

IN HONOR OF THE 70TH ANNIVERSARY OF BENJAMIN BANNEKER ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

**HON. BARBARA COMSTOCK**

OF VIRGINIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

*Friday, December 29, 2017*

Mrs. COMSTOCK. Mr. Speaker, I rise to recognize Benjamin Banneker Elementary School, as it celebrates 70 years of excellence in the 10th Congressional District of Virginia. Located in the Village of St. Louis in Loudoun County, the parents, teachers and students of Benjamin Banneker School and its predecessor, St. Louis School, have survived the awful conditions of segregation and the political gamesmanship over desegregation, to become a wonderful place of learning for a multi-racial student population in 2017.

The village of St. Louis was established in 1881, when landowner Thomas Glascock sold one-acre lots to formerly enslaved families. Earlier, in 1877, a one-room school had been established to attempt to serve the educational needs of the children of St. Louis and surrounding areas. However, the St. Louis School and other schools for black students of this era were overcrowded, mediocre facilities, usually with only a wood stove for heat and an outhouse. In 1896, the U.S. Supreme Court's decision in *Plessy vs. Ferguson* mandated that segregated public schools in Loudoun County and elsewhere in the nation operate under the doctrine of "Separate but Equal." While African-Americans advocated for equal pay for teachers and equal facilities for students, conditions remained unequal, with upwards of 50 students being placed in some one-room schoolhouses. By 1930, a national movement for "equalization" had been established by the NAACP and the parents of African-American students in Loudoun County began a protest movement known as the County-Wide League. After many years of advocacy for improved conditions, on March 31, 1948, the Parent and Teacher Association of St. Louis was able to convince the county school board to purchase 19 acres in the village and build the six-room Benjamin Banneker School, bringing together black students from several area schools whose buildings had badly deteriorated.

While there were improvements in conditions at all-black consolidated schools such as Benjamin Banneker, the NAACP, represented by future U.S. Supreme Court Justice Thurgood Marshall, argued that such physical improvements did not equalize the learning experience of blacks and whites, and that, in fact, the "separate but equal" doctrine was inherently unequal. Although, in 1954, the Supreme Court agreed with the NAACP in the landmark decision of *Brown vs. Board of Education*, parts of the Commonwealth of Virginia defied the judicial mandate until 1967, when Loudoun schools were finally integrated. In 1968, and as an aspect of the integration process, the Loudoun School Board attempted to change the name of the school to Mercer Elementary. However, the pride of the St. Louis community once again prevailed, as the community was able to convince the school board to reverse itself and keep the Benjamin Banneker name, whose namesake had been such an inspiration for the students and teachers of the school. Born a free man, Banneker

was a self-educated natural philosopher, mathematician and astronomer, who helped to survey the new capital city, the District of Columbia, and challenged future president Thomas Jefferson on the issue of slavery, asserting that it totally contradicted the religious and political principles of our nation as they were laid out in the Declaration of Independence and Bill of Rights.

Mr. Speaker, I recently had the pleasure of visiting Benjamin Banneker Elementary School and meeting three of the school's alumni, Mary and Eugene Howard and Ann Bland, who were students during the years of segregation. I then had the privilege of joining them and the school principal, Robert Carter, and the school's fifth graders, in dedicating a beautiful plaque that they initiated, to memorialize the school's important history. Mr. Speaker, I ask you and our colleagues to join me in honoring the determination of those who worked to ensure a quality education for the students of Benjamin Banneker School during those difficult years of segregation and in celebrating the outstanding teachers, administrators and community leaders who, seventy years from its founding, are continuing the tradition of providing an excellent education to the students of the school.

