

things that I think are eminently important and that perhaps could find consensus in this Chamber on both sides of the aisle. In fact, I believe even most countries across the world would agree with those two things, maybe even the United Nations and the Organization of American States could agree with that, and I am confident even the Vatican could agree with that, and that is that Nicholas Maduro was not the legitimate president of Venezuela. The Venezuelan people were neither free nor prosperous during his corrupt regime.

□ 1100

Here is another truth, Mr. Speaker, that in no way conflicts with this first one: The President of the United States must come to Congress before ordering a military engagement against any country.

Mr. Speaker, you cannot uphold the rule of law by breaking it. You cannot protect or abide by the Constitution by assaulting it.

Again, so there is no confusion between these two positions, Nicolas Maduro was not a legitimate President, and unauthorized military action is illegal without the consent of Congress.

With Nicolas Maduro now in the rear-view mirror, we must look forward and craft policies that support a free and democratic future for Venezuela and policies that return war powers to the United States Congress, as enshrined in the United States Constitution.

That is why I and the executive board of the Congressional Hispanic Caucus will propose a forward-looking framework for a democratic and stable Venezuela. As members of the Congressional Hispanic Caucus, we come from different nations in Latin America and the Caribbean. We are immigrants, like myself. Many of the members also have ancestors who settled in places in these United States before the United States even existed, and everywhere in between. We share, like most Americans with roots from all over the world, a special connection to Latin America and the Caribbean. Hence, we have crafted a series of recommendations, a roadmap if you will, for democracy and prosperity for the people of Venezuela.

Our first priorities will support a free and democratic Venezuela. That means rejecting authoritarian governance, whether the orders come from the Miraflores Palace or the White House.

The Venezuelan people deserve institutions that are accountable, transparent, and responsible to the world and a restoration of democracy through timely and legitimate elections that reflect the voices of the Venezuelan people themselves.

This is not just about the Venezuelan people. This is ultimately also about the American people, and the American people deserve a government that preserves, protects, and even respects our own rule of law, our own Constitution.

That is why we reject any further U.S. military intervention without

congressional authorization. If we are together, as a nation, to put our men and women in uniform at risk, then our Constitution wisely demands that the decisions be made by the Representatives of those people. It may well be that Congress will have voted for or against an intervention, but, ultimately, it is Congress that should do it.

Now that we are so deeply involved with Venezuela, we must act according to our principles. That means ensuring humanitarian protections at home and abroad for the Venezuelan people who have been victims of tyranny for so long.

At home, that includes extending TPS. We cannot deport people to a nation where our actions have set off a new wave of oppression.

In Venezuela, that means pushing for an end to that repression. It means the release of political prisoners, including journalists and civil society leaders. It means freedom of expression and freedom of the press. We must also ensure that Venezuela's future is decided by Venezuelans.

Our future is also in balance. Mr. Speaker, we are not a nihilist nation. Mr. Speaker, we are a nation of values, principles, and laws. We must act as one.

FOLLOWING THROUGH ON AMERICANS' PRIORITIES

(Mr. MANN of Kansas was recognized to address the House for 5 minutes.)

Mr. MANN. Mr. Speaker, as we begin the second session of the 119th Congress, we should take a moment to reset our focus and remember why we are here. A new year and a new session bring new opportunities, but the mission remains the same. Kansans sent me to Washington, D.C., to deliver results for the people of the Big First District, and that is what I will continue to do.

The Big First is home to farmers and ranchers who get up before the sun and work until the job is done. It is home to small business owners and families who balance budgets, meet payroll, and expect the same discipline from the Federal Government. Kansans are practical people who believe in hard work, common sense, and accountability. We don't want excuses. We expect results.

After President Trump's first term, the Biden administration inherited near-record lows in inflation and an agricultural trade surplus of \$6 billion. After 4 years of failed Democratic policies, we were left with a 21.5 percent increase in prices and an agricultural trade deficit of \$40 billion.

When a ship runs into an iceberg, it takes time to turn the ship around, Mr. Speaker. You need to bail the water, repair the planks, and restart the engine before you can fully correct course. Fortunately, thanks to the leadership of President Trump and congressional Republicans, we are back on track and moving away from the ice-

berg that was President Biden's administration.

