

On February 20, 1988, Nagorno Karabakh began its national liberation movement with a resolution to secede from Azerbaijan, and on December 10, 1991, Nagorno Karabakh officially declared independence, becoming a democratic state committed to freedom and respect for human rights. But today, the people of Nagorno Karabakh are still forced to live under the constant threat of violence from Azerbaijan.

As we commemorate the somber anniversary of the beginnings of their struggle, we wish for the peaceful resolution of this conflict and the right of the Nagorno Karabakh people to determine their own future.

PERSONAL EXPLANATION

HON. JIM GERLACH

OF PENNSYLVANIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, March 5, 2014

Mr. GERLACH. Mr. Speaker, unfortunately, on February 25, 2014, I missed two recorded votes on the House floor. Had I been present, I would have voted "yea" on rollcall 63 and "yea" on rollcall 64.

TRIBUTE TO L. TOM BULLA

HON. SHELLEY MOORE CAPITO

OF WEST VIRGINIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, March 5, 2014

Mrs. CAPITO. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize the career and contributions of Mr. L. Tom Bulla, upon the occasion of his receipt of the Shepherd Center of Greenbrier Valley's Community Service Award. Mr. Bulla's work ethic and volunteer spirit are truly deserving of this award, as he has proudly served communities, both in his professional and private life.

Tom began his career in 1962 and worked diligently to build a solid reputation as a credible leader in the North Carolina and Virginia banking communities. In 1981, he was hired as president, CEO, and director of Huntington Trust and Savings Bank in West Virginia. In 1985, Tom oversaw the successful merger of Huntington Trust with the First Huntington National Bank. Shortly thereafter, his services were requested at Charleston National Bank, where he would serve as president and CEO, and again direct the merger of two West Virginia banks; Charleston National with Bank One, in 1993. A year later, Tom accepted a position as president, CEO, and director of First National Bankshares Corporation and The First National Bank in Ronceverte, West Virginia. Tom was very active in the West Virginia Bankers' Association, serving both on its Board of Directors and as its Chairman from 1996 through 1997. Additionally, Tom was selected by his colleagues to serve on the Federal Home Loan Bank of Pittsburgh's Board of Directors from 1997 until 2000.

Tom's career shepherded him into public service with an appointment from Governor JOE MANCHIN as the state's first Secretary of Commerce, where he successfully managed the consolidation of seven government agencies.

As impressive as Tom's achievements in banking and the public sector have been, his

contributions to our communities are equally impactful. Tom dedicated his time and energy to numerous nonprofit agencies including the Clay Center for the Arts and Sciences, Tamarack Foundation, United Way of West Virginia, Hospice, Charleston Area Medical Center, and the American Cancer Society. He served on the Lewisburg Building Commission, West Virginia Education Fund, YMCA Spirit of the Valley, and the West Virginia Economic Development Authority, along with a host of other valuable community and state organizations. And lastly, the Shepherd Center of the Greenbrier Valley, who is honoring him with its Community Service Award for Tom's fulfillment of its three tenets: lifelong learning, service to others, and spiritual growth.

Tom Bulla resides in Lewisburg, West Virginia with his wife, Nancy. Known affectionately as "Papa" or "Papa T" by his grandchildren, Tom enjoys spending time with his extended family and his lifelong love: automobiles.

Mr. Speaker, the State of West Virginia, our communities, and indeed, the United States of America owe Tom Bulla a debt of gratitude for his many years of distinguished service in his professional and personal life. I am honored to call him a friend and fellow West Virginian.