IN RECOGNITION OF THE 150TH ANNIVERSARY OF ST. PAUL AME CHURCH

**HON. BARBARA COMSTOCK**

OF VIRGINIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

*Friday, December 29, 2017*

Mrs. COMSTOCK. Mr. Speaker, I rise to recognize and congratulate the St. Paul African Methodist Episcopal Church of Winchester, Virginia, on the celebration of its 150th anniversary. In 1867, only two years after the end of slavery, a small group of devout Christians in Winchester met in the home of Jacob Randolph and Mary Catherine Martin to begin organizing one of the first 50 chartered AME churches in the nation. The initial concept of the African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church grew out of the Free African Society that was established in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania in 1787. In response to "unkind treatment" and discriminatory practices at St. George's Methodist Church in Philadelphia, Richard Allen, Absalom Jones and other African Americans withdrew from the church to eventually form the national AME Church in 1816, providing people of African descent, who have the same potential and worth as anyone else, the self-respect, dignity and freedom to worship God that they deserved. The history of St. Paul AME church is the story of a close-knit African-American congregation of Christian disciples located within the Fort Loudoun community of Winchester. Because of its close ties with black and white families in the community, the church has been a spiritual center of the society, regularly ringing its massive 650 pound bell on important days of the Christian calendar and important occurrences, such as weddings and funerals, for the St. Paul congregation, itself. In fact, St. Paul was the first church in Winchester to recognize the end of World War I with the ringing of its bell on Armistice Day.

Despite hardships brought on by the impacts of slavery that had recently ended, and

the destructive impacts of segregation that continued for decades into the 20th Century, St. Paul AME Church has been an important force for good and for justice in the Winchester community. As leaders in the civil rights movement, the congregation hosted the Pastor's Alliance of Winchester as it began the first Winchester chapter of the NAACP in 1915. In collaboration with other churches, the St. Paul congregation has consistently done good works in the northern Shenandoah Valley, such as supporting the "Showers for Souls" program for the homeless at Mt. Carmel Baptist Church and with its emphasis on education, the church has a long tradition of supporting the Freemont Street Nursery and giving scholarships to high school seniors as they embark on higher education and providing financial and spiritual support for these scholars throughout their years in college.

In 2004, a remarkable thing happened in the history of the church. A significant leap of faith, similar to the one that started the church, was taken by the church's pastor, Rev. Kevin Wilson, and the leadership of the congregation. After more than a century of use, the church building was in significant need of repairs. Overcoming their own pride, the congregation let the surrounding community know about their predicament and was surprised by the amazingly generous response of the residents of the northern Shenandoah Valley, both black and white. Through the raising of significant funds, the generous volunteering of time and effort and the excellent leadership of contractor Shockey and Sons, in collaboration with members of the congregation, such as Mr. Bill Buckner, a beautifully renovated church, that is a historic landmark of the City of Winchester, was reopened in 2005. Over the years, the abundant goodwill that had been created by acts of faith and love of hundreds of Christian disciples at St. Paul AME Church, resulted in an incredible outpouring of love and generosity in return.

Mr. Speaker, I ask you and our colleagues to join me in congratulating Reverend Kevin Wilson and the congregation of St. Paul AME Church, and all those pastors and lay members who preceded them, for being the strong, loving body of Christ that God intended them to be. As the next 150 years unfold, may the bell of St. Paul AME Church toll again over the community that it has served so faithfully.

IN RECOGNITION OF THE 100TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE TOP OF VIRGINIA REGIONAL CHAMBER

**HON. BARBARA COMSTOCK**

OF VIRGINIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

*Friday, December 29, 2017*

Mrs. COMSTOCK. Mr. Speaker, I rise to congratulate the Top of Virginia Regional Chamber on the occasion of its 100th Anniversary and to highlight the extraordinary impact that it has had on the people of the northern Shenandoah Valley. Although it has undergone at least five name changes in the last century—starting out as the Winchester Board of Trade and, since 2006, as the Top of Virginia Regional Chamber—it has always remained true to its stated purpose of promoting the general welfare and prosperity of the northern Shenandoah Valley.

During the past century, the chamber has improved the quality of life of the people of Winchester, Frederick County and Clarke County in many important ways. In the late 1930s, it advocated for the construction of the Winchester Municipal Airport and for the completion of Route 50 from Winchester to the Shenandoah River. During 1950s, it was deeply involved in the establishment of Shenandoah University in Winchester, and in 1993, the chamber advocated for the construction of Route 37 around Winchester and even initiated a grassroots movement in 2004, to gain support for completing the road. In addition, the encouragement and support of its members has always been a priority of the Top of Virginia Regional Chamber and among the services and programs offered to its 835 current corporate members are quarterly educational seminars through Lord Fairfax Community College's Small Business Development Center, frequent Business and Breakfast and Business After Hours opportunities, various educational lunches and the activities of the Young Professionals Group.