Over the course of the first session of this Congress, we made important progress for Kansans. We pushed back against burdensome regulations that drive up costs for Main Street. We worked to strengthen American energy production so families can afford to heat their homes and fuel their vehicles. We advanced policies that support agricultural producers and rural communities and restored the rule of law at our border. Most importantly, we cut taxes for working families, giving the average Kansan \$2,200 more per year in take-home pay beginning this month.

That work matters, and I am proud of the progress we have made, but after the damage done by the previous administration, there is much more work to do. That is what this second session must be about.

For Kansans, this starts with agriculture. Farmers have been facing higher input costs, tighter margins, and growing uncertainty since 2021. They need predictability, risk management tools, and a strong farm safety net. Completing a farm bill that reflects the realities on the ground is vitally important, and I will continue pushing for a fiscally conservative, 5-year farm bill that reflects the priorities of our producers who feed, fuel, and clothe the world.

While real wages are rising and inflation is nearing a 5-year low, there is more to be done to lower costs for families and small businesses. Washington regulations often hit Americans hardest in rural communities like the ones I represent. Commonsense regulatory relief is not about cutting corners. It is about letting people work, grow, and innovate without unnecessary government interference.

Energy is another area where House Republicans are working hard for the good of our Nation. Kansans support an all-of-the-above energy strategy that prioritizes American oil, gas, biofuels, and renewables. This approach supports good-paying jobs, strengthens our economy, and keeps prices affordable. Green New Deal policies that pick winners and losers or ignore rural realities do not work in places like the Big First of Kansas, and this Congress has a responsibility to pursue solutions grounded in reality, not ideology.

Finally, Congress needs to ensure that we continue good stewardship of hard-earned taxpayer dollars. Families in Kansas must make tough choices every day, and they expect their government to do the same. Last year, we rescinded \$9.4 billion in waste, fraud, and abuse found in Federal programs, such as funding for Iraqi "Sesame Street," electric buses in Rwanda, and LGBTQ programs in Uganda. Fiscal responsibility is not optional. It is a basic obligation that House Republicans are focused on each and every day in the 119th Congress.

Mr. Speaker, the second session of this Congress is not about starting

over. It is about following through. Kansans sent me here to stay focused on results, not political noise. I will continue working to make sure this body delivers real outcomes for the Big First District of Kansas and keeps its promises to the people whom we serve.

PUTTING AMERICANS FIRST

(Mr. COSTA of California was recognized to address the House for 5 minutes.)

Mr. COSTA. Mr. Speaker, first, I would like to say thank you to STENY HOYER for an incredible career and for being a role model and my friend. He is always a class act.

I also rise today to speak for the families who are forced to choose between groceries, rent, and healthcare because prices keep climbing. Affordability is equal to economic stability. Let me repeat that: Affordability is equal to economic stability. Americans are struggling to pay for groceries, rent, gas, and healthcare. They are drowning under rising costs while promises to lower the cost of living have remained unfulfilled by this administration.

On day one, President Trump said he would put America first and lower costs. Instead, he pardoned violent insurrectionists, a mob that attacked this Capitol to overthrow a fair and free election. It was an attack that resulted in the deaths of five law enforcement officers.

We were promised America First, but what we are seeing is that a majority of Americans, who have been polled on whether we are headed on the right track or the wrong track, believe that we are on the wrong track.

This administration has prioritized costly foreign entanglements without transparency or congressional approval while working families pay the price at home.

Instead of protecting the economic well-being of Americans, we are seeing the following: Tariff policies are increasing the costs of essential goods. My farmers are struggling, as well as American consumers. Healthcare costs are skyrocketing for millions. Critical programs that help families stay afloat are under attack. The cuts in Medicaid and the Affordable Care Act, as well as SNAP and other programs, are taking their toll.

Take healthcare as an example. The enhanced premium tax cuts that help millions afford coverage are now expired. In California, new enrollments are down 31 percent last year, and nearly 190,000 families have canceled coverage because it is no longer affordable. Middle-class Americans who are earning more than \$62,000 are no longer eligible for the Federal premium tax credits, doubling cancellations from 8 percent to 16 percent.

Californians are switching to bronze plans to save on premiums, but these plans carry higher deductibles. For pregnancy care or cancer care treatment, costs can more than double compared to silver plans.