THE IMPORTANCE OF WOMEN PARTICIPATING IN A PEACEFUL RESOLUTION TO THE CONFLICT IN SYRIA

HON. ALBIO SIRE

OF NEW JERSEY

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, March 5, 2014

Mr. SIRE. Mr. Speaker, this month marks the 3 year anniversary of the conflict in Syria. This conflict is destabilizing the region and has created the largest humanitarian crises we have ever seen. Over 100,000 people have already been killed and 9 million people are currently in desperate need of humanitarian assistance. 3 million people are in hard to reach areas and over 250,000 people have been cut off from assistance for over a year. The UN has characterized the situation as "dramatic beyond description." There have already been multiple failed attempts at peace-talks and cease-fires. The international community and Syrian forces must come together to find a long over-due peaceful agreement and end these inhumane and debilitating acts of violence.

As we celebrate International Women's Day on March 8th, 2014, there is no better time to recognize the role of women in these protracted conflicts. They are not just the victims of violence; they are the resilient leaders working tirelessly to keep their families safe. Women leaders, who are pushing for peace can help further peace negotiations, understand a country's needs for an inclusive transition process and put Syrians on a path to reconciliation.

While we continue to search for solutions, the United States joined by the rest of the world must do all it can to have an inclusive peace process that alleviates the tremendous amount of suffering being inflicted on Syria's civilian population.

PERSONAL EXPLANATION

HON. LUIS V. GUTIÉRREZ

OF ILLINOIS

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, March 5, 2014

Mr. GUTIÉRREZ. Mr. Speaker, I was unavoidably absent in the House chamber for votes on Tuesday, March 4, 2014.

Had I been present, I would have voted "yea" on rollcall vote 91 in support of passage of the Homeowner Flood Insurance Affordability Act of 2014.

Had I been present, I would have voted "yea" on rollcall vote 92 in support of H. Res. 488 supporting the people of Venezuela. The Venezuelan people have the right to protest peacefully without fear of violence or intimidation.

THE 25TH SILVER ANNIVERSARY OF THE CONGRESSIONAL BLACK CAUCUS VETERANS BRAINTRUST

HON. CORRINE BROWN

OF FLORIDA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, March 5, 2014

Ms. BROWN of Florida. Mr. Speaker, I rise to commemorate March 5, Boston's Crispus Attucks Day, and to celebrate the 25th Silver Anniversary of the Congressional Black Caucus Veterans Braintrust which took place this past September within a truly unique historical and contemporary context of Black, or African American military service and sacrifice. First, a series of national commemorations: the 200th anniversary of the War of 1812, the 150th anniversary of the Civil War to Save the Union and End Slavery, the 100th anniversary of the death of Harriet Tubman, known as "The General," the 90th anniversary of the burial of Col. Charles Young, the third black graduate from West Point, the 70th anniversary of the D-Day Invasion, the 60th anniversary of the Korean War, the 50th anniversary of the assassination of Medgar Evers, World War II veteran and Civil Rights Hero, 50th anniversary of the Vietnam War, and the 12th anniversary of 9/11; and second, amid the drum beat of war, with the U.S. threatened bombing of Syria, the senseless violence of Aaron Alexis and the Washington, DC, Navy Yard shooting rampage, and the battle of the budget, or yet another governmental shutdown on October 1st, affecting more than 800,000 employees at a cost of \$25 billion. According to the U.S. Office of Personnel Management, a disproportionate number of the furloughed federal workers were Black, or African American, who made up 17.7 percent of the workforce.

Chaplain Michael McCoy, Sr., provided the Veterans Braintrust forum's invocation and benediction because we know from experience that Washington forums that start with an invocation and end with a benediction are blessed occasions. Welcoming remarks were given by Representatives CHARLES RANGEL (NY-13), SANFORD BISHOP, Jr. (GA-02), EDDIE BERNICE JOHNSON (TX-30) and myself. With Representative SANFORD BISHOP, Jr. speaking in his role as the Ranking Democrat on the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Military Construction and Veterans Affairs, and as

Co-Chair of the bi-partisan Congressional Military Family Caucus expressing a keen awareness of the dangers sequestration and furloughs are having on our nation's servicemembers, military families, and veterans, and further reductions to the active-duty Army, National Guard and the Army Reserves. In addition, as the representative in the U.S. House for Fort Benning, the third largest Army Base in the country where sequestration will have a dramatic impact on the soldiers, their families, and the Columbus, GA, community. Further, he emphasized, if sequestration goes forward, the Army will reduce over 210,000 soldiers to meet their budgetary requirements. Afterward Members were called away to the Capitol to talk on the floor and vote on the budget, and the forum was turned over to moderator Ron E. Armstead, Executive Director. Yet the forum remained well attended, powerful, and there was a tremendous amount of energy in the room.

