

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

Yemen, forcing Israel to defend its citizens and its sovereignty from these relentless threats. It is crucial to understand that these attacks are not random acts of violence but part of a larger, more sinister and coordinated plan.

In each of these regions, there exists a militia backed by Iran. In the Gaza Strip, it is Hamas; in Yemen, the Houthis; and in Lebanon, it is Hezbollah.

Recently, with the fall of Assad and the regime in Syria, this very much will disrupt some of those efforts that Iran and some of their backers in Russia have been able to do in there, but the United States and our diplomacy must pay very, very close attention to how this is handled because many times when there is a vacuum like this, there can be even worse results coming in, such as what happened in Libya and Iraq.

We will have to grade this by what we see as possible new leadership coming in, but, indeed, be on top of that so that Iran doesn't get a stronger foothold in Syria again.

It is exacerbated by the policies of previous U.S. administrations because of the overall outcome we are seeing. These people are funded, supplied, and directed by Iran as part of a calculated strategy to encircle and weaken Israel.

Indeed, they do not want Israel to exist, and it is pretty hard to sit down at a negotiation table to come up with peace when they don't even acknowledge your right to exist as a nation.

Unfortunately, the lenient stances taken by Presidents Obama and Biden have only encouraged Iran and others in the Middle East to keep Israel firmly in the target sights.

Secretary Blinken recently warned that Iran is potentially within weeks of nuclear capabilities. This is not hyperbole. It is a direct reality. We have been hearing that for some time, so we don't know what that really means, but Iran has been working ever since the JCPOA to become a nuclear nation.

We are witnessing a comprehensive and coordinated assault by Iranian militias aimed at Israel. The intent is to strain Israel's defenses from every direction. We must recognize and respond to the true nature of this threat.

The National Defense Authorization Act being brought to the floor this week in the House takes decisive steps to strengthen our partnership with Israel in the face of these ongoing threats. Our partnership with Israel is critical for their existence but also for us, as they have been a great partner in the Middle East and there are so many innovations and things that we do together as countries.

The NDAA authorizes full funding for joint U.S.-Israel missile defense programs, like the Iron Dome, a defensive mechanism. It allocates \$47 million for cutting-edge technologies, such as anti-missile laser defenses, and commits \$30 million to dismantling Hamas tunnel networks.

As Iran continues its aggression against Israel, these measures reaffirm

our unwavering support for Israel's right to defend itself and its future and to exist. Together, we must ensure that Israel has the tools it needs to stand strong.

Our partnership is ironclad. It is important to both of us. It is important to Israeli existence, and even other Arab countries nearby have acknowledged that Israel is an important partner due to the success of the Abraham Accords.

If my colleagues ask Arab Israelis who live in the country if they like it better in Israel or would rather go back to something else, they like it better in Israel.

There is a lot of good that comes from that nation being able to stand on its own, as it has always been a beacon of light and opportunity for people who just want to play by a good set of rules.

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BIDDING FAREWELL TO CONGRESS

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

Mr. ALLRED. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to thank the people of north Texas for trusting me with the sacred responsibility and opportunity to represent them for the last 6 years. It has been an honor of my life to serve the great people of north Texas, who I was born and raised among, and to have done it with so many great colleagues.

I was born and raised in Dallas by a single mom who was a public school teacher. It wasn't always easy for us, but because of our community, because of my family, because of my teachers, my coaches, and the good folks at the YMCA, I was able to make it. I played Division 1 football at Baylor University. Afterwards, I made the team on the Tennessee Titans and spent 5 years as a linebacker. I eventually went to law school and became a voting rights attorney, and I proudly served the Obama administration at the Department of Housing and Urban Development.

For the last 6 years, it has been my greatest honor to represent my hometown of Dallas and all the communities across the 32nd District from Dallas to Richardson to Addison to Mesquite to Garland, communities big and small across the DFW area. The folks in north Texas have always been my inspiration to get things done.

I am so proud of all the things we have done together. Working with folks in both parties, we secured the Garland VA Medical Center. It took over a year, but after countless meetings, phone calls, letters, and false starts and stops, we got it done. Together, we created thousands of good-paying jobs in north Texas and are helping to better serve our veterans and get them the care they have earned. This is one of my proudest accomplishments, and I will continue to support local efforts to invest and expand the facility.

We passed historic legislation that will help north Texas and the country for years to come: the CHIPS Act, the bipartisan infrastructure law, the Inflation Reduction Act, and the pandemic relief legislation that helped save our economy in a time of deep crisis.

We lowered the cost of healthcare and kept the cost of insulin for seniors at \$35 a month. We invested in high-tech manufacturing, job training, and clean energy that is helping Texas create thousands upon thousands of jobs.

Because of our efforts, more Texans will have access to economic opportunities to enter the middle class and to live their version of the American Dream.

During my time in office, I made a point to introduce legislation that was focused on helping people. From voting rights to ensuring veterans can access their benefits to cutting red tape and helping government work for people, I am so proud that together we worked to pass 50 of the bills I cosponsored into law. That doesn't include the dozens of amendments, committee work, or administrative actions that we had a hand in helping to get done.

We ran a constituent-first office that was focused on cutting red tape for people and helping them get the services and help they needed from their government. From helping folks with Social Security to assisting veterans to helping our businesses, big and small, keep people employed, I am proud that we closed over 4,300 cases and saved Texans more than \$57 million. I am also personally proud to be the first Member of Congress to ever take paternity leave and to hopefully set an example for all new dads who will follow me.

Though this is the end of a chapter for me, I am reminded that our democracy is great because it doesn't begin or end with one elected official. It is not about one person. It never has been.

We are caretakers. We are guardians of the great American experiment and protectors of this democracy.

I know that Congresswoman-elect Julie Johnson will serve the people of the 32nd District with honor. I thank my colleagues on both sides of the aisle who have worked with me over the years, people who I know will keep working in a bipartisan way to represent and deliver for their constituents.

I remember the legends and icons I have had a chance to serve with, Members like Eddie Bernice Johnson to John Lewis.

I also could not have done this without my wife, Aly, and my two boys, Jordan and Cameron, who have helped me every step of the way.

I thank my staff, who have been on my team and on my side since the very beginning. I am so proud that we have had one of the lowest turnover rates of any office in Congress. My dedicated staff are public servants who have