

Scout Woman of Achievement award and as the city of Dothan's first ever Community Leader of the Year.

Even though she retired from education, she never stopped working to make the world a better place. She launched Communities of Transformation, a program through the United Methodist Church focused on bringing together people from every segment of society to elevate families.

Suffice it to say, Laurel had a positive impact on so many lives throughout her time on this Earth. Whether it was helping a student at her community college reach their full potential or giving hope to a struggling family, so many people owe their success to Laurel Blackwell.

So, on behalf of Alabama's First Congressional District, I want to share my deepest condolences to Laurel's husband, Fred, and their four children. I hope they can all take comfort in knowing that Laurel will live on in the lives of the countless individuals she touched. She will be sorely missed.

#### TRIBUTE TO MARINE MAJOR ERIC BURKETT

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Pennsylvania (Mr. KELLY) for 5 minutes.

Mr. KELLY of Pennsylvania. Mr. Speaker, I rise today in honor of one of my constituents, United States Marine Major Eric Burkett, from New Castle, Pennsylvania.

Major Burkett was deployed as a member of the 24th Expeditionary Force in Morocco as an Osprey pilot. On April 11, 2012, he was nearly killed in a plane crash, which took the lives of two of his brothers-in-arms.

After coming home to Walter Reed, he lost one of his legs and continues to recover from his numerous injuries to this day. His wife, Melissa, who also is a former marine, has been by his side from day 1, along with their loving six children.

Major Burkett may never fly again, but already with his recovery he soars high above most of us. It was his spirit of service and patriotism that led him to start a program at Fort Belvoir for adaptive archery for his fellow wounded warriors.

Mr. Speaker, I include in the RECORD a poem penned by Albert Carey Caswell in his honor and in celebration of his new adaptive home, built thanks to the Gary Sinise Foundation.

At this time, I will read an excerpt from this poem:

As his two brothers, angels now up to Heaven would rise . . .  
Coming back home with only his family upon which to rely . . .  
So all by his side . . .  
His fine wife, Melissa, and children giving him the strength to try . . .  
As he knew it was time . . .  
Time to rebuild his life . . .  
Armed with his heart of the strength and iron will . . .  
Giving him the power and courage to nourish him to instill . . .

The strength to rebuild . . .  
Who against all odds our wounded warriors into that dark night move onward still . . .

Mr. Speaker, it is people like Major Burkett, whom we celebrate. It is the people who put themselves in danger and harm's way in order to protect the rest of us. I am so proud and humble today to be able to submit this poem in honor of Major Burkett.

OSPREY DE CORPS  
(By Albert Carey Caswell)

Osprey  
Osprey De Corps  
What a magnificent presence oh for sure  
And oh what a Osprey De Force  
As straight as an arrow heading for  
Truer than true into that face of war  
To serve and protect  
His Country Tis of Thee he'll not neglect  
To reek havoc upon the enemy a shear train  
wreck  
All in those magnificent shades of green  
Such Strength In Honor seen  
Soaring to new his courage convenes  
With such impact this United States Marine.  
Oh to be a United States Marine  
Who in Strength In Honor are seen  
Soaring to new heights to intervene  
To fight the fight  
What a Osprey De Force awesome sight  
Who for all us out on his course took flight  
Marines with wings,  
one of the most impressive of all things  
A sheer work of art this human being  
Swooping down upon the enemy for the Na-  
tion he so loves  
A bulls eye,  
hitting his mark all in his battle cry  
To vanquish an enemy straight into the  
heart of he flies  
Going from vertical to horizontal as he  
will not be denied  
In and out of places others dare not to try  
Making those boots on the ground realize  
That he's got their backs up on high  
Who bleeds Marine green all the time  
And loves Marines so much he married a Ma-  
rine this guy  
One of the baddest of the bad upon which  
this Nation relies  
Who leads with his heart as he sets  
his sights on high  
Finding his mark  
An Osprey De Corps all in his part  
Oh what a force  
All out on his most heroic course  
A United States Marine burning bright,  
this force  
When, out on a mission crashed as death was  
at his side  
As his two brothers,  
angels now up to Heaven would rise  
Coming back home with only his family  
upon which to rely  
So all by his side  
His fine wife Melissa and children giving him  
the strength to try  
As he knew it was time  
Time to rebuild his life  
Armed with his heart of the strength and  
iron will  
Giving him the power and courage to nourish  
him to instill  
The strength to rebuild  
Who against all odds our wounded warriors  
into that dark night move onward  
still  
As he won the battle but lose his leg  
Realizing he'd never fly again on that day  
When, he looked at his target and then his  
options weighted  
So setting his sights high out on his way  
A Osprey De Corps on his way to recovery  
with tear in eye seemed as he prayed