Recently, several innovative chamber initiatives have added significantly to strengthening the social fabric of the northern valley. The Community Leadership Program is a rigorous, nine-month program that develops leaders by teaching important leadership skills and an understanding of complex community problems and their potential solutions. The Valley Business Women program helps women achieve their own personal and professional transformation. The chamber's Workforce Development Committee has partnered with local businesses and public schools to help develop the region's workforce of the future. And since 2010, with the creation of its Public Policy Committee, the chamber has become an important venue for discussions about public policy matters, including education, transportation, workforce development, regional economic development, health care, and legislation at the local, state and federal levels. Its yearly breakfast meetings with state legislators, prior to and after each General Assembly session, as well as periodic reports from the member of Congress representing the northern Valley, have been excellent opportunities for an exchange of ideas.

Mr. Speaker, I don't know of a single organization in the northern Shenandoah Valley that has done more to unify the community than does the Top of Virginia Regional Chamber, by highlighting extraordinary work that is being

done by valley residents. Each year, the Greater Good Awards dinner recognizes some of these amazingly generous individuals and the Valor Awards dinner allows the community to recognize and thank our Valley heroes for their special acts of valor and selflessness. Because the Commonwealth of Virginia has a general election each November, the chamber's Hob Nob event is often the only opportunity for chamber members and the public to hear directly from a wide variety of candidates running for office.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, I ask you and our colleagues to join me in congratulating the Top of Virginia Regional Chamber for 100 years of successfully promoting the general welfare and prosperity of the people of the Northern Shenandoah Valley and to express gratitude to President and CEO Richard Kennedy, the chamber's board of directors and its great staff, as well as all those chamber CEOs, board members and staff who preceded them, for their hard work in serving the chamber's membership and in being such a powerful source of unity and enlightenment for the larger valley community.

IN HONOR OF PRINCE WILLIAM COUNTY RED CROSS ON ITS 100TH ANNIVERSARY OF SERVICE

HON. BARBARA COMSTOCK

OF VIRGINIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

*Friday, December 29, 2017*

Mrs. COMSTOCK. Mr. Speaker, I rise to recognize the Prince William County Red Cross as it celebrates 100 years of service to the people of Prince William County, the City of Manassas and the City of Manassas Park. This milestone of a very special organization in Northern Virginia gives me an opportunity to celebrate the International Red Cross and Red Crescent, as well as the Prince William Chapter's national organization, the American Red Cross, founded by Clara Barton on May 21, 1881. The American Red Cross received its first Congressional Charter in 1900 and to this day it has been tasked by the federal government with providing services to members of the U.S. Armed Forces and their families as well as providing disaster relief in the United States and around the world. Inspired by the motto "Sleaves Up. Hearts Open. All In", the American Red Cross goes wherever it is

needed, from small house fires to multi-state natural disasters, guided by a policy of total impartiality as to the community or individuals to be served, so that all people can have clean water, safe shelter and hot meals—and many times, a shoulder to cry on—when this care is needed the most.

The American Red Cross is the nation's largest blood collection organization, supplying 40 percent of the blood we use. Over the last century, the Prince William Chapter of the American Red Cross has served the people of this region with essential blood services, partnering with local community and faith-based organizations to obtain lifesaving blood donations. Literally 90 percent of the disasters the Red Cross responds to are home fires and to effectively respond to them in their community, the Prince William Chapter has maintained an on-call volunteer Disaster Action team to support the first responders as well as residents who are displaced. The American Red Cross empowers people at the community level, providing emergency and health and safety training and certification classes to provide fellow Americans with the knowledge and skills they need for effective leadership in the event of an emergency. Over the long history of the Prince William chapter, it has offered First Aid/CPR/AED or Automated External Defibrillator training classes, as well as Babysitting and Childcare and Aquatics courses throughout the community. By authority of Congress, the American Red Cross has provided essential support to the members of our Armed Forces and their families and the Prince William chapter of the Red Cross has worked with military families and active duty members to help prepare them for deployments, provide care and nurturing to wounded warriors in area military hospitals, and Reconnection Workshops for military families to help them reestablish themselves as a family unit after returning from service.

Mr. Speaker, because 90 percent of Red Cross workers are volunteers, I ask you and our colleagues to join me in expressing deep gratitude for the selfless and courageous sacrifice of the volunteers of the American Red Cross, who have done so much to prevent and relieve the suffering of others, and to congratulate the wonderful volunteers and employees of the Prince William Chapter, as they celebrate the 100th Anniversary of their extraordinary service to their community.