

think, will remember in this moment whether this body decided to make America more competitive or more brittle. It will remember whether we chose the future when the future was still a choice.

That is what the Energy Bills Relief Act is designed to do. It is about families first. It is about consumers. It is about fair markets. It is about building. It is about winning.

Mr. Speaker, I hope we don't argue too much about yesterday, and I hope we focus instead on building tomorrow.

Mr. CASTEN. Mr. Speaker, I thank Mr. LEVIN for his remarks.

As we prepare to close, I want to talk a little bit about how the Energy Bills Relief Act fits into the broader conversation we are having about energy permitting right now.

To do this, I want to ask you to consider that you saw someone on TV who said the reason we don't have a lot of houses in America is because of the permitting barriers to building houses out of straw. You would probably have two thoughts. The first is, who the heck wants to build a house out of straw? The second thought you might have is what little pig is behind this advocacy campaign.

I tell you that because you have to look at what is happening in the energy sector right now, among those in the fossil fuel industry who are telling you that the permitting problem we have is a difficulty deploying fossil fuel assets.

Let's look at some numbers. In the year 2010, the United States consumed 1.1 billion short tons per year of coal. Today, we consume about 500 million. That is a more than 50 percent drop in the amount of coal our country is consuming.

In the year 2000, the United States consumed about 20 million barrels of oil per day. Today, we consume about 20 million barrels of oil per day.

We drive more miles and have more people, yet we are consuming the same amount of oil. Our houses are just as well-lit, just as warm, yet we are consuming half as much coal.

How did we get to that point? The reason we got to that point is because vehicles got more efficient. Given the choice between driving a car that costs you \$40 to fill up and one that costs \$20, people prefer \$20. If the choice is \$100 versus \$50, people prefer \$50. Heck, if you have an electric vehicle, you don't have to pay at all, especially if you have a solar panel on your roof. People like not paying for energy.

The other way that that happened is that the fastest growing source of new energy in this country has been renewable energy. We now generate more power from non-hydro renewables than we do from all the coal plants in the country.

That is not because we got woke. It is because we got greedy. It is because markets said they want to build the cheap stuff, and consumers wanted to benefit from that cheap stuff.

Now, step back and say, okay, what do you do if you are a fossil fuel company that is selling something that is losing market share? There is a new technology coming out that is eating into your customer base. You can't sell as much.

They have done two things. Number one, they have shifted to exports. In 2016, the United States basically didn't export any natural gas at all. By 2021, we were exporting 300,000 million cubic feet per year. Today, we are over 500,000 million cubic feet per year. It is as if we invented cell phones and then decided to double down on exporting rotary phone technology to the rest of the world. We are still producing a lot of oil in the United States, but oil is increasingly also an export play.

If there is a permitting problem that is blocking our ability to produce and distribute oil and gas, how is it that it is so easy to get it down to the Gulf Coast and ship it out to overseas? The truth is, it ain't that hard.

The reason why we are having this conversation about permitting is really, really simple. Half of the businesses in this country, by definition, are below average. A competitive market does not reward below-average businesses. Now, we find ourselves in a position where energy industry participants that historically made sure that we kept our lights on, made sure that our cars could drive, and made sure that our homes were warm built the economy that we have, and we are grateful to them. They are now losing market share, and instead of pivoting to providing people with the technologies they want, they are, number one, shifting to exports to try to go places that are not blessed with the kind of competitive capitalistic markets that we have in the United States; and, number two, they are doing everything they can to ask people in this body to please prevent capitalism from eating my lunch because I cannot compete in a competitive market. That is what is going on.

The reason why we are spending this time talking so much about costs and energy is because we have this amazing opportunity right now that we can have our cake and eat it, too.

When we embrace clean energy, we are embracing affordable energy. When we embrace consumers, we are embracing competition. To turn against those is to turn against capitalism. It is to turn against everything that ever truly made America great. It is to turn against the things that have kept up.

Then you ask how much farther we could go. I will give you some crazy statistics. The United States' total GDP divided by the total amount of energy that the United States uses, we generate about \$200 of GDP per million Btu of primary energy.

The United Kingdom generates almost 350 million Btu, almost twice as much as we generate. The Danes generate over 500. Their economies are vastly more efficient at turning energy

into wealth than the United States is—vastly more, like twice as efficient.

Imagine if we were so bad at turning labor into wealth as our competitors. We would be having a crisis about why American labor is so uncompetitive. Imagine if you were running a business that did a terrible job at turning capital into wealth, and we were earning terrible returns on investment in the United States economy. We would be having a crisis.

We should be having a crisis about the fact that we have done such a horrible job at turning energy into economic activity. We can be depressed about that, or we can be enormously optimistic at the opportunity we have in front of us.

We don't have a lot of time to prevent massive ecological disaster from climate change, but we do have a way to move forward to avert that crisis and make us stupidly rich. My God, let's move forward.

