

HONORING THE 2023 WOMEN OF  
THE YEAR: LA TOYA THOMAS

**HON. JOHN GARAMENDI**

OF CALIFORNIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

*Thursday, October 12, 2023*

Mr. GARAMENDI. Mr. Speaker Pro Tempore, I rise today to recognize the contributions of La Toya Thomas as she is honored as one of California's 8th Congressional District's Women of the Year. La Toya is a passionate community member who has shown exemplary dedication to service in her profession and volunteer work. For over a decade, La Toya has worked as a department manager at Kaiser Permanente, where she has earned a stellar reputation for her leadership and team building in the healthcare industry. For years, La Toya has also devoted her energy and talents towards activism as an SEIU Union Steward advocating for the rights of her fellow employees. She currently serves on the board of Motivated 2 Help Others, a nonprofit dedicated to helping victims of crime of all backgrounds find the resources and support they need as well as helping formerly incarcerated individuals transition back into society. La Toya also serves her community through extensive philanthropic work, including providing meals for those facing homelessness and distributing backpacks to underprivileged children. La Toya is a proud and caring mother of two who devotes herself to her career, volunteer work, and family, all while treating everyone with kindness and positivity. She is a role model for others with her strength and resiliency and is known to go above and beyond for her family, work, and community. On behalf of the people of California's 8th Congressional District, it is my pleasure to honor and recognize La Toya Thomas for her positive contributions to our community.

RECOGNIZING THE WILSON FAMILY'S FARM, COTTON HILLS FARM IN LOWRYS, SOUTH CAROLINA

**HON. RALPH NORMAN**

OF SOUTH CAROLINA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

*Thursday, October 12, 2023*

Mr. NORMAN. Mr. Speaker Pro Tempore, I rise today to recognize the outstanding work of the Wilson Family in Lowrys, South Carolina and their dedication to providing locally grown produce for over 140 years.

Cotton Hills Farm was given to Joseph Wilson and Theodosia Abel as a wedding gift by the bride's father in 1880. It has been passed down multiple generations and is now run by JEB Wilson along with his brother, Pete, and his father, Jeff.

For 100 years, cotton had been the primary crop planted on Cotton Hills Farm. Starting in the 1940s, JEB's grandfather started planting peaches as well. Today, the family farm has expanded to pumpkins, peaches, watermelon, and cantaloupe. JEB Wilson has proudly said, "basically anything that can be grown in South Carolina, we grow it." The family also operates three retail locations in Chester County, South Carolina and sells wholesale produce.

Conservation and sustainability have been a key element to the long-term success of Cot-

ton Hills Farm. The Wilson family is constantly looking for ways to improve the farm and keep it sustainable for years to come.

I would like to recognize that the entire family is also very accomplished in their community. Jeff is a long-serving member of the Soil and Water Conservation District in Chester County and currently serving as the vice chairman. Additionally, JEB and Pete have been named Conservationist of the Year in Chester County. JEB credits the family's success to their adaptability to challenges and willingness to try new farming methods that will continue to decrease their environmental impact.

The Wilson family continues to be devoted to their farm and are looking forward to passing it down the family line. On behalf of the 5th District of South Carolina, it is my most sincere pleasure to recognize Cotton Hills Farm and the Wilson family for their great service to our state. Please join me in recognizing the farm on its advancements in agricultural innovation and conservation.

RECOGNIZING THE LIFE OF  
DANIELLE "DANI" DUGGAN

**HON. WILLIAM R. KEATING**

OF MASSACHUSETTS

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

*Thursday, October 12, 2023*

Mr. KEATING. Mr. Speaker Pro Tempore, I rise today in honor of the life of Danielle "Dani" Duggan.

Born on May 7, 1966, Dani was raised in Middleborough, Massachusetts, where she found a passion for the arts at a young age. After graduating as an honors student from Middleborough High School in 1984, Dani went on to study at St. Michael's College, where she received an honors Bachelor of Arts degree in fine arts and theatre and was the recipient of the Delta Epsilon Sigma Society Departmental Award for outstanding achievement in fine arts.

Dani then moved to Dublin, Ireland to work for the famous Abbey Theatre. This is where she also met her husband, Gerry Clements. She lived in Ireland for eight years receiving an honors master's degree in modern drama from University College Dublin and would later form the Salem Willows Theatre Company.

Dani returned to the U.S. with her husband, Gerry, moving to Pembroke, Massachusetts, and over the next 24 years, she taught drama at Middleborough High School. During her time at MHS, she became chair of the fine arts department and played a pivotal role in the design and construction of the new Middleborough High School Performing Arts Center and Blackbox Theatre. At MHS, Dani directed numerous school productions and the speech & theater workshop, as well as several productions with the Plymouth Community Theatre.

Sadly, Dani left us too soon on October 15, 2022, after a two year battle with cancer. Whether during her time at Middleborough High School or her work with the Abbey Theatre, Dani's passion for sharing her love for the arts serves as an example to all. Throughout her years at Middleborough High School, Dani laid the groundwork for the school district to hold an annual event celebrating students' work in the fine arts. On May 20, 2023, Middleborough held its inaugural Dani Duggan Fine Arts Festival to honor Dani's legacy.

