

PERSONAL EXPLANATION

HON. GUS M. BILIRAKIS

OF FLORIDA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Sunday, January 3, 2021

Mr. BILIRAKIS. Madam Speaker, due to a preexisting family obligation, I was unable to participate in the votes scheduled for Monday, December 28, 2020. Had I been present, I would have voted YEA on Roll Call No. 252, and YEA on Roll Call No. 253.

PERSONAL EXPLANATION

HON. MICHAEL WALTZ

OF FLORIDA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Sunday, January 3, 2021

Mr. WALTZ. Madam Speaker, I was sick in November and missed the following roll call votes. Had I been present, I would have voted YEA on Roll Call No. 219; YEA on Roll Call No. 220; YEA on Roll Call No. 221; YEA on Roll Call No. 222; NAY on Roll Call No. 223; NAY on Roll Call No. 224; NAY on Roll Call No. 225; YEA on Roll Call No. 226; and NAY on Roll Call No. 227.

REFLECTIONS ON THE 116TH CONGRESS

HON. GRACE MENG

OF NEW YORK

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Sunday, January 3, 2021

Ms. MENG. Madam Speaker, I rise today to speak about the 116th Congress, which was as historic as it was harrowing. These last two years stretched and struck us at our core. At the same time, they inspired us like nothing before. No matter what, every single day, I was proud and grateful for the chance to represent the families of New York's Sixth Congressional District.

Against the backdrop of the most diverse Congress ever, and with a record number of elected women, the 116th Congress commenced in midst of the longest shutdown in the history of our country. The humanitarian crisis at the border crushed our souls. The House of Representatives impeached President Trump for abuse of power and obstruction of justice. The dehumanizing death of George Floyd absolutely shocked our nation. But millions of people—from all walks of life—came together to protest the ongoing systemic racial injustice and police brutality.

And of course, the COVID-19 pandemic has upended every facet of our lives. As of today, there are over 20 million cases in the U.S., and over 350,000 Americans who have died from COVID-19. Earlier in 2020, when New York was at the epicenter of the COVID-19 crisis, my congressional district was the nexus of that epicenter. In fact, my district was the harbinger of what the rest of our nation is fighting right now. Elmhurst Hospital, which is in my district, was hit particularly hard with a surge of patients. It was operating with limited Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) and ventilators.

I heard from frontline health care workers, and cried with them, as they feared for their

lives and begged our federal government to provide the necessary PPE. I called on President Trump to activate the Defense Production Act, and the FEMA Administrator to help and prioritize critical resources to our local hospitals and nursing homes. And I secured, delivered, and facilitated PPE donations to union workers and other non-health care workers.

I met with small business owners, especially those in predominantly Asian American neighborhoods, who had been severely impacted by xenophobia—even before the first known COVID-19 cases in New York. I also heard from constituents who are essential workers, many of whom come from our immigrant communities—the janitors, grocers, and transit workers. Even as the pandemic ravaged our city, I was heartened by the strength and perseverance of these constituents who showed up—and continue to show up—every single day to keep New York City safe and running.

Madam Speaker, no matter what, I never lost sight of my sworn duty to uphold and defend the Constitution, and to fight for my constituents.

During the 116th Congress, I was proud to help pass a number of robust legislation on behalf of my constituents and the American people. From lowering health care costs and prescription drug prices to ensuring women receive equal pay for equal work; from curbing the gun violence epidemic by strengthening background checks for gun sales to providing a pathway to citizenship for those who have only known this country, such as the Dreamers or TPS and DED holders—I am proud to have helped pass life-saving and life-enhancing bills. Unfortunately, too many of these bills languished in the Senate; because of Senate Majority Leader MCCONNELL's and Senate Republican's shameful inaction and disregard, these bills never saw the light of day.

This year has been especially challenging as people all over my district and across the country face the excruciating pain, loss, and fear over the health and economic fallout of COVID-19. Furthermore, be it economic, educational, or health, this pandemic has exposed and exacerbated existing disparities, wherein communities of color are the hardest hit.

