that they just didn't have the resources to put out the small fire when a water drop by helicopter could have stopped it cold.

Yet, they had the resources to photograph it by helicopter, and they had the resources to do countless airdrops after they had allowed it to explode out of control.

□ 1900

Now, the Federal Government owns 96 percent of Alpine County, leaving it with virtually no tax base and entirely dependent on tourism attracted by the national forest. The fire has not only taken people's homes and destroyed their businesses, but it has severely damaged the forest resource that Alpine County's entire economy depends on for tourism.

It is dangerous nonsense to monitor incipient fires in today's forest tinderbox, even if they seem to pose no immediate danger. No person in his right mind would monitor a rattlesnake curled up in his bedroom because it isn't doing much of anything at the moment. He would kill it before it does.

In our national forests, only the Forest Service can prevent small blazes from becoming forest fires, and it is about time they did.

Mr. WESTERMAN. Madam Speaker, I thank the gentleman for his leadership in the past in getting bipartisan legislation in place.

I remember a couple of years ago I was out around South Lake Tahoe and I saw the fruits of the efforts of Representative MCCLINTOCK, working in a bipartisan manner with many groups, to do the Lake Tahoe Restoration Act, part of what was in the bipartisan WIIN Act.

And I felt proud as an American from Arkansas to be in California and seeing the forest actually being managed and knowing that it was my colleague, Mr. MCCLINTOCK, that pushed for that. And more of that needs to be done, enough of it is not happening. We need more land that gets treated like that. It looked like a park. From a forestry perspective, I would have maybe taken a few more trees out, but it was way better than what was left around it and it is making great progress, and that is because of solutions-based approaches to getting the job done and making a difference out on the ground.

But we have got 80 million acres of forest land in this country that is subject to catastrophic wildfire. When you mix that with the drought conditions that we are seeing today, Madam Speaker, it is a recipe for disaster.

Mr. MCCLINTOCK talked about a lightning strike that was left to burn, when it could have been put out early. We see massive destruction. We are seeing that in eastern Oregon, and we will continue to see it. We are seeing one of the worst wildfire seasons that we have ever seen.

I think Americans need to understand how important healthy forests are to good watersheds. Teddy Roosevelt knew that. He talked about the importance of developing the West and protecting the watersheds and the timber in the upper parts of the watersheds, because that timber acts as a filter. It acts like a sponge that holds water and releases it slowly so that you don't get all of it running off at one time.

We have these massive forest fires, next comes the flooding and the landslides and the degradation to our streams. We want to help species like the Chinook salmon. But when we are washing the topsoil into the streams, that is not helping any kind of fish.

We let wildfires burn right down to the edge of the stream. If we were doing forest management, we would thin the forest. We would be the gardener and the caretaker. We have solutions. We have proposed legislation but, unfortunately, Congress has failed to act. Not only has Congress failed to act, but Congress has failed to be able to come together and talk about these issues, and we need to do that.

I hope that over this August recess my colleagues across the aisle will have a change of heart, so when we get back here in September, these bills will come to the floor, and we will do real bipartisan work that is good for the environment, that is good for the economy, and that is good for America. We stand ready to do that.

Republicans are ready to work for the good of America—for rural America, and we want to make a difference. We invite our friends across the aisle to join us.

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

PATHWAY TO CITIZENSHIP

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 4, 2021, the gentlewoman from New Mexico (Ms. LEGER FERNANDEZ) is recognized for 60 minutes as the designee of the majority leader.

GENERAL LEAVE

Ms. LEGER FERNANDEZ. Madam Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members have 5 legislative days to revise and extend their remarks and include extraneous material on the subject of my Special Order.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Is there objection to the request of the gentlewoman from New Mexico?

There was no objection.

Ms. LEGER FERNANDEZ. Madam Speaker, we are here today to call on the President, to call on the House, to call on the Senate to pass immigration reform. We hope to see immigration reform in reconciliation.

We are here to tell the stories of why we must do this, of why we must do this not just for the immigrant community, and not just because it is the right thing to do, and not just because of the stories of each of those families who put their lives on the line, who study, our DACA, our Dreamers, our essential workers, not just for each of them. We are calling for immigration reform because it is good for America.

And we must move beyond the rhetoric of division. We must move beyond the rhetoric of hate. And we must move to the facts. And when we move to those facts, we know and we learn that immigration reform is good for this country.

I often talk about the fact that we need to ignore those who would divide us. Those who would seek to demonize another for political gain. Because we know in New Mexico, especially, we know that there is no other, there is only an us. No hay un otro, solamente nosotros.