The keynote address was given by the first African American to obtain the rank of Three Star Admiral in the U.S. Coast Guard, Admiral Manson K. Brown, a native of Washington, DC, who brought greetings from the 24th Commandant of the U.S. Coast Guard, Admiral Robert J. Papp, Jr. As Commanding Officer of Coast Guard Headquarters he asked all veterans to stand and be recognized, and to let our Navy friends, colleagues and family members know that our thoughts and prayers continued to be with them over the tragic loss of so many lives at the Washington, DC, Navy Yard. Adm. Brown went on to say the key objective during the sequester has been to preserve the ability of the Coast Guard to meet the highest priority mission activities, including search and rescue, critical security operations, and emergency response. In addition, he pointed out that as part of Adm. Papp's commitment to support the President and First Lady's efforts to strengthen military families over the last three years, the Coast Guard has strengthened their military housing program, enhanced child development services, and improved communications between operational commanders and families by strengthening their Ombudsman network. They also launched a military family campaign, bringing a specific focus to strengthening their linkage with retirees, over the year, in order to create a vibrant national retiree network as a way to enhance outreach to Coast Guard veterans at large. In short, he reported that the Coast Guard as a military service is managing through sequestration and shielding the impacts where they can for military families and veterans. However, this is a delicate balancing act based on tough choices that senior Coast Guard leaders must make between military families and veterans, or non-mission-critical training, air and surface operations reductions, ships, aircraft and shore facilities deferred maintenance, as well as personnel staffing and travel cuts. In closing, Admiral Brown said, "In terms of today's important Congressional budgetary discussions, this situation bears watching into an uncertain future."

The keynote address was followed by two very special presentations. The first recognized Harlem's own, the late Dr. Joseph Warren, a gifted scholar, teacher and leader who inspired many. Second, the Montford Point Marines Associations recognized my efforts in the 2012 awarding of the Congressional Gold Medal, including Rebecca Lungren of 69 Pro-

ductions for the upcoming Montford Point Marines movie "Black Boots."

Our distinguished panel consisted of Keith Miller, President, Foundation for Advancement in Science and Education (FASE); Dr. Mike Haynie, Executive Director and Founder of the Institute for Veterans and Military Families (IVMF) at Syracuse University; Darlene Young, National President of Blacks in Government (BIG); Col. Kevin Preston, USA, Ret., Director of the Veterans Initiative for the Walt Disney Company/ESPN; Lewis Runnion, Director of the Military Affairs Advisory Group at Bank of America (BOA); Mayor Setti Warren of Newton, Massachusetts, Chairman of the Community Development and Housing Committee, U.S. Conference of Mayors; Mike Betz, General Manager, Military Student Initiatives, Education Corporation of America (ECA); Edward Jennings, Jr., U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, Southeast Regional Administrator; John Moran, Deputy Assistant Secretary, U.S. Department of Labor Veterans Employment and Training Service (VETS); Everett Kelley, National Vice President for the American Federation of Government Employees (AFGE); and Dr. Shelley MacDermid Wadsworth, Director, Military Family Research Institute and Center for Families at Purdue University. Their presentations were lively and moving, but also very informative and focused to the point, thus holding the audience to the end and well worth it.