For Asian Americans, however, they are fighting an additional battle—one against xenophobia. Since the beginning of the pandemic, Asian Americans in my district and across the nation endured demeaning and dangerous acts of hate and bigotry. That is why I introduced H. Res. 908—a resolution condemning all forms of anti-Asian sentiment as related to COVID-19. The resolution garnered 157 co-sponsors and was endorsed by over 500 organizations from across the country. The Senate companion of my resolution was introduced by now-Vice President-elect KAMALA HARRIS, and Senators DUCKWORTH and HIRONO. I am grateful this legislation passed the House of Representatives, and thankful to my colleagues who bravely voted for this legislation. Passage of this resolution sends a clear signal to the American people that we reject racism, xenophobia, and violence. It also honors the more than 2 million Asian Americans who are fighting on the frontlines of this pandemic.

With regards to COVID-19, I am grateful to have helped deliver three critical and life-saving corona virus relief packages this year. Shamefully, because of Senate Republicans, the third and most recent relief package passed nearly nine months since American

families received any relief from the federal government. It's beyond infuriating that the Senate Republicans kept any relief at bay—even though House Democrats passed COVID-19 relief packages in May and October, both of which would have been more meaningful and impactful. But with cases and deaths surging, millions unemployed, families on the cusp of eviction, and an untold number of families struggling to put food on the table, I had to vote for this package.

As we look to the 117th Congress, we must pass a stronger relief bill—one that truly reflects our values and acknowledges the unprecedented hardships that millions of Americans are facing. We cannot let those who have passed—to have died in vain. The only way we will rise above this crisis is to meet it head on with a comprehensive package that puts American families and workers first.

Madam Speaker, at the start of the 116th Congress, I joined the Homeland Security Subcommittee on the House Appropriations Committee. It has been my honor to serve on this subcommittee, as well as the Commerce, Justice, and Science, and State, Foreign Operations Subcommittees—on behalf of my congressional district and State of New York.

During the 116th Congress, my good friend Representative NITA LOWEY made 'herstory' as she took up the gavel and became the first female chair of the House Appropriations Committee. I will greatly miss Chairwoman LOWEY, as well as my esteemed colleague and chair of our Commerce, Justice, and Science Subcommittee, Chairman SERRANO. I wish them both strength and blessings in their retirement at the end of this 116th Congress.

I am proud that our committee passed all 12 of the spending bills for the Fiscal Years 2020 and 2021. Spending bill packages for each fiscal year amounted to \$1.4 trillion—totaling \$2.8 trillion during this 116th Congress. Among the many provisions I was proud to have helped secure, I am especially pleased the two spending packages included \$50 million for federal research at the CDC and NIH into our nation's gun violence epidemic—the first time in over 20 years such funding was allowed. I am also glad the recent Fiscal Year 2021 spending bill includes \$114 billion for SNAP; \$6 billion for WIC; a new \$5 million to develop databases to track excessive use of force and officer misconduct; \$9.24 billion to ensure clean air and water, and hold polluters accountable; \$3.8 billion for opioid prevention and treatment; \$5.9 billion for the Child Care and Development Block Grant; \$952 million for Senior Nutrition programs; \$789 million for minority serving institutions; \$90 billion for VA medical care, including suicide prevention and outreach, homelessness, and gender-specific care; and \$3.5 billion for Community Development Block Grants, which the President proposed eliminating.

I would also like to take this opportunity to include in the RECORD the following work that became law this Congress on behalf of the people of the Sixth Congressional District of New York:

H.R. 4567, the "FAFSA Translation Act", which requires the Department of Education to translate FAFSA into no fewer than 11 foreign languages, and to make these translated forms available in paper and electronic formats, which appears on Page 2779 in Sec. 483 of Title VII, Division FF of the "Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2021"