Democracy and I may die, but not today
Down, down, down the stairs we go, cellphones light
up, and the world sees proof of my life as I flee live on PBS
This is absurd, fantastical, yet nonetheless very much happening
Down into the tunnels we go
Flanked by guardians, we keep moving, Demings made it out, too, and we rejoice
Up, up, up the stairs we go
We are in a room now, they describe it as safe, and we congregate in herds like cattle
I feel part relieved and uneasy
Instigators and innocent, masked and maskless, Members and staff, we wait together
A community prayer ensues
I call my wife, I have made it, at least I am mostly sure
COVID–19 lurks as a silent killer in the room
Partisan cliques form, realizations begin, and an awkward casualness attempts to take hold
Guilt, blame, excuses, and outrage begin to form
Because of course we told you so, of course dangerous rhetoric turns to violence, as the seeds of despicable lies finally grow to insurrection
I start to contemplate
I am hungry, I am thirsty, and I am suspicious of certain colleagues
Gomez and I leave the safe room for our offices on gut feelings alone
I am vaccinated, I am eventually vindicated, as days later some colleagues are sick with COVID–19
Our colleagues gave it to them, maskless and without remorse
I return to our Rayburn sanctuary, I am greeted with anxious smiles, my staff is safe
We share the events of the great happening, the terrible
We watch the news, we see the mob in all its horror, and the assailing of the Capitol walls
We are in disbelief
Capitol Police fight hand-to-hand combat, they are outnumbered, and beaten by flags that say MAGA, Trump, and back the blue
There is a vicious irony
Now hunger reminds us, snacks are procured, we eat creatively in fellowship
The hours go by in frightful minutes as our eyes remain glued to the television
Brave cooks open the cafeteria, police keep their posts, and my staff remain safe in the Capitol offices with me
We finally have a real meal
The decision has been made, we will return to the Chamber, and we will do our duty
Arizona receives its objection and it goes down
Arkansas, California, Colorado go by as Pence picks up momentum
We have a standoff on Pennsylvania
Debates ensued, liars are called out and angered, a second fight almost happens, but no one really wants to take on NFL linebacker Colin Allred
Midnight passes us as we wait
I venture forth, I return to the scene of the crimes, and again I watch the final mahogany boxes in motion
West Virginia, Wisconsin, Wyoming, Pence concludes his remarks
There is a slight mix of anger, disappointment, and resoluteness in his face
Pence fulfills his constitutional duty
Speaker PELOSI smiles slightly, she is graceful and marks the seriousness of the day's events
A domestic terrorist plot has been foiled
I am alive, the Congress is alive, and thank God Almighty, democracy is alive
America must remember this day, learn from it, lest we repeat it

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

PROTECTING OUR SOUTHERN BORDER

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

Mr. GROTHMAN. Madam Speaker, before we deal with the purpose of this speech, I would like to make some observations about changes that have been made in the last few weeks and other rapidly changing aspects of American life.

One of the few positive observations I have made since I was a Congressman is the freedom people have normally had to see their Congressmen. Eccentric people can stand at the base of the Capitol steps a few yards away and hand out their pamphlets, nice and free. Easy to meet their Congressmen, for those of us who like to walk outside and not use the tunnel.

Now, a chain-link fence stands around the Capitol with razor wire on top. Let's be honest. After about midnight on January 7, I think most of us felt pretty safe.

Now, we are almost a month later, and we still have National Guard folks in full combat, ready to protect us. We have the wire on top of the walls, as well as Constitution and Independence Avenues shut down.

I feel like I am in East Germany in the 1970s. I am not sure exactly what East Germany was like, but that is how I kind of visualize it, around maybe their parliament or whatever, fencing, police, always afraid of the people.

It is a fitting background for our brave new world order in which our high-tech oligarchs are censoring ideas. Perhaps that is this background to the new censor regime. It seems almost appropriate.

Our high-tech oligarchs are censoring ideas which are unpopular with the wealthy and powerful in our country. Eventually, we will need some antitrust enforcement or legislation to open up Twitter and allow American citizens to hear all points of view, including points of view that the great and powerful of our country do not want to have heard.

I would like to thank the German, Mexican, and French Governments for their support as Americans try to regain their roots as a country with a free flow of ideas.

