

residents of Hemet were forced to evacuate their homes.

Since then, the fire has burned over 28,300 acres, caused two deaths, and destroyed at least 36 homes or commercial structures—proving to be one of the largest and most destructive fires our local communities have ever seen.

To the families who have lost a loved one, our neighbors who have had to leave behind their homes, and the students who had to miss school, know that my heart is with you, and I stand ready to support you in any way that I can.

In the last 15 days we have faced much devastation. We have experienced uncertainty, grief, and fear. We have seen the havoc wildfires can wreak on our families, environment, and livelihoods. We have also been moved by the resiliency of our communities.

Through it all, I have been touched by the kindness and strength exhibited by every neighbor, firefighter, law enforcement officer, and volunteer who has pitched in to help keep us safe.

To our first responders from: Hemet Fire Department; CAL FIRE Riverside; CAL FIRE Incident Management Team 6; Riverside County Sheriff's Department; Cahuilla Fire; U.S. Forest Service; Bureau of Land Management; Idyllwild Fire Department; and the Bureau of Indian Affairs, thank you for your immense heroism.

It is because of each and every one of you—the men and women fighting the fire who have put your lives on the line—that the Fairview fire is now almost completely contained. There were 856 responders and 22 crews from these departments who stepped up without hesitation.

For their responsiveness and work to keep local families informed throughout the Fairview fire, I especially want to acknowledge the Fairview Fire Unified Command: Hemet Fire Department Chief Eddie Sell; CAL FIRE Chief Josh Jansen; Riverside County Sheriff's Department Lieutenant John Shulda; and the U.S. Forest Service Chief Jim Snow.

I also want to thank: CAL FIRE Incident Commander Deputy Chief Jeff Veik; CAL FIRE Incident Command Team 6 Staff Chief Andy Turner and Deputy Chief Dave Scheurich; Riverside County Fire Department Chief Dan Olson; Idyllwild Fire Department Chief Mark LaMont, and Cahuilla Fire Chief Randy Sandoval.

At the fire's highest point, nearly 38,000 individuals were under threat and forced to evacuate. I am incredibly grateful to them for their leadership, as well as every volunteer who pitched in at evacuation sites from Hemet to Temecula.

To everyone with the Riverside County Emergency Management Department, Riverside Department of Animal Services, and the American Red Cross who has contributed to evacuation and prevention efforts, thank you for all that you have done.

Your actions have helped families know when it was time to evacuate and helped our most at risk find shelter. In this disaster, there have been countless heroes, many who will go unnamed—the neighbor who texted their friend to make sure they saw the evacuation alert, the mother who pitched in that extra \$10 to a local evacuation center, and the many non-profits, volunteers, and local leaders who did whatever they could to help without seeking honor or recognition. The list goes on and on.

As a community, we can never forget the heroes who stepped up throughout the fire—big or small. As a Nation, I encourage each of us to follow the example set by the people of Hemet to come together in a time of crisis and to always lend a helping hand to a neighbor in need.

RECOGNIZING BRAD ASHFORD

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

Mr. BACON. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize the hard work and accomplishments of my friend and former Congressman, Brad Ashford, who passed away April 19, 2022. Brad began his career in politics by faithfully serving in the Nebraska State legislature for 16 years, focusing on ways to solve problems in education, labor, and urban affairs.

After being elected to represent the Second Congressional District of Nebraska, Brad worked hard to advance multiple bills in support of veterans. He was a co-sponsor of the Border Jobs for Veterans Act of 2015, which helped veterans find sustainable employment and apply their skills to work for Customs and Border Patrol. He also co-sponsored the Wounded Warriors Federal Leave Act of 2015, which allowed veterans with a service-related disability to take an increased amount of time to seek treatment and heal as needed.

Brad will most be remembered when people drive by the nearly 2-year-old Ambulatory Care Clinic at Omaha's VA Hospital. This facility, funded through a public-private partnership, was largely the result of Brad's efforts to craft and pass the CHIP In for Vets Act of 2016.

This innovative legislation was a first of its kind that enables the use of Federal funds to be matched with privately raised donations. Brad and I became friends after 2016 and we worked together to see the project come to fruition. This past September, I was humbled to carry on his legacy by passing the reauthorization of this important legislation.

It was Brad's mission to ensure all constituents of the Nebraska community felt well-represented. Throughout his tenure in Congress, Brad consistently sought to reach across the aisle and advocate for bipartisan legislation, highlighting that Representatives are

not only capable of working together, but must do so to advance our Nation, and we do this regardless of ideology or political party.