And when we look at some of these numbers, we recognize that. When we notice that immigration reform will bring a $1.7 trillion benefit to our economy, that it will raise annual wages for everybody by $700, that it would create 438,000 jobs for Americans, there is an economic reason for doing this beyond the sense of who we are, our humanity, and who we are as a Nation of immigrants.

This issue affects every community in our Nation. And it is so important in my own community that the first meeting I had after I was elected was with Somos Un Pueblo Unido. We Are a United Community. Somos Un Pueblo Unido.

And it was wonderful to have that meeting, because I heard directly the voices of my sisters who were undocumented. I heard their voices tell the story of what it was like to work, tell the story of what it was like to be exposed to COVID, but they knew they had to go back to work because they did not have a choice. Because they did not have any other way of providing for their children.

They put themselves in harm's way to care for us. They put themselves in harm's way to make sure that our grocery stores were stocked. They put themselves in harm's way to make sure that our elderly were cared for. They asked me a favor, they said, Senora Congresista, we ask that you will take our stories to Washington, D.C., that you will take our stories and use your voice there to repeat them. And so my voice right now is not mine, it is theirs.

Today, we stand in the people's House and use our voices to share the community stories, to highlight the benefits of immigration reform, and hopefully, hopefully, to get closer to making it a reality.

There are an estimated 11 million undocumented immigrants in the United States, they are the Dreamers who we have talked about. They are undocumented students, children, adults, who have only known this country as their home, they have U.S. citizen family members. As noted, they are caregivers, healthcare workers, education, and small business owners.

The immigrants in the United States are a reflection of us. They do the

things we do, they are doctors, they are lawyers, they are students, they are children. They are American. Just as American as any of us, and they each deserve an opportunity to reach their fullest potential.

And year after year after year immigration reform becomes a political football. Year after year after year 11 million people are held hostage by political games.

You know, the Congressional Progressive Caucus has advocated and fought for a pathway to citizenship for undocumented immigrants for years. It is one of our priorities that we get it passed. It is one of our priorities that we address immigration reform in the American Families Plan, in the American Jobs Plan.

The Congressional Hispanic Caucus has been fighting this battle for decades—since they were formed. They have not given up. And the Congressional Progressive Caucus has not given up because we know that we must carry those voices and those voices must be all of our voices.

Let's talk a little bit about what happened during the pandemic. Immigrants carried us through the pandemic. While we stayed home, immigrant farm workers continued to go to work in the fields, risking their lives to keep our country fed. Undocumented essential workers in our grocery stores kept the shelves stocked with that food that was picked by the immigrant farm worker. Dreamers taught our youngest, they kept them engaged over that Zoom screen.

We saw how the pandemic, though, fueled the rise of anti-Asian hate crimes. But what else fueled that rise of hate? Anti-immigrant, racist, xenophobic rhetoric from the Trump administration. Asian Americans, despite those attacks that were leveled at them, they continued serving their communities, even in the face of those racist violent attacks.

And, yet, during the first round of stimulus checks, these immigrants, who we just described, who kept us going through the pandemic, they were left behind. They were made to feel like they were not part of our country, that they were not part of our recovery, and like they were an other.

I want to talk a bit more about the other immigrants.

Madam Speaker, I yield to the gentleman from New York (Mr. BOWMAN), to engage in this conversation about the role that immigrants play.

Mr. BOWMAN. Madam Speaker, I thank Congresswoman LEGER FERNANDEZ for convening this Special Order hour to discuss the urgent topic of immigration reform.

Last week, I had the opportunity and privilege of visiting the U.S.-Mexico border to bear witness to the carceral system that undergirds our immigration policy and practices.

I gained a firsthand understanding of how our Federal policies impact the conditions at the border. While there, I visited a Catholic Charities shelter that centered its work around caring for newly arrived asylum seekers. This shelter operates on a shoestring budget and relies on FEMA to retroactively reimburse spending for essentials like food, a funding process that is never certain. And most of the workers there were volunteers from across the country. While their facilities lacked resources, it was abundant with care.

I then saw inside a well-funded Customs and Border Protection, or CBP, facility, where law enforcement had put over 10 men, who had not been tested for COVID, together in one small cell, sleeping on the concrete floor, even when other cells were sitting empty.

□ 1915

For context, the current year, the funding level for CBP is more than $15 billion.

In New York's 16th Congressional District which I represent, one-third of my constituents are born outside of the United States. I represent thousands of undocumented constituents, refugees, and immigrants living and working in the Bronx and Westchester who have to navigate our immigration system on a regular basis with fear from ICE agents. In our home State of New York is Ellis Island which reads:

Give me your tired, your poor,
Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free,
The wretched refuse of your teeming shore.
Send these, the homeless, tempest-tost to me,
I lift my lamp beside the golden door!

