

HONORING THE LIFE AND LEGACY  
OF CIVIL WAR VETERAN ALEX-  
ANDER JOHNSON

**HON. ELISSA SLOTKIN**

OF MICHIGAN

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

*Monday, February 27, 2023*

Ms. SLOTKIN. Mr. Speaker, today I rise to pay tribute to a man who should have been hailed as a hero, but for too long his story was lost in history. Alexander Johnson was a Black Civil War Veteran who lived and worked in Owosso in the late 1800s, and when a group of white residents chased most Black folks out of town, Johnson and two other Black men refused to go.

Born in Tennessee in 1833, Johnson fled slavery and made his way to Michigan before enlisting in a Union regiment of African Americans in Kalamazoo to fight in the Civil War, then moving to Canada at the war's end, and later returning to Michigan to settle in Owosso with his wife.

No one knows for sure why he chose Owosso. Some historians believe Johnson's wife may have had family nearby. Others surmise he might have had connections to a home in Owosso rumored to be part of the Underground Railroad, and still others say that at the time, the growing community was a place where people of all races moved to explore economic opportunity. Whatever the reason, Owosso is where Alexander Johnson chose to put down roots, opening up a downtown barbershop and was, by all accounts, a well-liked businessman and respected member of the community.

Unfortunately, the good times did not last long, as racial tensions grew and the Ku Klux Klan became active in the county. The tensions culminated in 1871 when 40 white vigilantes gathered together and attempted to drive all the Black residents out of town. There is little we know about this dark moment in Owosso's history, but we do know that Alexander Johnson was a light that would not be extinguished. Johnson stayed in Owosso, along with two other Black men, until he died. In 1907 Johnson received a military burial at Oak Hill Cemetery in Owosso, and his story was buried with him for more than 100 years.

There are those who seek to ignore or even wipe away the more painful pieces of our history, and there are those who understand that we cannot ever be great without acknowledging our failures, learning from our mistakes, and moving forward with a commitment to grow. The Owosso Rotary Club falls into the latter category, as they were the ones not just to uncover Johnson's story, but to acknowledge it and honor it as a piece of Owosso's history.

Alexander Johnson was formally recognized by the Owosso Rotary on Veterans Day 2021 with a solemn ceremony at his gravesite. It is only fitting that I, too, join in paying tribute to this brave man whose convictions led him first out of slavery, then to fight for a country he believed in, to establish the life he wanted, and to stay in the community that he loved. May his memory be a blessing and an inspiration to us all.

REMEMBERING JAYNE HARPER  
PLANK

**HON. JAMIE RASKIN**

OF MARYLAND

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

*Monday, February 27, 2023*

Mr. RASKIN. Mr. Speaker, I rise, with Congressman ERIC SWALWELL, to honor the remarkable life of my constituent, Jayne Harper Plank, who passed away on February 23, 2023. Jayne dedicated her life to civic service, philanthropy, and historic preservation, and she will be greatly missed by her beloved family, her many friends, and our entire community.

Jayne grew up in Washington, D.C. and graduated from George Washington University. She served on the Kensington Town Council for 7 years and in 1974 became the first woman elected mayor of Kensington, ultimately serving 4 terms.

In honor of her extraordinary civic service to the town, the renovated Kensington Cabin, originally built in 1934, was renamed the Mayor Jayne H. Plank Kensington Cabin.

In 1982, President Reagan appointed Jayne as the Director of Intergovernmental Affairs at the State Department, a position she held for 5 years. Jayne served as a liaison to governors, mayors, county officials and state legislators on the administration's policies. She also worked as a cryptologic linguist for the National Security Agency.

Jayne was active in historic preservation, philanthropic and civic organizations. She was the first woman elected President of the Maryland Municipal League and the first woman to serve as the State of Maryland's representative to the National League of Cities.

Jayne was also appointed to the Christopher Columbus Quincentenary Jubilee Commission and served on the Maryland Heritage Areas Authority, the Board of Trustees of Tudor House in Georgetown, and the Maryland Historical Society. She was active with the Women's Leadership Group of the Boys and Girls Clubs of Greater Washington and the Citizen's Association of Georgetown. In 2016, Sister Cities International recognized Jayne for her work building strong international relationships.

Jayne was the beloved wife of the late William H. Plank, Sr. She is survived by her loving family, including her sons William Plank, Stuart Plank, John Scott Plank, Colin Harper Plank and Kevin Audette Plank; her grandchildren, Jack, Casey, Eve, Jesse, Campbell, Talya, Aitan, James and Katherine; and sisters Peggy DeFranceaux and Donna Miller.

Mr. Speaker, I urge my colleagues to join me in honoring the remarkable life and legacy of my trailblazing constituent, Jayne Harper Plank.

