

Secured advance appropriations for the Veterans Administration for the first time—creating an uninterrupted source of funding for medical care for veterans.

The Caregivers and Veterans Omnibus Health Services Act helped veteran caregivers with training, access to mental health counseling, and 24-hour respite care in veteran's homes.

1. The law helped veterans of Operation Enduring Freedom and Operation Iraqi Freedom by allowing them to select a caregiver who would receive a financial stipend along with travel and lodging expenses associated with the veteran's care.

2. This law also expanded and improved services for the then 1.8 million women veterans, and provided for the expected increased number of veterans that would transition from active duty to civilian life.

3. The law authorized the VA to provide healthcare for newborn infants of women veterans.

It is important that we preserve and build upon this record of achievement.

Veteran homelessness was addressed in the Housing and Economic Recovery Act of 2008 by increasing the VA loan limit which helped veterans with refinancing their homes by making low-interest home loans more available to veterans.

Mr. Speaker, all members of this body were deeply concerned over the troubling disclosures reported in the media regarding conditions as some of the nation's VA facilities.

I am pleased to report that the Department of Veterans Affairs, at the direction of President Obama and mandated by Congress, has made substantial progress in improving the performance of VHA healthcare now, developing a positive service culture, transitioning from "sick care" to "health care" in the broadest sense, and developing agile business systems and management processes that are efficient, transparent and accountable.

For example, The "Road to Veterans Day" initiative, launched on September 8, 2014 by Secretary Robert A. McDonald, has resulted in significant progress for Veterans over the past 3 months

During that time, DVA has taken deliberate actions to improve service delivery for Veterans, rebuild trust, increase accountability and transparency and put the department on the path to long-term excellence and reform.

Secretary McDonald has traveled extensively during his first few months in office, visiting 41 DVA facilities in 21 cities while also making 11 recruiting visits to medical schools.

To improve service delivery, VA has prioritized efforts to accelerate Veterans off of wait lists and into clinics through the Accelerated Care Initiative begun by Deputy Secretary Sloan Gibson this summer.

Through this initiative, VA medical centers have increased access to care inside and outside of VA, added more clinic hours and work days, deployed mobile medical units, and shared their best practices from VA's high-performing facilities throughout the organization.

Significant improvements have resulted nationally:

1. Scheduling more than 1.2 million more appointments in the past four months than in the same period last year.

2. In total, VA medical centers have scheduled over 19 million Veteran appointments from June to October 1, 2014.

3. Reducing the national new patient Primary Care wait time by 18 percent.

4. Completing 98 percent of appointments within 30 days of the Veterans' preferred date, or the date determined to be medically necessary by a physician.

5. Authorizing 1.1 million non-VA care authorizations, a 47 percent increase over the same period last year.

Secretary McDonald addressed all employees via Video Teleconference, where he directed each employee to reaffirm the mission and core values of the Department.

A new award program has been initiated to highlight employees who truly embody DVA's ICARE values—Integrity, Commitment, Advocacy, Respect, and Excellence. The first nominations for this new incentive program will be accepted in January 2015.

Since June 2014, DVA has proposed disciplinary action against more than 40 employees nationwide related to data manipulation or patient care.

DVA is also working diligently to cooperate with the over 100 investigations currently being undertaken by the VA Inspector General, the Justice Department, and the Office of Special Counsel (OSC).

On October 3, OSC certified DVA under their Whistleblower Protection Certification Program after DVA worked to achieve compliance and protect employees who identify or report problems from unlawful retaliation.

DVA also worked closely with OSC to successfully resolve whistleblower retaliation complaints filed by three individuals from the DVA Phoenix Health Care System.

DVA has posted data online on a regular basis since the beginning of June showing the number of appointments on waiting lists and the average wait times at each medical center across the country.

Additionally, each medical center and benefits office has conducted a town hall with Veterans and the public to collect feedback. These town halls will continue at each facility every three months.

DVA is reviewing options to reorganize the department for success, guided by ideas and initiatives from Veterans, employees, and all of our stakeholders.

This reorganization will be known as "MyVA" and is designed to provide Veterans with a seamless, integrated, and responsive customer service experience—whether they arrive at VA digitally, by phone, or in person.

Long-term reform of DVA also means making sure DVA has the medical professionals we need to best care for our patients, which is why Secretary McDonald launched a national recruiting effort in August, visiting medical schools in an effort to bring the best and brightest to work at DVA.

On September 17, DVA announced an increase in the salary pay scale for DVA doctors and dentists to aid in recruiting and retention.

As part of the "Road to Veterans Day," Secretary McDonald has reaffirmed DVA's homelessness program and the Veterans Benefits Administration's Claims Transformation Strategy.

DVA remains committed to working with its federal, state and local partners to end homelessness among Veterans, which has been reduced by 33% since 2010.

With the backlog of disability claims reduced by 60% since its peak in March of 2013, DVA is also on track to eliminate the backlog in

2015 and will continue to expand online claim-submission capability in all programs.