The U.S. Mexico border is the new Ellis Island, yet these newcomers—a darker hue than those who came to Ellis Island with welcome arms—are met with punishment, walls, and harm. We send our tired and our poor to prison-like detention centers without proper medical care and little food and produce a retraumatizing experience for those who already made a scary and life-threatening trek across the border.

I heard stories of mothers traveling with their 1-month-old babies across the river, carrying their babies on their heads as they waded through the waters. Now imagine the level of desperation in your home country, Madam Speaker, where you would risk the life of yourself and your 1-month-old baby to come to this country with no guarantee that you were going to be able to remain here.

We need to reimagine and redesign our immigration system and the support we provide to our immigration neighbors. If we want to live up to the ideals of this country, our system must be rooted in care and inclusion, not militarization, surveillance, detention, and forced deportation.

As a Black man in America and as Black people in America, we have been experiencing mass incarceration since the end of slavery. Our brothers and sisters coming in through the Mexico border to the U.S. are experiencing mass incarceration and mass deportation under the hands of CBP.

The differences in funding and capacity at the Catholic Charities shelter, which heavily relies on donations, versus the CBP facility was startling and disheartening. The vast majority of CBP apprehensions, Madam Speaker—over 90 percent—were determined by Border Patrol to not be criminals. Over 90 percent, the Border Patrol told me. Yet the vast majority of our annual funding to this region goes to law enforcement. We need a fundamental shift in our priorities to move away from funding detention and militarization at our border.

This is especially true given how past U.S. policies, such as the U.S. occupation of Nicaragua in 1912 and other Latin American countries, and our historic empowerment of corrupt governments have contributed to instability, violence, and economic oppression; all of which force people to flee their home countries and seek asylum here.

Yes, our immigration policy is connected to our foreign policy and connected to our capitalism. We have stolen land and resources from foreign countries and caused their political and economic systems to be disrupted and taken over by violence. The guns that get to many of these countries come from here. So we have caused this harm and disruption, yet we won't allow those who are looking for peace to flee into our country.

We also need to create a pathway to citizenship for all of the 11.4 million undocumented immigrants as part of the next reconciliation package. The young adults whom we met with in Laredo, Texas, whose family members had been deported deserve a pathway to citizenship.

By the way, once CBP, which seemed to be hunters in this situation, detain someone and they need long-term detention, they pass them over to the ICE agents. Then the ICE agents put them in detention, and they are so isolated they can't receive calls from family and friends, they can't receive letters, and they can't receive visits. Finally, when someone finds a way to make a connection with the detention center, the person who was in the detention center is lost, often never to be found.

The young adults whom I met with in Laredo whose family members have been deported deserve a pathway to citizenship. The high schoolers in my district who fear they won't be able to file for DACA status and stay in our country for college deserve a pathway to citizenship. From Laredo, Texas, to the Bronx, to Westchester, to St. Louis, Missouri, there are millions of people who should be able to stay in this country and continue to help our communities thrive.

We have the power to provide stability and a sense of belonging to our immigrant communities this Congress, and we cannot wait any longer.

I will end with this: during the last administration there was so much fear

instilled in our immigrant families and communities that one student in the Bronx thought that her mom was deported from home, but the mom actually ran away so she wouldn't be deported. But because the student thought that the mother was deported, the student fell into a deep depression and committed suicide because she thought her mother was taken from her.

This is what we are dealing with when it comes to our immigration policy. It is inhumane, and it is evil. Our immigrants make us a stronger nation, not a weaker one. It is time for a 21st century Marshall Plan to help rebuild Central and South America. But those who come in here should be welcomed with open arms as they are just seeking peace, safety, care, and security. If we are as a nation to live up to the ideals of our democracy and our Constitution, then we must welcome them with open arms and with love so that we can build a better nation back better.

Madam Speaker, I thank Congresswoman LEGER FERNANDEZ for her leadership.

Ms. LEGER FERNANDEZ. Madam Speaker, I thank the gentleman for going to the border because it is only when we go to the border, but go to the border not with the intent to create a wedge issue but with an intent to listen and with intent to open our arms that we really see what is going on, the seeking of refuge. I went to the border with actually a bipartisan delegation surprisingly. It was wonderful. It was a bipartisan delegation.

It struck me. Meeting with those young children who are alone it struck me that the seeking of refuge and sending your child alone to a place that you believe is safe, Madam Speaker, is as old as the Bible itself. Remember, Madam Speaker, Moses' mother put her child in a basket and sent him down the Nile because that was the way to save his life. When we think of that, let's remember the tears and the pain in the heart of every parent who sets out on that journey to seek asylum; and let's remember that it is the law of this land; it is the law of the United States and of the world to allow asylum and to grant asylum when you fear for your lives.

