

and communications, 3:00 a.m. conference calls, check-ins with the State Department and congressional members. We also dispatched a message to the Governor that one of his constituents had been imprisoned in Sudan. Immediately, Governor Richardson picked up the phone and called me.

In that watershed moment, everything changed. Bill Richardson began his unique methodical and deliberate steps to bring Paul home. Unintimidated by despots or warlords, the Governor saw Paul in a familiar situation that he had adroitly handled before. Watching him in those urgent days that culminated in our flight to Khartoum, it became clear that he had a rare gift of intelligence, diplomacy, and magic. He never took a single success for granted, and it was his respect for the “stardust”—the alignment of the seemingly impossible—that made it all work.

It was 34 days before Paul, Suleiman, and Idriss would see their freedom, a shorter time fortunately than many others detained have endured, but every bit as vivid and terrifying and dangerous.

The day we crossed into north African air space I remember looking out over the vast sand of the Sahara while everyone slept, the anxiety of what would transpire more palpable as we approached Khartoum. As soon as we disembarked the Governor was whisked away to meet with President Umar Al-Bashir. Three hours later Governor Richardson emerged with a “Pardon” for Paul based on humanitarian grounds.

But Paul was not in Khartoum. He was 489 miles away. We would have to fly there to rescue him.

After a tense and uneasy night, the next morning we boarded a smaller aircraft and flew two hours into Darfur, a province ripped apart by arson and genocide. There, we waited all day. The provincial governor of Darfur was unhappy. He had not been consulted before the president pardoned Paul. I watched as Governor Richardson went to work again soothing the irritation, Paul, Suleiman, and Idriss were put through a 15-minute mock trial where their charges were read aloud. They were admonished but ultimately released. Governor Richardson had worked his magic again.

We returned to Khartoum at dusk with our prize of three and left several hours later for New Mexico with Paul. Suleiman and Idriss were reunited with their families in Chad. The whole excursion took only 48 hours.

For all the admirable things Governor Richardson accomplished in his distinguished lifetime of public service, I believe it was his extraordinary diplomacy that he would most want to be remembered for, that, and the stardust that so often aligned for and with him.

RECOGNIZING ELIZABETH FUNCHESS, EAGLE SCOUT

HON. SAM GRAVES

OF MISSOURI

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, September 14, 2023

Mr. GRAVES of Missouri. Mr. Speaker, I proudly pause to recognize Elizabeth Funchess. Elizabeth is a very special young woman who has exemplified the finest qualities of citizenship and leadership by taking an active part in the Boy Scouts of America, Troop 8G, and earning the most prestigious award of Eagle Scout.

The multiyear journey to the Eagle Scout Award is one of the most involved and trans-

formative experiences a young person can have. They try new things through the merit badge program, develop confidence in the outdoors, practice leadership tactics, and plan, develop and give leadership to a service project that benefits their community. For Elizabeth's Eagle Scout service project, she, built 2 picnic tables that convert into benches for her church to have an outdoor classroom.

Mr. Speaker, I proudly ask you to join me in commending Elizabeth Funchess for her accomplishments with the Boy Scouts of America and for her efforts put forth in achieving the highest distinction of Eagle Scout.

COMMENDING DIVISION CHIEF KEVIN RITTENHOUSE FOR EXCEPTIONAL PERFORMANCE DURING HURRICANE IDALIA

HON. GUS M. BILIRAKIS

OF FLORIDA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, September 14, 2023

Mr. BILIRAKIS. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to express my commendation for the outstanding performance displayed by Division Chief of Training Kevin Rittenhouse during Hurricane Idalia. His dedication and exemplary efforts went above and beyond the call of duty.

In the face of extreme adversity, Chief Rittenhouse demonstrated exceptional leadership, ensuring the safety and well-being of both his team and the affected community. His quick thinking and decisive action played a pivotal role in mitigating potential hazards and securing vital resources. Chief Rittenhouse was the area incident commander for the Hernando Beach area as storm surge was rising, structure fires were difficult to access due to flooding, and high-water rescues were being performed. Simultaneously, Chief Rittenhouse's home was being damaged by storm surge waters.

Mr. Speaker, it is with great pride that I acknowledge Kevin's exceptional performance. We are immensely grateful for his invaluable contributions during this critical time. His actions embody the highest standards of professionalism and serve as an inspiration to us all.

HONORING THE SERVICE OF FORMER MARYLAND CONGRESSMAN ROSCOE BARTLETT

HON. DAVID J. TRONE

OF MARYLAND

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, September 14, 2023

Mr. TRONE. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize the service of Congressman Roscoe Bartlett, who faithfully represented Maryland's 6th Congressional District for 2 decades, from 1993 to 2013.

