

community keeps delivering progress, and we all must lift our Nation's motto up: "e pluribus unum"; "out of many, one."

Not against one another but working together for the future of America.

HONORING THE LIFE OF JUAN LÓPEZ

(Ms. RAMIREZ asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute and to revise and extend her remarks.)

Ms. RAMIREZ. Mr. Speaker, I rise to honor the life of Juan López.

(English translation of the statement made in Spanish is as follows:)

I rise today to honor the life of Juan López—a Honduran, a Catholic leader, a human rights defender, an environmental activist—a year after his brutal assassination.

Today, I declare we will not forget Juan López. As Juan said, "They can tear me up, they can cut me down. But I'll always come back."

Today, I honor all those who carry on Juan's legacy to live without fear of powerful companies and corrupt officials stealing and polluting their land and murdering courageous leaders for peacefully defending natural resources that are rightfully theirs.

Today, I stand in solidarity with all those who loved Juan López, who continue his struggle, and who will not back down until we realize justice for Juan, for Berta Cáceres and for all those land defenders murdered.

Me levanto hoy para honrar la vida de Juan López—hondureño, líder católico defensor de los derechos humanos y activista ambiental—un año luego de su brutal asesinato.

Hoy, declaro que no olvidaremos a Juan López. Como dijo: "Pueden destrozarme, pueden derribarme. Pero siempre volveré".

Hoy, rindo homenaje a todos aquellos que continúan el legado de Juan, viviendo sin temor a que empresas poderosas y funcionarios corruptos les roben y contaminen sus tierras y asesinen a líderes valientes por defender pacíficamente los recursos naturales que les pertenecen por derecho.

Hoy, me solidarizo con todos aquellos que amaron a Juan López, que continúan su lucha y que no cederán hasta que se haga justicia para Juan, para Berta Cáceres y para todos los defensores de la tierra asesinados.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The gentleman will provide a translation.

HONORING VICTIMS OF 16TH STREET BAPTIST CHURCH BOMBING

(Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 3, 2025, Ms. McCLELLAN of Virginia was recognized for 60 minutes as the designee of the minority leader.)

GENERAL LEAVE

Ms. McCLELLAN. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members may have 5 legislative days in which to revise and extend their remarks and include extraneous material on the subject of this Special Order hour.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Is there objection to the request of the gentleman from Virginia?

There was no objection.

Ms. McCLELLAN. Mr. Speaker, it is with great honor that I rise today to anchor this CBC Special Order hour. For the next 60 minutes, members of the CBC will have an opportunity to speak directly to the American people.

Today, the Congressional Black Caucus is remembering an anniversary. It was a terrible anniversary that happened 62 years ago today in Alabama.

Mr. Speaker, to begin our commemoration, I yield to the gentleman from Alabama (Mr. FIGURES).

Mr. FIGURES. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentlewoman for yielding.

Mr. Speaker, this is one of those speeches that I wish we did not have to give and one of those moments in our history that I wish we did not have to acknowledge in the first place. By acknowledging it, we are reminded of its occurrence.

This is one of the more tragic acts in American history: the bombing of four little girls, made worse by the fact that it happened in a place of worship, that it happened in a church, and that it happened in an African-American church.

When you grow up Black in Alabama, this is one of the seminal events that you hear about in our State's history that you cannot ever forget. It is important to me that we sit here in this Chamber today to acknowledge this disastrous event and to remember the names of the little girls who were killed and one who was injured.

As a son of Alabama and a Representative of the birthplace of the civil rights movement today, which is the city of Montgomery, I know the names of Carole Robertson, Denise McNair, Addie Mae Collins, and Cynthia Wesley. These are names that you have to know. They are names that all of America should know, and they are names that all of us should recognize and appreciate and honor here in this House.

They are names that must be said. They are names that must be said repetitively. They are names that must be ingrained into the fabric of this Nation: Carole Robertson; Denise McNair; Addie Mae Collins; Cynthia Wesley; and Sarah Collins Rudolph, who took from that day not only the loss of her friends and family member but also injuries that she still carries with her to this day as she advocates for justice.