What we have now is a broken system. Trump took a sledge hammer to it. But we must demand that it be put back together.

So, Madam Speaker, I thank the gentleman for sharing his thoughts with the Nation today.

Madam Speaker, I yield to the gentlewoman from Washington (Ms. JAYAPAL). I thank the gentlewoman for serving as the chair of the Congressional Progressive Caucus that allows us to have this conversation here today.

Ms. JAYAPAL. Madam Speaker, I thank Congresswoman TERESA LEGER FERNANDEZ. It has been a joy in Congress to have the gentlewoman's voice, to have her passion, and to have her advocacy. This is what makes me so proud to be the chair of the Congressional Progressive Caucus because of the words, the passion, and the advocacy of Representative BOWMAN, of Congresswoman LEGER FERNANDEZ, and of our 94 other members who are part of the Progressive Caucus. The Special Order hour that we host for this Progressive Caucus is about the issues that matter to the Congressional Progressive Caucus.

Let me be very clear, progressives have been at the forefront of fighting for comprehensive immigration reform for a very long time. Our Progressive Caucus is extremely diverse. We have members who are part of the Hispanic Caucus, part of the Asian-American Caucus, and part of the Black Caucus.

The reality is that we represent the diversity that is immigration today in this country.

Madam Speaker, when I think about immigration, this is very personal to me for multiple reasons. I am an immigrant myself. I am one of only two dozen Members of Congress who serve in Congress who is a naturalized citizen. When I came to Congress in 2017, there were actually only six of us at that time. Then it moved to 12, and now it moved to 24. It is good that we are here and that we are representing the voice of immigrants who come from all over the world seeking refuge because that is the identity that the United States has as a place to seek refuge.

I came here when I was 16 by myself. My parents just had a few thousand dollars in their bank account, and they used all of it to send me, their child, across the ocean by myself at the age of 16 because they believed that this was the place that I would have the most opportunity.

But it isn't just that. It was 20 years ago that in Washington State I started what was a grass-roots effort to organize against the Bush administration at that time cracking down on immigrants, Arab Americans, Muslim Americans, and South Asian Americans and curtailing civil liberties. That was the moment that I got involved in grassroots organizing around immigration issues and ended up starting and founding what became the largest immigrant advocacy organization in Washington State and one of the largest in the country.

Madam Speaker, if John Lewis were here, he would tell you that the first thing that I said to him when I came on to the floor is: You taught me how to make good trouble.

The reason is because I, too, got arrested multiple times fighting for immigration reform in civil disobedience that was about calling attention to the pain of the country when we treat immigrants with the cruelty that we have treated immigrants with both Democratic and Republican administrations through the past to today.

Yes, Donald Trump did something to the immigration system that was beyond anything that had been done before. But we should be clear that much of the cruelty has existed prior to the Trump administration coming in going back to the exclusionary history of immigration law in America, but then also continuing through what was called welfare reform. That was the so-called immigration reform that actually began the criminalization of immigrants in the United States.

So the work that we do here in Congress as Representatives of our communities on so many levels is incredibly important, because we get to change the conversation about what the issue is and what we need to do. We also get to change the conversation about where to put the priority for legislative fixes to the issues that we are facing.

We have an opportunity coming up in the reconciliation package to do the right thing for immigrants—not just for immigrants, by the way, to do the right thing for America, because let's be very, very clear, America would not survive without the labor and the toil of immigrant communities. That is why I am so excited about the opportunity to actually advance a path to citizenship for Dreamers, TPS holders, essential workers, and farm workers in the upcoming reconciliation package.

This is an opportunity for us to actually face the truth about who it was that kept the country going during the COVID–19 pandemic. The COVID–19 pandemic only underscored how our communities and our economy rely on the work of immigrants. Throughout the pandemic, immigrant workers have filled a broad swath of duties from picking and preparing the food we eat, to cleaning our homes and community spaces, to serving as front-line medical professionals and the heroic teachers who educated our kids over Zoom.

We are talking about an estimated 5.2 million undocumented immigrants who were serving as essential workers, nearly 15,000 DACA recipients who have pivoted to remote learning as teachers, 1.7 million immigrants working in the food supply industry to put food on our tables, and over 200,000 undocumented immigrants working as healthcare practitioners including as registered nurses and home health aides.

That is why we put as one of our top five priorities for the Congressional Progressive Caucus in the reconciliation package a roadmap to citizenship for these essential workers.

□ 1930

One million of these undocumented essential workers are also Dreamers. Just a few weeks ago, a judge in Texas cruelly ruled against the DACA program, stopping the government from processing new applications and, once again, throwing the status of hundreds of thousands of DACA recipients back into limbo.