Mr. Miller read a statement about DC resident Shirley Gibson, a real hero. She and other critical incident stress management team members, along with rescue workers, put their health on the line in the aftermath of New York City's 9/11 tragedy, and were later helped by an innovative detoxification treatment that was made available to them. Such innovative treatments as this rely on research funding. Unfortunately such funding is often the first to go when there are budget cuts. Consequently, sequestration is a threat to both the quality of life and health of our veterans.

Dr. Haynie commented on the applications of sequester, and more broadly programmed reductions in federal spending, as the reductions are positioned to impact the employment situation of our nation's veterans and their families. To begin, one of the most immediate consequences of sequester for veterans is the fact that 27.3 percent of the federal workforce is composed of military veterans, many of which will more than likely be furloughed. The DoD workforce will be particularly impacted, as it will sustain approximately 52 percent of the total planned budget cuts. 44 percent of the DoD workforce are military veterans—which speaks volumes about the potential effects on our military readiness, due to the resulting loss of valuable knowledge, skills and experience. In the end, adding veterans currently employed by the federal government to the ranks of the nation's unemployed is positioned to potentially overwhelm supportive services and community-based infrastructure already strained by limited resources. Research also suggests that many of our military and veterans families are already economically vulnerable, and in the face of Congressional budget battles those families are likely to become "collateral damage" of sequester—an indiscriminate and ill-conceived approach to addressing the Nation's fiscal challenges.

Retired Army Colonel Preston commented that our nation's veterans represent a value-

added proposition for the business community, and hiring a veteran is not only the right thing, but also a smart business decision. Also when considering a veteran, do not fixate on their military rank, or job title—instead, view their attributes. Equally important, realize they are coming from a very different culture, have convertible task-oriented skill, years of leadership experience, a code of ethics, and winner's attitude. Moreover, our nation's veterans represent our society's best, so "hire a vet."

Mr. Runnion described how Bank of America's (BOA) Military Affairs Advisory Group was formed to bring together partners from across the company to help service members reintegrate into the civilian workforce through education, employment, wellness and housing. Additionally, how BOA supports our nation's active-duty military and veterans in three major areas: (1) Recruiting and Employment, (2) Customer Support, and (3) Community Outreach. One specific example he shared was BOA's three-year commitment to make up to 1,000 properties available to military veteran support organizations and other non-profit, community-based groups, which provide housing to military veterans and their families. Again, he reasserted, BOA has supported the U.S. military for more than 90 years, by contributing to military non-profits, providing banking services to military service members, and recruiting and retaining military veterans, Guard and Reservists, and military spouses.

Mayor Warren cited the U.S. Conference of Mayors Hunger and Homeless Survey (December, 2012), sharing excerpts from the executive summary—lack of affordable housing as a leading cause, followed by poverty, unemployment, evictions and violence. In addition, he discussed sequestration's impact on U.S. cities at the local level. While pointing out that cities are the laboratories of innovation, and along with their surrounding suburbs represent 90 percent of the nation's wage and salary income, which drives the national economy. Subsequently, 163 mayors have signed the U.S. Conference of Mayor's letter expressing opposition to sequester cuts that will deeply impact cities, for example, Community Development Block Grants (the largest and most flexible stream of federal dollars to cities and municipalities), particularly in addressing the needs of homeless veterans and homeless veterans supportive services organizations, now, and leading up to 2015, or President Obama's promise to end chronic homelessness among veterans.

Mr. Betz, discussed today's trends in education, as a result of troop drawdown and increased separation from the military. First, at a time when overall educational enrollment is declining, student veteran enrollment continues to increase. Second, additional assistance and coordination with the private employment sector is needed to insure employment opportunities for our transitioning student veterans where they may provide adequately for their families. Third, he cautioned against our growing regulatory environment, which threatens to restrict awareness and access to training for our transitioning veterans and limits institutional choice.

Mr. Kelley, an Army veteran stressed how AFGE's members know firsthand the pain that sequestration and furloughs inflict on lower wage federal workers and their families. Stating "the current assault on federal employers is one of the most vicious we have ever seen."