Let us not forget that this was merely one example of tragic violence that was used as a means to suppress the greatest movement that this world and that this Nation has ever seen, which is the civil rights movement.

Though these are names that we know and names that we speak of in one of the more noteworthy or notable or well-known events that happened, there were several others who were the victims of such violence, and we also cannot forget them as we sit here today and honor the four little girls in Birmingham.

These are names, some of which you know and some of which you don't.

These are names like Medgar Evers, who was assassinated in his fight for equal access to the ballot box; and Rev. James Reeb, who was a minister who was beaten to death while standing with the marchers in Selma.

These are names like Viola Liuzzo. These are names like Jimmie Lee Jackson and Jonathan Daniels. These are people who put it all on the line and whose deaths are the reason that I am able to stand here today.

Whenever we have the opportunity, we should always sit here in this Chamber and recognize these individuals.

□ 1930

I cannot close without quoting the speech that Martin Luther King gave in his eulogy of these four little girls. Speaking at a time when racial tensions in the country were enormously, enormously high and never did anyone think that those tensions would result in such a cowardly act as a bomb being placed in a church and set to detonate on a Sunday morning as four little girls were down there getting ready for Sunday school, but he took to the pulpit and he gave these powerful words that I will quote, in part.

He said: "These children—unoffending, innocent, and beautiful—were the victims of one of the most vicious and tragic crimes ever perpetrated against humanity."

"And yet they died nobly. They are the martyred heroines of a holy crusade for freedom and human dignity. And so this afternoon in a real sense, they have something to say to each of us in their death."

"They say to each of us, Black and White alike, that we must substitute courage for caution. They say to us that we must be concerned not merely about who murdered them but about the system, the way of life, the philosophy which produced the murderers. Their death says to us that we must work passionately and unrelentingly for the realization of the American Dream."

"And so my friends, they did not die in vain."

"God still has a way of wringing good out of evil. And history has proven over and over again that unmerited suffering is redemptive. The innocent blood of these little girls may well serve as a redemptive force that will bring new light to this dark city."

Those are the words of Martin Luther King as he eulogized these four little girls. I think a lot of what he references is still true to this day, that we have to, by all means, continue to be unrelenting in our pursuit of the realization of the American Dream for everyone.

These four beautiful little girls, who unknowingly became one of the galvanizing symbols of the civil rights movement, these are names that we must know. These are names that we must continue to say: Carole Robertson, Denise McNair, Addie Mae Collins, and Cynthia Wesley.

I obviously never had the opportunity to meet any of them. I have had the privilege to meet several of their family members throughout my life, but to them I owe an enormous debt of gratitude because without acts like this, as violent and as vicious and as terrible as it was, without moments like that, there would not have been a Civil Rights Act. There would not have been a Voting Rights Act. There would not have been the progress in this Nation that we saw in terms of rights being secured for African Americans, and all people for that matter, the same rights which led to the possibility of myself and many others being able to stand here in Congress.

This is about more than an anniversary of celebrating the lives of those that were killed in the explosion. This is about celebrating the galvanizing force for progress in this Nation. This is about celebrating the lives of people who are responsible for many of us being here.

Whether you like it or not, the civil rights movement embodied everything that America should be, and it is because of these four little girls that I am able to stand here today.

It is also worth noting about this tragic event, to add insult to the injury of four little girls being murdered in a church, justice was not served immediately. Justice was not served a year late or 5 years late or even 20 years late. It took nearly 40 years, nearly 40 years, for all of the perpetrators involved in this case to be brought to justice.

Let's think about that. Mr. Speaker, 40 years after four little girls were killed in a church and the leaders at the time knew not only that it was the Klan that was responsible but they knew the individuals who were responsible, but for lack of courage, for lack of cooperation, for lack of willingness, that justice was delayed for nearly four decades, 39 years. It took the involvement of the Federal Government to finally make that happen.

