

Congresswoman Cori Bush Farewell Address

U.S. House Floor | Thursday, December 12, 2024

St. Louis and I rise, just as we have risen so many times before over these last four, historic years.

Together we came into this work with a simple mission: to transform Missouri's First District by taking care of the people. On day one, we vowed to do the most for St. Louis, starting with those who have the greatest need.

We were clear-eyed of what was in front of us, ahead of us, and behind us. We stayed focused, we stayed committed.

St. Louis, WE came to Congress after unseating a 52 year political family dynasty. I ran for this seat twice to win it, and today, I stand before you as the first Black woman and first nurse to represent Missouri in Congress, the first woman to represent Missouri's First Congressional District, and the first activist from the movement to save Black lives to serve in Congress.

From the day that I was sworn in, I have brought you, my community, and my own lived experiences with me into every vote, every Committee hearing, and every floor speech. St. Louis and I. I am proud to be the people I represent.

I am the young girl who grew up in a working class household, where my father was a union meat cutter and my mother was a computer analyst. I am the teenager who had my first abortion at the age of 18 after being sexually assaulted at the age of 17. I am the young woman in her early twenties who endured an abusive relationship that nearly ended my life. I am the mother who endured pregnancy and childbirth complications who encountered biased medical care that was dismissive of my pain. I am the formerly-single mother to two beautiful children, Zion and Angel—who will always be my greatest accomplishment. I am the nurse and pastor who cared for others throughout our community. I am the asthmatic adult who

understands the challenges of being uninsured. I am the activist from the Frontlines of Ferguson, the Ferguson uprising movement, who in 2014, was out on the streets for over 400 days, protesting police violence after the killing of Michael Brown, Jr.

My life's experiences are different from many of my colleagues here on Capitol Hill, but, outside these walls, my experiences are all too familiar. In Missouri and across the country, people are living multi-faceted lives and they endure the decisions we do and don't make in this chamber each and everyday. Like me, 1 in 4 people of reproductive age have had an abortion before the age of 45 in the United States. Like I was, over five hundred and eighty thousand people in the U.S. experience homelessness on any given night, and in Missouri nearly 6,000 people are living without stable homes, almost a quarter of them unsheltered. Like I've been, nearly 1 in 5 women and 1 in 71 men in the U.S. have been raped at some point in their lives, and in Missouri, 1 in 3 women and 1 in 7 men has experienced sexual violence. And just like I have endured, approximately 41% of women and 26% of men across our country have reported that they have experienced a form of domestic violence by an intimate partner during their lifetime, and in Missouri, our state has the third highest rate of domestic violence in the U.S.

St. Louis, you sent me to Congress, because I reflect the struggles so many people in our community endure. And throughout my tenure in the People's House, I've turned my pain into purpose. I've testified before the House Oversight Committee, sharing my abortion story for the first time. I knew that there are others out there, like me, who may never share their truth with their family members or friends, but are living through this new reality—horrified.

It's led me to fight and put my own body on the line to protect medication abortion, to protect sexual and reproductive health, to stop the Comstock Act, to secure abortion justice, to finally, *finally* finalize the Equal Rights Amendment, which we're pushing President Biden to do in the next 39 days. And on this point, I'm so proud to be one of two Black women to ever

sponsor legislation to ratify the ERA in its 101 years long history, to have co-founded and co-chaired the first-ever Congressional Caucus on the Equal Rights Amendment. Black women have always been integral to the fight for equal rights and so often relegated to its footnotes.

Congresswoman Ayanna Pressley and I have forever changed that.

My life experiences have shaped and informed this work. I've been violated, shot at, raped and assaulted—by people I've known and people I've loved. So I deeply understand the statistic that a woman is five times more likely to be murdered when her abuser has access to a gun, because I *am* one of the women who have come so close to joining that statistic. It's why I pushed so hard for the inclusion of ending the dating partner loophole in the Bipartisan Safer Communities Act. Because I know safer communities doesn't just mean safer streets, it means safer relationships too.

I've been beaten, brutalized, and assaulted as a Ferguson Frontlines activist. I've grieved with my community for Mike Brown, Kajieme Powell, VonDerritt Myers, Anthony Lamar Smith, and so many others. I know that police brutality is a preventable crisis that is affecting Black and brown communities disproportionately. It's what our movement to save Black lives is born out of, and it's why I partnered with that same movement to author the People's Response Act. To end police brutality, to end all police violence, to transform community safety, to treat public safety as the public health issue that it is.

I am one of 187 Black representatives to ever serve in this institution where over 1700 members of Congress who enslaved Black people have held office, and as the Congresswoman representing the very district where Dred Scott was denied citizenship because he was Black. I've seen how the legacy of enslavement persists in the policies that govern our lives today, from housing and healthcare to education and economic inequality to mass incarceration and police brutality. It's why I introduced the Reparations Now Resolution, laying out a historic framework for how our government can begin its moral and legal obligation to provide reparations to the descendants of chattel slavery in America. Because it isn't enough to just

acknowledge the past. We must work to reckon with its consequences and act to repair harms.