In the meantime, my plea to the Speaker and majority leader is please tear down the walls around this Capitol and begin to undo the damage done to our freedoms.

Now, back to the purpose of the speech.

One more time last week, I returned to our southern border, and already, we are seeing the results of, I think, reckless comments made by our Chief Executive.

We are getting to the point where we have had 300 unaccompanied minors a day crossing our southwest border. That is because we have had a President who has made comments that indicate that the United States is not sincere in protecting our southern border.

□ 2130

It does result in more money and more presence for drug cartels at the Southern border. So people understand, people do not just walk across the border. Mexicans are charged $3,000 a person; Central Americans, $5,000 a person; Brazilians, $9,000 a person; and Asians, $20,000 a person to cross the border.

And when statements are made indicating that we will no longer be enforcing the border, those statements are conveyed by the cartels to people who they believe will pay to get across. We are, therefore, seeing the increase of people at the border, including unaccompanied minors who are supposedly people we want to protect.

Last week, on the Sunday, Monday, and Tuesday, just in the Sasabe section alone, after I left that area, there were 120 unaccompanied juveniles. Some already part of a criminal element, but given that they have to deal with the cartels to get across the border, it certainly is not a good influence on them.

Also while I was down there, I heard in the last year, on the Tucson sector alone—and there are seven or eight sectors along our Southern border—well over 100 people were found dehydrated to death. This is the result of the current system in which we do not secure our border.

Unfortunately, despite the verbiage which indicates we are going to be less stringent in enforcing our border, we are also going to stop building the wall. First of all, you are throwing away about 5,000 jobs right away, and supposedly we are supposed to be looking for new jobs.

But more than that, when you end these contracts, you wind up having to pay companies for parts of the wall that have been built but haven't been put up yet, pay them to undo or fill in holes which have been placed there in anticipation of a full wall, pay them to undo the damage to roads. And roads are part of the wall system that is going to be built down there. As a result, we are spending a lot of money which could be used to put in more wall and is not.

I should point out that when you put up a wall, it saves money as far as the number of Border Patrol agents you need. If you don't have a wall, it should take about two or three border agents a mile to patrol the border. With a wall, it is about one agent for every two miles. Another benefit for having a wall.

But above all, the idea of paying money to wrap up the project rather than paying money to complete the wall is a waste of money and a real problem.

Another thing I found out, with the wall, you are going to have less injuries to Border Patrol agents, which is probably one of many reasons why when I have gone down at the wall, I have yet to find a Border Patrol agent or a sheriff's deputy for the counties along the Southern border who is not in favor of the wall.

We are going to wind up losing money as we pay money to care for people crossing the wall, losing money to our society as we have more drugs coming across the Southern border. And not surprising, as marijuana becomes more legal in the United States, more of the drugs that cross the Southern border are fentanyl, are meth, are heroin, resulting in more deaths all around the country. Another reason why we should be taking our Southern border seriously.

I, therefore, strongly encourage my colleagues, as we look at future appropriation bills, to pay attention to the border. We cannot go back to the days of completely anybody can come across there, because, like I said, you are going to wind up with more people dehydrated to death in the desert. You are going to wind up with more unaccompanied minors who are going to be dealt with by the tender arms of the drug cartels, which control all the immigration and illegal immigration across the Southern border.

So, please, I ask my colleagues, do what I did. Go down to Arizona. Go down to Texas. See the situation we have. See whether anybody could possibly think going back to the old system is humane in any way. It is not humane to minors. It is not humane to the people who are guided by the cartels. It is not humane to the people who cross the border and wind up dehydrating across our Southern edge.

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

LET'S KEEP OUR EYES ON THE FUTURE

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 4, 2021, the Chair recognizes the gentlewoman from Michigan (Ms. STEVENS) until 10 p.m.

Ms. STEVENS. Madam Speaker, I thank you so much for your dedication to this body and your oversight this evening. I thank all of the very hardworking professionals who help to run the floor of the House. I am so pleased to be back on the floor of the House of Representatives this day, February 4.

Some on the outside project fair criticism, question, demand, want of us. Some may look at us even with a frustrated or loathing eye. We all know how often we hear the statistic about how popular Congress is. What pours in here through money, outside influence, the money that circles around this building.