That story, both the viciousness of this crime, the delayed justice, that story is a story that is not uncommon, especially during acts of violence during the civil rights movement, but despite there being the delay in justice, what was not delayed was the impact that they had on the broader realm of justice and the broader realm of rights that we were able to secure. Though unfortunate and certainly unnecessary, certainly unwarranted, their deaths shine a bright light on the injustices that were happening across this Nation in how Black people were being treated in the South, especially in the State of Alabama, and we were able to get through this body and the Senate and across the President's desk the biggest and most beautiful piece of legislation that this Nation has ever seen, and that is the Civil Rights Act and that is the Voting Rights Act.

As I close, I will again thank Carole Robertson, Denise McNair, Addie Mae

Collins, Cynthia Wesley, and Sarah Collins Rudolph.

Ms. MCCLELLAN. Mr. Speaker, it is now my privilege to yield to the gentlewoman from Alabama (Ms. SEWELL).

Ms. SEWELL. Mr. Speaker, I first really just thank the Congressional Black Caucus for commemorating this 62nd anniversary of the bombing of the 16th Street Baptist Church with this Special Order hour.

Mr. Speaker, I indeed rise with my colleagues to commemorate the 62nd anniversary of the bombing of the 16th Street Baptist Church in Birmingham, Alabama, and to honor the legacy of the four precious little girls killed in that attack.

Sixty-two years ago today, parishioners of the 16th Street Baptist Church gathered within its sacred walls ahead of its 11 a.m. service. It was youth day that day, that day 62 years ago. It was youth day, so the youth were in charge of that service.

There were lots of little girls and little boys running around the church. At approximately 10:23 a.m., while the four little girls were getting dressed in the church basement restroom, 19 sticks of dynamite placed by the KKK exploded.

As the walls of the church caved in, more than 100 parishioners rushed for safety. While most of them escaped unharmed, under the debris lay five little girls.

Today, we must remember all five, four were killed that day and one is still alive today.

Today, we remember the name of Addie Mae Collins, of Denise McNair, of Carole Robertson, and Cynthia Morris Wesley. We also remember the name of Sarah Collins, who was the younger sister of Addie Mae Collins.

□ 1940

In response to the attack, hundreds of African Americans took to the street to demand justice, only to be met with more violence at the hands of law enforcement. Within hours of the bombing, two more children lost their lives in Birmingham, Alabama: Johnny Robinson and Virgil Ware were killed in clashes with the police.

Dr. King described the bombing as one of the most vicious crimes ever perpetrated against humanity. Yet, despite the horrific nature of the attack, it took more than 34 years for the perpetrators to be faced with justice. In fact, it was only 34 years later that they really all were brought to justice.

Make no mistake, the four little girls did not die in vain, as my colleague from Alabama, SHOMARI FIGURES, so eloquently said. They didn't die in vain. Their murder focused the eyes of the Nation on the racial terror being waged against African Americans in the Jim Crow South, and their legacy galvanized the civil rights movement, giving voice to the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965.

It was because of their death that the Nation in horror saw four little girls,

who were simply going to church, killed. It was senseless violence by the KKK. We had a Birmingham campaign because of that, a crusade of children who marched and protested in Kelly Ingram Park.

It was because of their efforts and the efforts of so many, the sacrifices of so many, it is never lost on Shomari or myself that we get to walk the Halls of Congress because four little Black girls cannot. Four little Black girls cannot.

Congresswoman MCCLELLAN, we are blessed to be able to represent our home districts, but we know that we are not the first who deserve to be here in Congress. No, we are the lucky ones who stand on the shoulders of those who were murdered, who marched, who bled, who prayed for the opportunity of African Americans to have an equal voice in this society.

The sacred right to vote is just as sacred today as it was then. I think all of us in this Chamber, Republicans and Democrats alike, respect the late, great Congressman John Lewis, who had the audacity to believe that he could march across a bridge unfettered by the viciousness of the State troopers.

When he was met with that viciousness, it was John, with a backpack on his shoulder—that image is seared in my mind. I have the great honor of being a daughter of Selma, growing up in Selma. You can't grow up in Selma, Alabama, without really understanding its place in American history.

