

of the Commission on the Social Status of Black Men and Boys: Rev. Alfred C. Sharpton of New York.

MORNING BUSINESS

TRIBUTE TO MAJOR ALLEN "SIG" BLACK

Mr. COTTON. Madam President, I would like to take a few moments to recognize Maj. Allen "Sig" Black who has worked in my Senate office this year as a defense fellow. Major Black is a patriot who has served our country nobly and made it a safer and better place. It has been a pleasure to have him in my office.

Major Black joined the Air Force in 2011 as a distinguished graduate of the ROTC program at Pennsylvania State University. He began flying the F-22 fighter aircraft soon after completing the Euro-NATO Joint Jet Pilot Training in Texas and has since become a masterful Air Force pilot and knowledgeable authority on virtually every detail of the Raptor. In total, Major Black served as an operational F-22 pilot for 5 years, deploying for combat operations in Operation Inherent Resolve and executing numerous homeland and Presidential protection missions.

Prior to moving to Washington, D.C., Major Black spent 3 years at Edwards Air Force Base in California. There, where he attended the U.S. Air Force Pilot Test School and left as a distinguished graduate and the Liethen-Tittle Award winner as the top test pilot graduate in class 19A. While still serving at Edwards, Major Black also distinguished himself as F-22 command chief pilot and assistant director of operations of the 411th Flight Test Squadron, 412th Operations Group.

In 2021, Major Black led the F-22 Combined Test Force through 26 F-22 and 20 F-16 developmental test missions and several first-time events. Twelve of his missions were supporting elevated risk F-22 envelope expansion tests. For one such mission, Major Black planned and led the first F-22 high angle of attack test in 17 years while carrying a new externally podded capability. His success in executing 12 additional missions evaluating new F-22 software led to the fielding of the first F-22 Rapid Agile Capability Release operational flight program.

Major Black is a skilled military leader. He directed the No. 1 DOD weapon program, developed new F-22 open software pathways, and has helped lead numerous working groups. According to Air Force Materiel Command, "The distinctive accomplishments of Major Black reflect great credit upon himself and the United States Air Force." For these achievements, Major Black was awarded the Lieutenant General Bobby Bond Memorial Aviator Award, which is the award for the best test pilot of the year in the entire Air Force.

I could not have been assigned a more talented pilot to join my office in January 2023, representing the Air Force in Congress as a Defense Fellow.

During his time in my office, he staffed over 25 high-level engagements and at least 10 hearings, along with helping draft dozens of pieces of legislation to strengthen our Nation's defense. He has also provided meticulous and incisive research that has guided my office on important public policy questions. His colleagues have been consistently grateful for his attention to detail, willingness to diligently analyze problems, and ability to translate complex military concepts into digestible language. His passion and dedication to making this great Nation safer was evident each and every day working in the Senate.

Finally, I cannot honor Major Black without also thanking his family: his wife Kelsey, his daughter Sloane, and his son Nicholas. I am grateful to his family for sharing him with my team.

Major Black has had a remarkable career and he has a promising future ahead. He is exactly the kind of man and leader that our military needs. For these reasons and many more, I was honored to have Major Black in my office this year.

Sig, thank you for your service to Arkansas and to the United States of America.

ADDITIONAL STATEMENTS

TRIBUTE TO HAROLD HEPPER

• Mr. CRAMER. Madam President, I want to honor a very special North Dakota resident who is turning 100 years old on December 15. Harold Hepper was a longtime resident of McClusky and most recently has lived in Bismarck, where he will celebrate this landmark birthday.

Harold embodies the very best of the Greatest Generation. A year after graduating from McClusky High School in 1942, he and five buddies were drafted into the Army and traveled to Fort Snelling, MN. Initially rejected because of his poor eyesight, Harold returned home and begged the Selective Service Board for another chance to serve. After obtaining plastic glasses, he was able to train at Camp Barkeley, TX, to be an Army medical aidman.

He shipped out from New Jersey for England and was on the frontlines in France the summer of 1944, where he was wounded in the shoulder during the Battle of Brest. Following his participation in the Battle of Hurtgen Forest, that December found him in the Battle of the Bulge. There, thousands of Americans died in what was the largest and bloodiest U.S. battle of World War II. The first day of the battle on December 16 brought heavy casualties on both sides. Harold and other medics worked on the front lines for 10 days, providing nonstop medical aid before they were relieved.