This is not what the American people want. It was yet another urgent reminder about why we need to end the filibuster in the Senate and pass the

Dream and Promise Act that we already passed multiple times in the House of Representatives.

This, though, cannot wait. We cannot wait, and so it is time for us to act in this upcoming package.

Further, over 7 million immigrant essential workers do have legal status, but they only have temporary status or are waiting to adjust their status. When we talk about immigrant essential workers, it is crucial that we recognize that many of them do have legal status and have been waiting—in some cases, in waiting lines projected to last over 80 years to transition—to a roadmap to citizenship.

I know that when I became a citizen, Madam Speaker, it was after 17 years of being on multiple visas. By the time I became a U.S. citizen, it was impossible for me to uproot my family, my parents, and bring them to the United States to be with me. That is why they still live in India, and I live here. I have not lived on the same continent as my parents since I was 16 years old.

Every day, essential immigrant workers put their own health and the health of their families at risk, showing up to work on the front lines so that we and our families could stay safe. They do all of this knowing full well that a simple traffic stop could tear them away from their families and communities, and that should they get COVID, they likely wouldn't have access to healthcare.

For instance, TPS holders have been serving on the front lines, even as the former President rescinded their TPS designation and threatened to rip them away from their communities.

Recognizing the tremendous contributions of immigrants, countries like France actually acted to expedite citizenship for essential immigrant workers. Not only is that the right thing to do, but it is also good for our communities and for our economy.

Most of these workers have lived alongside us as friends and neighbors for over a decade. They are deeply rooted in our communities. Many have U.S. citizen children and family members, and tearing them from their homes and their families would leave gaping, irreplaceable holes in communities across the country.

Moreover, if doing the humane thing isn't enough for you, and if doing the popular thing isn't good enough for you either, then look at the economic benefit. In 2019, immigrant essential workers had an estimated $860 billion in spending power, and that is after paying up to $239 billion in Federal and payroll taxes, as well as an estimated $115 billion in State and local taxes. So it is clear that immigrants are helping to sustain our communities and bolster our economies.

Madam Speaker, the gentlewoman and Mr. BOWMAN were talking about the importance of going to the border, and I just have to recall some of the worst cruelty that I saw in the last 4 years. I was the first Member of Congress to go into a Federal prison where mothers and fathers who had been separated from their children, in many cases, babies as young as 3 months old, under the previous administration and the previous President, when they were imprisoned—these parents were imprisoned and separated from their children.

When I went to see them, a couple of weeks into this crisis, and as the first Member of Congress to do so, I met with hundreds of parents, mothers and fathers who did not know where their children were.

Some of them were given slips of paper that had names of children on them. But guess what? They weren't their children because DHS had lost all trace of which children belonged to which parents.

What we know today is that there are still hundreds of children who are separated from their parents. Their parents have been deported, in some cases, and they will never be reunited. This was by design. This was cruelty of epic proportions perpetrated by the last President and everybody who went along with those policies. Not all Republicans did, by the way.

I remember when Laura Bush spoke out against this and said this is not who America is. Well, I have a different perspective on that because we have had a lot of things happen in America that remind us that we have a bad side to America as well.

But we have resilience. We have refuge. We have humanity. When that trumps, that is the best of America.

The reality is, Madam Speaker, I went down to the border, as well, multiple times. In fact, I see my colleague over here. I think he called me—I forget what he called me, but I think he called me a Congresswoman coyote.

No, I am not yielding to you, Mr. GAETZ. But I appreciated that because I helped children across the border as a Member of Congress.

How could anybody be against that? These were children traveling alone. Had I not been there, as a Member of Congress, they wouldn't have gotten over and been able to be processed because the last administration actually closed all the ports of entry.

When I went to Tijuana and met with so many of these people—I remember a 15-year-old boy who had been shot in his knee. His mother said to him to just go as quickly as he can because his brother had already been killed by gangs. Just go. Just go. Just try to get there.

This was a strapping young boy, and he wept as he played me the message that his mother had left him so that he could listen to it over and over again in the shelter that he was in to get away from gangs and violence.

This is what we are dealing with. That is why I have introduced the Roadmap to Freedom resolution, which lays out a positive vision of who America is, and who we should be, and who we can be if we continue to embrace those roots by which everybody came here, unless you were Native American. Either you came enslaved on ships against your will and were forced to work and your labor was taken, or you came as an immigrant in some category.

The reality is, Madam Speaker, there are many things that we have to do. Thank goodness this new administration closed the Irwin Detention Center, where women were being sterilized without their consent. Thank goodness that for-profit, private detention center was closed in Georgia.