We all know the real agenda behind sequestration and reduction in force: weakening government programs that try to level the playing field for the other 99 percent.” Further, for the past five years, the VA has targeted low wage positions filled primarily by minorities, veterans, the disabled and women for “reclassification.” Or those positions that Congress created after the Vietnam War to provide entry-level job opportunities for disabled veterans. Similar, to broader-based budget cuts at other federal agencies under sequestration, VA’s downgrading initiative is both arbitrary and vicious. Furthermore, we still have a great deal of work to do to fulfill President Obama’s mandate in Executive Order 13518 to make federal government the leader in creating new job opportunities for veterans. Veterans comprise nearly 42 percent of DOD’s workforce, nearly 25 percent of Homeland Securities workforce, and nearly 28 percent of VA’s workforce. In conclusion, he said, “we need to find a solution to the sequester, and not hold our military and their civilian supporters hostage.” That is why AFGE is supporting HR 2785 introduced by Congressman TIMOTHY WALZ (MN–01), to expand veterans preference rights for reservists, and for employees of the VA health care system who do not have title five appeal rights.

And Dr. MacDermid Wadsworth, reiterated, African Americans comprise a significant percentage of service members and veterans, and have fought for the right to fight. And there is solid scientific evidence that shows the military has provided an environment for African American service members and their families that allows them to avoid some of the significant inequities that plague civilian society. For example, in civilian society, Black men are far less likely to marry and far more likely to divorce than their white counterparts. In the military, these differentials disappear, largely because economic resources are less likely to be tied to race. The military has also provided career opportunities and resources for single parents, ensuring that their children have access to health care and childcare—something their enlisted parents would have great difficulty obtaining in the civilian labor force with just a high school education. Moreover, she said, the sequester and the military drawdown pose a number of significant challenges.

First, the sequester has had a cascading effect on family support in DOD. Because the rules of the sequester limit the ways that DOD can implement reductions, the pressure to cut programs that help to minimize the corrosion that military service can impose on families is especially intense. The furlough’s have effectively reduced much of the workforce by 20 percent, and prevented the replacement of departing workers. For example: 30 percent of family support positions in the Army are currently unable to be filled.

Second, the sequester is causing reductions that may be disproportionately hurtful to the programs that prevent and reduce child maltreatment, interpersonal violence, and other important family-related issues.

Third, the drawdown will pose difficult challenges in terms of reducing military opportunities in the future for African Americans to pursue careers in an environment free of many inequities we have been unable to erase in civilian society. Careers already underway will be cut short. The black service members who

are unwillingly sent to the civilian job market will need much more special assistance to ensure that they find jobs and/or positions that maintain their present trajectories.

A fourth challenge that is in part an artifact of the sequester and in-part a result of the always-evolving diversity of families, especially now that it is clear that marriage is an imperfect way to define military families. Because it doesn’t address the families of single service members whose parents, or sibling may constitute their primary support system, and it doesn’t address committed partners who are unmarried. In this period of financial constraint, it might be tempting to forget about families. But every First Sergeant knows that families are key in the minds of service members, families are who they worry about while they serve, families make it possible for them to serve, families support them while they serve, and families care for them when they come home, especially when they are wounded or injured. Consequently, families are far too important to ignore, but she feels that is what could happen because of the perfect storm of sequester and policy complexities.

The question and answer period provided the attendees a long awaited opportunity to both comment and ask questions of the panelist.

While the government shutdown lasted 16 days, five fewer than in 1995—the budget battles, partisanship, gridlock and Congressional inaction have left many Americans confidence shaken with respect to the government according to several recent polls. American trust in government, and belief that it can solve pressing problems is at an all-time low. However, despite highly negative views of government, particularly Congress, according to Representative SANFORD BISHOP, Jr., the recent veterans unemployment rate, the lowest since 2001, tells a very different story. Post 9/11 veteran’s unemployment is now below the national average, and for the first time since 2001 veterans are being hired at a faster rate than non-veterans. This improvement demonstrates that when Congress works together for a common cause we can make a difference.