As one of the longest-serving representatives in Maryland history, Congressman Bartlett and I have shared the honor of representing Western Maryland in the U.S. House of Representatives.

And while our politics differ, one of Congressman Bartlett's efforts that I strongly commend was to expand green energy and fight against climate change. As former Leader STENY HOYER once said, “Roscoe was green before it was cool to be green.”

Congressman Bartlett embodies the spirit of a true self-made American. Born a few years before the Great Depression and raised on a tenant farm in Western Pennsylvania, he persevered to become an engineer for the U.S. Navy, earn a Ph.D. in physiology, and serve as a Member of Congress. Beyond his congressional service, he is a loving husband and a devoted father of 10.

Today, we thank Congressman Bartlett for his service to this Nation.

RECOGNIZING JULY CONSTITUENT OF THE MONTH MATTHEW REBELO

HON. MIKE LEVIN

OF CALIFORNIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, September 14, 2023

Mr. LEVIN. Mr. Speaker, it is my great honor to recognize Carlsbad resident and attorney Matthew Rebello as my July Constituent of the Month. In his work assisting Afghan refugees through the legal challenges of gaining asylum, Matthew embodies the critical importance of supporting those who face violence—especially the women and children most often at risk.

For Matthew, this work is personal. In 2015 he immigrated to the United States from South Africa and relates his own experience with starting anew here to his desire to help others coming to the United States. A former barrister in South Africa, Matthew continued his legal career in the United States after obtaining his green card and passing the California bar exam. It's inspiring to witness Matthew's initiative in using his time and skills to assist on a pro bono basis those escaping the Taliban's violence.

I'm forever grateful to the members of our CA-49 community who dedicate their time and effort towards helping others in critical need. I'm proud to honor Matthew Rebello as my July Constituent of the Month.

RECOGNIZING VICKI HELFER

HON. JASON CROW

OF COLORADO

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, September 14, 2023

Mr. CROW. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize the accomplishments of Vicki Helfer, recipient of the Colorado High School Counselor of the Year award.

As a counselor for Aurora Central High School, Vicki advises students to work through their assignments and supports them through the anxieties that come with graduating. Outside of her counselor responsibilities, she advocates on behalf of her students. Vicki has helped her students obtain gender-neutral bathrooms and has assisted in creating programs to support students whose first language is not English.

Vicki is a model mentor and an outstanding civilian. Her dedication to supporting our youth has undoubtedly led to the recognition she deserves. I congratulate Vicki for being named the Colorado High School Counselor of the Year and wish her continued success.

CONGRATULATING GRACE
VERGARA-MACTAL

HON. SUSIE LEE

OF NEVADA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, September 14, 2023

Ms. LEE of Nevada. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to honor Grace Vergara-Mactal, Executive Director of SEIU 1107, for her upcoming retirement and a career of service to Nevada.

Grace was born and raised in the Philippines where she earned her bachelor's degree and worked as a medical technician. Immigrating to the U.S. in 1989, her first job involved mopping floors for \$3.50 an hour, but she worked her way back into the health care field as a hospital lab technician. As a leader and organizer for her fellow lab workers, Grace was suspended from her job while circulating a petition. Undeterred, she pursued this activism, climbing from volunteer, to organizer, Organizing Director, Chief of Staff, and eventually leader of Local 1107.

As one of the foremost leaders of the labor movement, both in Nevada and across the country, Grace has been a tireless advocate for good jobs and quality services during her incredible 3-decade career. As Executive Director, she represents nearly 20,000 health care and public service workers across the state.

In this position, Grace has led with a commitment to mobilizing and empowering workers and families while fighting for economic, racial, and social justice. Her work focused on growing Local 1107, passing historic legislation, winning major contract battles, and building vital community coalitions. She also serves as Vice President and Executive Board Member of the Service Employees International Union, officer of the SEIU Asian Pacific Islander Caucus, and Executive Board Member of the Nevada AFL-CIO.

In addition to being an important union leader, Grace is a trailblazer in our community. As the first member of the AANHPI community to serve as an officer for Local 1107, she is an important representative for one of Nevada's fastest growing demographics. Grace has a particular dedication to developing and supporting worker leaders, especially workers of color in her leadership with SEIU Local 1107 and the Nevada AFL-CIO.

Grace often says that she will always be an organizer at heart, so I am confident that her retirement will not be the last that I see of her.

Mr. Speaker, please join me today in honoring Grace Vergara-Mactal on her outstanding service to Nevada and our Nation, and in congratulating Grace on her retirement.

THANKING MONET STRAUB FOR
HER SERVICE TO KANSAS

HON. JAKE LaTURNER

OF KANSAS

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, September 14, 2023

Mr. LATURNER. Mr. Speaker, I rise today in appreciation for a member of my staff for her dedicated service to the people of Kansas. Monet Straub has been an invaluable member of my team since she joined my staff in 2017 when I was still serving as State Treasurer.