In my district, over 65,000 families risk losing Medicaid, and another 22,000 families will face higher premiums and out-of-pocket costs. Nationwide, nearly 100,000 American families could lose their coverage each year if Congress fails to act.

Last year, Republicans passed a partisan bill that failed to renew the essential premium tax credits, forcing millions of Americans to pay higher costs this year, even though a bipartisan solution is at hand. Families, therefore, unfortunately, are left waiting.

Americans are also struggling with the rising costs of energy, transportation, and other critical services. What we need are bipartisan solutions that create jobs, lower costs, and increase enhanced premium tax credits so millions of American families can afford their healthcare.

What we need is bipartisan legislation such as my bipartisan Rural Homeownership Continuity Act that will reduce financing costs and bipartisan legislation on permitting reform to get infrastructure like energy, transportation, and housing projects more quickly approved for working families.

Mr. Speaker, we need bipartisan solutions, and they are clear. Congress must act now to ease costs, expand access to healthcare, and invest in the future of our communities throughout the country.

The cost of living is not a partisan issue. It is not. It is a matter of fairness, security, and justice. From groceries to gas and from rent to healthcare, Americans cannot afford to wait any longer.

Mr. Speaker, it is time that we get together. It is time for Congress to act in a bipartisan effort to renew the sense of Congress as the people's House that we can work together. It is time, Mr. Speaker, for Congress to act. America's people, American citizens, and our constituents must come first.

HONORING THE LIFE AND SERVICE OF CARL J. STEWART, JR.

(Mr. MOORE of North Carolina was recognized to address the House for 5 minutes.)

Mr. MOORE of North Carolina. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to honor the life and service of Carl J. Stewart, Jr., a proud son of Gaston County, North Carolina, and a former speaker of the North Carolina House of Representatives, who passed away on December 23 at the age of 89.

Carl grew up in a working-class family as the son of two Firestone Mill employees. He earned a scholarship that helped him attend Duke University and Duke University Law School. He then went on to serve in the North Carolina House for 13 years and made history as the first speaker elected to serve two consecutive terms.

□ 1115

Throughout his life, Carl was a very well-respected attorney in our area

with an absolutely great law practice. He combined his legal work with public service, along with serving in the legislature. He held leadership roles on the North Carolina Board of Transportation, the North Carolina Economic Development Board, the North Carolina Ports Authority, as well as the North Carolina Ethics Commission.

His legacy lives on in the infrastructure and educational access that he helped build, especially at Gaston College. For six decades, Carl Stewart served the community college, first as a business law instructor, then as legal counsel, forming a partnership with college presidents and board members rooted in innovation, integrity, and unwavering commitment to student success. In every role, he focused on building a stronger North Carolina, and he really put in so much time to improve the lives of folks in Gaston County. Whether it was education or other things, you name it, he was always there.

I will tell you one thing about Carl. He never lost sight of where he came from, and he spent his life helping. I got to know Carl even before I was speaker of our statehouse, and I can tell you, he was a great mentor. He was somebody who loved nurturing folks who were coming up in public service and getting involved and folks who really wanted to try to make our State a better place. I am going to tell you, North Carolina is a better place because of Carl Stewart's work and his example.

I join our community in mourning this tremendous loss. I ask that you keep his family in your thoughts and prayers in appreciation for all that he has done for so many in our great State.

HONORING LIFE AND SERVICE OF OFFICER
MICHAEL MILES

Mr. MOORE of North Carolina. Mr. Speaker, today I rise to honor the life and service of Officer Michael Miles, who passed away unexpectedly earlier this week.

He was a proud marine, a loving father, and a dedicated police officer serving the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Police Department for more than 13 years. He spent much of that time protecting and mentoring others in the Freedom Division.

Before wearing the badge, he wore the uniform of the United States Marine Corps and served his country with honor. That same spirit of service guided him every day on the job and at home.

His sudden passing is a heartbreaking loss for his loved ones, his fellow officers, and our entire community. Officer Miles leaves behind his partner, Hannah, and four children. I ask my colleagues to join me in lifting up his family in prayer.

ACA TAX CREDITS EXTENSION

(Ms. PRESSLEY of Massachusetts was recognized to address the House for 5 minutes.)