The 25th silver anniversary gala reception and awards ceremony was held in veterans hearing room 334 of the Cannon House Office Building, and consisted of both church, and club music. Church in terms of the fellowship, spiritually uplifting and awe inspiring presentation of special Congressional Awards to Sgt. James Guilford, Jr., USA, WWII (102 years old); Kenneth Guscott, U.S. Army Air Force, WWII; Hon. Federal Judge George Leighton, Ret., USA, WWII (100 years old); Dr. Rodney Atkins, Co-Chair, Annual Texas African American Soldiers Recognition Day; Johnnie Collins, Jr., Executive Director, AMVETS, Department of DC; James “Jack” Hadley, Founder & Curator of the Jack Hadley Black History Museum; Chaplain Michael McCoy, Sr., National President of the Military Chaplain Association & Associate Director Diversity Development, U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs; Philadelphia City Councilwoman Jannie Blackwell, Widow of Hon. Lucien Blackwell (PA–02), a decorated Korean War veteran, Ari Merretazon, 1st Vice President of Pointman Soldiers

Heart Ministry & 2012 Black Male Engagement (BME) Leadership Award Winner for Veterans Community Development, Rev. Marsena

Mungin, Commissioner of Women at Veterans Are Still Warriors, Veterans Serving Veterans, Inc., Ervin “Tootsie” Russell, USA, Vietnam veteran, AMERICAL Division. Posthumous: Capt. William Cooke, USA, WWII; John D. O’Bryant, USA; Dr. Jay Carrington Chunn, II, USMC; Eddie Lee Washington, USA, an accomplished musician & educator and Sgt. John Wesley Motley, Jr., USA, Korean War. Historic Groups, and Film: the Crispus Attucks Museum of Indianapolis, Jack Hadley Black History Museum in Thomasville, GA, and the film “Veterans of Color,” produced by the Manasota Branch of the Association for the Study of African American Life and History (ASALH) in Florida, and music culminating with Ray Charles soulful rendition of “America the Beautiful.”

Equally important, our once in a lifetime awards guest speaker was none other than Dr. Mark Attucks, the fifth generation descendant of Crispus Attucks, the first American martyr to die during the Boston Massacre on March 5, 1770, a prelude to the American Revolution, accompanied by his father Jesse Attucks, Jr., a decorated U.S. Marine who served in Vietnam. His ancestor was the first of more than 5,000 African American Patriots who served our country in the Revolutionary War. In 1888, a monument was built to honor his forefather and the events of that fateful day in our nation’s history. The following poem was written and read at the dedication ceremony by John Boyle O’Reilly.

“Where shall we seek for a hero, and where shall we find a story?

Our laurels are wreathed for conquest, our songs for completed glory; But we honor a shrine unfinished, a column with pride,

If we sing the deed that was sown like seed when Crispus Attucks died.

“Honor to Crispus Attucks, who was leader and voice that day

The first to defy, and the first to die, with Maverick, Carr and Gray

Call it riot or revolution, his hand first clenched at the crown

His feet were the first in perilous place to pull the King’s flag down

His breast was the first one rent apart that liberty’s stream might flow

For our freedom now and forever, his head was the first laid low

Call it riot or revolution, or mob or crowd, as you may

Such deaths have been seed of nations, and such lives shall be honored for aye.”

In 1998, the U.S. Mint authorized a commemorative silver dollar honoring Crispus Attucks and the Black Revolutionary War Patriots. However, two little known facts stand-out: First, his name Attucks does not have any European roots. Simply speaking the current spelling is not a “slave” name. Second, from the American Revolution to the present day an Attucks has served in the military, fighting for America’s freedom, making Attucks the nation’s longest serving military family.