We had that resolution—that was my resolution—on the floor. And do you know what? It passed with bipartisan support. Members on the other side of the aisle, as well, couldn't stomach that.

We have an opportunity here to do something really tremendous in the next reconciliation package. I know firsthand that our immigration story is one of struggle and resilience. Immigrants push boulders up mountains, and we succeed because we have to. There is no other option for us.

It is that strength of courage that comes out of struggle that is what defines America, defines immigrants in America. So, I look forward to doing everything I can to make sure that the Congressional Progressive Caucus continues to push for bold, progressive immigration reform and that we make sure that we get a path to citizenship for our essential workers who have been taking care of all of us through this pandemic.

Madam Speaker, I thank Representative LEGER FERNANDEZ for her tremendous work, her leadership, her heart, and her passion.

Ms. LEGER FERNANDEZ. Madam Speaker, I thank Representative JAYAPAL, and I really do appreciate the Congressional Progressive Caucus' support for making sure that we include immigration reform in the reconciliation.

We can do that because it has a direct economic benefit to this country, and it has a direct economic benefit that will be reflected in the budget. And we support it.

But I think the other thing to remember is the country supports it. The support for doing immigration reform is huge. Sixty-seven percent of voters support the DREAM Act. Eighty-three percent of Americans support a pathway to citizenship for immigrant youth. Sixty-five percent of voters support citizenship for undocumented farmworkers.

It is something that the country supports because they understand that immigrants, they are us. They live with us and care for us and are us. Americans know that, and they support that.

So, then, we must ask, why are we not doing this? We will work on that.

Madam Speaker, I yield to the gentlewoman from Michigan (Ms. TLAIB) to tell us the stories and to raise her voice about the immigrant experience.

Ms. TLAIB. Madam Speaker, I am a proud child of immigrants.

Both of my parents immigrated from Palestine. My dad's journey actually was from Palestine as a young boy, and he grew up, his teenage years, in Nicaragua. From Nicaragua, at 19 years old, he came to the United States.

My father, with a fourth grade education, couldn't ever experience human dignity anywhere except until he came here and worked for Ford Motor Company and became part of the United Auto Workers, the UAW. That is when he felt, for the first time, human dignity in the workplace.

My father, in the 1970s, used to be in Detroit, on the corners. If you came up to him before he got to Ford, he would pull up his arm and say, ''Which watch you want?'' Because he hustled. That is how he provided for his family.

My mother only went up to eighth grade because she was trying to provide for her family, which is a farming family in Palestine. When she came to this country, pregnant with me, never could they have imagined their daughter ever becoming a United States Congress Member and coming here with that lived experience and understanding the importance of bringing truly loving and caring farm immigrant neighbors.

The human impact on doing nothing in regard to immigration is real. I grew up in Southwest Detroit—20 different ethnicities. I want you all to know what that feels like, right?

I mean, this is a majority Black city with a little bit of beautiful Brown spice here and there. I mean, it was just incredible to grow up in such a diverse community, where I felt like it made me a better mother, a better advocate, a better American because, at that moment, I appreciated things that my immigrant neighbors had seen through their lens and my Black neighbors through their experience in this country as they were fighting against racism, and continue to do so, and discrimination.

It is so incredibly important, as we think about this, not to allow others to fear our immigrant neighbors, to allow our country and policies to blame them for everything wrong in our country, when we all know they helped build it.

I also want to take a moment because I think it is incredibly important to know that I grew up in a border community. Right there in Detroit, on the other side, you can see Canada. What does that mean? Because people focus on the southern border. What that means is Border Patrol and immigration enforcement is right there in our community.

Why this is important is because I want you all to know, as they are supposed to be patrolling that border, making sure that illegal drugs and substances don't come in, that is not what they did. This very, very broken Customs and Border Patrol system and structure in place is so racialized that they turned on this beautiful Southwest Detroit community. They turned on my Latino neighbors. They turned on my Muslim brothers and sisters, many of them just trying to experience and live in this border community.

A 9-year-old ACLU investigation of Customs and Border Patrol operations in Michigan revealed just how incredibly racist the agency is. The report revealed that, even though CBP's mandated mission is to police the border, only 1.3 percent of their cases in Michigan involved attempted entries from Canada that were illegal. Ninety-six percent of those arrested by CBP in Michigan were recorded by agents of being nonwhite.

Now, I want to explain this to you all. My block club president, this beautiful Cuban, Black, mixed person, he is an incredible advocate. He works in the auto industry. He is out there with this guy from Germany coming in on a visitor visa. He is in this car, and he is showing them the border, the riverfront, just the walkway, and just showing: Hey, that is Canada. This is my community. This is where I live.

