

All of this was inside a warehouse located near residential areas. It was not a licensed facility. It was operating in the shadows without proper licensing or permits. Why? Ostensibly, the reason was to develop medical kits for COVID testing and for pregnancy testing. Clearly, that was not the case.

Local authorities initially lacked the clear tools and resources to determine what hazards they were dealing with or how to safely respond. The situation placed local law enforcement officers, code enforcement staff, and nearby residents at serious risk.

It required coordination of local, State, and Federal agencies to fully assess the threat and dismantle this operation. It was slow in coming.

Now, over the weekend, some of my colleagues have probably noted a national story in Las Vegas, where there was the report of a discovery of a new lab and that materials were under investigation related to the illegal biolab that was created in 2023 in Reedley, California. This does not surprise me.

We cannot assume that communities across the country are immune from similar risks. Many jurisdictions simply do not have the expertise or Federal support needed to quickly identify and respond to unauthorized biological operations. That is why I have introduced legislation based upon committee recommendations.

This is bipartisan legislation aimed at strengthening Federal coordination, improving oversight, and helping close regulatory blind spots that have allowed unauthorized facilities to operate undetected. We hope this will ensure local communities have the access and the resources necessary when a biological threat emerges.

Too often, local officials are asking: Who do we call? Who has the authority? Who has the expertise? Our legislation helps answer those questions before another emergency unfolds.

Mr. Speaker, first responders should not have to walk into an unknown biological environment without clear Federal support. Parents should not have to worry about hazardous material being stored in facilities next door to schools and residential areas. Communities deserve transparency and safeguards, whether the incident occurs in California, Nevada, or anywhere else in the country.

It is important that we protect our constituents from a larger crisis. The legislation would strengthen oversight, coordination, and response mechanisms that can prevent confusion and reduce the risks.

I urge Members on both sides of the aisle to review these two pieces of legislation and to become cosponsors. Together, we can ensure that Federal agencies, State authorities, and local communities are better equipped to address these unauthorized biological operations that would prevent threats in their areas. The public demands that we provide preparedness, and preparedness demands action.

Let me also thank local officials that acted responsibly when it was first determined they had a problem. They include Code Officer Jesalyn Harper from the city of Reedley, City Manager Nicole Zieba; mayor of the city, Mayor Tuttle, of the city council; and Supervisor Nathan Magsig. All of these individuals worked together with our office to, in fact, act on the situation in Reedley, California.

Mr. Speaker, I urge that we act on this legislation so that people around the country can feel safe from any kind of illegal biological labs that may crop up in their communities. Together, we can close these gaps, support the communities, and keep our constituents safe.

HAPPY 90TH BIRTHDAY TO BETH RAGLAND

(Mr. BACON of Nebraska was recognized to address the House for 5 minutes.)

Mr. BACON. Mr. Speaker, I rise to recognize Beth Ragland, who I call my honorary mother, a remarkable Nebraskan who is celebrating her 90th birthday this week.

Beth represents the spirit of our district. After the passing of her husband, Ken, she chose not to slow down but to keep moving forward with a purpose. She returned to the classroom, pursued her long-held interest in law, and earned a degree with a perfect 4.0 grade point average.

She went on to serve as an intern at the Sarpy County Courthouse, where her curiosity and work ethic stood out immediately. I know firsthand that the county attorney from Sarpy, Lee Polikov, values her hard work and support.

Beth is an inspiration to her fellow students. She reminded them, and all of us, that learning, service, and ambition never end at any stage of life.

Her unyielding spirit inspires us all to work hard for whatever we desire. Her generosity, resilience, Christian spirit, and joy for learning continue to uplift everyone around her.

On behalf of Nebraska's Second District, I wish Beth Ragland a very happy 90th birthday and thank her for being such a powerful example of perseverance and purpose and for being my friend.

CELEBRATING BLACK HISTORY MONTH

Mr. BACON. Mr. Speaker, in recognition of Black History Month, I rise today to honor two community leaders and two outstanding youth for their contributions to the Second Congressional District of Nebraska.

Brenda Council has been described as a pure force, a trailblazer, a fighter, and a leader who has paved the way for so many in Omaha. As a prominent politician and community leader from North Omaha, she has established a historic career marked by several firsts for African-American women in Nebraska.

