

my grandmother still drives a car, shops at the grocery store, and attends a weekly exercise class with her friends.

I am my grandmother's only grandchild, which is notable because she will forever have a perfect record of having her grandchildren elected to Congress.

Since her 95th birthday, we have celebrated her birthday in very special ways. This year, my grandmother is watching at home with family as we wish her, from the floor of the United States House of Representatives, a very happy 102nd birthday.

REMEMBERING THE 31ST ANNIVERSARY OF THE OKLAHOMA BOMBING

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

Mr. LUCAS. Mr. Speaker, I rise today in solemn remembrance of something that happened 31 years ago in Oklahoma City at the Federal building that we refer to as the Murrah Building when an act of unimaginable horror took place and the lives of 168 of our fellow Americans were taken in almost an instant.

That was one of those experiences that forever reshaped my community and my neighbors. It reshaped the country at the time, and that is what I and my colleagues rise this evening to discuss those 31 years ago and how our communities responded and where we went from there.

I was an 11-month Member of Congress at the time. My district office was 1½ blocks away from the Murrah Building, and the force and the magnitude of the explosion that day were so incredible that not only did it blow the interior out of the Murrah Building, leaving just a shell, but it also damaged buildings blocks away, literally creating chaos and confusion all over central Oklahoma City.

Sometimes, in the chaos of the modern world, we forget that we are Americans, we are Oklahomans, we are fellow human beings, and we rise to the occasion. That response, beginning almost instantly and covering hours, days, and weeks, reflected that Oklahoma standard, that Oklahoma way of doing things—but not just Oklahoma, our great Nation.

This evening for a little bit, we together will discuss the things that we have dealt with since then, things we observed in those moments, and how it made a real difference in the lives of the survivors and those who were so critically injured.

My friend, Congressman COLE, was Secretary of State in the State of Oklahoma, a central member of Governor Keating's cabinet. When the emergency response programs were activated, he was a part of the State's response to help local government in interacting with FEMA.

Mr. Speaker, I yield to the gentleman from Oklahoma (Mr. COLE).

Mr. COLE. Mr. Speaker, I thank my good friend from Oklahoma, my distinguished colleague and extraordinary leader in that moment, Mr. LUCAS, for yielding.

Like my friend, we don't need a lot of notes to talk about that day 31 years ago to the day yesterday. We remember what was the darkest day in Oklahoma history, the worst act of domestic terrorism ever performed on American soil.

My friend, Mr. LUCAS, as he said, was only 11 months in as a new Congressman representing that area, that district, and we are very lucky there was not a loss of life in his office, as close as they were to the disaster site. I had been in office less than 100 days working for our friend, Frank Keating.

I will never forget that day. I was walking into my office, and I could feel a little shudder. The capitol is about 2½ miles away from the disaster site. I sat down in my chair, and my secretary immediately walked into my office.

She said: Something terrible has happened in downtown Oklahoma City. Your wife—who was three blocks away working as a paralegal at the time—has just called and said that something terrible has happened. She is on the phone.

I got on the phone, and she described to me what she could see from the 18th floor of an office tower at a law firm three blocks away.

She said: I don't know what has occurred, but there has been a horrific explosion. There are hundreds of people in the street. People are screaming, and something awful has happened.

Immediately I walked upstairs to the Governor's office. Frank Keating was our new Governor at the time. He obviously had been in office less than 100 days, as well. If you walked into the Governor's office, Mr. Speaker, there is a press office immediately to your right. I looked to the right. I saw the Governor and his chief of staff, my good friend, Clinton Key.

They were watching the disaster as it unfolded because there were already helicopters flying over the disaster site, and one of the news commentators was speculating: Well, this was a natural gas explosion.

Frank Keating had been an FBI agent in the early part of his career as a law enforcement official and later an Associate Attorney General of the United States under President Reagan. He was looking at this. One of his first jobs as a young FBI officer in the 1960s had been to investigate acts of terrorism associated with the Vietnam war on the West Coast.

I will never ever forget him watching this. He said that is not a natural gas explosion. That is a car bomb, and it is probably some act of terrorism.

