

This is what it means to stand for freedom, to be resolute in one's principles in the face of adversity.

America is the lighthouse of freedom and democracy is the unforgiving sea of the world.

Illuminating the path to the patriotic way of life for which the previous people of this country fought so hard.

Not only is it important for the lighthouse to point the way for smaller vessels on the water, but also to maintain its light, to maintain its freedom.

Before America can radio the path for other countries, it must first prioritize its own freedoms and make sure its lightbulb never flickers.

Our next winner is Lauryn Lercher, who is also an 11th grader at Waynesville High School.

Lauryn wrote:

Freedom isn't just a word; it is a responsibility. To stand for freedom means defending the rights of others, even when it is difficult.

At home, America strives to protect democracy, ensuring every voice is heard.

But freedom isn't just for us, it is a global value. The U.S. promotes human rights and stands against oppression worldwide through diplomacy, aid, and example.

However, authentic leadership means acknowledging our flaws and working to improve.

Standing for freedom isn't about power, it is about justice, equality, and courage.

If we truly believe in freedom, we must defend it everywhere, for everyone.

Because without freedom, we lose what makes us who we are.

I am extremely proud of these young people. They are talented, smart, and patriotic Americans who want our country to be better. Let us all strive in this body no matter what side of the aisle we are on to make that happen.

Mr. Speaker, I will continue at a later date with our remaining winners.

Again, I encourage my colleagues on both sides of the aisle to adopt the congressional speech contest to build patriotism among our young people in the United States of America.

PROTECT MEDICAID

(Ms. RIVAS of California was recognized to address the House for 5 minutes.)

Ms. RIVAS. Mr. Speaker, as we speak, House Republicans are finalizing an extreme budget plan that includes the largest cut to Medicaid in our country's history.

This is an outright assault on the healthcare of nearly 14 million Americans, including over 370,000 people in my district, California's 29th.

Additionally, hospitals like Olive View Medical Center in Sylmar, where over 70 percent of patients rely on Medicaid, will suffer, and services at health centers throughout my district, including El Proyecto del Barrio and Northeast Valley Health Corporation will be cut.

Republicans' attacks on Medicaid means Americans, including millions who are already struggling to keep up with the rising cost of living, will be forced to pay more for healthcare.

Republicans continue to show that they have no plans to make life easier

for anyone who is not a billionaire. In fact, while the rest of the country gets sicker and poorer, Republicans are set to give their billionaire donors new tax breaks.

Protecting Medicaid is essential to our communities. That is why House Democrats and I are demanding an up-or-down vote to protect it.

I call on my Republican colleagues to join House Democrats in signing our discharge petition to protect Medicaid for their constituents and healthcare for children, seniors, and the disabled in their district.

NATIONAL SCIENCE FOUNDATION

Ms. RIVAS. Mr. Speaker, this week we should be celebrating the 75th anniversary of the National Science Foundation and the countless investments it has made to propel our country ahead in the technological race.

However, since the start of the Trump-Musk administration, the NSF has been in its crosshairs. In total, Elon Musk, DOGE, and this administration have terminated over 1,400 meritorious grants totaling more than \$1 billion in funds.

Some of the projects that these funds would have supported include giving middle school students opportunities to use math and design to address agricultural issues; identifying the use of deepfakes and curbing the spread of misinformation; and supporting and training the next generation of quantum technicians.

Cuts to these programs, and many more, came with no transparency, little communication, and zero accountability.

My colleagues on the Science Committee have repeatedly demanded that the administration answer for their actions, even as recently as this week. Each time we were met with radio silence.

This administration needs to answer for its unprecedented attack and how it wiped out decades of progress for science, including decades of progress for diversifying the STEM workforce.

This week, we should be celebrating the advancements NSF has contributed to over the past 75 years and looking forward to a bright and innovative 75 more years. Instead, we are fighting to save it from the chaotic, reckless, and destructive actions of this administration.

PRESIDENT TRUMP IN THE MIDDLE EAST

(Mr. STUTZMAN of Indiana was recognized to address the House for 5 minutes.)

Mr. STUTZMAN. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to share my thoughts on the dilemmas that we face here in Congress.

Watching what is happening not only here at home and here in Congress but also around the world, we have a great opportunity in front of us. We can be not only strong here at home, but we can also be strong abroad. President Trump is showing that as he travels today in the Middle East.