Mr. Speaker Pro Tempore, I am proud to honor the life of Dani Duggan. I ask that my colleagues join me in recognizing her life's commitment to serving her community through the arts.

HONORING SUZANNE SMITH

**HON. MIKE THOMPSON**

OF CALIFORNIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

*Thursday, October 12, 2023*

Mr. THOMPSON of California. Mr. Speaker Pro Tempore, I rise today, along with my colleague, Rep. JARED HUFFMAN, to honor Suzanne Smith for her dedicated service to the Sonoma County Transportation Authority and Regional Climate Protection Authority where she worked to build both agencies from the ground up.

Ms. Smith received her Bachelor of Arts degree in Political Science from the University of California, San Diego, where she also studied urban planning. Suzanne would later receive her Master of Arts degree in Public Administration from the University of San Francisco.

The Sonoma County Transit Authority (SCTA) and the Regional Climate Protection Authority (RCPA) represent Sonoma County and the area's nine cities. They work together to balance the interests of each local government while spearheading transit projects, and climate protection initiatives. Ms. Smith was hired as the SCTA's first independent executive director in 1997 and later was assigned to lead RCPA as well. Since then, she has grown the team to sixteen curated employees, and worked tirelessly to implement crucial transportation and climate projects and programs in Sonoma County and the North Bay.

Ms. Smith led the organizational process that created the Measure M Traffic Relief Act (Measure M). She worked to include it on the 2004 ballot and to ensure it passed. This quarter cent sales tax has been successfully used to improve transportation, transit, safety, and the widening of Highway 101 for carpool lanes. In addition, she oversaw long range planning, and collaborated with partner agencies and the public on policy priorities. Additionally, she was instrumental in the founding legislation for Sonoma Marin Area Rail Transit District (SMART) and the Sonoma County Regional Climate Protection Authority.

In 1997, Ms. Smith had three goals: to get a sales tax measure passed to support transportation, widen Highway 101, and establish train service. She not only accomplished her goals, but she has also acted as an incredible leader for the community of Sonoma County. She has made and maintained effective partnerships with agencies and elected officials nationwide and has directed the Sonoma County Transit Authority and Regional Climate Protection Authority through economic downturns and the COVID-19 pandemic. She has served with integrity, foresight, thoughtfulness, and unquestionable dedication and commitment. Ms. Smith demonstrated exceptional interpersonal skills and an innate understanding of how politics work and how to move projects forward.

Throughout her professional career, Ms. Smith also served as the district director for State Assembly Member Valerie Brown. She worked on policy issues such as transportation, education, and local government.

Ms. Smith is revered by her colleagues not just for her work but also for her friendliness and collegiality. When she is not working, she also loves to spend time with her family including her husband, Tim, her mom, Barbara, her stepchildren, Katie Mason, Nick Smith, and Emily Angelopoulos, and her grandchildren, Cam, Nick, Sidney, Ben, Anthony, and Dominic.

Mr. Speaker Pro Tempore, it is therefore fitting and proper that we recognize Suzanne Smith for her longtime service at the Sonoma County Transit Authority and Regional Climate Protection Authority.

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RALPH CONTINI

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### HON. JEFFERSON VAN DREW

OF NEW JERSEY

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

*Thursday, October 12, 2023*

Mr. VAN DREW. Mr. Speaker Pro Tempore, it is my honor and privilege to commemorate the induction of Ralph Contini as the National President of UNICO National. Ralph, an exceptional leader with forty years of dedicated service to UNICO at all levels, currently serves as its Executive Vice President and Chairman of the UNICO National Columbus Day Committee. Throughout his tenure, he has been recognized for his unwavering commitment and received prestigious awards, including the Dr. Anthony P. Vastola Gold Medal Award and the Outstanding District Governor Award. Born and raised in Italy, Ralph's deep connection to Italian heritage has shaped his remarkable journey. Beyond UNICO, Ralph actively participates in several Italian American organizations, holding esteemed positions such as Treasurer/Executive Director at the Tri-State Italian American Congress and serving on the Board of Trustees for The Columbians. His dedication was further recognized with the honorable title of Cavaliere by the President of the Republic of Italy. As District Governor of New Jersey Districts Six and Seven, Ralph received the "Outstanding" and "Distinguished" UNICO National District Governor Awards, recognizing his outstanding leadership and dedicated efforts in managing the chapters within each district. Today, as the proud owner of Ralph A. Contini, CPA, LLC in Paramus, he provides top-tier accounting, tax, consulting, and financial planning services. Now residing Hackensack with his family, Ralph finds joy and fulfillment in his family life and values the support they provide as he continues to make a meaningful impact to their community. His legacy as an outstanding leader and advocate Italian heritage stands as a testament to his deep commitment and passion to the cause. Congratulations to Ralph for his induction as National President at UNICO and I thank him for his dedication to his community. God Bless Ralph Contini and God Bless the United States of America.