He knew immediately what we were dealing with. As we watched that horrific day unfold where we lost 168 lives,

I marveled every single day at the extraordinary leadership that Frank Keating and our first lady, Cathy Keating, showed for the State of Oklahoma. He not only knew what had happened, he knew instinctively what he needed to do.

We had an emergency meeting in the Governor's office. We decided there is always a debate in one of those things: Do you go to the site? Do you lead from the capitol?

Frank Keating said: You go to where the action is. I am going downtown and assign various tasks to the rest of us. Then he headed down.

□ 2000

I joined him later that day. He saw this horrific explosion that had taken 168 lives and injured hundreds and hundreds more people. We watched the unfolding relief effort.

As bad as the day was for Oklahoma, I don't think I ever was more proud of the State and, quite frankly, the country as it dealt with the tragedy unfolding in front of us in those opening hours on April 19, 1995.

Our first responders in Oklahoma City—police officers and the fire department—immediately sprang into action, immediately trying to get people out of the building, trying to contain the disaster. Over 300 buildings around the site had been heavily damaged.

They performed heroically and magnificently because, frankly, we thought at the time that there might be other bombs there and that there might be other explosions coming.

By about 11 o'clock that morning, we had the Governor back, and we convened at the capitol complex in Oklahoma City.

About 1 o'clock, we got a call from the President of the United States, Bill Clinton. Most people don't know this, but President Clinton and Governor Keating had gone to Georgetown University together. When the Governor was president of the senior class, then-sophomore class member Bill Clinton was president of the sophomore class. They knew one another extraordinarily well.

There was already lots of speculation that it might be terrorist activity directed from overseas. The President asked the Governor: Governor, do we have any earthly idea who did this? He said: No, Mr. President, we don't. You will hear a lot of speculation, but obviously, we don't know at this point who did this deed.

I will never forget the response of President Clinton, who said immediately: Well, I hope it is not a forerunner who did something like this.

I remember thinking: Well, gosh, how could you want it to be an American? The President said something very insightful. It actually came back to me when we as a country went through 9/11. He said: If this was done by somebody overseas, we will be at war someplace in the world in the next 6 months. He, too, knew immediately

what the consequences of this awful act were.

In the days ahead, again, our firefighters, our National Guard, our police, and all the surrounding police officers and fire departments did an extraordinary job as we struggled to find out who had done this, what we could do to save lives, and whether there were still survivors left in there.

At every point, Governor Keating showed leadership, but he was not alone. The mayor of Oklahoma City, Ron Norick, a good friend of Congressman LUCAS and mine, also performed magnificently, directing the response effort.

Much more importantly than that for us, the people of Oklahoma responded instinctively and heroically, not only in sending the relief efforts that we initially needed, but also in rallying around the victims, giving blood, and trying to see that whatever was needed would be done.

I then recall all the other Americans from all over the country who were immediately moving in our direction to help. We had relief units. I met the captain of the New York Fire Department, who later lost his life responding to 9/11. I met relief and rescue workers from Fort Lauderdale, Florida. People came from all over America because it is what Americans do when they face a tragedy: You help other Americans.

Finally, I will tell you that the Clinton administration responded spectacularly. President Clinton sent every bit of aid that we requested and then some. When our First Lady decided that we needed to grieve while we were dealing with disaster, she came up with the idea of the prayer service, which was attended immediately by Billy Graham, by the President of the United States, obviously by our local dignitaries, and by our neighbor, the newly elected Governor of the State of Texas, George Bush. You saw all Americans coming and working together.

Over the course of that, something called the Oklahoma Standard was developed and is still very famous amongst first responders. This is how our community, a State, and, frankly, a country is supposed to respond when confronted with an unspeakable act of evil. So as terrible as it was, it became a rallying point for the people of Oklahoma, and it became an incident where you could see the goodness and decency of the American people overcoming a terrible act of evil.

We got help from all over the world. I still have prayer beads sent to us from Germany that the nuns had made. People just responded and stepped up.