CELEBRATING THE CENTENNIAL  
OF THE VETERANS OF FOREIGN  
WARS DEPARTMENT OF VIR-  
GINIA

**HON. ROBERT J. WITTMAN**

OF VIRGINIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

*Monday, February 27, 2023*

Mr. WITTMAN. Mr. Speaker, I rise today in recognition of the centennial of the Veterans

of Foreign Wars Department of Virginia (Virginia VFW). For the last 100 years and counting, the Virginia VFW has provided critical services and support to Virginia's veterans.

The Veterans of Foreign Wars National Headquarters formally chartered the Virginia VFW in February 1923. The Virginia VFW's members then formally organized in March 1923 in Norfolk, Virginia. Its founding members included veterans from the Spanish-American War and World War I. Membership in the Virginia VFW has grown substantially since its founding in 1923: it originally had 13 Posts and 663 members; now, it has 128 Posts and over 40,000 members. The Virginia VFW's membership includes members from all branches of the military and represents conflicts over the past 100 years.

The Virginia VFW's mission is: "To foster camaraderie among United States veterans of overseas conflicts. To serve our veterans, the military and their families. To advocate on behalf of all veterans."

The Virginia VFW advocated for the establishment of the Department of Veterans Affairs, and for the passage of the Montgomery GI Bill, the Blue Water Navy Vietnam Veterans Act of 2019, the elimination of the Survivor Benefit Plan (SBP) Dependency and Indemnity Compensation (DIC) offset, and the PACT Act. These are just a few of the many pieces of legislation they successfully supported that have helped countless veterans.

Additionally, the Virginia VFW's Service Claims Agents ensured that Virginia veterans received over \$13 million in earned benefits that otherwise may have been lost. Furthermore, Virginia VFW members avidly support their local communities. In the last five years, the Virginia VFW's members volunteered for 1,233,783 hours and donated \$9,155,822—of which the combined value is \$41,840,483. I have no doubt that the Virginia VFW will continue to fulfill its mission.

Mr. Speaker, I ask you to rise with me in celebration and honor of the centennial of the Veterans of Foreign Wars Department of Virginia. May God bless the Virginia VFW and its members as they continue to serve veterans, veterans' families, and their communities.

RECOGNIZING MR. GERALD MIXON

**HON. SANFORD D. BISHOP, JR.**

OF GEORGIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

*Monday, February 27, 2023*

Mr. BISHOP of Georgia. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to extend my personal congratulations and best wishes to an exceptional community leader and outstanding citizen, Mr. Gerald Mixon, on his retirement as the Planning Director of the Middle Flint Area Planning and Development Corporation and the River Valley Regional Commission after 47 years of service. His retirement celebration was held on February 17, 2023 at the River Valley Regional Commission in Americus, Georgia.

For nearly five decades, Gerald has been a dedicated leader in the Middle and Southwest Georgia community, helping to bring much-needed resources and development opportunities to multiple counties in Georgia's Second District, including Dooly, Macon, Marion, Schley, Sumter, Taylor, and Webster counties. During his tenure, he has successfully applied

for countless federal programs to spur community development projects in his community, and he has been instrumental in working with local government and the various federal departments and agencies to improve the quality of life for Georgians.

As the Planning Director for the Middle Flint Area Planning and Development Corporation and the River Valley Regional Commission, Gerald Mixon has become a vital resource to the dozens of local government officials and non-profit institutions that fall within his reach. His deep knowledge and experience of the grant-writing process and bottom-up community development has positioned him to serve as an essential lifeline for these community leaders who often seek technical assistance and sound advice as they work to improve their communities and neighborhoods. His service in this regard served the community tremendously as local officials are often tasked with working together to implement region-wide projects under the Community Development Block Grant, including in transportation and infrastructure, housing, and anti-poverty programs.

Gerald has built an impressive career in his lifetime, planning and overseeing the successful completion of countless community development projects, including leading the efforts to implement numerous comprehensive plans for efficient and sustainable solid waste management in the Middle Flint and River Valley Regions. Amid frequent destructive tornadoes, hurricanes, and other severe weather-related incidents, Gerald authored eight pre-disaster plans for counties and cities across the region to help mitigate damage and the need for costly repairs following disasters. And he modernized his region's public safety apparatus by conceptualizing and organizing a seven-county Enhanced 911 center covering the largest service area in Georgia that went on to become the Middle Flint E-911 system, which is still in operation today.

Gerald has accomplished much throughout his life, but none of this would have been possible without the Grace of God and the love and support of his wife, Diane, and his three children, Heather, Stuart and David.

Sir Winston Churchill often said: "You make your living by what you get; you make your life by what you give." The Middle and Southwest Georgia region is a better place today because Gerald Mixon gave so much to so many for so long to make our communities stronger, better place to live. As a man of tremendous work ethic, organizational talent, vision, and tact, his life's work has helped create prosperity and opportunities in Georgia that many may have once not thought possible.

Mr. Speaker, I ask my colleagues in the House of Representatives to join my wife, Vivian, and me, along with the more than 765,000 people of Georgia's Second Congressional District, in extending our sincerest appreciation and best wishes to Gerald Mixon upon the occasion of his retirement from an outstanding career of service to his beloved community.