I ran for this seat to deliver for you, St. Louis, for the people. Over the past four years, we have delivered over \$2 billion dollars in federal investments for our communities; resources that will empower our district and create lasting change for generations. This includes over \$41 million which has gone toward community projects geared toward homelessness prevention, public health, youth engagement, environmental justice, and economic revitalization projects across St. Louis. We have helped to guide thousands of our constituents through federal casework, and we established community programs, such as *Congress in Your Neighborhood* and *Congress in Your Classroom*.

I've refused to settle for crumbs handed to our communities. I've sat and listened to SEIU caregivers and so many other union workers and leaders, I've been in community with environmental organizers pushing for climate action, I've mourned with grieving families demanding an end to gun violence, I've been with the mom who couldn't afford childcare or who struggled to feed her family. So when the President asked us to fight for his full economic agenda, I fought. We fought. Those sitting behind me, we fought for his full economic agenda. But for a few corporate Democrats, the Build Back Better Act would be the law of the land now. We would have stopped talking about rising inflation and instead delivered on universal pre-K and affordable childcare, a permanent, monthly child tax credit, paid leave, free school meals, investments in our caregivers, historic funding to build new affordable housing and rehabilitate crumbling housing stock, expanded Medicare benefits, taxes on billionaire corporations and the ultra-wealthy so that they can finally pay their fair share, and lastly, removing every lead pipe poisoning our communities. We may have lost that fight, but there must be a reckoning. The November election has shown that we were right to fight with everything we had for Build Back Better. This party must do better.

I've been unhoused. I know the trauma of that policy violence, of being forced out on the streets, of not knowing if my two babies would survive the night in our car because of freezing temperatures. I know that. It's why I introduced first-of-its kind legislation, the Unhoused Bill of Rights, which makes clear the basic human rights and dignity of our unhoused neighbors. It provides the roadmap for ending homelessness by 2027. Congress can do that. We can guarantee safe, affordable, and stable housing for ALL people—and we must.

I still remember the day in August 2021, when on the brink of the expiration of the federal eviction moratorium, and with a bill waiting to be passed on the House Floor, Congress actually gaveled out to head to the comforts of their own homes for the next six weeks. Knowing the indignity of being evicted myself, I could not leave. And I did not leave. And I had friends who stayed- or who showed up and came back. Squad shows up. Because for months prior, we had pushed the Biden Administration and CDC to prevent a lapse in the pandemic-era federal ban on evictions. I knew that so many lives in St. Louis and nationwide were at risk. So I did what I do, I led from my life experience and stayed put—right on the Capitol steps. For four nights and five days, through cold rain and summer heat, we pushed for our government to act. My team and I negotiated with House and Senate Leadership, the White House, Biden Administration officials including HHS and Treasury, and worked in tandem with the Congressional Black and Progressive Caucuses to keep people housed. And the White House heeded our call, reinstating the eviction moratorium, and keeping 11 million people housed. But it shouldn't take such drastic action for lawmakers to act. The risk of harming a single person, when you have the power not, should be enough. Again, as my time here comes to a close, I ask my colleagues here to do better.

The decisions we make here—within these halls—do not exist in a vacuum. They ripple outward, touching the lives of millions. They impact the unhoused veteran searching for safety, the survivor waiting to be heard and believed, the child admitted to the emergency room because they're

asthmatic and can't breathe. We must honor the humanity and circumstance of those we serve.

Because being in Congress is a privilege. Don't waste it and don't settle. Don't say, "well, we tried." Don't abuse the power we've been afforded to make a difference in people's lives. The people are depending on you to show up for them and their need. You have the power to change the world. Don't sit on that power, use it to do good deeds and to save and transform lives. We are the United States of America—the wealthiest and most powerful country in the world. So we can't act like the court jester. So do better. But if you're not willing to do the hard work, to shirk the corporate donors in service of everyday people, then how can you call yourself a representative?

I understand this and it is why I was one of the first members of Congress to call for a ceasefire, and why I am the lead sponsor of the *historic* Ceasefire Now Resolution. It's why I kept calling for a ceasefire, even after the White House called us "repugnant" and "disgraceful" only to turn around later and adopt the same policy, without an apology, without even so much as a phone call. It's why I will keep standing up *for* Palestinian liberation and *against* genocide, infanticide, femicide, and androicide. Why I will fight for peace and against endless war, for our collective humanity and against our collective demise, even when my persistence bought, *yes bought*, my successor this seat with a whole lot of Republican money.

For me, when I came into office, I vowed to be the same person I was then as I am today. To lead with a heart that knows no borders. My love and my fight have always been for all people.