Monet has worked tirelessly as my Deputy District Director for the past 2½ years—helping thousands of Kansans from across the Second Congressional District navigate our federal agencies through high-quality and reliable constituent services.

From organizing the Topeka office to running Mobile office hours, Monet's dedication, patience, and hard work have been vital in ensuring the success of our district operation. Most importantly, Monet always put our constituents first and Kansans knew they could count on her to get the job done. I am grateful for Monet's positive attitude and dedication to service over these past 6 years. I wish her the very best and look forward to seeing her excel in her new endeavors.

RECOGNIZING THE CONSULATE OF
MEXICO IN FRESNO

HON. DAVID G. VALADAO

OF CALIFORNIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, September 14, 2023

Mr. VALADAO. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize the Consulate of Mexico in Fresno on the 213th Anniversary of the Independence of Mexico and thank them for their significant contributions to the Central Valley.

The Consulate of Mexico in Fresno opened in 1931 to support the needs of Mexican agricultural workers located in the Central Valley. The mission of the consulate is to help Mexican citizens assimilate into the community and advance their rights while residing in California. For nearly a century, those working in the consulate have been dedicated to that mission, providing invaluable assistance to local immigrants including identification services, health guidance, and educational opportunities. The consulate connects local immigrants with the services they need to thrive.

Through their Mobile Consulate, which travels to different cities across the Central Valley throughout the year, Mexican immigrants have greater access to the over 30 services the consulate provides. The consulate is also focused on the educational outcomes of Mexican students.

Last year alone, the consulate, in partnership with other local organizations, granted more than \$45,000 in scholarships to 30 college students pursuing careers in public health. On this day, as we celebrate the independence of the Mexican people, I want to recognize the incredible contributions Mexican immigrants have made to our communities in the Central Valley and across the nation. As the son of immigrants, I understand first-hand the perseverance, determination, and sacrifice of immigrants who come to the United States in search of greater opportunities.

Mr. Speaker, I ask my colleagues in the United States House of Representatives to join me in celebrating the 213th Anniversary of the Independence of Mexico and thanking the Consulate of Mexico in Fresno for their dedication to the well-being of our Mexican community.

HONORING WORLD-RENOWN CON-
SERVATIONIST, THEO PAGEL
WITH AMERICAN HUMANE/GLOB-
AL HUMANE'S KIESSLING INTER-
NATIONAL PRIZE FOR SPECIES
CONSERVATION

HON. GUS M. BILIRAKIS

OF FLORIDA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, September 14, 2023

Mr. BILIRAKIS. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize heroic efforts on behalf of wildlife worldwide. American Humane, the first and most experienced national humane organization, which was created in 1877 to ensure the safety, welfare, and well-being of animals, has awarded Prof. Theo Pagel, CEO of the Cologne Zoo in Germany with the 2023 Wolfgang Kiessling International Prize for Species Conservation. This award was created in honor of Wolfgang F. Kiessling, the founder of Loro Parque and global leader in conservation.

Prof. Theo Pagel has dedicated his life to ensuring the survival of countless species, and inspiring and educating generations of people. As the CEO of the Cologne Zoo, the former president of the World Association of Zoos and Aquariums, and Chair of the Reverse the Red Committee of the International Union for Conservation of Nature, Pagel has led significant change for animals both in the wild and in zoos. He was inspired at an early age by his father, also an animal lover, and started a breeding program in 1988 to save the endangered Bali Starling—a program he coordinated for nearly 20 years.

Pagel created sustainability strategies and guidelines for conservation education during his tenure as president of the World Association of Zoos and Aquariums. He approaches conservation through inspiring the public as well as leading high-level strategies on saving countless species from the very largest Asian Elephant to the smallest Asian songbird.

He has led a global charge to push back the effects of what scientists call a "Sixth Mass Extinction," with up to one million species at risk of disappearing forever.

Mr. Speaker, wildlife conservationists put the world first, wildlife first, the future first. They don't seek a hero's reward, a medal, or a prize. But they surely deserve it. Mr. Speaker, I ask today that we recognize the impact Theo Pagel has had on saving species, honor his work and acknowledge American Humane's Kiessling Prize as a way to shine a light on the important work of saving species for future generations to love.

CELEBRATING DAVID HECKER'S
40+ YEARS BUILDING THE LABOR
MOVEMENT

HON. DEBBIE DINGELL

OF MICHIGAN

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, September 14, 2023

Mrs. DINGELL. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize David Hecker, the President of AFT Michigan on the occasion of his retirement. The tireless work he has put in to ensure our state has a strong public school system and the teachers to staff it is worthy of commendation.