HONORING THE GROUNDBREAKING  
CAREER AND CONTRIBUTIONS OF  
CARRIE OWENS

**HON. ELISSA SLOTKIN**

OF MICHIGAN

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

*Monday, February 27, 2023*

Ms. SLOTKIN. Mr. Speaker, I rise today in honor of an extraordinary educator who shaped the lives of thousands of mid-Michigan students during her groundbreaking career.

Carrie Owens grew up in Florida during the time of segregation and high racial tensions, and she knew from an early age she wanted to work toward dismantling the systems she saw all around her. Though her parents had no formal education, they pushed their kids to have what they had not, and a young Carrie thrived in school. She eventually became a teacher and was hired by Okemos Public Schools in 1964, becoming the first Black teacher in the district.

It's said that when Mrs. Owens first interviewed for a job at Cornell Elementary School in Okemos, she vowed to help each student individually, because she recognized what many even in education circles did not yet grasp—that all students learn at different paces and in different ways. Just as she thrived in school, Owens did everything to ensure her students did the same, and she was put in charge of a transitional class of elementary students, who up until that point had had limited success in school. Owens made sure each of her students progressed to grade level, and empowered them to understand how they learned.

Word of her tireless dedication to student success and her innovative teaching philosophy spread quickly, and many families moved to Okemos just so their children could be in her class.

By the time she retired from teaching in 2001, she had touched thousands of young lives and helped change the face of education in the community. Not only did her hiring pave the way for other teachers of color, by the end of career Okemos had its first Black superintendent, and the district was overall a more diverse, inclusive community.

As we mark Black History Month, I salute Carrie Owens, who is Black history in Okemos. This trailblazing teacher has left her mark on the hearts and minds of the entire community, and we are so much better for her service. May her lessons live on in all the students she touched, and in all the lives she changed.

HONORING YING LEE

**HON. BARBARA LEE**

OF CALIFORNIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

*Monday, February 27, 2023*

Ms. LEE of California. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to honor the extraordinary life of my dear friend and first legislative director, Ying Lee, and her incredible contributions to her community and our country. I want to extend my deepest condolences to Ying's children, Sarah and Max, her grandchildren, Max Jr. Kelley, and Olivia, and Ying's entire extended family. They are all in my prayers during this difficult time.

Ms. Lee's story is one of tremendous perseverance, resilience, and fortitude in the face of struggle. Born in China, Ms. Lee arrived in the United States as a refugee from Shanghai during World War II. Her life before immigrating was marked with hardship, as Ms. Lee faced firsthand the brutal realities that stem from war and militarization. By the young age of 13, Ms. Lee had survived more than most people do in a lifetime, witnessing poverty, famine, and sickness, all brought on by devastating warfare. Her experiences in childhood were fundamental in shaping Ms. Lee's identity as an activist, educator, city councilmember, and anti-war movement icon.

Her family's escape from an invading Japanese army brought Ms. Lee to the Bay Area. Settling in Berkeley, Ms. Lee spent most of her fighting for progress, peace, and equity, as a councilmember and as my legislative director. Her journey in political activism began in the halls of UC Berkeley, where Ms. Lee studied political science, earning her bachelor's and master's degrees. There, she became involved in the civil rights movement, fighting for racial justice; and the anti-war movement, calling for an end to the Vietnam war.

Ms. Lee's commitment to serving the greater good began with her career as a teacher at Berkeley High School, where she spent years educating young minds. In 1973, Ms. Lee made history as Berkeley's first Asian American council member and helped shape the city's ongoing legacy as a haven for progressive politics. She continued her journey in public service as a Congressional aide for Congressman Ron Dellums and, later, for myself, as my first Legislative Director when I came to Congress. Here in D.C., Ms. Lee spent years by my side advocating for equity, global peace, and legislative change. Together, we worked to advance global peace and security on many fronts, including our visit to Japan to discuss the consequences of war in the aftermath of the September 11 attacks. Ms. Lee's work to advance equity measures included her contributions to the Living Wage, Jobs For All Act, which sought to codify basic economic rights for all Americans and improve the quality of life.

Ying Lee was a tireless warrior, as her activism never ceased. In 2020, Ms. Lee joined historic crowds of people to fight for Black Lives, marching in the streets of Berkeley with her "Black Lives Matter" sign. At 83, she protested the closure of Berkeley's post office, handing out pamphlets and participating in rallies. Ms. Lee exemplified a true public servant, an advocate, and fierce warrior for justice.

I spoke with Ying two weeks before her passing. She sounded strong and energetic. As always, she encouraged me to keep fighting the good fight. While I will always remember our last conversation with a heavy heart, I will meet our challenges head on with Ying's fervor and passion, in her honor.

While we mourn her loss, we celebrate her remarkable life, which will be remembered as one of love, passion, compassion, dedication, and brilliance. Her legacy will provide us guidance in rising to the occasion as we continue her fight for peace and justice. I loved Ying and will miss her tremendously. May she Rest in Peace and Power.