

identified before their interment, and therefore, they were buried as “unknowns.”

In recognition of his service, Seaman Saunders was awarded a Purple Heart for military merit and three ribbons for American Defense, American Campaign, and the Asiatic-Pacific Campaign.

As the last living sibling, Anna Belle was committed to bringing her brother home and laying him to rest at the gravesite that their parents prepared for him those years and years ago at Fairview Cemetery in Winnie, Texas.

□ 1045

In 2015, the DPAA was given authority to exhume the unknown remains of these servicemen associated with the USS *Oklahoma* and to reexamine them. It was at this point that the military contacted Anna Belle, his younger sister. She worked tirelessly to gather and provide DNA of family members to help identify her brother's remains.

Unfortunately, Anna Belle passed away on July 19, 2019, but she never lost hope that her brother would one day return home. She prayed her unwavering mission would be continued by those who survived her, and it was. On February 11, 2021, the Saunders family received word that their long-lost relative had finally been found and identified.

Mr. Speaker, Seaman Second Class Charles “Sonny Boy” Saunders’ arrival in Winnie, Texas, will be welcomed by many relatives, friends, and fellow patriots; finally coming home. On the 80th anniversary of his passing, Mr. Saunders will be buried alongside his parents with full military honors.

May God continue to bless this family for their long record of service and sacrifice to our great Nation.

USING EMPLOYER-SPONSORED EDUCATIONAL ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS TO PAY OFF STUDENT DEBT

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Illinois (Mr. RODNEY DAVIS) for 5 minutes.

Mr. RODNEY DAVIS of Illinois. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to talk about a national problem that has continued for years; that is the rise in student loan debt. Over 40 million borrowers hold outstanding student loan balances that exceed \$1.7 trillion. The average borrower holds about \$39,000 in student debt.

This is unacceptable. We hear talk about pie-in-the-sky policies, like debt forgiveness, that come maybe from the other side of this Capitol or Chamber, what we call the U.S. Senate. These are not just pie-in-the-sky proposals; they are BS. They are not going to happen. It is time that Members of this body talk about the solutions that all of us here helped implement. We actually addressed the student debt issue.

It is through legislation I led with my colleague, Congressman SCOTT

PETERS of California, that was signed into law by President Trump last year, that would allow employers to make tax-free student loan payments of up to \$5,250 per year to each employee who holds an eligible student loan, lowering payroll taxes both for employers and the employees.

This public-private partnership model makes student loan payments eligible for employer-sponsored educational assistance programs, just like tuition assistance has been for years.

In fact, my good friends at Chegg and I have got four public universities in my district, four private universities in my district, and a handful of community colleges in my district—every one of those students, like my three kids who are in college right now and grad school, knows what Chegg is. That is where they are getting their books. It is a cost-effective, private-sector approach to lower the cost of textbooks for kids nationwide.

Well, the people of Chegg know how important student debt is, because they have actually paid back over a million dollars in student debt for their employees. They have actually taken advantage of this program that we all passed in a bipartisan way to address this \$1.7 trillion problem.

Every employer out there should do what Chegg has done and take advantage of the tax provisions that are in place and were put in place by Republicans and Democrats and signed into law by President Trump. Let's make sure that you use this as an effective recruitment tool and retention tool in this economy.

Mr. Speaker, I am asking my colleagues to help get the word out to our employers across this great country to use what is already available to them and their employees who have student debt. They can use this student loan debt benefit to help recruit more workers. They can use it to retain more talent. They can use it to give their employees financial freedom and make a real difference in their lives by reducing their student debt and by reducing the \$1.7 trillion in debt that we have in this country, which outnumbers all auto and credit card debt combined.

Help the employees. Help America. Let's get this economy back on track.

WE NEED THE ESSENTIAL CAREGIVERS ACT

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentlewoman from New York (Ms. TENNEY) for 5 minutes.

Ms. TENNEY. Mr. Speaker, I rise today as the colead of H.R. 3733, the Essential Caregivers Act, to tell the stories of Americans across the country who are desperately calling on Congress to immediately act on this bill.

I also thank Representative LARSON, who is my colead, for helping me sponsor this bill. I am grateful to him for his leadership and his compassion.

I have shared many heartbreakingly tragic stories before in this Cham-

ber, and I will continue to do so until there is action on my bipartisan Essential Caregivers Act. Just as so many families who were forced to helplessly watch as their loved ones rapidly declined physically and mentally in long-term care facilities, I am not going to give up this fight. I am just getting started.