I often tell my constituents that we are custodians of America's history. What happened on that bridge, the blood that was shed for the Voting Rights Act of 1965, is commemorated year after year after year. The first Sunday in the month of March is Bloody Sunday, a sacred day that for so many years John Lewis would bring Republicans and Democrats, a bipartisan group, to walk across that bridge. We didn't just come to Selma. He would take us first to Birmingham where we would sit in the 16th Street Baptist Church, and we would see the beautiful stained glass that was donated by the people of Wales to the church.

I have heard Pastor Price, who is the current pastor of the 16th Street Baptist Church, regale that the sermon that day 62 years ago, the sermon that day was: A love that forgives. That was the title of the sermon: A love that forgives. Now, we know that political violence has no place in this society, but how ironic that the pastor was preaching a sermon about forgiveness.

As I reflect on our painful past, I am reminded that every gain in the battle for civil rights and voting rights has come at a high cost, paid for by the sacrifices of others.

As a direct beneficiary of the legacy of the four little girls, I am honored that my very first piece of legislation that I passed in Congress bestowed

upon the four little girls a Congressional Gold Medal on the 50th anniversary of the bombing of the 16th Street Baptist Church.

Oh, it was a grand day. I was able to watch as President Barack Obama signed that bill into law in the Oval Office. Standing to my right was none other than the mother of Denise McNair and the sister of Denise McNair. Standing to my left was a cousin of Carole Robertson. Standing right beside me was Eric Holder, the Attorney General, and his wife, Sharon Malone, a distinguished doctor whose sister, Vivian Malone, was the very first African American to integrate University of Alabama. Also there was the Surgeon General, another very proud native of Alabama. The Surgeon General at the time was Regina Benjamin.

It was a proud day to be an Alabamian. It was a proud day to be an African American. It was a proud day to be an American. It took us 50 years to acknowledge the four little girls on this House floor.

I have to say that perhaps one of the most poignant memories that I have not just of that day—and, yes, Pastor Price was there as well—it was really the opportunity to bestow a Congressional Gold Medal to Sarah Collins, and lots of our colleagues came with us that day, came with me, flew to Birmingham months later to actually bestow the Congressional Gold Medal to Sarah Collins.

History is riddled with the bodies and blood of those who sacrificed for this country to live up to its creed, the creed of this country to honor its principles of justice and equality. At a time when some would seek to whitewash our history and roll back our progress, it has never been more important for us to remember, to ensure that the memory of the four little girls lives on. Their loss paved the way for the freedoms and opportunities that we enjoy today, and their legacy reminds us that the price of freedom is not free. It has been paid for by the sacrifices of others.

I thank my colleagues in the Congressional Black Caucus for hosting tonight's Special Order hour, and I ask both sides of the aisle to join us in honoring the memory of Addie Mae Collins, Denise McNair, Carole Robertson, and Cynthia Wesley, and the life of Sarah Collins.

I look forward to having a colloquy with my colleagues about what this really means to all of us. I have to say that as the Member of Congress who represents Birmingham, Alabama, and Selma and Tuscaloosa, I was never more proud than to remember the legacy, the amazing legacy that is Alabama's Seventh Congressional District.

□ 1950

While I am honored to represent the constituents of today, I carry with me and know that the legacy of this district is something that must be ad-

vanced. It needs to be protected. It needs to be known. It needs to be advanced.

I never thought that 60 years after John Lewis was bludgeoned on a bridge, or 62 years after four little girls were killed in the bombing—assassinated in the bombing—of the 16th Street Baptist Church, that the Civil Rights Act and the Voting Rights Act would be in jeopardy.

The Shelby v. Holder decision struck down a key provision of the Voting Rights Act. As we speak, the Supreme Court is considering striking down or nullifying section 2 of the Voting Rights Act.

It is on our collective watch that we say no, that we must say hell no, that this body must act. This body can come up with a modern-day formula to determine voter discrimination, such that we can put life back into section 4, which allowed us to say that those States that had a history of voting discrimination must pre-clear every voting law.

That provision had no teeth because they struck down the formula. States across this Nation started voter suppression laws, voting on voter suppression laws that didn't have any remedy other than after the fact. We could only sue after the fact.