We will never forget in Oklahoma the horror of those days, the worst days I ever lived through. We will never forget the decency of both the people of Oklahoma, certainly of Oklahoma City, decent people from all across the country who helped us, and a great and compassionate government that was immediately available. Sometimes, the government is a pretty controversial

thing these days. You will never know how lucky you are as an American as when something terrible like this happens and all the resources and all the compassion of a great and good people are immediately at your disposal to help you get through a disaster: FBI, FEMA, law enforcement personnel, more rescue teams. That went on for day after day after day.

Out of that came a thought that the Governor had: What can we do to help the survivors? What can we do for all the children who are now orphans? He set up with the First Lady, Cathy Keating, a foundation which, frankly, raised the money and provided for the education of every child who lost a parent. College, technical education, whatever they needed, we would be there to fulfill the role of the parents who were taken from very young children at an age and in a way that they couldn't possibly comprehend. Frankly, none of us could ever understand what happened behind it and what the reasons for it were.

I think about that day quite often, and I think about it particularly on the anniversary dates. There was an enormous celebration yesterday in Oklahoma City, prayer services, a memorial marathon that we run every year connected with this event, and the Day to Remember. Again, out of that terrible thing, many good things have happened.

Mr. Speaker, I particularly commend my friend. I was assigned the job, as secretary of state, of being the liaison with the Federal Government. That meant I was working through my congressman and friend FRANK LUCAS to try to make sure that the Federal Government played its appropriate role, not only in the response—and, believe me, they did. I could not have, again, asked any more from President Clinton. I have expressed that to him on many occasions and on this floor on multiple occasions. Anything we asked for, he made sure that we had.

I also think of all the decent people who rallied around and helped us. We saw superb leadership at the public level. My friend was at the heart of making sure that Oklahoma City got all the help that it needed.

We were trying to struggle with what it would take to rebuild Oklahoma City. I remember talking to my counterparts in the Federal Government at the time whom President Clinton had dispatched. The normal relief in a situation like that, a disaster, is a 75/25 split. I remember telling one of them that this isn't a natural disaster. This is an attack on a Federal facility in the middle of Oklahoma City.

□ 2010

They thought about it. They said: You know, you are right, this is really a Federal responsibility. The generosity of the people of the United States of America helped rebuild Oklahoma City, and that very same concept was used when our friends in New

York, who had been so quick to send us help, went through an even more horrific ordeal on 9/11.

These disasters were meant to hurt the State of Oklahoma. They were meant to hurt our faith and our system, and they were meant to damage the American people profoundly. They did exactly the opposite. They reminded us that whatever our differences politically, whatever differences we have in different parts of the country, in the end we are all Americans, and in the end Americans stick together and look after their own.

Frankly, as I said, we got help from all over the world. We got help from every point on the political spectrum. We got the assistance of folks who decided they would not give in to horror, they would not give in to terrorism, they would not allow evil to overcome the innate decency of the people.

As I pause and reflect, I do remember it as the worst day of my life. I do remember it as the worst day in the history of my State. But I remember it also as an example of the compassion, decency, and the enormous capability of the American people to look after their own in a terrible situation.

I thank my friend for organizing this memorial to this horrific event because it is really something we should never forget, but it is something we should always be proud of. We should be proud of the response of those very first police officers and firemen, just as at 9/11, not knowing exactly what had happened, but throwing themselves in harm's way.

We should be proud of the political leadership that we had at the time. We were very fortunate to have the Governor we had, the First Lady that we had, Frank and Cathy Keating, the mayor we had in Oklahoma City, the Congressmen we had that represented that area and worked with us not just in those days and weeks but, frankly, in the months and years that followed to make sure that Oklahoma City recovered.

We should be proud of a people that never ever will forget what occurred that day and never ever will let the forces of evil overcome the forces of good and the decency of the American people.

I have seen enough in my lifetime to know when good overcomes evil and that in the end it always does because I saw it in Oklahoma City. I saw it with friends and colleagues. I saw it from strangers all across the country. I saw it from political leaders at every point in the political spectrum. What was our worst day as a State was probably our best day in terms of showing what we were capable of when we were challenged and reminding the world that all of America stands together against terrorism and all of America works together to help people not only deal with the immediate tragedy but to overcome, to heal, and to move on.

Mr. Speaker, I thank my friend for setting up this fitting memorial discussion this evening.