Mr. Speaker, thank you for allowing us the time. I thank Congressman LEVIN, Congresswoman KAPTUR, and Congressman SUBRAMANYAM. For goodness' sake, let's move forward. I yield back the balance of my time.

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. HARIDOPOLOS). The Chair reminds Members not to refer to persons in the gallery.

ADJOURNMENT FROM WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 25, 2026, TO THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 26, 2026; ADJOURNMENT FROM THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 26, 2026, TO MONDAY, MARCH 2, 2026; AND ADJOURNMENT FROM MONDAY, MARCH 2, 2026, TO TUESDAY, MARCH 3, 2026

Mr. KILEY of California. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that when the House adjourns today, it adjourn to meet at 9:30 a.m. tomorrow; that when the House adjourns on that day, it adjourn to meet at 9 a.m. on Monday, March 2, 2026; and when the House adjourns on that day, it adjourn to meet at noon on Tuesday, March 3, 2026, for morning-hour debate and 2 p.m. for legislative business.

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

There was no objection.

PRICES IN CALIFORNIA ARE TOO HIGH

(Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 3, 2025, Mr. KILEY of California was recognized for 30 minutes.)

Mr. KILEY of California. Mr. Speaker, over the last month, gas prices in California have risen by about 40 cents. This is very different from what is going on elsewhere in the country.

In fact, right now, gas prices in California average \$4.63 where the national average is \$2.97. California's gas prices are by far the highest in the country.

They are 23 cents higher than the next highest State, Hawaii, which, of course, is an island State.

Lest you think this is strictly a matter of red States versus blue States or Democrat versus Republican policies, take a look at what folks not far from here in Maryland are paying for gas.

In Maryland, the State average is actually \$2.98, \$1.65 cents cheaper than in California. Here are examples of a gas station in California and a gas station in Maryland.

Now, Maryland is actually a bluer State than California is, and so the reason our citizens in California have to pay so much is because of the uniquely bad policies that we have in California, such as the highest in the Nation gas tax, the so-called cap-and-trade program, and regulations around the fuel mix that make it incredibly difficult to source.

All of this has caused two refineries to now leave our State, which is going to spike gas prices even more. Indeed, it has recently been reported that California is now importing gasoline from The Bahamas, in addition to many other places overseas. By the way, this gasoline comes in on tankers that run on petroleum. The policies of California's politicians have somehow given us the Nation's most expensive gas and its most environmentally unfriendly gas.

Mr. Speaker, on top of all of that, while all of these taxes are supposed to be going toward our roads, we are routinely rated as having among the very worst roads in the entire country. This is the extraordinary price that Californians pay for political failure.

Mr. Speaker, to try to provide at least some relief, I have introduced the Gas Tax Reduction Act here in the House, which would place a national cap on how much a State can tax its own citizens for gasoline. This would save Californians at least 21 cents a gallon right off the bat.

Unsurprisingly, the Governor of California, Gavin Newsom, has come out against it. I am hopeful that we can get bipartisan support for this common-sense, much-needed proposition in this House, get Californians a modicum of relief, and ultimately change the disastrous policies that have produced this reality for our citizens.

SERIAL CHILD MOLESTER RELEASED EARLY IN CALIFORNIA

Mr. KILEY of California. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to share the alarming news that in California a serial child molester by the name of David Funston has been granted early release.

The parole board has granted parole to Mr. Funston, a serial child molester, who, according to the Sacramento County Sheriff's Office, used candy and toys to lure children 7 years old and younger. He was convicted of 16 counts of kidnapping and child molestation. According to the sheriff, multiple young children were victimized, some as young as 4 years old.

He was sentenced to more than 20 years in prison, along with three addi-

tional consecutive sentences of 25 years to life, with the judge describing him as "the monster parents fear the most." Yet the parole board has now released him or has recommended his release pursuant to a program known as the Elderly Parole Program that grants eligibility of parole to individuals over the age of 50.

Now, when this program was expanded to include anyone over 50, even for these most heinous and vile of crimes, I was a member of the legislature and voted against it. It, in fact, received broad bipartisan opposition, yet Governor Gavin Newsom nevertheless signed that bill into law, putting many Californians and many young Californians at risk.

Mr. Speaker, this is the outrageous consequence of reckless criminal laws in California that have removed consequences for criminal activity and provided for the early release of tens of thousands of serious, hardened criminals.

We have made some progress in California through a voter initiative to make crime illegal again, passed overwhelmingly by California voters in 2024, but we have a long way to go to reverse the reckless laws that remain on the books and protect Californians from the most heinous of offenders.

COST OF LIVING

Mr. KILEY of California. Mr. Speaker, it is undeniably true that many Americans continue to struggle with the cost of living in this country, but what is also true is that those struggles are not felt uniformly throughout the country, that prices are much higher in certain places than others.