Mr. Speaker, as we honor and remember the sacrifices of the millions of veterans who have served our country throughout its history, let us always remember that the first obligation of a grateful is, as President Lincoln reminded us long ago, "to care for him who has borne the battle, and for his widow and his orphan, to do all which may achieve and cherish a just and lasting peace among ourselves and with all nations."

IN RECOGNITION OF AMERICAN VALOR AT THE BATTLE OF THE BULGE AND THE 70TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE PATTON PRAYER CARDS

**HON. MATT CARTWRIGHT**

OF PENNSYLVANIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, November 12, 2014

Mr. CARTWRIGHT. Mr. Speaker, I rise to honor and remember the bravery of American troops who fought in the Battle of the Bulge and to recall the unique prayer cards General George Patton distributed to his Third Army in December 1944. The prayer, which asked for favorable weather, was printed on the back of a Christmas greeting from General Patton. The troops received these prayer cards prior to the Battle of the Bulge.

The incident of the now famous Patton Prayer commenced with a telephone call to the Third Army Chaplain on the morning of December 8, 1944. After weeks of severe rains that threatened the prospects of victory, General Patton called to ask Msgr. James H. O'Neill if he knew a prayer for good weather. While looking out on the steadily falling rain, the chaplain wrote an original prayer alongside a Christmas greeting, and then had it circulated it to all 250,000 Third Army troops on the eve of the Battle of the Bulge.

The prayer, in part, read: "Almighty and most merciful Father, we humbly beseech Thee, of Thy great goodness, to restrain these immoderate rains with which we have had to contend. Grant us fair weather for Battle. Graciously hearken to us as soldiers who call upon Thee that, armed with Thy power, we may advance from victory to victory . . .".

The Battle of the Bulge, one of World War II's most critical battles, started when Nazi forces launched a major surprise offensive on December 16. Fought among the dense forests bordering Belgium and Luxembourg, it was the bloodiest battle the U.S. encountered during the World War II, with over 18,000 Americans killed and over 65,000 captured or injured. The heavy rains and thick fog eventually subsided, and Allied forces were able to hold off Nazi forces and severely deplete their resource supply. The Battle of the Bulge is symbolic of the resilience and strength of American soldiers, who were unyielding in the face of both enemy fire and debilitating weather. After the Battle, General Patton told Msgr. O'Neill that "our prayers worked." To General Patton, prayer was just as powerful a weapon of war and as defense and attack strategies.

It is an honor for me to commemorate the valor of these American soldiers, the leadership of General Patton, and the ultimate victory of the "Greatest Generation."

IN RECOGNITION OF THE HONORABLE LAWRENCE M. LAWSON

**HON. FRANK PALLONE, JR.**

OF NEW JERSEY

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

*Wednesday, November 12, 2014*

Mr. PALLONE. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize the outstanding achievements of the Honorable Lawrence M. Lawson and congratulate him on his recent retirement as Monmouth Vicinage Assignment Judge. Judge Lawson has served honorably, breaking barriers and serving as an example for younger generations.

Judge Lawson received his undergraduate degree at Bowie State College (now Bowie State University) and his Juris Doctor from The Catholic University of America Columbus School of Law. Prior to enrolling at The Catholic University, Judge Lawson completed the Council in Legal Education Opportunity (CLEO) Program and earned a 3-year scholarship for law school.

Judge Lawson's judicial experience began after he graduated from law school. In 1972, he worked as a law clerk for the late Honorable Thomas L. Yaccarino in Monmouth County, and was the first black law clerk to work in the Freehold court house. He was nominated as a Monmouth County judge by Governor Tom Kean in 1987 and was appointed to Assignment Judge on April 15, 1993, serving as the first black assignment judge. Early in his career, Judge Lawson served in the Civil Division and the Criminal Division, eventually serving as the Presiding Judge of the Criminal Division. With this assignment, Judge Lawson became the first black judge of a division of the court system. Judge Lawson retired as Assignment Judge on September 1, 2014.

In addition to his judicial service, Judge Lawson worked for the New Jersey Department of Community Affairs State Office of Legal Services, held a general law practice in Asbury Park for 12 years, worked as the Asbury Park Municipal Prosecutor, the Neptune Township Board of Adjustment Attorney and served as a delegate at the 1980 Democratic National Convention and the 1984 Democratic National Convention for Ted Kennedy and Walter Mondale, respectively. Judge Lawson also served on the Neptune Township committee and was elected mayor in 1984, serving as the first black mayor of the township.

Judge Lawson is also an active member of his community. He has coached a midnight basketball team, volunteered as a mentor at Second Baptist Church and worked with the United Fellowship men's program. Through his background and community outreach, Judge Lawson has motivated the community's youth to strive for success.

Mr. Speaker, I sincerely hope that my colleagues will join me in congratulating the Honorable Lawrence Lawson on his retirement and thanking him for his service. Judge Lawson dedicated nearly 30 years to the bench and his contributions and achievements are truly deserving of this body's recognition.