Mr. LUCAS. Mr. Speaker, I now yield to the gentleman who represents the Second District of Oklahoma, Congressman BRECHEEN. Clearly, he, too, cares about all Oklahomans and all of our fellow citizens.

Mr. BRECHEEN. Mr. Speaker, I find myself in an unfortunate status. I was a Coalgate High School young adult. A Member of Congress was dealing with this at the time that I was in high school, and the Secretary of State was dealing with this at the time I was in high school. I, of course, had friends who lost a loved one. I would later have a college roommate that I would discover—people I went to church with for years—his father was an APHIS, Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service, veterinarian for USDA. We would room together at Oklahoma State University. I never learned this story while we were going to church together; it took going to college.

I heard the story of how his wife accidentally put the notice of him being called to the headquarters office, she covered it up accidentally, and he didn't show up for one of the sides of the building that would be most impacted. There are some very famous photos.

A few years later, I would be State FFA president, and we would start the 168 Pennies campaign on behalf of career tech. While these men were serving in State leadership roles, the youth were responding to try to find ways to assist and be a part of the good will that was spoken of just a minute ago.

I will close just by saying that it reminds us, this incident, of the need to fulfill what George Washington in a 1789 statement talked about: That it is the duty of all Nations to acknowledge the providence of Almighty God, to obey His will, to be grateful for His benefits, and humbly to implore His protection and favor.

That incident was a first for a Nation that had enjoyed quietness on the home front, and it shattered us. Years later, we would have 9/11, but it reminds us today, as we pause and remember what happened in Oklahoma 31 years ago, taking the lives of 168 innocent people, the need for us to have bended knees and pray Psalms 91-type protection over this Nation.

Mr. Speaker, I thank Congressman LUCAS for setting this up. I truly appreciate it.

Mr. LUCAS. Mr. Speaker, my grandparents' generation could tell you where they were when they heard the news that Wiley Post and Will Rogers had been lost in that plane crash in Alaska in 1935. They could also tell you exactly what they were doing when the news came of the bombing of Pearl Harbor in December of 1941.

My parents, who were young men, kids at the time, could tell you exactly where they were when that same news about Pearl Harbor came. They could

tell you exactly what they were doing when they discovered that President Kennedy had been assassinated.

For my generation, there have been many things that imprint the mind that will mark the memory forever, but that day 31 years ago that took the lives of 168 of our fellow citizens is my equivalent to those earlier tragedies.

I and the Oklahoma delegation were all together in Dallas-Fort Worth for a meeting of the Base Realignment and Closure Commission, BRAC, when the tragedy occurred at 9:02 a.m. I will never forget having a reporter from one of the Oklahoma City news radio stations tap me on the shoulder, and he said: Congressman, don't you have an office in the Federal Building?

I said: Chris, I do, but there are three Federal buildings. Are you talking about Murrah, the Federal Courthouse, or the United States Post Office?

He said: We have a report that there has been some kind of an explosion at the Federal Building in Oklahoma City, and it is gone.

Now, at that moment, I jumped up and charged out of the auditorium, and in the lobby were the television screens even in that day with the live coverage. I immediately recognized the Murrah Building. My people were a block and a half away in the U.S. Post Office Building, but I immediately recognized the building. The core of this building had been blown out. It had been designed in the 1960s during the antiwar period to withstand an attack, but not the magnitude of this attack.

Senator Nickles, who led the delegation that day to the BRAC hearing, hurriedly went down and discussed with the leadership of the BRAC Commission and the two State delegations ahead of us, and they were able to accelerate our abbreviated testimony. We left Dallas and came back to Oklahoma City as fast as we could.

I will never forget walking up the street from the south, I believe Harvey, coming by what was then our old Sixth District office in the U.S. Post Office Building. This is a block and a half away on the opposite side of the blast, down the street. The shock wave was big enough that it blew all of our windows in and took down our ceilings.

Now, I had people buried under rubble, I had people thrown across rooms, but everyone was okay. We were lucky. In the delegation, we proceeded, J.C. and I and several staffers, on up the street and around the corner to behold what we saw, it was just the most amazing thing.