She was the first African-American woman to serve on the Omaha City

Council and president of the Omaha School Board and first to serve in the Nebraska Unicameral. She served on the Omaha Board of Education for 11 years and is president of the National Caucus of Black School Board Members and State senator for the 11th legislative district.

Council has held leadership roles in many organizations such as the Urban League of Nebraska, North Omaha Community Care Council, and United Way of the Midlands.

Ms. Council has been married to her husband for 40 years. Together, they have one son and five grandchildren.

Fred Conley is a pioneering figure in Nebraska politics, recognized as the first African American elected to the Omaha City Council. His career, spanning over 50 years, is defined by breaking racial barriers and advocating for the revitalization of North Omaha.

Raised in Omaha, Mr. Conley is a veteran of the U.S. Air Force. His political career was born from community activism, specifically the right for district-based voting. Prior to the city's removal from at-large elections, a system that historically marginalized Black candidates, Conley ran for the city council twice.

Following the transition to district elections in 1981, Mr. Conley was elected to represent North Omaha and dedicated his efforts toward infrastructure and economic development. His leadership was recognized by his peers who elected him city council president. In 1988, Mr. Conley served as Omaha's first African-American acting mayor.

Mr. Conley's legacy includes the enforcement of fair housing laws and the physical reclamation of community landmarks. He was instrumental in their naming of the Malcolm X Park and supporting the Martin Luther King, Jr., Memorial.

His continued civic work through service on the Papio-Missouri River Natural Resources District Board, and as a founding member of 100 Black Men of Omaha leave a great mark in our city.

Mr. Conley and his wife, Teresa, have three children and have resided in the same North Omaha district they have dedicated themselves to for over 40 years.

Earsul Banks IV exemplifies resilience, resilience in the face of adversity. Despite significant academic disruptions caused by a chronic battle with sickle cell disease, Banks utilized mentorship from 100 Black Men of Omaha to regain his academic standing. He is a dedicated member of the chorus, drill team, and marching band. Mr. Banks is an unstoppable force who transformed health challenges into an opportunity for personal and academic growth.

Mara Johnson Anthony is a high-achieving high school student who maintains a 4.0 GPA with AP courses. She balances academic rigor with leadership in volleyball, the art club, and the Girls Inc. Eureka! program.

Her extensive history of community service includes the Open Door Mission and organizing gift drives for overseas troops and local seniors. Ms. Anthony is known for her compassionate leadership and is a role model for her peers.

Mr. Speaker, I greatly admire these leaders in the Second District of Nebraska. They make our district better and our community better.

NORFOLK SOUTHERN TRAIN DERAILMENT

(Mrs. SYKES of Ohio was recognized to address the House for 5 minutes.)

Mrs. SYKES. Mr. Speaker, this week marks 3 years since a Norfolk Southern train derailed in East Palestine, Ohio. Mr. Speaker, it has been 3 years since toxic chemicals burned in the sky, families were forced from their homes, and a small town became a warning sign for what happens when corporate negligence meets congressional inaction.

For the people of East Palestine, this anniversary is not symbolic. It is personal, and it is ongoing. It is a constant reminder of a Congress who continues to put profits and corporations over people.

From the very beginning, I have shown up for this community. I don't represent East Palestine, Ohio, but within weeks of the derailment, I traveled there. I met with residents. I pressed FEMA, the EPA, the CDC, Health and Human Services, and the Department of Transportation for answers and resources.

I helped secure an EPA order, forcing Norfolk Southern, not taxpayers, to pay for the cleanup and remediation. When families were told that they may be taxed on disaster relief, I fought to change the law and succeeded. In 2024, President Joe Biden signed the East Palestine Tax Relief Act. That is what accountability looks like. That is what results look like.

Mr. Speaker, 3 years later, the most important question remains unanswered. What has Congress done to prevent this from ever happening again to East Palestine or any other American city? The answer is not enough.

That is why this week I am introducing the Railroad Safety and Accountability Act to protect labor and public interest voices in rail safety decisions, voices that Federal regulators have tried to push aside.

That is why I have continued fighting for passage of the bipartisan RAIL Act led by Democrats and Republicans representing Ohio. It is one of the most comprehensive rail safety proposals before Congress.

The bill would require two-person train crews and increased inspections, especially for trains carrying hazardous materials. It would strengthen emergency notification so first responders are not left in the dark. It would raise penalties for safety violations and address the exact equipment failures that caused the East Palestine derailment.