Bulls eye hitting the mark  
As soon he was up and out the door  
Leaving behind a town called pity for sure  
When, to new heights his heart so soared  
To Teach Us  
To Reach Us  
To Beseech Us All The More  
Creating his own Hunger Games,  
with his great appetite for recovery he hun-  
gered for  
And the last time I saw Major Burkett,  
I had to look up  
Because, with his fine heart way above me he  
so soars  
His wife Melissa he married up for sure  
With four beautiful children he's thinks he is  
the luckiest guy and can't ask for  
more  
Because, the families are the unsung heroes  
whenever Johnny goes off to war  
Who are the ones who must wait and worry  
all the more  
And when they come home give them such  
comfort for their recovery to insure  
And where would all these heroes be if it  
were not but for all of these?  
The families are our unsung heroes each day  
our Lord so sees  
Leading the way to recovery  
Major Burkett all in those shades of green  
Is one magnificent Osprey De Force seen  
The pride of Pennsylvania for what he's done  
and where he's been  
Its courageous men like him off to war our  
Nation sends  
Who help win all those wars upon whom we  
depend  
For all that we hold sacred and so love and  
adore  
A one fine Osprey De Corps  
Ooo Rah!

#### STRENGTHENING AMERICA'S AGRICULTURE COMMUNITIES

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Texas (Mr. ARRINGTON) for 5 minutes.

Mr. ARRINGTON. Mr. Speaker, I am proud to represent a rural district in west Texas that is home to 14 million acres of farmland and thousands of hardworking farmers and ranchers. These men and women are feeding and clothing the American people. They are bolstering our economy and they are strengthening our national security.

As a member of the House Agriculture Committee, I am committed to delivering results that are in the best interest not only of west Texans, but all Americans. I am doing that with my neighbor and strong leader of the Ag Committee, MIKE CONAWAY.

As we craft the next farm bill, there are a few priorities that, if achieved, will put our United States farmers and ranchers, and our country as a whole, in the strongest competitive position.

The first is that we must maintain America's food and fiber independence from other countries, which, like energy independence, is a national security imperative.

To achieve this objective, we must maintain a viable and responsible safety net for all commodities, which means the committee must work in a bipartisan way to get cotton back in under title I of the farm bill.

We can never again let the World Trade Organization dictate agriculture policy to the United States.

Addressing the gaping hole in the current agriculture safety net for cotton and fixing other shortfalls and risk management for both crops and livestock will ensure a strong, viable agriculture sector for the United States and rural America.

Ultimately, we must maintain appropriate programs to mitigate against unforeseen global market changes and commodity prices, ensure against adverse weather events, and maintain access to credit so farmers across the country can continue to supply America with abundant and affordable sources of food.

Additionally, as Texas is the top cattle-producing State in the Nation and represents \$80 billion in annual cash receipts nationwide, maintaining key livestock disaster programs are equally important to a responsible and effective safety net for our ag producers.

Second, our rural communities need greater access to broadband communications to be viable in the modern era. Increasing access to broadband is fundamental to the survival of rural America. It is necessary to support critical infrastructure, such as healthcare and education, and for overall economic sustainability so that we can finally close the digital divide between rural and urban America.

Let me put it to you this way: no rural America; no food, fuel, and fiber for the American people.

Third, we need another generation of farmers and ranchers. The American agriculturist is facing tough times. The average age of a farmer is nearly 60 and the number of people involved in ag production in their thirties and forties continues to decrease dramatically, with less than 1 percent of the American population involved in ag production. The math doesn't look promising.

Operating expenses continue to rise and farmers, particularly the young ones, have less equity to finance their operations. Farmers of all ages need a dependable and flexible operating loan structure with loan amounts that are useful. We must work to ensure that the USDA has the flexibility it needs to extend credit in the most meaningful way.

Fourth, innovation makes it possible for the farmer and rancher to continue to operate. Ensuring adequate and equitable research funding for agriculture colleges across the country is key.

Let's not just pour all of our money into land-grant institutions just because they are land-grant institutions. Let's fund the best ideas. It is call meritocracy. That is what our country was founded on.