I just want to remind us all that we have threats around the world who are watching the United States on a daily basis.

I was recently over in Syria, and there was a great opportunity there that President Trump has addressed by lifting the sanctions on the Syrian people, but the Syrian people know that America can be trusted. Now, let's take that opportunity and help not only them, because that is going to help stabilize the region in the Middle East and it is going to help our ally, Israel, it is going to help our other allies who are participating in the Abraham Accords. I want to applaud President Trump for what he is doing.

However, to see how the people in the Middle East and others around the world who are there have respect for our President is refreshing, to know that they know he is going to do what he says he is going to do.

He is a strong leader. He is one who is willing to sit down and talk to anyone. He is not afraid to sit down and talk to anyone. He has the American people behind him. He has the American economy behind him.

Look at what he is doing with China right now, Mr. Speaker. We all know that China is the threat that we are concerned about the most. We also know that others around the world don't want to do business with China because of the way they operate. They manipulate their currency. They take advantage of their own people, and they don't respect the environmental standards that we do.

What President Trump is doing is truly remarkable. He is resetting the national stage, the global stage, for the United States of America and for the American people. The tariff policy that he has implemented is bringing people to the table.

People ask: Why are people wanting to talk to President Trump in the Middle East as he is there visiting?

They see how much they want to get his ear. It is because he has reset the table and said: The American people are going to be put first, no longer are we going to continue to supplement, subsidize, and let other countries take advantage of the American people.

So I applaud the President today.

THE BUDGET

Mr. STUTZMAN. Mr. Speaker, I want to talk about our budget. We here in Congress have a greater opportunity and a responsibility to be sure that we move towards a balanced budget and reduce our debt and deficits.

I would encourage all of us, Republican and Democrats, to realize we are spending more money than what we make. Mr. Speaker, \$1 trillion goes towards our interest each year. That means \$1 trillion doesn't go towards helping the American people.

Also, we are in deficit spending. Trillions of dollars are going to the national debt. I was first elected to Congress in 2010. The debt was \$9 trillion. In 2017, I left for a period of time, it

was \$18 trillion. Now we are in 2025, and the national debt is \$36 trillion of debt. That is going to be put on the backs not only of our children and grandchildren, but it is going to be put on the backs of us as Americans today.

Hardworking Americans are watching what we are doing. They are working hard.

Are we working hard for them?

We need to come to the table with this reconciliation package. I want everybody—we should all be at the table and realize that our healthcare costs are out of control. President Trump is already showing leadership on this. If the healthcare industry can't get its act together and lower the costs, then we are going to have to address it. It is no longer a free market in healthcare.

So I believe that we, as Congress, are going to have to start taking measures to be sure that the cost isn't just continually passed on to the American people and driving our debt further and further.

I would challenge the healthcare industry: Start doing it now; start lowering the cost.

We know healthcare costs in this country are out of control. Medicaid is the one that is now paying for it, and more and more people have been forced on to Medicaid. This goes back to ObamaCare. We were told by the Democrats that ObamaCare was going to fix our healthcare problems. Look where we are at today, Mr. Speaker. It is worse today than what it was back in 2008 and 2009 when ObamaCare was passed.

This is our opportunity to realize we have to cut spending in Washington. Let's make sure we take care of our men and women in uniform, but let's address the healthcare costs that are truly subjugating our Federal budget.

NATIONAL POLICE WEEK

(Ms. GILLEN of New York was recognized to address the House for 5 minutes.)

Ms. GILLEN. Mr. Speaker, in recognition of National Police Week, and on behalf of New York's Fourth Congressional District, I am proud to stand here today to honor our brave men and women in law enforcement. Every day, our officers are on the front lines of the most urgent public safety challenges in service to our community.

When disaster strikes and people are in need, our law enforcement officers are the first to respond. Despite the risks, the long hours, and the constant stress, hundreds of thousands of officers wake up each day, put on their badge, and answer the call. They do it for us, for our loved ones, and for our communities.

This week serves as a solemn reminder of the dangers that our officers face daily. Without law enforcement, we would not enjoy the security we often take for granted. With courage and with bravery, our officers run toward danger every day to keep us and our loved ones safe.