The RAIL Act is supported by rail workers, local governments, and a bipartisan group of lawmakers, Democrats and Republicans in and out of Ohio. Yet, for two consecutive Congresses, House Republican leadership has refused to even give the bill a hearing. That is not gridlock. That is a decision and a terrible one at that. It is a decision to put profits over people.

Since the derailment, President Trump, Vice President VANCE, members of the Cabinet, and Ohio Republicans have all visited East Palestine, held press conferences, and promised action.

Here is the reality. Mr. Speaker, 3 years later, this Republicans House has not passed a single rail safety law to prevent another East Palestine. It is not even that. It is not just that the law has not passed. There hasn't even been a hearing.

On February 3, 2025, Transportation Secretary Sean Duffy made the following statement: "In partnership with the Trump-Vance administration and Congress, USDOT will work to advance rail safety. As President Trump has pledged, we will ensure that people of East Palestine are not forgotten, and we will use every resource to prevent other communities from enduring what they experienced."

During a Transportation and Infrastructure hearing last year, I asked Secretary Duffy directly what concrete steps were being taken to stop another derailment like this one. I asked him directly and specifically had he worked with the chair of the committee to move forward any legislation. His answer was no. Further, he said he talked about it on Fox News before anyone else.

Here is a news flash for Secretary Duffy and House Republicans. Talking on television does not make trains safer. Talking on television does not make our communities safer. Talking on television does not do what East Palestinian residents have asked us to do for over 3 years. Press conferences do not replace legislation, and communities cannot rebuild on empty words.

Meanwhile, large corporations continue to resist stronger national safety rules and real accountability, while pursuing massive corporate expansion and relying on congressional inaction to protect its bottom line.

Monitoring the damage after a disaster matters, but monitoring alone is not prevention. Studying the aftermath is not the same as fixing the cause.

Mr. Speaker, the contrast is clear. I have legislated. I have shown up. I have questioned those in power and refused to let East Palestine be forgotten.

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Others have toured the site, issued statements, and moved on, while blocking the very reforms that would keep another town from becoming another headline in a disaster.

Mr. Speaker, 3 years later, East Palestine has heard plenty of promises and

many pledges, but Congress and the administration have not delivered the safety laws to stop the next disaster.

Mr. Speaker, East Palestine deserves action. America deserves action. We deserve accountability. We deserve a Congress that puts people over profits, and I will keep fighting until that happens.

NATIONAL OVERSIGHT FOR BIOLOGICAL LABS

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

Mr. KILEY of California. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to call for Congress to act with urgency to address the alarming news that we have just heard from Las Vegas of the discovery of yet another illegal, dangerous biolab run by Chinese nationals.

In 2023, when the secret lab in Reedley, California, came to light, thanks to the tremendous efforts of local officials there, I gave several speeches on this floor calling attention to the danger that this posed to all Americans. I noted that we don't know how many similar such labs might be out there.

After I requested an investigation, the House Select Committee on the Chinese Communist Party reached a similar conclusion that we don't know what other such labs might be out there.

Unfortunately, it turned out to be true that we had reason for concern because the lab that was just discovered in Las Vegas is run by the same individuals under the same sham LLC as the one that was uncovered in Reedley.

What is more, officials there described materials and equipment that are consistent with the operation that was going on in Reedley: commercial-grade freezers and refrigerators, equipment for processing biological materials, and thousands of vials which are now under examination by the FBI.

In Reedley, the pathogens that were discovered included E. coli, Ebola, malaria, HIV, and tuberculosis. We have every reason to believe that these same dangerous pathogens have been found in this latest Las Vegas lab.

Mr. Speaker, the question still remains: How many other such labs are out there?

As my colleague from Fresno, Mr. COSTA, just said on this floor, many local communities simply don't have the ability to uncover these things on their own. That is why we need a national framework. We need national resources. We need more national oversight, and that is precisely what my bipartisan bill, authored together with Mr. COSTA, will do.

Mr. Speaker, I am calling today for an immediate markup of this legislation so that we can get it passed through the House and signed into law in order to protect our communities.

CALIFORNIA HIGH-SPEED RAIL UPDATE

Mr. KILEY of California. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to provide a brief update on the California high-speed rail,