□ 2020

My colleagues are right, the response from almost the first instant was amazing. A lot of times people think that when you have a tragedy, a natural disaster, that the Federal Government is going to come in and save you. That is not the system.

The system is for local government to function and for local government to call upon county and State government

to support them. If the need is great enough, they then turn to the Federal Government and FEMA to back them up. That is exactly the way it worked in Oklahoma City. The mayor, the police chief, and fire chief triaged the situation, knew they had more than they could handle, called upon county government, State government, the Governor, Secretary Cole, who then turned to FEMA and the President of the United States. It was a textbook example of how things were supposed to work in the most hideous and horrible of circumstances.

I don't ever want anyone to go through something of that nature or magnitude ever again. It took 5 years of the Federal delegation working with those Federal employees who had survived, many of whom had been physically or emotionally injured, and their families to sort out what were they going to do next, what did they want to do, and what were they capable of doing.

Mr. Speaker, call it compassionate work if you want, call it treating your fellow citizens in a decent way, but we worked for 5 years to work our way through that.

I will also say that Congressman COLE referenced the outflowing of love and support from across the country. The emergency management teams and all of the entities that came pouring in to help. It was amazing. However, about 3 or 4 months after the immediate tragedy was over, I got a call from one of our colleagues, a congressman in New Jersey by the name of Jim Saxton. Jim told me that his community had been raising money and they wanted to give it to Oklahoma City to help. Would I come to New Jersey with him and see his folks and accept their gift.

I didn't know what to expect, but I thought the world of Congressman Saxton, and if his people were trying to help my people, absolutely. We went up to New Jersey. In a high school auditorium near a military base, the bands and the cheerleaders and the school kids and the adults in the community—it was quite an event—they had done car washes and bake sales. They donated money. They raised cash, and they presented me with a huge check—now, this is 31 years ago—for \$100,000.

That is a lot of money now, but that was an incredible amount of money in 1995 to give to people you had never met and that you didn't know but you knew you cared about. That is another one of those moments I will never forget, \$100,000.

Bottom line is this: From that great tragedy came the foundation to educate people about these issues, from that tragedy came the memorial memorializing, honoring, and remembering those 168 lost people.

If you are ever even remotely close to Oklahoma City, you should go and walk through that somber memorial. You should go through all of the educational exhibits at the foundation. It is just the most amazing thing.

Am I different today still after all this time than I was before the moment the tragedy struck? I will always be different. I will always be different. When you have seen the worst of what humanity can do to itself, followed by the best of what humanity can do for itself, you can't help but be a changed person.

Mr. Speaker, again, to my friends, I thank them for everything that they did. I thank them for working so diligently for all those good folks in Oklahoma City and everybody across the country.

My grandparents could tell you when Wiley and Will had their tragedy. My father could quote you where he was standing in Elk City when they saw on the TV screen that President Kennedy has been assassinated. I will forever have burned in my memory that reporter tapping me on the shoulder, "We have a report. There has been an explosion. The Federal building is gone. Where is your office?" I will never forget that.

Mr. Speaker, one last time, I thank everyone who helped us in Oklahoma City. I express my sympathy for everyone who lost someone in Oklahoma City, but thank goodness, we are Oklahomans. Most importantly, we are Americans.

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

CELEBRATING BLACK MATERNAL HEALTH

(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 to revise and extend their remarks and include extraneous material on the subject of this Special Order.

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. MESSMER). Is there objection to the request of the gentlewoman from Virginia?

There was no objection.

Ms. MCCLELLAN. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to anchor this Special Order hour on behalf of the Congressional Black Caucus in honor of Black Maternal Health Week.

For the 10th year in a row, the Black Mamas Matter Alliance led Black Maternal Health Week last week to address the high rates of preventable maternal mortality among Black women who are more than three times as likely to die from pregnancy-related causes than White women.

Black Maternal Health Week focuses on advocacy, community building, and policy change. This year's theme, Rooted in Justice & Joy, highlights the need for both systemic change to address racial disparities and the celebration of Black motherhood and strength.

This Special Order hour is an opportunity for the Congressional Black Caucus to discuss the ongoing crisis facing our Nation's Black mothers and to explore solutions to protecting our communities' Black women.