In my own State of California, we have the highest cost of living in the country and our Governor, Gavin Newsom, was asked about this recently on CNN. Why does California have the highest cost of living in the country?

The Governor had no answer, but the answer is obvious. It is the State's failed policies that have—through this laboratory of democracy experiment we have in this country where you can compare the results of different policies side by side, State by State—driven up the price of just about everything in California.

We have the highest gas prices in the country, the highest electricity prices in the country, the second or third highest water bills in the country, the second or third highest grocery prices in the country, the highest taxes in the country, and the highest housing costs in all of the continental United States.

The list goes on, which is why when you look at the Census Bureau's measure of the real poverty rate, which accounts for the cost of living, California has the highest poverty rate in the entire country. By the way, we also have the highest unemployment rate and among the lowest rates of wage growth, so not only are our residents forced to pay the highest prices but they are experiencing the smallest boost in their earning capacity and paychecks.

Now, the policies that have created this unfortunate reality are not difficult to identify. California taxes its citizens more than any State. It regulates its businesses more than any State. It has the worst litigation environment of any State. It has the most onerous regulations on gas, electricity and energy. It has failed to build adequate water storage in many decades, although we are, thankfully, changing that. It places tremendous restrictions and frivolous litigation on building housing and imposes fees that make it cost tens of thousands of dollars before you even break ground, which is why Gavin Newsom claimed he was going to build 3.5 million new homes when he came into office and has produced less than 20 percent of that number.

Mr. Speaker, there is a lesson to be learned here. When we talk about an affordability agenda that we can pursue here in the House to lower costs and improve the quality of life for folks all across the country, it is to do the opposite of what States like California have done. It is to do the opposite of overregulating each and every sector.

Instead, we should look to unleash the extraordinary capacity of the people of this country to build, to start businesses, to build housing, to remove the barriers, to be on the side of those who are creating and making life and providing more opportunities to folks all across this country.

We passed some measures that are important steps in that direction, but we certainly have more to do. We should bear in mind the example of California as we move forward with that agenda and seek to raise the quality of life for folks across the country.

□ 1250

NO PATH FORWARD FOR CALIFORNIA HIGH-SPEED RAIL

Mr. KILEY of California. Mr. Speaker, the CEO of the California High-Speed Rail Authority was recently arrested and placed on leave, so the Rail Authority is now on its sixth CEO. That means there have been six more CEOs than there have been passengers because, of course, there haven't been any passengers, despite spending \$17 million over 17 years. There has been no track laid.

Nevertheless, the Governor recently, with quite a bit of hoopla, held an event in Kern County to celebrate the fact that a single railhead has now been completed. The Governor that crowed they are now entering the track-laying phase, whatever that might mean.

Mr. Speaker, it is time for the Governor to acknowledge what the U.S. Department of Transportation did in a recent compliance review. This project has no viable path forward.

Thankfully, in the House of Representatives, following a bill I introduced to this effect, there was a bipartisan vote to cut off all further Federal funding for high-speed rail. There is no

viable path forward for the project. I do believe when we have a new Governor in the State, the project will finally be wound down.

Taxpayers also deserve answers on where all of this money has gone. Curiously, as we are seeing new scrutiny to answer that question as to where the money is going, the Governor is pushing a bill in the legislature to keep records of the project secret and to create new exceptions to our public records laws that specifically apply to high-speed rail. That raises the question: I wonder what he doesn't want the public to see.

Mr. Speaker, I will continue to fight to assure that our share of Federal tax dollars goes toward projects like our roads that will actually benefit Californians, now that we have cut off funding for high-speed rail, and in encouraging leadership at the State level to wind this project down immediately so we don't continue to throw good money after bad.

AUDIT OF NEXT GENERATION 911 SYSTEM

Mr. KILEY of California. Mr. Speaker, I am grateful to hear that there is going to be an investigation, an audit, of the so-called Next Generation 911 system in California by the non-partisan State auditor. At least this is being requested.

For several years, since 2019, Californians were charged extra fees on their phone bills. This was to build a Next Generation 911 system. The fees were paid by the taxpayers, and they went into a pot of money to build out this system. The Newsom administration ultimately spent \$450 million building this new 911 system, which is needed. Our system is outdated in California.

Yet the Newsom administration has just announced it is scrapping the entire project because the technology doesn't work. How does that happen, Mr. Speaker? This is California, by the way. Silicon Valley is a stone's throw away from the Governor's office. How do we charge Californians fees for years on their phone bills, spend \$450 million, and get absolutely nothing for it because the technology doesn't work?

Now our taxpayers have lost that money, and we still don't have an upgraded 911 system. We are looking at ways we can bring some scrutiny at the Federal level, as well; but we need to get answers why, once again, Californians have been forced to sacrifice and gotten absolutely nothing in return.