Lastly, special 25th Silver Anniversary thank yous go to Dr. Frank Smith, Jr., Dr. William Lawson, Dr. Donna Holland Barnes, Shannon Gopaul, Clyde Sims, Jr., James Gordon, Jr., Charles Henderson, Edward Daniels II, Lela Campbell, Carolyn Williams, Rev. Marsina Mungin, Cathy Santos, Chaplain Michael McCoy, Sr., Ralph “Coop” Cooper, Ernest Washington, Jr., Anthony “Tony” Hawkins, Clarence “Tiger” Davis, LeRoy Colston II, Thomas “Tom” Harris, Mildred “Milli” Smith,

Morocco "Roc" Coleman, Robert "Big Bob" Blackwell, Cheryl Holland-Jones, the Educational Corporation of America (ECA), T. Michael Sullivan and the William Joiner Institute for the Study of War and Social Consequences, and Congressional staff members Ronnie Simmons, Lee Footer, Stephanie Anim-Yankah, Jonathan Halpern, Adam McCombs, George Henry, Hannah Kim, and Reba Raffaelli.

Congratulations on 25 years, during which the journey has been the destination.

PERSONAL EXPLANATION

HON. JOAQUIN CASTRO

OF TEXAS

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, March 5, 2014

Mr. CASTRO of Texas. Mr. Speaker, on rollcall No. 91 on H.R. 3370, Homeowner Flood Insurance Affordability Act of 2013, I am not recorded. Had I been present, I would have voted "yea."

CONGRATULATING THE MINORITY BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT AGENCY ON ITS 45TH ANNIVERSARY AND THE OPENING OF MBDA BUSINESS CENTER AT HOUSTON COMMUNITY COLLEGE

HON. SHEILA JACKSON LEE

OF TEXAS

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, March 5, 2014

Ms. JACKSON LEE. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to congratulate the Minority Business Development Agency, MBDA, on its 45th anniversary and commend its commitment and success in promoting the growth and competitiveness of a critical segment of the U.S. economy, the minority business community. For the past 45 years, the MBDA has provided an essential service to this nation, working to level the playing field for minority-owned businesses.

The results speak for themselves. At the time of MBDA's creation there were only 322,000 minority-owned firms in the nation. Today, the number stands at 5.8 million; 215,000 of which are in the City of Houston. Over the last five years in particular, the MBDA has assisted firms gain access to over \$19 billion in contracts and capital resulting in the creation and retention of nearly 60,000 jobs.

Today, the MBDA is celebrating this day in my district by launching a new MBDA Business Center at Houston Community College, which was awarded a three-year \$900,000 grant to operate the MBDA Business Center. HCC's MBDA Business Center will help boost job creation and global competitiveness of minority-owned businesses across the nation. I look forward to continuing to work with MBDA and Houston Community College to create jobs locally so that we may thrive globally.

Congratulations, MBDA, on 45 years of great work. May the next 45 years be even better.

PERSONAL EXPLANATION

HON. ALLYSON Y. SCHWARTZ

OF PENNSYLVANIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, March 5, 2014

Ms. SCHWARTZ. Mr. Speaker, on rollcall No. 85, I was unable to attend the vote. Had I been present, I would have voted "no."

HONORING PATRICK DENEEN

HON. DAVID G. REICHERT

OF WASHINGTON

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, March 5, 2014

Mr. REICHERT. Mr. Speaker, today I rise to honor an Olympic athlete from Washington State's 8th District, Mr. Patrick Deneen. Mr. Deneen just returned from representing our nation in the XXII Olympic Winter Games in Sochi, Russia. Mr. Deneen is an incredible athlete who has reached the pinnacle of his sport and achieved a well-deserved 6th place finish in the Men's Moguls event.

I applaud both his achievement and the hard work and perseverance that paid off during these games. Simply to attend the Olympics is an honor, and to do so well is a testament to everything Mr. Deneen has accomplished. I thank him for representing America so well, and I am proud to call him a constituent and a Washingtonian.