When I was first elected, I toured John Lewis's office. I stood in the space where courage once sat, and I vowed to honor his legacy, as I know many of us in this body have done. But let's be honest: too many of us recite his words without following his example. Too many of us, who should be allies, remain silent in the face of injustice.

Many of us, especially my democratic colleagues, tout that we are the party for human rights and for justice. That we fight - loud and proud - for all people, no matter their race, background, sexual orientation, faith or ethnicity.

Yet when it comes to Palestinian liberation, so many have chosen silence. Silence in the face of bombed hospitals and schools, displaced families, starvation and illness, entire bloodlines wiped out, and the cries of mothers and children. Silence in the face of apartheid. Silence in the face of the ethnic cleansing. Silence in the face of oppression and racial subjugation that mirrors the systems of Jim Crow, systemic racism and inequality that we fight against here in America. Silence.

Maybe for some, it's because it's easy, or because the politics are just "too complicated." Those are excuses. Those are copouts to doing the right thing. And as members of Congress, they are hindrances to doing our jobs.

In the words of Dr. King, the time is always right to do what is right.

So, *I* will keep leading with consistent love and consistent respect for all people, no matter their background, the color of their skin, or where they were born. I will fight for every person's right to live, to love, and to thrive. I will keep standing up for a free Palestine, for a free Haiti, for a free Congo, for a free Sudan, for a free St. Louis, for a free America, for a free democracy. I will always fight for the people in our country and world who have the greatest need—for those who are incarcerated, unhoused, unemployed, uninsured, food insecure, struggling to make ends meet, for our children and our elders, for victims and survivors of violence, for the persecuted and the villainized—and for every person who has been historically marginalized, silenced, or cast aside by entrenched systems of violent oppression, repression, white supremacy, and systemic injustice.

And if you think it is this consistency or this radical love that is a weakness, a mistake or the reason why I won't be here next year, think again.

My radical and unconditional love for humanity is not a weakness, it's my superpower.

The *only* reason why I will not be here next year is because I didn't bend my morals to special interests. They tried to silence me, but it didn't work. They thought I would crack under the pressure, but they underestimated me. They tried to buy me, but you cannot buy someone who refuses to be bought.

No one can buy my silence. No one can pay me to be silent so their people can drop bombs. I made a decision to be change, not chained.

I am reminded of a scripture in Mark 8:36 "For what shall it profit a man to gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?"

My colleagues – I share the words of Dr. King who said, "In the end, we will remember not the words of our enemies, but the silence of our friends."

Colleagues, special interests would have them believe that fighting for those others deem unworthy, justice, comes at a cost that they can't afford. That it isn't worth putting their reputation and livelihood on the line. That sometimes backing down or staying quiet is smart politics. That keeping the status quo is better than challenging it. My Christian colleagues should be familiar with this verse "You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt loses its flavor, how shall it be seasoned? It is then good for nothing..." If we are not bringing something to the situation to transform it for the better, if we are not being about the change. If we are not the reason why people are helped. If we can't season the problem, bring flavor to it meaning leave a positive mark, then we have no purpose in the work.

My words are not for condemnation but for reconciliation. A reminder to love thy neighbor- love being an action word. Reflect on your own actions or inaction, reckon with yourself and walk into this moment anew. There are people in this country and around the world who need your voice, who need you to stand up and speak out. Who needs you to be who you say you

are for all people- not just for some of the people. Don't let them down. Never before have we seen such vital collective action on Palestine or support for the calls for an arms embargo on Israel. And never before have we seen such brazen efforts by AIPAC and its affiliates to try and shut out our voices. But they wouldn't be coming for us if we weren't powerful. We won't back down. We won't go backwards. We'll keep fighting for equal rights, dignity, security, justice, and self-determination for ALL people. We understand what the word ALL means. We'll keep fighting to end the disastrous *Citizens United*, to get dark money out of politics, and for the representation that everyday people—not billionaires and billionaire corporations—deserve.

Now, every elected official knows that the work we do, we don't do alone. There are so many people who uplift us, support us, sustain us, prop us up, and hold us down in this work. I want to take some time to thank some of them now.

To my chairmen and their staff, Ranking Members Raskin and Nadler, and former Chairwoman Maloney: thank you for believing in me, for nurturing me and welcoming my perspective. To Carolyn your mentorship on the ERA has helped me arrive at this point where I am today. Jamie, your work has inspired me and your mentorship has meant the world to me. To Democratic House Leadership and their staff, thank you for your support. And to every person who calls the Capitol their workplace—thank you. To our OG Congresswoman, Barbara Lee, thank you for being a quintessential auntie, mentor, leader, and friend—for always having my back and showing that even if you have to stand alone to never compromise on your values. To CPC and CBC Chairs Pramila Jayapal, Joyce Beatty and Steven Horsford, for leading our Caucuses with foresight and openness—and to your staff, including but not limited to Vincent Evans and Michael Darner: thank you. To the late Congresswoman Sheila Jackson Lee, for her friendship, mentorship, and commitment to securing justice for Black communities, particularly in the form of reparations, I will forever honor your memory.