Today, we honor Nassau County's own who gave their lives in the line of duty. Among them are Officers Erick Contreras, Christopher Cizmarik, Kevin Canavan, and Philip Schifini of the Nassau County Police Department who bravely served our community on 9/11, one of the darkest days in American history.

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In the aftermath of the worst terrorist attack on American soil, they are among the brave first responders who ran toward danger, working tirelessly among the toxic rubble at Ground Zero. Years later, all four would tragically lose their lives caused by the toxins that they were exposed to in their heroic efforts. This is a painful reminder of the lasting cost of their selfless service.

Unfortunately, thousands of our heroic law enforcement officers, firefighters, and emergency personnel who bravely answered the call on the darkest day in our Nation's history continue to suffer from life-threatening cancers, respiratory diseases, and other debilitating conditions from the toxins at Ground Zero.

That is why I was proud to help reintroduce the bipartisan 9/11 Responder and Survivor Health Funding Correction Act, which would permanently fix the current funding shortfalls in the World Trade Center Health Program.

We owe it to our 9/11 first responders to ensure that the programs they rely on will be fully funded and fully staffed.

In addition, last year, we also lost Officer Jonathan Diller who proudly served with the NYPD. Tragically, he was killed last year while conducting a routine traffic stop in Queens.

In just 3 years on the force, Detective Diller made over 70 arrests and was honored with three Excellent Police Duty medals. His colleagues remember him as a bright, positive presence, always eager to learn, deeply dedicated, and truly passionate about the job he loved.

The names I mentioned are not just names on a list. They were fathers, brothers, sons, and friends. They were pillars in their department and in their communities, whose courage will never be forgotten, and their sacrifice will never be in vain.

On behalf of all of Long Island, we will never forget those who laid down their lives in service to others. As we mark Police Week, may God bless the officers who gave up their lives to keep Americans safe and may He give their loved ones comfort.

Mr. Speaker, I thank, honor, and stand with all of our officers, past, present, and future.

SPEAKING TRUTH ABOUT POWER

(Mr. GREEN of Texas was recognized to address the House for 5 minutes.)

Mr. GREEN of Texas. Mr. Speaker, and still I rise, unbought, unbossed, and unaframed.

Mr. Speaker, I rise, driven by conscience, to embrace the moral imperative to speak truth not only to power but to also speak truth about power.

I rise today to acknowledge, driven by conscience, what the world is witnessing as we see the collective punishment being imposed upon Palestinians in Gaza.

I rise to say that this level of punishment is something that is intolerable and has to be addressed.

I rise to say that not only is there collective punishment, there is ethnic cleansing taking place in Gaza.

I rise to say that, at some point, we in this Congress have to take a stand against the injustice being perpetrated against innocent Palestinian men, women, and especially children.

This level of injustice is something that this country has always stood against, but we find ourselves today standing with Mr. Netanyahu and the government that is bringing shame to the country of Israel. Israel should never do what it despises. I believe that the country of Israel would despise this level of punishment, this level of injustice being perpetrated upon another country. Yet, we find today, under Mr. Netanyahu's leadership, Israel is gaining a reputation as a pariah country.

Mr. Speaker, to add insult to this grave injury, the United States of America, by and through President Donald John Trump, is aiding and abetting by simply having him conclude that somehow Gaza should become a resort of a sort and that the Palestinians would be moved to some other place. That is a form of nouveau ethnic cleansing.

I do not support it, and I want the world to know that if in this bill, this big, beautiful bill that the President would have us sign off on that I am already antithetical to, if there is money in that bill to support the continued ethnic cleansing, the continued inhumanity that is taking place against the Palestinians, I cannot support that. I will not vote to send more money to see innocent men, women, and especially children slaughtered the way it is taking place right before our very eyes.

The unfortunate thing is there are too many among us who are afraid to speak up. I refuse to be among those who at this time are challenging controversy, who would sit and cower. I am going to take a stand not because it benefits me personally but because conscience says we cannot allow these injustices to go unpunished. I am driven by conscience to say that I won't be supporting sending any additional dollars to Israel, having already sent and voted for more than \$50 billion.

Nobody can accuse me of not being supportive of Israel. I have supported it, but I can't support the Netanyahu administration and what it is doing to the country of Israel. I can't support what is happening in my country as our President would embrace this ethnic cleansing.