First and foremost, the Essential Caregivers Act is a critically important bill that would ensure the policies that were put in place during the COVID-19 pandemic never happen again. In my home State of New York, and many States across the Nation, families were literally shut out from their loved ones living in long-term care facilities, neglecting the basic needs of their loved ones at these facilities. These decisions to isolate long-term care facility residents were fatal and will have long-lasting impacts.

Today, I am here to share stories that go beyond my home State of New York. I will begin by sharing a story from Alaska. This is an excerpt from the book entitled “Protecting Them to Death.” This is a book that was compiled and written by my great constituent, Karla Abraham-Conley, who lost her mother in a long-term care facility.

This is an excerpt from the book compiled using COVID-19 isolation stories. The first one is a story from Denise Brown:

“Ohana” means “family” in Hawaiian and that no one is left behind. This word means a lot to us. My mother's skilled nursing facility was an hour away from her home and ours, so they became her pseudo ohana.

She was moved there by the State of Alaska when an employee brought COVID-19 into her extended care facility. She was able to see us through a window once or twice a week because she was on the ground floor at that time. We talked every day on the phone, except for those days when she was too weak to answer my call. Last year on her birthday, when she was in the final skilled nursing facility that the State had moved her to, we cooked her dinner outside her window, we sent it in to her via a CNA. My boys built her rock towers, and we sang “Happy Birthday” through the window. But the moment they moved my mother to the second floor, I think she gave up hope of getting stronger, of seeing the faces she loved through the window. It was her one connection to us that still seemed real and wasn't through a virtual visit. We lost her on January 12, 2021.

Mr. Speaker, Ms. Brown could still be here with us today if she had had access to an essential caregiver.

The next two stories come to us from Arizona. The first story is from Linda Thompson, also featured in the book “Protecting Them to Death”:

My husband is in a memory care facility. He no longer speaks as a direct result of the isolation during the pandemic. He uses a walker. Because he was confined to his room, he was unable to exercise his legs. All his physical abilities have declined significantly. Change of any kind takes a toll on dementia residents. Knowing that he spent 17 days in a sterile room in the COVID-19 ward of his facility is heartbreaking. He had very few symptoms but lost 20 pounds. I am still praying this never happens again.

If he had access to his loved ones, Mrs. Thompson's husband might still be speaking today. But the moment he was shut off from his essential caregivers, his health took a devastating toll.

Also from Arizona, here is the story from Anne Martinez, who lost her mother in the pandemic, also from the book "Protecting Them to Death":

Every time I visited my mother, she looked like a zoo animal behind the patio door. She would mouth that she was hungry or motion for what I had brought to drink. The blueberries I left got moldy, the almond milk grew stale, and the canned organic soups gathered dust. Nobody was giving them to her. My dad gestured at the closed patio window how much he missed her, and she avoided eye contact so as not to cry. Some days I was allowed to bring home-cooked meals and other days I was not allowed to feed her.

On the day she was transferred to a hospice care facility, I was with her to say goodbye and could see the particles in her dentures that had not been cleaned in weeks and blackened food underneath her fingernails from trying to eat with her bare hands.

I was actually relieved when they told me she had contracted COVID shortly after being vaccinated. Nobody deserves to spend their last years, months, weeks, or even days, alone in a facility without their loved ones at their side.

Anne's story is just one of thousands that are occurring across this Nation.

I will continue sharing these stories and urging immediate passage of the bipartisan Essential Caregivers Act. Denise, Linda, Anne, and their families, friends, and loved ones are depending on it.

HONORING ROBERT HAMILTON HURT

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

Mr. CARTER of Georgia. Mr. Speaker, it is with great pleasure that I rise today to honor a man who has dedicated his life to a better Georgia and a better United States: Robert Hamilton Hurt.

Bob Hurt is retiring this year, but his legacy will last generations. You would be hard-pressed to find a better adviser, more loyal friend, or hardworking foot soldier for every cause to which he has dedicated himself than Bob Hurt. This includes his commitment to his lovely wife, Virginia, and daughters Emma and Louisa, who are daily witnesses to Bob's unwavering support.

Bob is a proud graduate of Mercer University in Macon, Georgia, where he studied history. During this time reporting for and serving as editor for the campus newspaper, The Cluster, Bob both covered and advocated for the school's desegregation.

After graduating, Bob cashed in on a couple of summers interning for the Atlanta Constitution to score a full-time job reporting for the paper.

That career was put on hold as Bob was commissioned as an officer for the United States Army through Mercer's

ROTC program and was then called to defend our Nation in Vietnam.

While in Vietnam, he served as an Army infantryman and military intelligence officer with the 173rd Airborne Brigade and with the 5th Special Forces, more commonly called the Green Berets.