Harold was awarded the Purple Heart, Bronze Star, and other campaign medals. Honorably discharged in November 1945, he has remained active in veterans organizations the rest of his life. This includes 76 years as a member of the McClusky American Legion. Returning home, Harold worked as an insurance agent at the First National Bank of McClusky for 44 years before retiring in 1987. He joined the McClusky Fire Department in 1954 and served there for 33 years, including one year as fire chief. Harold and his wife, Laura, who died in 2015, raised two daughters, Debra and Gail. They will join five grandchildren, three great-grandchildren and other family, friends, and veterans groups in honoring Harold on his 100th birthday.

North Dakota is home to more than 200 centenarians, and we consider them among our most treasured residents. Their pioneer spirit, dignity, and hard work have brought them through many challenges and personal achievements. On behalf of all North Dakotans, I thank Harold Hepper for his service to our country and wish him a happy 100th birthday. I hope you enjoy continued good health and vitality.●

TRIBUTE TO DR. CARL HEILMAN

• Mr. MARSHALL. Madam President, I rise today to thank Dr. Carl Heilman for his many years of service to the free State of Kansas and Barton Community College, as well as honor him for all that he accomplished during his career.

A lifelong educator committed to service, Carl began his journey at the University of Northern Iowa as a student, where he graduated with a bachelor of arts degree in social sciences. After graduating, Carl would continue his education at Northern Iowa, obtaining a master of arts in counseling, later pairing that with a master of arts in public administration from Minnesota State University. Carl completed his formal education with a doctor of philosophy in higher education administration from Iowa State University.

With this knowledge in hand, Carl served in administrative positions at several colleges across the U.S. Beginning at Iowa Lakes Community College in Iowa, Carl was both a chairperson and faculty member. While at Northland Pioneer College in Arizona, Carl served as vice president for student services, and at Lincoln Trail College-Illinois Eastern Community College District, Carl was campus president.

But Carl's service to the State of Kansas began in 2006 when he became the fifth president of Barton Community College. Carl hit the ground running, quickly building rapport with the board of trustees, faculty and staff, local community constituents, and the student body. With this support, Carl set attainable goals for the future of Barton, establishing it as a dynamic institution able to weather

limited access to resources, fluctuating economic conditions, and shifting State demographics. Under Carl's guidance, Barton has expanded its online learning options, generated diverse workforce training opportunities, and expanded services to Kansas military communities. In fact, Carl was integral in keeping the 1st Infantry Division stationed in Kansas, as his testimony to the Kansas Governor Military Council on behalf of Kansas higher education for The Big Red One proved persuasive to the 2015 Base Realignment and Closure Commission.

With these accomplishments, it is unsurprising that Carl received exceptional recognition from the State of Kansas. He served an unprecedented 3 years as chairperson for the system council of Kansas Community College Presidents, where he oversaw the statewide implementation of a public higher education course articulation process, the introduction of a public higher education reverse transfer model, and the development of reverse transfer for both community colleges and the private college system. Thanks to Carl, these actions have eased administrative processes for Kansas students and administrators, making life simpler for everyone.

Carl will officially retire from Barton Community College on June 30, 2024, after over 17 years of service to the people of Kansas. I now ask my colleagues to join me in recognizing the distinguished career of Dr. Carl Heilman, as well as thank him for all his work on behalf of the state of Kansas and Barton Community College.●

RECOGNIZING MID KANSAS COOPERATIVE

● Mr. MARSHALL. Madam President, I rise today to recognize the Mid Kansas Cooperative and honor them for their reception of the esteemed Retailer of the Year Award, presented by the Agricultural Retailers Associations, ARA.

I am extremely proud that the Mid Kansas Cooperative, a pillar of prosperity in central Kansas since 1965, has received ARA's extremely prestigious award this year. Known locally as MKC, the co-op is headquartered in Moundridge and offers a complete line of products, programs, and services citizens throughout the State of Kansas. With more than 600 employees, 11,000 members, and 8,000 customers through a wholly-owned subsidiary, MKC specializes in grain, agronomy, energy, feed, and risk management. The farm communities that Mid Kansas Co-op serves have a long history of fostering innovations in grain production, and MKC continues that tradition by utilizing technology like drones and autonomous robots for precision agriculture management tactics.

White pickup trucks bearing the MKC logo dot the plains from planting to harvest, and their specialists aid Kansas producers in making agronomic decisions all year long. While many co-

ops provide goods and services as a complement to agriculture producers, MKC goes above and beyond through a robust college internship program and investments back into the very communities that their branches inhabit through scholarships and sponsorships.