In my portion tonight, I join my colleagues for a colloquy by just saying that we who are beneficiaries of this important legacy have a very special role to play. Ours is to legislate, but ours is also to motivate and mobilize our constituents and this Nation, to mobilize and realize that the Voting Rights Act and the Civil Rights Act are similar pieces of legislation that all Americans should acknowledge as the reason why the arc is bending toward justice, as Martin Luther King would say. We know that the moral arc doesn't bend by itself. It bends at the will, at the sacrifice, at the demands of the people.

As I close, I want us not only to remember their names but remember their sacrifice, and let's pay it forward. I think we who are beneficiaries must pay it forward. I don't know about you, but just looking at their faces gives me a pep in my step.

We may be living through very troubling times, but we do so because others sacrificed. It was because of their sacrifice that we get to enjoy the freedoms we do.

Mr. Speaker, I thank the Congressional Black Caucus for acknowledging today as the 62nd anniversary of the bombing of the 16th Street Baptist Church.

Ms. McCLELLAN. Mr. Speaker, may I inquire how much time is remaining.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The gentleman from Virginia has 31 minutes remaining.

Ms. McCLELLAN. Mr. Speaker, I will put today's anniversary in a larger context, but first, I will center on these four little girls again.

As the congregation of the 16th Street Baptist Church greeted each

other before the start of Sunday's service, five little girls gathered in the ladies' room in their best dresses. They chatted about the first few days of the school year. They were excited about Youth Day. They were excited to take part in the Sunday adult service.

Rather than rising to begin prayers, just before 11 o'clock, the congregation was knocked to the ground when a bomb exploded under the steps of the church.

In the basement, 14-year-olds Addie Mae Collins, Denise McNair, Carole Robertson, and 11-year-old Cynthia Wesley were killed. Addie's sister, Sarah, survived but lost her right eye. Between 14 and 22 other people were injured.

Dr. King described the attack as "one of the most vicious and tragic crimes ever perpetrated against humanity."

Two years later, the FBI shut down its investigation after determining that the bombing had been committed by four members of the local Ku Klux Klan: Thomas Edwin Blanton, Jr., Herman Frank Cash, Robert Edward Chambliss, and Bobby Frank Cherry.

They chose the church because it had been a rallying point for the civil rights activities of that tumultuous spring of 1963.

In 1971, Alabama Attorney General Bill Baxley reopened the case and requested evidence from the FBI. After building trust with witnesses who had been reluctant to testify, they were able to convict Robert Chambliss on November 14, 1977, of his part in the crime. It would be decades later before the other suspects were tried.

On May 1, 2001, Thomas Blanton was convicted and sentenced to life in prison. In 2002, Bobby Frank Cherry was convicted. He boasted that he was the one who planted the bomb next to the church wall. That brag is what sent him to prison.

Justice was delayed, but ultimately, justice for these little girls was had.

Putting this in a larger context, as we grapple with the fact that political violence has reared its ugly head in America yet again, yet again, we see anger, fear, hatred, and division across the Nation. We have been here before multiple times. We don't have enough hours in the day to do a Special Order hour on everyone who has suffered because of political violence.

Focusing on how we move forward, Dr. King's words have been on my mind a lot in the past few years. In response to the violence of Charlottesville after the Unite the Right rally, in response to assassination attempts, in response to school shootings, in response to hate crimes, whether political violence, racial violence, or just violence grown out of hate, Dr. King gave us a way forward in two speeches that I come back to as being relevant today. He gave two speeches, one in 1957 called "Loving Your Enemies," and he gave one in 1967 called "Where Do We Go from Here: Chaos or Community?"

That question is relevant today. We see a lot of chaos around us. We have

lost sight of community, but we come out of chaos when we focus on community.

I am going to read some of Dr. King's words. His speech "Loving Your Enemies" was rooted in the Sermon on the Mount. It was rooted in the commandment that Jesus added on the Sermon, in addition to love God, love God as you love yourself, to love your enemies.

□ 2000

Mr. Speaker, he talked about how difficult it is to love our enemies. How do we do it? He gave some practical suggestions.

He said: "In order to love your enemies, you must begin by analyzing self. And I'm sure that seems strange to you, that that I start out telling you this morning that you love your enemies by beginning with a look at self. It seems to me that that is the first and foremost way to come to an adequate discovery to the how of this situation."