Bob returned to Atlanta following the war, where he continued his career as a journalist covering many beats before moving to Washington, D.C., to report on the happenings inside this building for the people of Atlanta.

While in Washington, Bob continued to pursue his goals while studying legislative affairs at George Washington University, where he went on to receive a master's degree.

Bob left the Atlanta Constitution and began an illustrious career in the United States Congress working for both the House of Representatives and the United States Senate.

Accumulating an incredible 24 years of combined experience, Bob has truly seen it all, but he never lost his commitment to the people of his beloved Peach State. He served as chief of staff to two of my predecessors, Representative Bo Ginn and Lindsay Thomas, as well as staff director for Senator Sam Nunn.

Though his dear friend Frank Norton may have convinced Bob to leave the government service, Bob never stopped working for our State. He has been a trusted adviser to Members on both sides of the aisle to further the interests of Georgians at the Federal level.

For more than 40 years, Bob Hurt has had a hand in nearly every project to create jobs and improve lives in the First District of Georgia. He has also been a fierce advocate for our military installations and for ensuring America's troops are the best equipped, highest trained, and most well cared for in the world.

While he is the first to roll up his sleeves and commit to doing the hard things, Bob is the last person who will ever take credit for getting the job done.

Mr. Speaker, I am here today to shine a light on this faithful public servant who I am honored to call my friend.

Joining me in honoring Bob today are former Senator Sam Nunn and my predecessors Lindsay Thomas and Jack Kingston.

Mr. Speaker, I include in the RECORD their remarks.

NOVEMBER 29, 2021.

DEAR BOB: It is a pleasure to join with your family and many friends to congratulate you on your well-deserved retirement. (I don't really believe it.)

From your work at The Atlanta Constitution and your service in the U.S. Army—to your time as my Administrative Assistant in the Senate and your hard work at Hurt & Norton, you have had an outstanding, impactful, and I am sure, very fulfilling career. In every role, you have served with distinction, integrity, and a great sense of humor, and you have been a force for good for Georgia and our nation. You've given all

of us who have been blessed by your company a joyful example of how to live a wonderful life.

Considering your news media background, I am reluctant to admit that you are a superb writer, so let's put it this way: I am looking for a speechwriter for my own retirement years. Are you available? I am honored that we've had the opportunity to work closely together over these many years, and I treasure our relationship.

Thank you for your friendship, your leadership, your wise counsel and your good jokes, which you have occasionally shared. Colleen and I send our best wishes to you and Virginia for a relaxing and enjoyable retirement. She is the one who really deserves it, and we hope to see more of both of you on the Georgia coast!

Sincerely,

SAM NUNN.

Though a newcomer to the political arena, I was well aware of the reputation and capabilities of Bob Hurt long before he agreed to serve as my Chief of Staff.

I cannot recall a serious disagreement that came between us throughout those ten years. There were surely times when my naïveté and lack of experience frustrated him greatly but never did it shake his steady, even-handed manner of directing the affairs of our office.

Bob selected our staff, directed the budget, and inter-office proceedings and, with his established knowledge of the First District, precluded any serious opposition during my ten years in office. His careful stewardship of the complex management challenges that face any congressional office enabled me to concentrate on focusing on the district and its people. In doing so, he afforded me the ability to spend the kind of time I found necessary to keep our pulse on the sentiments of the people we represented and the agenda of the First District.

I came to recognize how much respect Bob had on Capitol Hill. Other chiefs of staff and even other Members were aware of his knowledge, experience, and wisdom, seeking his counsel often. On many occasions I was perfectly aware of how Bob felt about various issues before us based on their questions of me.

In serving former Congressman Bo Ginn before me and then Senator Sam Nunn after, I have often thought of what a contrast it must have been to take on the responsibility of such a novice as myself. He did so in a manner that helped me come to a resolution on controversial matters, on the gamut of ordinary issues that affected the nation and the First District, and on the mundane responsibility of assuring the people who elected me that our office was there to serve them in every way possible.

Bob Hurt is a person of sterling character, very deep intellect, and passion for our nation. He has exemplified that passion not only through his years as Chief of Staff for three Members of the United States Congress, a Vietnam veteran, a father and family man, and a consultant to some of the most important enterprises in the country, but also as a friend and trusted counsel to people who shape the nation's agenda.

He is a perfect example of a life well lived, and a person whose service has made our country a better place.

I am truly honored to be his friend and I can say without reservation our longtime friendship and association has made me a better man.

LINDSAY THOMAS,
Member of Congress (1983–1993),
First District of Georgia.

Most of us don't know if Bob Hurt ever officially moved his residency to the state of