In combining the two facets of a productive workforce and expert knowledge, MKC maintains its position as an innovative steward of Kansas farmland, an exceptional provider of customer service, and a leader in local communities across a great portion of the State of Kansas. This commitment to excellence and innovation in the agricultural sector made MKC a more than worthy winner of the Retailer of the Year Award. They truly embody their motto of "Shared growth. Shared success."

I now ask my colleagues to join me in congratulating MKC president and CEO Brad Stedman, along with all other MKC member-owners and employees, for being named the Agricultural Retailers Association's 2023 Retailer of the Year.●

RECOGNIZING THE MISSOURI HIGH SCHOOL FOOTBALL CHAMPIONS

● Mr. SCHMITT. Madam President, I rise today to honor a group of Missouri's finest high school football teams. Last week, there was a lot of memorable football that was played for State trophies. From Lamar High School's dramatic comeback to Marionville High School's dominant display and Archie Whirlwind's victory, each game encapsulated the spirit of determination and excellence. These championships not only showcased remarkable individual and team performances but also underscored the deep-rooted passion for football in Missouri. The stories of these teams—their struggles, their strategies, and their victories—are a testament to the celebrated history of high school football in the State.

On December 2, 2023, the Lamar High School football team achieved a remarkable 35-28 overtime victory against Valle Catholic (12-2) in the Class 2 Show-Me Bowl. The Lamar Tigers, with a season record of 13-1, overcame a challenging 21-0 first-quarter deficit to clinch their ninth State championship. Quarterback Alex Wilkerson, alongside a formidable defense that conceded only one touchdown after the first quarter, played pivotal roles. Wilkerson's 25-yard touchdown kickstarted the overtime, and the Tigers' defense sealed the win by preventing Valle Catholic from gaining any first downs in OT.

On December 1, 2023, Marionville High School's football team won the class 1 state championship, defeating North Platte (12-2) with a decisive 29-0 score. The team's fast, physical playing style was evident right from the start. Their opening drive was 14 plays that led to a touchdown by Hugh Eaton. Head coach Padden Grubbs commended

his team's tough, physical approach and their resilience against challenging weather conditions. For the seniors, this victory marked the culmination of an impressive undefeated 14-0 record this season.

On November 30, 2023, the Archie High School Whirlwinds (14-0), in the eight-man State title game, won 40-26 over the Worth County High School Tigers (12-2). Archie Whirlwinds' quarterback, Briar McIntire, scored an impressive five rushing touchdowns. This strong performance by the team's quarterback was coupled with a dominant offensive and defensive line. Despite Worth County's brief resurgence, Archie maintained control, which was led by McIntire. The game ended with Worth County scoring 12 unanswered points to make it a two-score game; however, their attempt at comeback was thwarted by the Whirlwind's strong defense.

In closing, the Missouri high school football championships of 2023 were an impressive combination of talent, teamwork, and tenacity. Each team, regardless of victory, demonstrated a remarkable blend of skill, strategy, and sportsmanship. These teams have etched their names in the annals of Missouri's sports history. Congratulations to all the teams that competed in these games, and a special congratulations to Lamar, Marionville, and Archie for their outstanding accomplishments in the 2023 State championships.●

MESSAGE FROM THE HOUSE

At 12:20 p.m., a message from the House of Representatives, delivered by Mrs. Ali, one of its reading clerks, announced that the House has passed the following bills, in which it requests the concurrence of the Senate:

H.R. 542. An act to amend title 38, United States Code, to improve certain programs of the Department of Veterans Affairs for home- and community-based services for veterans, and for other purposes.

H.R. 1547. An act to direct the Secretary of Transportation to conduct a study on the costs and benefits of commuter rail passenger transportation involving transfers, and for other purposes.

H.R. 3848. An act to make certain improvements in the laws administered by the Secretary of Veterans Affairs relating to homelessness, and for other purposes.

MEASURES REFERRED

The following bills were read the first and the second times by unanimous consent, and referred as indicated:

H.R. 1547. An act to direct the Secretary of Transportation to conduct a study on the costs and benefits of commuter rail passenger transportation involving transfers, and for other purposes; to the Committee on Banking, Housing, and Urban Affairs.

H.R. 3848. An act to make certain improvements in the laws administered by the Secretary of Veterans Affairs relating to homelessness, and for other purposes; to the Committee on Veterans' Affairs.