He was a problem-solver and a man of action. Even after his time in Congress, he continued to advocate and educate the public on justice-engaged youth, including our last project together finding pathways to careers that could reintegrate them as productive members of our community and reduce recidivism.

I salute and thank Brad for his leadership, mentorship, and friendship. We went from being political adversaries to great friends. It is my hope that we all carry on Brad's legacy of civility, compassion, and cooperation. I personally will miss the optimistic and hopeful conversations with my friend that we frequently enjoyed.

My heart goes out to his wife, Ann, his children; John, Ellie, and Tom; his granddaughter, Rosie; and his many loved ones. We are eternally grateful for all that Brad has done for our Nation.

□ 1030

HONORING NEBRASKA SENATOR TOM BREWER

Mr. BACON. Mr. Speaker, in honor of Native American Heritage Month, I rise to recognize the dedication and accomplishments of Senator Tom Brewer, a veteran with 37 years of service, including six tours to Afghanistan, two Purple Hearts, and a Bronze Star.

His experiences show resilience and true patriotism as he holds the title of the first senator of Native American descent to serve in Nebraska's unicameral. He was first elected in 2016 and represents the 13 counties of District 43 in the western Nebraska Sandhills.

Senator Tom Brewer is a member of the Oglala Lakota Sioux and grew up on the Pine Ridge Reservation before he enlisted in the Nebraska Army National Guard. He attended college at Doane University in Crete on an ROTC scholarship and continued to serve us internationally as he fought on behalf of our freedoms in Afghanistan.

Although gravely wounded in his final tour, Senator Brewer did not let this injury prevent him from fighting for his country through public service. After serving nearly four decades, Senator Brewer retired from the Army and was then elected to the Nebraska unicameral.

His inclusion represents how far we have come as a State, as well as the ways that we as people can come together in the future to uphold the proposition that all men are created equal.

Since his time in office, he has worked on legislation that improves veterans' affairs and agriculture policy to help all Nebraskans.

Senator Brewer continues to advocate for farmers and ranchers, servicemen and women, and fights to protect our constitutional rights. He has just returned from 2 months in Ukraine doing humanitarian relief in the Kharkiv region.

Though he has faced much adversity, he has managed to overcome it and use his experiences to create new standards in Nebraska's government. We thank him for his service and honor him for paving the way for all Native Americans.

OPPORTUNITY TO TRANSFORM THE VIRGIN ISLANDS

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentlewoman from the Virgin Islands (Ms. PLASKETT) for 5 minutes.

Ms. PLASKETT. Mr. Speaker, first, I offer my prayers and the prayers of the people of the Virgin Islands for the people of Puerto Rico after the devastation of Hurricane Fiona. My colleague across the aisle, Congresswoman GONZÁLEZ-COLÓN, knows that, like so many other issues, she has my support.

Mr. Speaker, like many Virgin Islanders, September is a month forever etched in my mind. Five years ago on September 6, Hurricane Irma relentlessly pummeled the territory, and Virgin Islanders watched in mute shock as a Category 5 storm shredded roofs, uprooted trees, and shattered lives.

Then, 2 weeks after Hurricane Irma, 5 years ago today, Hurricane Maria made landfall. For hours that stretched into the early morning, another Category 5 hurricane brought destruction across parts of the island that had not been shredded by Irma.

The compounded impact of two Category 5 hurricanes is unfathomable. Virgin Islanders, undeterred by the dramatic scale of devastation, rallied in the face of tragedy and proceeded to rebuild their lives and our community.

Virgin Islanders banded together to deliver food and medical supplies, organize cleanup initiatives, and volunteer to transport people and goods between the multiple islands and Puerto Rico.

The response of this body, the House of Representatives, from leadership chairs to rank-and-file Members, was extraordinary. Ultimately, the dialogues and relentless advocacy were crucial to securing extraordinary funding and a significant change to the Stafford Act for the Virgin Islands and Puerto Rico to not only provide necessary funding to rebuild but to rebuild with resiliency, to rebuild not as things were but as things should have been.

Despite the tremendous bipartisan funding, however, recovery stalled during the Trump administration due to, frankly, a belief by that administration that the funding was too much for the people of the Virgin Islands and not the financial responsibility of the Federal Government. Money was slow-walked.