WEALTH TAX CAUSING CALIFORNIA'S MASS EXODUS

Mr. KILEY of California. Mr. Speaker, the so-called wealth tax being proposed in California has now caused individuals worth a combined \$1 trillion, by some estimates, to leave the State. The latest are Mark Zuckerberg and Steven Spielberg. Others include Larry Ellison and the founders of Google, Larry Page and Sergey Brin, among many others.

The wealth tax would confiscate 5 percent of an individual's net worth if they are worth more than \$1 billion.

What is worse is it would actually go after people who have already left the State if they had been in California within a year of the measure's enactment.

That is why you are seeing this exodus simply based on the wealth tax being proposed. If you stick around too long before it goes into effect, if you miss the deadline, then they will come after you and seize your assets wherever you might be. I could not think of a more self-defeating proposition.

Let's start with the fact that a lot of individuals with a high net worth don't necessarily have 5 percent of their assets that are liquid. They will be forced to unwind their companies. When they are leaving the State, they are taking their businesses and investments with them. They are taking their income taxes with them.

That is why any country that has tried any such wealth tax has actually repealed it because it has had the opposite of the intended effect.

I have introduced the Keep Jobs in California Act to preempt the most blatantly unconstitutional provision of this measure, the one that would tax former residents. My measure simply says that a State cannot seize the assets of former residents.

Mr. Speaker, this is a straightforward proposition. If this goes into effect, then it will stop this mass exodus because people will not need to leave California simply based on the threat that this could eventually go into effect.

SHUTTING DOWN ILLEGAL BIOLABS

Mr. KILEY of California. Mr. Speaker, I have joined with several of my colleagues, including the cosponsor of legislation I have introduced, Representative COSTA, in calling for immediate consideration of our bill to find, detect, and shut down illegal biolabs operating throughout the United States.

A couple of weeks ago, a second illegal biolab run by Chinese nationals was discovered in Las Vegas. This follows the lab that was found in Reedley, California, a couple of years ago. It was run by the same international fugitive with ties to the Chinese Communist Party.

While the samples are being tested now, it looks very similar to what was found in Reedley, where some of the world's most dangerous pathogens were being held, pathogens like E. coli, like malaria, like HIV, like COVID, like AIDS in this facility that no one knew was even there. They also had genetically modified transgenic mice in this facility in Reedley.

By the way, they had a freezer that was labeled "Ebola" at that Reedley facility. It should be noted that Ebola has a 50 percent fatality rate—a 50 percent fatality rate. While it is not especially transmissible, we know based upon our experience with COVID that in the Wuhan lab, they conduct gain-of-function research.

Imagine if they produced a strain of Ebola with its 50 percent fatality rate but at a higher level of trans-

missibility. I could not think of a more jarring threat to public health in the United States.

Mr. Speaker, the U.S. Congress needs to act with urgency in considering and passing this legislation that we have introduced. After the first lab was discovered, I said that we don't know how many others are out there. That concern was echoed by a report by the House Select Committee on the Chinese Communist Party.

We now know that at least one other lab was out there. The question still remains: How many others are there? We need to get answers to that very quickly, and we need to make sure we are doing everything we possibly can to find and shut down any other labs that are indeed out there.

CONGRATULATING PRIDE INDUSTRIES' 60 YEARS OF SERVICE

Mr. KILEY of California. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to congratulate and recognize PRIDE Industries on reaching their 60-year anniversary milestone.

In 1966, PRIDE Industries was founded in the basement of a church in Auburn, California, by a group of parents of young adults with developmental disabilities. These parents shared a simple, yet powerful, goal: To ensure their grown children had purpose and the opportunity to participate in the workforce.

Now, 60 years later, still based in Placer County, they are the leading employer in the Nation of people with disabilities. PRIDE has operations that span across 15 different States, as well as here in Washington, D.C.

Throughout the past six decades, PRIDE Industries has remained committed to making direct investments in breaking down barriers to employment, strengthening our local workforce, driving economic growth, and delivering a lasting and meaningful social impact.

It is an honor to represent exemplary organizations like Pride Industries in Congress. As such, I commend Pride Industries for their ongoing dedication to helping people with disabilities to realize their full potential and maximize their participation in the workforce.

Therefore, on behalf of the United States House of Representatives, I join Pride Industries in celebrating 60 years of service, and I look forward to seeing all that they will continue to accomplish in the years to come.

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

□ 1300

PEACEFUL, SILENT PROTEST

(Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 3, 2025, Mr. GREEN of Texas was recognized for 30 minutes.)

Mr. GREEN of Texas. Mr. Speaker, and still I rise, and I rise, Mr. Speaker, a liberated, unbought, unbossed, fearless, unafraid Democrat.

I rise, Mr. Speaker, with a special message, one that concerns events that