He went on to talk about how sometimes there is something in the way a person carries himself that triggers a hate response or anger in someone else. He said that the first thing we have got to do is look at ourselves. Was it something I said, even if I didn't mean it? Was it something I posted? Take a look at whether we are embodying love. He said that sometimes we have got to admit there are people that just aren't going to like us, and that is okay.

The second, and much more important one, was that an individual must discover the element of good in his enemy.

"Every time you begin to hate that person and think of hating that person, realize that there is some good there and look at those good points which will overbalance the bad points." . . . "We're split up and divided against ourselves. And there is something of a civil war going on within all of our lives."

He put it in the context of what was happening in the south. I think we have heard rumblings over the past few years and questions: Are we facing another civil war in ourselves?

He said: "So somehow the 'isness' of our present nature is out of harmony with the eternal 'oughtness' that forever confronts us." . . . "That within the best of us, there is some evil, and within the worst of us, there is some good. When we come to see this, we take a different attitude toward individuals. The person who hates you most has some good in him; even the nation that hates you most has some good in it; even the race that hates you most has some good in it."

"And when you come to the point that you look in the face of every man and see deep down within him what religion calls 'the image of God', you begin to love him in spite of. No matter what he does, you see God's image there."

Mr. Speaker, I think that is really important. I regret the fact that I

never got to meet John Lewis or Dr. King because I want to ask both of them one question: How did they come to love people who physically threatened or attacked them? They both found a way to do it.

I think it was rooted in the fact that they recognized—and I think all of us watching in this Chamber, and around the world, should remember what John F. Kennedy said, which is that we all breathe the same air. We all cherish our children's future.

We may violently disagree in theory, but that does not mean we should put that violence into action solely because we don't like what someone has said or what they have done. I think we all need to take a step back and see the face of God in one another.

Growing up, I remember listening to my parents tell stories of my great-grandparents and the racial terror and lynchings that they faced. I remember them telling me stories of the violence of the 1960s. I remember being lulled into this false sense of security as a Gen X child of the seventies and the eighties of how great it is we moved beyond that.

Unfortunately, this week reminded us we haven't. We never will if we don't acknowledge and hold onto the basic decency that tells us, yes, we should love our neighbors but also love our enemies. If we don't, I don't know that we will survive as a country. That is one of the things Dr. King talked about.

As a historian, he talked about how different civilizations fell. He talked about the destructive nature of hatred not only toward the person that is hated but toward ourselves.

One of my favorite quotes from him is how in both of these speeches he said: "And I say to you, I have also decided to stick with love."

"Hate is too great a burden to bear."

Hate twists us up. It eats us up and destroys us. He told a story about how he and his brother were traveling in Tennessee. Every time they would go down a road, the oncoming car would leave their bright lights on. His brother said: The next time somebody does that, I am going to leave my bright lights on.

He said: Hold up. Somebody has got to have sense enough to turn down the lights. If we don't, we will both be blinded and run off the road.

I think we are at a point where we need to have sense enough to turn off the lights, to turn down the temperature, and remember our children are watching. Our children are watching.

As we see a rise in gun violence, I have been particularly disturbed by how many children have gotten to the point where they let their hatred allow them to kill other children.

As I raise a teenager and a tween, as a preacher's daughter, I try to instill in them the same message of love our neighbors and love our enemies. It is really hard to do that.

When I am away from home, making sacrifices to make their lives easier,

they see not only the violence that we have become numb to but they see people, their mother included, get threatened. They see people that they have seen in this body say the most vicious things on social media. These are people who were kind to them when I was sworn in and when they stood beside me. They ask some pretty tough questions.

As leaders in this country, we have a responsibility to understand that when we stand in this well, at this podium, in our committees, at a press conference, or post on social media, we are not just trying to get clicks, or we shouldn't be. We are not just trying to get attention, or we shouldn't be. We are setting an example for the next generation of leaders. We are setting an example for our children.