HONORING THE LIFE AND LEGACY OF DR. BENJAMIN J. LAMBERT III

HON. ROBERT C. "BOBBY" SCOTT

OF VIRGINIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, March 5, 2014

Mr. SCOTT of Virginia. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to honor the life and legacy of my friend and former colleague in the Virginia General Assembly, Dr. Benjamin J. Lambert III, who passed away on Sunday, March 2, 2014.

Benny, as he was affectionately known by his friends, family, and constituents, was a pioneering figure in Virginia politics. We were both elected to the Virginia House of Delegates in 1977. In 1980, Benny became the first African American elected to represent the Commonwealth on the Democratic National Committee. In 1985, he was elected overwhelmingly to fill the seat vacated by then-Lieutenant Governor Doug Wilder. During my time serving alongside Benny, I always admired his ability to build strong relationships with his colleagues, work across the aisle, and take the tough positions that were not always politically popular but were the ones he believed were right for his constituents.

Benny was born in Richmond on January 29, 1937 to Frances and Benjamin J. Lambert, Jr. He attended Henrico County Schools at a time when they were still racially segregated. He graduated from Virginia Randolph High School in Glen Allen, just outside of Richmond. He went on to earn his undergraduate degree from Virginia Union University, and his graduate degree from the Massachusetts College of Optometry. After graduate school, Benny returned to Richmond and practiced

optometry in the Jackson Ward neighborhood. He was an active member of the Virginia, National and American optometric societies and was chosen as Virginia's Optometrist of the Year in 1980.

Benny came to the Virginia General Assembly after years of political and civic activism, which helped him to become a very influential and effective legislator during his 30 year tenure. He served on several committees in the General Assembly, including Education and Health, General Laws, Privileges and Elections, General Government, and Health and Human Resources. He also has the distinction of being the first African American in the 20th century to serve on the Virginia Senate Finance Committee.

Additionally, he chaired the Subcommittees on Higher Education and General Government, the Brown v. Board Scholarship Commission, and the Lead Abatement Subcommittee. Benny also served as a member of the Joint Commission on Health Care, the Joint Subcommittee Studying the Election Process and Voting Technologies, the Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Memorial Commission, the Commission on State Employees Health Benefits Reform, and the Virginia Legislative Black Caucus. In 2010, Governor Bob McDonnell appointed him vice chair of the Commission on Government Reform and Restructuring.

Outside of government, Benny had a very active civic life. He was a member of the NAACP, the Richmond Crusade for Voters, the Jackson Ward Civic Association, the Richmond Jaycees, the North Richmond YMCA, and he served on the board of his alma mater, Virginia Union University. Benny was also an active member of Omega Psi Phi Fraternity, Inc.

Benny devoted his career in and out of public service to the citizens of Richmond and Central Virginia, always doing what he thought was best for his community, regardless of the political consequences.

Mr. Speaker, words alone cannot express the tremendous loss to the Richmond community and the Commonwealth of Virginia with Benny's passing. Benny Lambert was a humble optometrist that achieved so much on behalf of his community during his 77 years of life. My thoughts and prayers are with Benny's wife Carolyn, his children and grandchildren, and his many friends and admirers during this difficult time.

RED BANK ELEMENTARY SCHOOL BUSINESS MENTOR PROGRAM

HON. JOE WILSON

OF SOUTH CAROLINA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, March 5, 2014

Mr. WILSON of South Carolina. Mr. Speaker, The American Dream is attainable with hard work and dedication. South Carolina is very fortunate to have devoted teachers who dedicated to helping every child succeed. This week, a group of teachers and students from Red Bank Elementary School in Lexington, South Carolina, are visiting Washington to see the government at work. I am very proud of this group of young people, as they are dedicated to achieving a bright future by participating in their school's Business Mentor Program.