As former vice chancellor of research at Texas Tech University, I saw some of the best and most innovative ideas spawned from research go to market and make a difference for our economy and the quality of our lives.

Lastly, the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program needs a more focused accountability. As we craft the

next farm bill, we should continue to monitor the effectiveness of all programs, especially SNAP, which accounts for 80 percent of all spending in the farm bill.

While the intent is well-meaning, the unintended consequence is an increase of recipients who are work-capable adults without dependents, accounting for nearly 30 percent of all recipients. It is imperative to require that able-bodied adults work in order to receive government assistance not just in SNAP, but all government programs.

Mr. Speaker, in closing, our farmers and ranchers are central to the vitality and security of this great Nation. This legislation is extremely critical to the success of our farmers. By including the priorities I have outlined today in the next farm bill, we can ensure a safer, stronger, freer America for our children.

#### TAX REFORM

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Kentucky (Mr. BARR) for 5 minutes.

Mr. BARR. Mr. Speaker, I rise today in strong support of efforts to simplify our outdated and overly complex Tax Code in order to make our economy more competitive and to provide big tax cuts to hardworking American families.

Last night, the House voted to go to conference with the Senate to work out differences between our two versions of the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act. I am confident the conference committee will report a reconciled bill capable of passing both Chambers, because the American people need and deserve tax relief.

Make no mistake: no matter what the tired talking points are on the other side of the aisle, this legislation will be a tremendous benefit to middle- and lower-income Americans who have been hit hardest by the policies of the previous administration. This is a massive victory for low- and middle-income Americans.

But don't just take it from me. Let's review the facts.

The House bill takes the lowest 10 percent tax bracket to zero, and it doubles the standard deduction, meaning hardworking Americans can immediately take home more of their paychecks. Specifically, the first \$24,000 of family income will be completely tax free under this plan.

We are nearly doubling the child tax credit. The changes to all tax brackets means we are lowering taxes for low- and middle-income taxpayers even as we simplify the Tax Code and broaden the base.

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A study by the nonpartisan Tax Foundation found that, in Kentucky, this legislation will create 11,782 new full-time jobs and will increase take-home pay by \$1,724 by Kentucky households making the median income.

Not only will middle-income families be able to keep more of their paychecks, their paychecks will grow.

A letter signed by 137 economists last week, sent to all Members of the House and Senate, made the case that "a competitive corporate rate is the key to an economic engine driven by greater investment, capital stock, business formation, and productivity—all of which will yield more jobs and higher wages."

That is why these economists are urging us to make the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act law. They note that our current corporate tax rate of 35 percent, which is the highest in the industrialized world, has made America non-competitive, resulting in the loss of 4,700 companies to overseas competitors since 2004, lost jobs, and lost wages.

This analysis is confirmed by the Tax Foundation, which concludes that approximately 74 percent of corporate taxes are paid by workers in the form of lower wages. Let's give American workers a pay raise.

Reducing the corporate tax rate will ignite economic growth, allow jobs to return from overseas, increase new private sector jobs through greater investment, and increase paychecks. A win-win-win-win for middle class workers and those looking to get ahead.

Now, the ultimate irony is that if you actually wanted to help the wealthy and the well-connected, then you would vote against tax reform and you would keep the current Tax Code in place. It is a complicated mess of multiple brackets, high rates, and special interest loopholes. The Code is a haven for special interests, tax manipulators, and the well-connected. It is an impossible frustration for ordinary middle class Americans who need to comply with the Code to hire tax lawyers and accountants. So if you want to help the middle class, get rid of this complicated mess.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, I would like to take a moment to respond to my friends on the other side of the aisle who after more than doubling the national debt during the Obama administration and who continue to push massive unpaid increases in spending, such as single-payer healthcare—government-run healthcare—have suddenly become gravely concerned about our national deficit and debt.

Now, let me be clear: I welcome this epiphany. I welcome their change of heart. I hope we can work together to actually address the true cost drivers of our deficit and debt. But last year, the Federal Government took in \$3.3 trillion in revenue. Our deficits are not the result of too little revenue. They are the result of Members of Congress who are unwilling to force the government to live within its means. We will never balance the budget or even think about paying down our debt without robust economic growth.

Those on the other side assume that a \$1.5 trillion tax cut will increase the debt by \$1.5 trillion. But that is based on the absurd assumption that nobody changes behavior when you get a tax