Tonight, I start this Special Order hour with identifying the state of Black maternal health in our Nation. In a nutshell, we are in crisis, and the Black maternal health crisis is not just statistics.

Eleven years ago next week, I nearly became one of those statistics when my daughter and I both nearly died when my placenta ruptured 9 weeks before my due date. I needed an emergency C-section. I had placenta previa, and because I had health insurance and access to pre- and postnatal care, I was one of the lucky ones, but too many Black women in America aren't so lucky. Compared to other high income countries, the U.S. still has the highest rate of maternal deaths.

In 2023, the most recent year for which data is available, the national maternal mortality rate actually declined, but Black women were still more than three times as likely as White women to experience a pregnancy-related death and 87 percent of these deaths were preventable.

In my own State of Virginia, after significant improvements from peak deaths in 2021, Virginia's maternal mortality rate got worse in 2023.

We face a complex road ahead as we seek solutions to protect Black women and families against this loss. The maternal health crisis connects healthcare with insurance policy, reproductive freedom, environmental policy, and so much more. These issues don't exist in a vacuum, and many of them are rooted in decades, I would say, centuries of inequity.

These issues require a holistic approach to bring down the mortality rate and save lives, but recent rollbacks at the Federal level risk deepening this maternal health crisis. Medicaid cuts and the expiration of the enhanced premium tax credits over the Affordable Care Act have driven up the cost of maternal care for millions, making this vital care inaccessible for those unable to pay for it out of pocket.

The Supreme Court's decision overturning *Roe v. Wade* caused one in three women of childbearing years to live in States with abortion bans or extreme restrictions, and in those States, States with bans, women are two times more likely to die of pregnancy-related causes.

Again, it is not just statistics. We have seen tragic stories of women like Amber Thurman and Candi Miller, who died suffering miscarriages awaiting simple procedures that could have saved their life, but the hospitals weren't sure if they fit within the exceptions to the ban.

□ 2030

On top of this, the Trump administration has doubled down on making it

harder to secure justice for Black families and address the maternal health crisis in Black communities with President Trump's executive order banning diversity, equity, and inclusion practices, limiting the Federal Government's ability to enforce hospital accountability for treatment of Black mothers weeks after the Biden administration reached a historic settlement agreement to uphold these guidelines and provide training for hospital staff to address bias.

Under the Trump administration, funding cuts and mass layoffs have left agencies like the Department of Health and Human Services without the resources or staff needed to conduct research and implement policies that save lives. Thousands of datasets that have helped to identify the maternal mortality factors and track how we are doing with policies to address them can no longer be accessed.

Now, President Trump wants to go even further, as his proposed budget for 2027 calls for over \$800 million in cuts to maternal and child health programs at HHS.

The proposal would eliminate many essential programs entirely, including the Healthy Start program, which serves mothers and infants in high-risk communities; the maternal mortality review committees; the Perinatal Quality Collaboratives; and other programs that track maternal mortality and share solutions for reducing it. This is not acceptable, and the Congressional Black Caucus will do everything within our power to oppose this proposed budget.

Mr. Speaker, in the face of these setbacks at the Federal level, we will continue to push for change. As a member of not only the Congressional Black Caucus but the Black Maternal Health Caucus, and especially as a mom who faced that crisis personally, I am fighting back as we continue to push forward because we cannot afford to wait. We certainly can't afford to sit back and do nothing.

That is why I am cosponsoring the omnibus, a package of 14 bills that aims to address the root causes of maternal health challenges, provide support to mothers, and study how we can build a better system for every American family in need of care.

The Black Maternal Health Caucus has fought for this legislation for years. We will not stop until it becomes law. It must become law now.

Our fight remains far from over, but legislators and advocates alike continue to work toward tangible change to eradicate this Black maternal health crisis. I am proud to stand and work alongside Members, like the chair of the Congressional Black Caucus, Representative YVETTE CLARKE.

Mr. Speaker, I yield to the gentlewoman from New York (Ms. CLARKE).

Ms. CLARKE of New York. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentlewoman from Virginia, my esteemed colleague Congresswoman JENNIFER MCCLELLAN,