He is driving around and, of course, CBP stops him. He goes to the guy who is here on a visitor visa: Hey, I know you are from Germany. Don't worry. Just have your immigrant documents ready and everything.

But guess what? They didn't ask the guy from Germany for any of his documents. They asked the U.S.-born citizen, Brown neighbor of mine for those immigration documents.

Not only that, one of my neighbors running around in her own local park, in her own local park, was asked: Where are your papers?

□ 1945

People are now being asked to carry their documents with them, and this never happened for a very long time, up until about 15 or 20 years ago. To my good colleague from New Mexico, you should know this. This is a community that has never seen these kinds of ICE and immigration operations at schools, which is illegal. It is against our own Federal policies. They were doing them near churches. I mean, literally, near churches, against their own Federal policy. So it is really incredibly important to understand just how broken those systems are.

We can continue to talk about the contributions and the benefits of immigrants and our immigrant neighbors, but I don't want to make it out so—of course, it is an economic benefit. Many of my colleagues don't even realize that most of the food on the table, most the things that are done, are from immigrant hands touching it, most of it.

You look around. Everybody knows. Everybody knows who is building our country. Everybody knows that the agricultural community and industry relies on our immigrant neighbors. Everyone knows that. But they don't want to do that. They want somebody else to blame. Instead, my colleagues want to focus on making a pathway to citizenship, one much more humane. They are focused on blaming them for any economic downfall.

Guess what? Poverty is increasing, not because of our immigrants, but because we haven't been able to focus and put people before profits. We would rather do tax breaks for billionaires instead of actually taking care of our neighbors. We try to go ahead and blame our Brown and Black communities for everything going wrong in their own neighborhoods. That is just not how it works.

I am here because I also wanted to talk about Jakelin, if I may. Jakelin's story was really eye-opening to me as to what is really going on at the border. She was a 7-year-old who died shortly after arriving in the United States in 2018.

Jakelin turned 7 years old on her 2,000-mile journey north through Mexico. She was given her first new pair of shoes for this journey. Her and her father went north in search of a better life and to try to make money to send home to Jakelin's mom and her two siblings. Her family is from a tiny village in Guatemala, and they lived on approximately $7 per day. She was one of two children to die in CBP custody that month alone.

I say this because, where is the morality when it comes to these beautiful children that are coming with their parents? Where is the morality and understanding that people are coming here for this better opportunity and we have no pathway? This broken immigration system is hurting all of us. We need to wake up and understand that.

My beautiful neighbors in southwest Detroit always have my back. They are the ones when they got up in the morning who knew where my kids were, what was going on in the community. They were and still are just an integral part of my neighborhood and my community. When I look around, all I see is beauty, people that just want to live and thrive in our country.

I can show all kinds of economic benefit, but it is not enough, because a lot of people want to blame my immigrant neighbors for everything wrong. And everything wrong is not because of that; it is because you keep putting corporations before our people, period. That is it. You look at the budget, you see how much we are spending on defense versus how do we address infrastructure issues? How do we address the broken education and inequity in our education system?

I have a school district right now where the majority of fountains have garbage bags over them because they have no clean water coming through in our schools. Our kids don't have clean drinking water in schools. That is not because of all of these things that they keep talking about, about broken immigration. No.

If you look at what President Reagan did, President Bush and President Clinton, if you look at what they did, they created some sort of pathway. It wasn't perfect. But this constant vilification

needs to stop. It needs to stop, because that is the lazy approach. That is the lazy approach of legislating in this country.

Come on. I grew up here. You know what Detroit and this beautiful Black city taught me? You always have the backs of the people you represent. You focus on helping them get through everyday issues. You focus on what is broken inside, not looking far away and saying it is all their fault. Some of them are not even here, and they are blaming everybody else. Accept the fact that we haven't had the courage to stand up and say the economic divide in our country is real, that our folks are paying the high cost of auto insurance, folks are paying a high cost in a number of issues regarding their homes, regarding the education system and so many other systems.

I am passionate about this because not only am I a child of immigrant parents, but I was my mother's translator until I was 12 years old. I still remember, Madam Speaker, that I went into Sears and I was translating for my mother and this cashier just looked at her and looks at me and looks at her and looks at me—and I am 12 years old—and she goes: ''She needs to learn English.''

I look and smile. Of course, the southwest Detroit girl came out of me. My head did bob a little bit, and I said: ''Excuse me, but I am not translating what you are saying to my mother. I am translating what my mother wants to say to you. Why? Because even with her heavy accent, you are dehumanizing her. You are othering her. You are making it like she is less than, even though she tries.''

As she beautifully speaks the English language, I feel like, my God, like, if anything, people should appreciate it more.

