to our communities.

The cast is made up of talented young people from our community who brilliantly invite us to reflect on what it means to call a place home and what it means to find belonging and to build a future in the face of challenge.

It invites us to wonder what makes the United States of America. The production is a culmination of years of work involving over 300 collaborators, including youth performers, storytellers, and creators. It is a testament to the theater company's 27-year-old commitment to using the arts to empower young people in bringing our community together.

Albany Park and our Nation have always been a port of entry for many families seeking new beginnings, whether through the southern border, like my mom, or welcomed by the "Mother of Exiles," the Statue of Liberty, like many of the ancestors of the Members of this very same body.

Today, at a time when Members of this Chamber and the incoming administration are threatening to tear our communities apart and would question who gets to be American and who doesn't, this play feels so timely and vital.

I thank the Albany Park Theater Project and Debbie Reznick, one of the founding directors, for reminding us of the power of storytelling to inspire empathy and connection. I thank them for showing us that theater is not just for entertainment, but it is a vehicle for change and a celebration of the human spirit.

I am so proud to represent this community. I am even prouder to be the daughter of immigrants. Their work reflects the very best of our district and our Nation.

HONORING RETIRING STAFF MEMBERS WADE BALLOU AND RALPH SEEP

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentlewoman from Minnesota (Mrs. FISCHBACH) for 5 minutes.

Mrs. FISCHBACH. Mr. Speaker, it is my privilege to honor two men who have given a combined 74 years of service to the House of Representatives, Wade Ballou and Ralph Seep. Both of these gentlemen are retiring and have made important contributions in the way that the House functions.

In November, Wade Ballou retired after 41 years of service in the Office of Legislative Counsel, including the past years as head of OLC. Over his years, he provided clear, coherent, and high-quality legal analysis and built a reputation for being warm, engaging, and attentive to the needs of Members of Congress and staff.

No matter how complicated or time-sensitive the project was, Wade was warm, engaging, and attentive to the needs of the Members of Congress and our staff. We are all grateful for his care and his work.

Ralph Seep spent the past 33 years in the Office of the Law Revision Counsel, including the past 13 years as head of the office. After a long career of helping to oversee and maintain the publication of the United States Code, Wade retired on October 1.

While the Members of Congress write the laws, Ralph was the one who ensured that they were literally published in black and white and placed into the United States Code.

Ralph's leadership, high standards of excellence, calm demeanor, and generous spirit have made him a trusted leader and colleague and earned him the respect of his staff and colleagues.

On behalf of the entire House of Representatives, I thank Wade and Ralph for their service to this Chamber, and we wish them both the best in their next stages of life.

CELEBRATING RETIREMENT OF DENVER METEOROLOGIST MIKE NELSON

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

Mr. SORENSEN. Mr. Speaker, as the only meteorologist in Congress, I rise

today to honor one of the best in the career field of atmospheric science, Mike Nelson of Denver's Channel 7, on a remarkable 40-year career.

For decades, Mike was the trusted voice that families turned to in order to prepare them for what is ahead. Blizzards, tornadoes, devastating wildfires, Mike tracked them all.

His impact did not stop there. Early on, Mike took the initiative to communicate how our climate was changing. In addition to those watching his broadcasts, more than a million school-age students learned from him.

A 20-time Emmy Award winner, a member of the Emmys Silver Circle, and a fellow of the American Meteorological Society, Mike's contributions are extraordinary. With many thanks, he signs off from Denver7 News this week.

From Capitol Hill, I am forecasting a sunny and well-deserved retirement ahead. I congratulate Mike on a job well done.

Mr. Speaker, I yield to the gentlewoman from Colorado (Ms. CARAVEO).

Ms. CARAVEO. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman for yielding.

Mr. Speaker, I rise today to celebrate the remarkable career and contributions of Denver7 Chief Meteorologist Mike Nelson, who will deliver his final weather forecast this week.

With 40 years of forecasting and 25 of those dedicated to Colorado, Mike Nelson has become a familiar face and trusted voice for weather in our State, and his impact goes far beyond the screen. From his early days at Weather Central to pioneering the use of computer weather graphics, Mike has been a trailblazer in his field.

Over his career, Mike has shared his love of weather with more than 750,000 students across the State, inspiring young minds with his trademark tornado dance. Mike's decades of dedication, innovation, and community service have made Colorado a better place.

I congratulate Mike on his well-deserved retirement. Here is to clear skies and sunny days ahead.

Mr. SORENSEN. Mr. Speaker, finally, a last word of advice for our friend, Mike Nelson. On his last broadcast day, when his executive producer gets into his ear and says he has gone over in time, he should finish his work and then say: I yield back.

STRENGTHENING OUR PARTNERSHIP WITH ISRAEL

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

Mr. LAMALFA. Mr. Speaker, I stand before you today to address a crucial and escalating situation facing Israel, our close ally. They have been under attack not only from isolated factions but from a coordinated effort orchestrated by Iran.

Rockets have rained down on Israel from Lebanon, the Gaza Strip, and