And when we walk onto this floor of the House of Representatives, though, we are all but just Members. We are representatives of our constituents, carrying a voting card, carrying a voice, representing the values, the determinations, the wishes and the wants of our district, and forced to come together to make a determination.

We ask ourselves: What do we demand of this institution?

I had the privilege of being here this evening as we have seen a long debate, a long time of Special Orders ensue, those who reflected on the events of January 6, the horrible insurrection that took place, the desecration of this institution, this pride and joy of the United States of America, both the House and the Senate momentarily taken over. And I join my colleagues in those reflections.

We saw the other side of the aisle reflect on energy needs, energy resource needs. We also saw some contributions made to constituents back at home.

Tonight, as you look out to the Capitol—and we know this—it is not a full Chamber right now. These are obviously also different times, Madam Speaker. We don't have many outside guests walking through the Congress due to the pandemic. But everyone is allowed to look at the Capitol and see the lantern, see the tholus that supports the Statue of Freedom, that supports Lady Freedom. That lantern is lit right now.

And what is that lantern saying?

That democracy rings out, that freedom rings out, that our future is still within our grasp.

I am proud and grateful to be here tonight, Madam Speaker. I know that the time is not always a given. We certainly recognize that in the midst of this pandemic. We reflect just a month in to this 117th session of Congress. I am very excited about this 117th session of Congress because it is new. It is a new session.

And what do we get with new?

A month ago, January 4, the day after the swearing-in of the new Congress, we passed our rules package, we had procedural votes. I am very proud to say I introduced my first bill of the Congress, the Resilient Manufacturing Task Force Act, a bipartisan bill, focused on our domestic supply chain needs to ensure that we can withstand future disruptions, that we can continue to test our system, that we can bring together the best and brightest of America to get in front of challenges and create jobs and continue to create jobs.

I come from Michigan, and I am really proud of coming from Michigan and I am proud of what Michigan's story is, particularly coming out of the year 2020, and what that means with regard to the first bill I introduced in the 117th Congress, our manufacturing economy, our innovation capabilities.

We have continued to monitor this economy. We are seeing some ricochets, some growth in areas we weren't expecting, some job loss. Michigan's at about a 7.5 percent unemployment. We are going to build it back better. We are going to get people back to work with good wages and good benefits and a dignity for what they do. You see that in manufacturing, when people work with their hands, when they produce, when they are part of an outcome and a productivity. And it is really very exciting to see that Michigan will continue to be a leader.

It must be recognized, our leadership, because when those supply chain disruptions hit almost a year ago, when we saw the PPE shortages in our hospitals, in our healthcare system for the individual American who was going to the grocery store looking for some hand sanitizer or a roll of paper towels, it was the Michigan manufacturers who stood up immediately to rework their supply chains, to rework their production channels, to source that PPE, from the big three—from Ford, Chrysler, GM—on down the supply chain. And it was absolutely amazing, and it was union workers to boot.

And then the great innovation of America, the story that will also be heralded and seen coming out of this pandemic was the creation of a proven and tested vaccine that we invested in immediately. My colleagues and I will reflect on that, that the first thing we did as a body together, all of Congress, everyone who gets to stand in this body voted to fund the research for the vaccine, the very beginning of March. And we got that vaccine, and it got produced in a place called Portage, Michigan. As the year began to reach its conclusion, the trucks filled with that vaccine, and it started to get in the arms of the people who were counting on it. Absolutely miraculous. So unique to the place that I am privileged to call home.

As we reflected in 2019, on the 50th anniversary of the Moon landing, the question I would ask my colleagues is: What is our moonshot of the next 50 years?

We certainly met one in the year 2020, yet we haven't stopped continuing to innovate. We haven't stopped continuing to keep our eyes on a future that we are inheriting and that our next generation is inheriting.

I am optimistic about this next generation. I am optimistic about what they represent and about my opportunity to engage and to listen to the students of America and to advocate for them from the Halls of Congress. It is why I proudly sit on the Education and Labor Committee.

President John Kennedy said: ''To govern is to choose.''

To govern is to choose. And we make those choices. See, I don't get to issue proclamations instead of voting. I take a vote. I come down, ''yes'' or ''no.''

Which way do we decide to come down as a nation?

Are we going to agree as a people with one another every step of the way?