HONORING THE 2023 WOMEN OF THE YEAR: LISA TINBRINK HOWARD

### HON. JOHN GARAMENDI

OF CALIFORNIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

*Thursday, October 12, 2023*

Mr. GARAMENDI. Mr. Speaker Pro Tempore, I rise today to recognize the contributions of Lisa Tinbrink Howard as she is honored as one of California's 8th Congressional District's Women of the Year. Lisa is a leader who serves her community through her work, advocacy, and volunteer efforts. Early in her career, Lisa worked as an engineer, where she broke down barriers and was a trailblazer for other female engineers. She later founded Tolenas Winery, which she operates with her husband in the Suisun Valley. There they provide wine education and help others understand the invaluable contributions of local agriculture to our community. Lisa has served on the Solano County Agricultural Advisory Committee and is Secretary of the Suisun Valley Vinters and Growers Association where she works with elected officials to advocate for farmers and winemakers. Furthermore, Lisa serves her community through her volunteer work, which includes work with the local 4H, advocating for women in the wine and agricultural industries, and supporting military personnel. She is also a proud and caring mother of three children and inspires others with her dedication to her faith, family, business, advocacy, and community service. On behalf of the people of California's 8th Congressional District, it is my pleasure to honor and recognize Lisa Tinbrink Howard for her positive contributions to our community.

RECOGNIZING MAYOR JOSEPH THALLEMER'S SERVICE TO WARSAW, INDIANA

### HON. RUDY YAKYM III

OF INDIANA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

*Thursday, October 12, 2023*

Mr. YAKYM. Mr. Speaker Pro Tempore, I am proud to recognize and congratulate Mayor Joseph Thallemer, who is completing his tenure of dedicated service to Warsaw, Indiana at the end of this year.

Currently serving in his third term as Mayor, Joe Thallemer has long advocated solutions that make Warsaw a better place to live, work, and raise a family, and that maintain and build on Warsaw's status as the Medical Device and Orthopedic Capital of the World.

Prior to becoming Mayor, Joe Thallemer also served on the City Council and the Warsaw Plan Commission, meaning his record of faithfully serving Warsaw runs nearly three decades deep.

Beyond City Hall, many Hoosiers know Joe through his Optometry practice that he established in Warsaw in 1980.

Outside of his medical practice and elected office, Joe has also given back to the community he and his wife Jill call home by serving on the local YMCA board as well as in church and school activities with Jill and their four children.

As he prepares to step down as Mayor, spend more time with his family, and write the

next chapter of his life, I am proud to congratulate Joe Thallemer on a distinguished career and a job well done. The Warsaw community is unquestionably better off thanks to this good man with a servant's heart.

I join Hoosiers throughout Indiana's Second Congressional District in expressing our gratitude to Mayor Thallemer for his service and in wishing him and his wonderful family nothing but the very best going forward.

HONORING THE 2023 WOMEN OF THE YEAR: MARINDA ELAINE KEITH

### HON. JOHN GARAMENDI

OF CALIFORNIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

*Thursday, October 12, 2023*

Mr. GARAMENDI. Mr. Speaker Pro Tempore, I rise today to recognize the contributions of Marinda Elaine Keith as she is honored as one of California's 8th Congressional District's Women of the Year. Marinda has been a community leader and owner of Marinda's Family Daycare for decades. After operating her daycare center for 35 years, she has served roughly 400 children and families. She is passionate about educating every child in her care and works to ensure that every child receives food, education, and the support they need. Her love and commitment to the children she cares for is evident in the educational and career pursuits her students have accomplished. She is also an active member of the church, where she volunteers and gives back to those in need. Through her church she has organized the annual backpack drive for underprivileged children and numerous food giveaways. During the COVID-19 Pandemic she donated, prepared, and delivered baskets of food and supplies to seniors. In addition, she volunteers to cook and serve meals for the unhoused in the parks throughout Richmond. Marinda's compassion, selflessness, and dedication serve as an inspiration to all who meet her. On behalf of the people of California's 8th Congressional District, it is my pleasure to honor and recognize Marinda Elaine Keith for her positive contributions to our community.

HONORING CHIEF GARY GACEK OF CONCORD, NORTH CAROLINA FOR HIS MANY YEARS OF DEDICATED SERVICE

### HON. RICHARD HUDSON

OF NORTH CAROLINA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

*Thursday, October 12, 2023*

Mr. HUDSON. Mr. Speaker Pro Tempore, I rise today to recognize and congratulate Chief Gary Gacek on his retirement from the Concord Police Department and to honor his many years of faithful service to the people of Concord, North Carolina.

Gacek began his career in law enforcement with the Milwaukee Police Department, where he served in a variety of roles over the course of 25 years. He began his role as Chief of Police of the Concord Police Department in July 2015. Under his leadership, Concord became one of the safest cities in the state, with crime