To Senator Bernie Sanders, thank you for your leadership and unwavering consistency. You are an inspiration and movement builder. To Senator Elizabeth Warren, thank you for being a model for delivering for communities, for stepping out and embracing issues that help everyday people, and for embracing me during our action on the eviction moratorium. Senator Markey, you've been a steadfast partner in the work for environmental justice and protecting frontline communities, and I'm deeply appreciative that our first bicameral bill together made it into law to help prioritize resources to communities like St. Louis.

I am so grateful to have the greatest group of friends within these walls - who are anything but silent. Rashida, Ayanna, Delia, Ilhan, Jamaal, Summer, Alex and so many others – our squad was never small or silent. We have changed the course of history. Each of you have made history and a difference in your own right, and you have each made a difference in my life. And I'm going to speak for brother Jamaal, you made a difference in his life. Thank you for your friendship, your partnership and your solidarity. Thank you for bringing ALL of yourself to Congress to help communities from Detroit, to Minneapolis, to Pittsburgh, to Boston, to the Bronx to Chicago, to Puerto Rico, to Central America, to Somalia, to Haiti, to Palestine and everywhere in between. And I ask that you hold up our sister Rashida for the next two years in our absence

To my brother, Jamaal. We came into Congress together in 2020. I'm so proud to have served in such a time as this one, with you. You are authentically you. You've represented your district and your country with heart and with courage. We are family—and if for nothing else we'll always be connected for our time in Congress together, our impact on our world, and for the experiences we've endured together this cycle and the last. Thank you for not *ever* backing down in our work to protect humanity, no matter the stakes.

To my remarkable staff: Amelia Letson, Caleb Ammon-Hahn, Christopher Key, Claire Shackelford, Isabella Seigel, Jessica Grandberry, Jacqueline Greco, Joi Benton, Karla Santillan, Kate Salamido, Kimberly Bryant,

Marina Chafa, Rachell Nord Roseau, and Lynese Wallace. And all of our interns and all of our fellows. To Abbas Alawieh, Danielle Spradley, Stephanie Herndon, Kate Kelly and to all those, past and present, who are forever a part of Team Rep. Cori—thank you. Thank you for never forgetting the mission: to do the most for every person in St. Louis, starting with those who have the greatest need. From responding to the toughest of days—two historic flooding events, a devastating school shooting, displaced housing incidents, verbal attacks and death threats—to the best of days, securing the eviction moratorium, transforming people’s engagement with government, delivering for our community, for our collective liberation and building movement-based coalitions—Team Rep. Cori has delivered for St. Louis. I am deeply appreciative of each of you for your love and dedication to our district and the betterment of our country and world.

To Ferguson Frontline, the families, and the whole of our movement to save lives: thank you for entrusting me, my team, and our work. Our work is unfinished, and we will never tire, and never back down, until justice is won.

To my family, who has always stood by me in this work- my dad Errol, super dad, my mom Barbara- Happy birthday mom, go 70, to my sister Kelli, brother Perry, aunts, uncles, cousins, nieces and nephews, To my incredible husband, our four kids and grandson and in-love family: you have endured missed holidays, the weight of public scrutiny, and the challenges that come with my calling. Without your unwavering encouragement, boundless grace, and steadfast support, I would not have been able to dedicate myself so fully to serving St. Louis. Your love has always been my *foundation* and my *strength*.

To my beloved St. Louis: this work was never about one single seat. It was always about the change we need to *feel*, the dreams we dare to dream for ourselves and for our children, for our legacy, the hopes and aspirations we have to move beyond struggle and hardship and towards opportunity and prosperity for ALL of us. We are the change we seek.

What we have accomplished together over the last four years is nothing short of extraordinary. We have witnessed history, and we have made history. We have laughed, and we have cried. We have stood in solidarity and we have stood our ground. We have turned our pain into power and our obstacles into opportunities. We have faced challenges head-on and we have emerged stronger than ever. We are St. Louis. Though we know that there is still much more work left to do. Together, we have shown that it is possible to lead with purpose and moral clarity and to fight with honor and love for all people.

While my time in Congress may be coming to an end for now, know this, I came into congress with my voice. Congress did not give that to me. Congress can not take that away when I leave.

It has been the honor of my life to be your Congresswoman Missouri's First District. Mom and Dad, I know you're proud.

From St. Louis to Gaza and everywhere beyond and in between: Always remember, this Congresswoman loves you and will always have your back even if it means I lose something. So, until we rise again, St. Louis- I love you.

I yield my time back to the chair.