So I say this because this lived experience of my mother, as a naturalized American citizen, who is so proud of having human dignity here, this freedom of raising her daughter who is now a United States Congresswoman, should be celebrating it and should be honoring it. Instead, I know what is happening to her in the streets. People are yelling at her to take off her hijab, vilifying her. That is what we are doing to our immigrant neighbors, the same ones who pick fruit and put it on our tables, who open and revive neighborhoods that have never seen life since they came to our communities.

I am tired of it. I am tired of folks using fear-mongering rhetoric to create hate towards my immigrant neighbors.

They are here because our country offers something that others don't. We should understand that. We should create a humane and fair and just immigration system, not one that hurts them and allows children to die, that targets women in detention centers, and separates our families. It is simply wrong.

The most American thing I could do up here is push back and say: Enough. We are a Nation of immigrants. All of us. I am tired of the hate and the racism.

I thank the Congressional Progressive Caucus for always speaking that truth to power.

Ms. LEGER FERNANDEZ. Madam Speaker, I think it is important to remember that they are not here just because we offer something more. Immigrants are here because we need them. We don't exist as a country without immigrants. They are here because they bring music and because they bring food and poetry and art and laughter. They bring community.

But they also bring incredible economic benefits. I talked earlier about the $1.7 trillion over 10 years, the 438,000 new jobs, the $700 in increased wages for everyone, the 6 years of additional life that we give Social Security. All of those are economic benefits.

Do we know that three-fourths of undocumented immigrants in the labor force are actually essential? That means they are the essential workers. Not just that. They are healthcare workers: 38 percent of the home healthcare aides caring for our loved ones at home, 29 percent of physicians, 23 percent of pharmacists. They are taking care of us. They are keeping us healthy.

Not only that. They are our entrepreneurs. They are the ones who are starting our businesses. Right now, 25 percent of new firms in America are opened by first-generation immigrants. The New American Economy reports that over 3 million immigrant entrepreneurs employ almost 8 million American workers across the Nation.

It is immigrants and the children of immigrants, who we have just heard, who come and serve in Congress, but they also start over half of all Fortune 500 companies. Yet, they are subject to the hatred that brought tears to my colleague's eyes. It is not right.

They are subject to that hatred in order to detract us from talking about what we need to talk about. What we need to talk about is, what we have been doing in this Congress when we passed the American Rescue Plan.

Instead of going back and being able to tell your communities that we passed the American Rescue Plan, help is on the way, we are going to be putting shots in arms, and we are going to get people back to work and kids back in schools—they don't want to talk about that. They want to talk about that border. That border is not threatening any of us, but that is what they want to talk about because they don't want to get to the work at hand.

But we are going to get to the work at hand, and we are going to push to include immigration in the reconciliation.

We heard earlier discussions about the manner in which families have been torn apart and separated at the border by the Trump administration. I have a bill that will not only reunify those families, but, as a mea culpa, as a way of saying we are sorry, we will make sure that they actually receive a visa and that they receive the kind of care that we must do whenever you traumatize a young child. They need that help.

We are also going to push to make sure that everyone who pays taxes receives the child tax credit. Those immigrant families are working, they are paying their taxes, and they were not getting the benefit of the child tax credit. We are going to make sure that we push for that and argue for that. We are going to make sure that we highlight who our immigrant brothers and sisters are, because they are us.

I want to remind us here today that back when this country was founded, even with all of its faults and flaws and original sins in how we started, that even back then, when our Founders talked about what this House should look like, they said that it should be a mirror, a portrait of America. They said that we should make sure that Congress has the right to pass the laws regarding how we vote us into office, because they did not trust those States. This was back at the founding. They did not trust those States because they knew that they would fight against having our House look like a miniature of the American people, a portrait.

That is the other thing that we are going to fight to do, to make sure that we get the voting rights in H.R. 1 passed and H.R. 4 passed, because that is how we also continue to push for immigration reform. We know America wants it. We talked about those polls, 83 percent, 67 percent. There is great, great support for that. It is only because we are not able to truly exercise our democratic values of self-governance that we have not yet passed it.

But we have this moment in reconciliation. We have this moment. It is a priority of the Congressional Progressive Caucus. It is a priority of the Congressional Hispanic Caucus. It is a priority of so many of our colleagues. So I am incredibly hopeful.

I am looking forward to listening to the President's words, after a recent meeting with the Congressional Hispanic Caucus, to tell us that he will also be supporting this.

We call upon the Senate to support immigration reform in the reconciliation act.

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

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ISSUES OF THE DAY

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 4, 2021, the Chair recognizes the gentleman from Florida (Mr. GAETZ) for 30 minutes.

Mr. GAETZ. Madam Speaker, the gentlewoman from New Mexico said that the border is not threatening to