

**House Judiciary Committee
October 21, 2021
Member Day**

Thank you, Chairman Nadler for hosting Member Hearing Day today.

I proudly sponsored the bipartisan H.R. 2923, the Energy Security and Lightering Independence Act of 2021, which will help ensure the continued safe operation of energy liquid-cargo lightering vessels transiting in our ports.

This is because current law does not allow the U.S. State Department to issue visas that exceed a 29-day period while lightering crew work aboard these vessels—those key workers that physically manage the transfer of liquid products from “lighter” ships that operate shallower waters to much larger oceangoing vessels, and vice versa—may range between 60 to 180 days in their crew rotation.

To align with real-world industry norms more closely, the bill authorizes visas of up to 180 days for liquid lightering workers.

Otherwise, the disconnect between the current crewmember visas and their typical employment contracts threatens to leave lightering vessels short-staffed, disrupting both domestic oil exports and the critical feedstock imports for America's refiners and petrochemical industries.

Lightering is vital to the U.S. refining industry and accounts for nearly 50 percent of all crude and natural gas imports into and exports in Texas and the U.S. Gulf Coast.

I look forward to having this legislation come before the Judiciary Committee to make much needed changes so crews of these lightering vessels remain healthy so that these vessels may operate safely and efficiently.

I'm also a proud sponsor of the Virtual Naturalization Act of 2021 (VNA), and I thank Chair Lofgren for co-leading this essential legislation.

For the hundreds of thousands of lawful permanent residents seeking to become U.S. citizens each year, the oath of allegiance—typically administered at an in-person ceremony—is the last step to becoming a U.S. citizen.

When U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services was forced to suspend in-person services during the early days of the COVID-19 pandemic, citizenship ceremonies were canceled for thousands of individuals whose applications for naturalization had been approved.

Without any procedures to administer naturalization oaths remotely, many individuals were left in limbo for months, unable to complete the citizenship process.

My bill directs the Secretary of Homeland Security to establish procedures to administer remote oath ceremonies.

The bill also makes changes to the Immigration and Nationality Act to clarify that a remote oath ceremony is a permissible alternative to an in-person ceremony, and makes technical changes to

ensure that the Secretary of Homeland Security can administer such oaths and deliver certificates of naturalization efficiently.

Lastly, I applaud President Biden's recent decision to stop the detention of pregnant, nursing, and postpartum migrant women by ICE.

The previous administration's decision to engage in these abhorrent practices was part of a larger anti-refugee, anti-immigrant campaign of cruelty that we are glad to see come to an end.

But while this recent decision by the Biden administration is commendable and welcomed, it is limited and can unfortunately be easily reversed by any future administration.

This is why Senator Patty Murray and I reintroduced the bicameral Stop Shackling and Detaining Pregnant Women Act.

As a Member of Congress, I have a responsibility to ensure that we do everything in our power to protect those who seek refuge in the United States from cruelty and mistreatment.

We need permanent protections that apply to all border law enforcement agencies—not just ICE—to protect pregnant women at every step of the way.

That is why I call on Congress to take swift action and bring this legislation to President Biden’s desk to codify protections for present and future migrant people.

Thank you again to this distinguished committee for the opportunity to share the importance of taking up these critical pieces of legislation.

Thank you, I yield back.