RECOGNIZING THE CONTRIBUTIONS OF IZADELI "IZA" MONTALVO VÁZQUEZ

**HON. ALAN GRAYSON**

OF FLORIDA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

*Wednesday, November 12, 2014*

Mr. GRAYSON. Mr. Speaker, I rise today, in honor of Hispanic Heritage Month, to recognize Izadeli "Iza" Montalvo Vázquez. Iza was born in Mayaguez, Puerto Rico, and was raised in the town of Sabana Grande. From a very early age, she demonstrated a gift for poetry and by the age of seven, she wrote her first poem. Her love for writing was inherited from her uncle, Emilio Forestier Gregory, a lawyer and published poet in Puerto Rico.

Her parents, both public school teachers, encouraged her to get involved in the community. She started writing theatrical plays for her school to bring awareness to different topics and to raise funds for student clubs. In middle school, she founded the student's newspaper, "Eco Estudiantil." Iza was an honor student throughout her school years. At the age of 14, she started playing professional volleyball. In her senior year of high school, she was offered a scholarship to play for the InterAmerican University of Puerto Rico's volleyball team. The Puerto Rican Volleyball Federation also signed her to join Las Leonas de Ponce.

In college, Iza continued to follow her passion for writing by joining the José Gautier Benítez literature club, where she received numerous awards for her poetry. She also earned third place in a poetry competition where film director, Jacobo Morales, served as the judge.

In 1998, Iza moved to New York City. She continued her undergraduate studies at St. John's University in Queens, where she graduated with a Bachelor of Science degree in Journalism in 2001. During that time, she interned at Univisión 41 in New Jersey and at El Diario La Prensa, where she was hired to work as reporter. She has reported about the protests at the United Nations against the Navy's presence on the island of Vieques, protests in Times Square against the War in Iraq, the World Economic Forum, the aftermath of September 11th, Abner Louima and Amadou Diallo's police brutality cases, and dozens of homicides.

In 2004, Iza moved to Orlando to work as a reporter for El Nuevo Día Orlando, part of Puerto Rico's largest daily newspaper. Her work has been published in newspapers including Caribbean Business, El Nuevo Día in Puerto Rico, La Prensa in Panamá, La Opinión, La Raza and El Mensajero.

Iza has also worked as a reporter for The Ledger, a company owned at the time by The New York Times Regional Newspaper Group. There she covered immigration and other topics of interest to the Hispanic community. In Florida, Iza reported on the 2004 Atlantic Hurricane Season, the NBA's All-Star Game in Orlando, and the 2012 presidential and local elections, among other stories. Iza has conducted many interviews, including one with Jose Mélendez Pérez, the U.S. Customs and Border Patrol Protection Inspector at the Orlando International Airport who became a key national figure when he refused entry to a terrorist involved in planning the 9/11 attacks. As a TV producer, she arranged an exclusive

interview with Joseph Acaba, the first person of Puerto Rican heritage to be named as a NASA astronaut candidate.

Iza's professional experience also includes working as a producer for Univisión WVEN TV 26 in Altamonte Springs and as my press secretary during 2013. She has been a member of the National Association of Hispanic Journalists (NAHJ) since 2001, and she was recently named honorary godmother of the International Association of Writers and Poets (AIPEH). At age 39, Iza became the editor in chief of La Prensa, Central Florida's oldest Spanish language newspaper. La Prensa is owned by ImpreMedia, the leading Hispanic news and information company in the U.S.

I am happy to recognize Iza Montalvo Vázquez, during Hispanic Heritage Month, for her contributions to the Central Florida community.

**HONORING DR. TALMADGE WILLIAMS**

**HON. JAMES P. MORAN**

OF VIRGINIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

*Wednesday, November 12, 2014*

Mr. MORAN. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to honor my friend Dr. Talmadge Williams. He was a man of consequence who forever strived to restore balance to the scales of justice, whether it was ensuring that our government committed to telling the full story, or making sure someone he knew had a fair shot at success. And he was my friend.

I am not exactly sure when our paths first crossed, but Talmadge had a way of growing on you. As a local elected official, particularly in my early years of service, I was out almost every night at a different event, connecting with communities and constituents I represented, first at City Hall in Alexandria and subsequently in Congress.

Somewhere among the meetings and events I saw Talmadge as a familiar face and in a short while we would seek each other out and discuss local issues of concern. His quiet demeanor and keen insight made him an indispensable ally and a trusted friend.

He always seemed to know more about a local issue than what was common knowledge, and in sharing it with me, he opened my eyes to a narrative and a perspective that was largely unknown.

It was more than just folklore; it was history that was still unwritten but needed to be. And, there was often a reason it went unrecorded and remained unwritten. It was part of a painful truth that too many, particularly those in power, found inconvenient or uncomfortable to acknowledge.

Well, Talmadge's sense of justice wouldn't let it stand and a great deal of his life was devoted to finding ways to tell the full story.

One monumental way he found to tell the full story was when he conceived the idea of building in Arlington The Black Heritage Museum. It was a vision I am pleased to be associated with through congressional legislation I helped pass that reserved a segment of the Navy Annex site for the future museum.

But, Talmadge was not one to pass up on other opportunities and I was proud to join with him in restoring the surviving slave quarters at Robert E. Lee's Arlington House. You