Additionally, with the changes in law made by this Congress to allow the Virgin Islands to rebuild to prevailing industry standards, HUD, and especially FEMA, have had difficulty at the regional and local levels in accepting and implementing the changes in standards.

In view of this and unnecessary government bureaucracy, I coauthored the Expediting Disaster Recovery Act, a bipartisan disaster relief bill, with my colleague Representative GARRET GRAVES, which expedites the allocation of additional funds and assistance to cover unmet needs.

Our isolation from the mainland and relatively small size created difficulty in obtaining supplies and workers, and the decision to report in to Puerto Rico added another layer of bureaucracy, further hindering the speed of rebuilding.

I must be transparent by recognizing that, unfortunately, local government exacerbated the slow pace of the rebuild. The unprecedented funding was not met with sufficient macro planning. We did not use the first years after the storm and still have not sufficiently built capacity—training individuals while paying them to meet construction and project management demands, developing integrated fund and project management systems, aggressively recruiting experienced Virgin Islanders to return home to advance the rebuild, and educating the people to be prepared for spending the massive funding.

Fortunately, there is a window of opportunity to jump-start this rebuild while Democrats remain in the majority, our President prioritizes resiliency in underserved areas that are particularly vulnerable to climate change, and our local and Federal elected officials maintain transparency and cooperation to advance this once-in-a-generation opportunity to transform the Virgin Islands.

I am continually encouraged by the grit and heroism exhibited by my people, the people of the Virgin Islands, who face the grueling task of rebuilding their lives with sheer tenacity and determination.

Together, we have a shared responsibility to safeguard the future of these islands by ensuring that the Virgin Islands remain stronger and more resilient from the twin tragedies of back-to-back Category 5 storms. The opportunity that lies before us is too great and meaningful to let pass by.

RECOGNIZING STATE SENATOR SHEILA MCNEILL

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

Mr. CARTER of Georgia. Mr. Speaker, I rise today in recognition of State Senator Sheila McNeill, who is retiring after many excellent years in service to the city of Brunswick and to the State of Georgia.

Senator McNeill is a longtime supporter of our country's Armed Forces, having served for 2 years educating citizens and elected officials on the importance of seapower as the first woman to ever lead the Navy League, but her support for America's sailors didn't stop there.

In 1996, Senator McNeill played a key role in establishing St. Mary's Submarine Museum, the largest museum of its kind in the South.

During her tenure as a State senator, Sheila sponsored legislation to fight Georgia's human trafficking crisis and the pernicious effects of homelessness and sponsored countless bills to improve our State's educational infrastructure.

Sheila will be retiring at the end of her term this year to support her husband of over six decades. We thank her for everything she has done for our Armed Forces, for students, and for the many Georgians she has served over the years.

Her career has been a long and impressive one, and we were so lucky to have such a talented woman fighting for such important causes.

RECOGNIZING IAN GALLAGHER

Mr. CARTER of Georgia. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize the bravery of Ian Gallagher, a Rincon police officer who stepped up when help was needed most.

On a bright morning this June, the city of Rincon was hosting their annual Let Freedom Ring Parade, which I was proud to be a part of. A crowd of hundreds of people was gathered along either side of the parade route to watch the spectacle.

Around this time, Officer Gallagher heard calls over the radio that the roadblock, which had been set up, had been breached by an erratically driving car. He looked and saw an SUV speeding down the route, only just missing onlookers, including myself.

Shouting to those along the road to back up to safety, knowing that he must do something to stop the driver, he kept his patrol car behind a fire truck. Just before the suspect's car passed him, he pulled out directly into its path, stopping the driver in a head-on collision. His act of selfless bravery and split-second heroism undoubtedly saved many lives that day.

While this head-on collision was dangerous and surely jarring, both Officer Gallagher and his canine officer, who was with him at the time of the incident, are on their way to a full recovery.

He has recently been awarded the Medal of Valor, the Nation's highest award of valor for a public safety official.

I, alongside the people of the First Congressional District of Georgia, thank him for his service and his selflessness.

HONORING RON AND SANDRA ELLIOTT

Mr. CARTER of Georgia. Mr. Speaker, I rise today in honor of Ron and Sandra Elliott, owners of Game Changers Running Company.

Since the store's founding in 2012, Game Changers has been so much more than just a place to get your running shoes. Under the leadership of Ron and Sandra Elliott, Game Changers has been committed to the health and fitness of Georgia's coastal region.