I think we need to think about that before we post or say something in anger. If somebody doesn't have sense enough to turn on the lights, our hatred is going to blind us to the point where we tear each other and ourselves apart.

□ 2010

I get asked all the time: How do you stand it on the Hill?

How do you stand in the same room with this person or that person?

It is because I do what Dr. King says, which is rooted in love. I look at that person, even if they give me a reason not to, and I recognize: You and I breathe the same air. We both cherish our children's future. We are all worthy of love and respect.

We need to get back to that, Mr. Speaker, because if we don't, then I don't know where that leads.

Does it lead to a civil war?

Does it lead to chaos and everybody just being afraid to leave the house, give a speech, go to a rally, to a movie theater, to school, or to church?

Violence isn't new, but in the past, we have found a way to come together and focus on community in the midst of chaos. I am afraid we are losing the ability to do that. We have a responsibility as Members of Congress and as leaders in our community to show the way, to show a way toward community and to show a way out of chaos.

It is up to us. It is up to us whether we make it to 2026 where we can celebrate a revolutionary idea that the power of government was derived from the people. I don't know if we can do that if we allow hatred to tear us apart. I think we owe it to everyone who has suffered at the hands of violence, political, racial or otherwise.

I want to end with something Dr. King said at the funeral of these four little girls whose lives we celebrate on the 62nd anniversary of when they died:

"Now I say to you in conclusion, life is hard, at times as hard as crucible steel. It has its bleak and difficult moments. Like the ever-flowing waters of the river, life has its moments of drought and its moments of flood. Like the ever-changing cycle of the seasons,

life has the soothing warmth of its summers and the piercing chill of its winters. And if one will hold on, he will discover that God walks with him, and that God is able to lift you from the fatigue of despair to the buoyancy of hope, and transform dark and desolate valleys into sunlit paths of inner peace."

I think there are a lot of people this week who need that hope. I think there are a lot of people who worry and fear: Will they feel the same despair that so many others have felt when a loved one is killed because of hatred?

We owe it to Addie Mae Collins, Denise McNair, Carole Robertson, and Cynthia Wesley to do our best every day to build what Dr. King called the "beloved community," where someone will not go to a college campus, a church, or to the movie theater and have their lives snuffed out solely because someone hated them.

We can get there if we focus on building community out of chaos, if we focus on the goodness of everybody, and if we focus on love.

I yield back the balance of my time, Mr. Speaker.

HONORING THE ECUMENICAL PATRIARCH, H.H. BARTHOLOMEW I

(Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 3, 2025, Mr. BILIRAKIS of Florida was recognized for 60 minutes as the designee of the majority leader.)

GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. BILIRAKIS. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members may have 5 legislative days in which to revise and extend their remarks and include extraneous material on the subject of this Special Order.

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. SHREVE). Is there objection to the request of the gentleman from Florida?

There was no objection.

Mr. BILIRAKIS. Mr. Speaker, I want to commend the gentlewoman from Virginia. Well said this evening. I appreciate the gentlewoman's kind words.

Mr. Speaker, I rise today not only as co-chair of the Congressional Caucus on International Religious Freedom and the Hellenic Caucus, but, more importantly, as an Orthodox Christian. I am here to honor and welcome His Holiness Bartholomew, Archbishop of Constantinople, New Rome, and Ecumenical Patriarch, who is visiting the United States this week.

This visit is a huge blessing for the Orthodox family in the United States, Mr. Speaker. Not only is His All Holiness a great spiritual leader, but he is also an unparalleled ambassador for peace, interfaith dialogue, and religious freedom. As we honor him today for a lifetime of achievements, Mr. Speaker, I think of his legacy in three words: faith, peace, and endurance.

First, faith; His All Holiness has led millions of the faithful in the global Orthodox church for more than 34 years, conscientiously carrying the leg-

acy of Saint Andrew the Apostle and upholding the 2,000-year-old traditions of the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople, the Holy See for over 300 million Orthodox faithful worldwide.

His leadership of the Eastern Orthodox community has impacted and will continue to impact this ancient church and doctrine for centuries to come.

However, his role extends far beyond the Orthodox church, which brings me to the second point, peace. Throughout his selfless service, Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew has been at the forefront of interreligious dialogue, setting the stage for a more peaceful and cohesive world. He has a record of reaching out and working for peace and reconciliation amongst all faiths and has fostered dialogue among Christians, Jews, and Muslims.

Just last month, Mr. Speaker, he hosted the annual Religions for Peace World Council, bringing together leaders of diverse faiths to address global challenges.

His All Holiness' leadership in these groundbreaking conventions has not only been about theology, but to engage faith with humanity's most pressing challenges.

From his historic visit to the Korean Demilitarized Zone in 2018 to his current efforts promoting coexistence in the Middle East, His All Holiness' pursuit of global peace in the world's most challenging conflicts has truly touched the lives and hearts of millions.

In fact, Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew received, on his first official visit to the United States in 1997, the Congressional Gold Medal presented by my father, Michael Bilirakis, and many, many others. It was presented by the United States on behalf of the Congress in recognition of his outstanding and enduring contributions to religious understanding and peace and was recognized by the United States in a manner reserved for a very small number of world leaders, as you know, Mr. Speaker, leaders such as George Washington, Winston Churchill, and Pope John Paul II.

Most dear to my heart, however, is his life of enduring advocacy for his persecuted church, as well as other oppressed religious minorities.

□ 2020

Recently, when the Egyptian Government confiscated the holy Saint Catherine's Monastery in Sinai, Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew stood as defender of Christian heritage. This monastery is not just a Greek Orthodox treasure but an ancient house to Christianity's most valued heritage, including the sacred tree, the Burning Bush, where our God revealed himself to Moses.

For months now, Mr. Speaker, His All Holiness has led a global movement demanding that the Egyptian Government honor this heritage and protect the autonomy of the monastic community in Sinai. For those of us in Congress who have worked to preserve the

monastery's independence and existence, his advocacy is a source of inspiration.

His All Holiness' mission to protect the Christian community and its heritage in Türkiye is just another example of his noble pursuit. In the last hundred years, the Turkish state has systematically exploited its Christian communities unfortunately, reducing them from 20 percent of the population to a mere 2 percent.

To this day, the Turkish Government refuses to recognize His All Holiness' ecumenical jurisdiction, stripping him of the universal title that is acknowledged by more than 300 million faithful across the globe.

Mr. Speaker, His All Holiness has endured in silence discrimination under Erdogan's regime. This body must insist that Türkiye eliminate all forms of discrimination, particularly discrimination based on race or religion, grant the Ecumenical Patriarchate appropriate recognition and ecclesiastical succession, grant the Ecumenical Patriarchate the right to train clergy of all nationalities, not just Turkish nationals, by reopening the famed and beautiful Theological School at Halki, which I visited in 2019 with my beautiful wife.

Türkiye must absolutely reopen the jewel of Christendom, the Hagia Sophia, Church of the Holy Wisdom of God, as a church, not a mosque. The Hagia Sophia was the world's largest cathedral for nearly 1,000 years. It served as a center for all Christians until the Ottoman invasion in 1453, which saw the collapse of Constantinople as well as the church.

For decades, it had been converted to a museum and has been a UNESCO Heritage site until Erdogan illegally converted it into a mosque 5 years ago.

I could go on and on, Mr. Speaker, about the persecution His All Holiness and the Ecumenical Patriarchate has faced under Erdogan's rule. It is maddening, as far as I am concerned.

But Ankara's violations go far beyond just Christian communities. Just over the summer, Mr. Speaker, the government authorities in Istanbul arrested 41 Muslim women, including 15 minor girls, solely based on their religious expression.

As the Turkish Government converts ancient churches to mosques, intimidates clergy, and displaces religious and ethnic minorities, His All Holiness has continued to peacefully advocate for the voiceless, which is why I take this occasion to call on the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom to designate Türkiye as a country of particular concern under U.S. law.

It is incumbent upon us to recognize His All Holiness as a living testament for Türkiye's explicit mission to erase its native Christian community and to respond to such cynical plans with the seriousness they deserve.

As we honor His All Holiness today, let us not only celebrate his faithfulness and mission of peace but commit