

Now, Jeff is channeling his energy and gratitude into supporting families facing similar challenges. This summer, Jeff embarked on an extraordinary adventure, cycling 4,600 miles across the country from Irvine, California, to Philadelphia. The monumental endeavor, aptly coined "One Dad's Mission," is part of his goal to raise \$5 million for the Ronald McDonald House Charities to thank the organization that supported his family in their darkest hours and give back to other families navigating similar, unimaginable challenges.

Jeff's mission is more than a fundraising effort; it is shining example of how the support of community can provide the strength and hope to rise.

It is the work of individuals like Jeff that reminds us of the strength of the human spirit, turning your darkness into light, and uplifting other families facing similar challenges. Today, we honor Jeff Bekos not just for his remarkable service but for who he is—a true hero in every sense of the word.

On behalf of Pennsylvania's First Congressional District, I extend my deepest gratitude to Jeff Bekos for his extraordinary service. I ask my call to join me in honoring this exceptional individual, whose leadership and spirit of service will inspire generations to come. May his example remind us of the boundless potential within each of us to make our communities, country, and world a better place.

HONORING THE 50-YEAR ANNIVERSARY OF THE LEAGUE OF MEXICAN AMERICAN WOMEN

HON. JIM COSTA

OF CALIFORNIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, October 29, 2024

Mr. COSTA. Mr. Speaker, we come together today to honor and celebrate the monumental 50-year anniversary of the League of Mexican American Women. Founded with a steadfast commitment to community service and empowerment, the League's journey has been one of resilience, dedication, and unwavering support for Latinas and the broader community.

The roots of the League trace back to a group of visionary women in the years 1973 and 1974, including Dolly Arredondo, Betty Rodriguez, Mercy Bencomo, Rachel Torres, and Rose Najera. In 1973, a pivotal moment arose when Dolly Arredondo extended an invitation to local Latina women, sparking discussions about the organization of the Mexican American Women for the betterment of the community. The League of Mexican American Women officially took shape in 1973 and was ratified in 1975. The organization's central tenet was community service, distinct from political pursuits. Its primary mission was to provide leadership training for Latina women in Fresno, fostering empowerment across generations and social backgrounds.

The League's inaugural women's conference, "La Primera Conferencia Femenil," chaired by Josie Mena, set the stage for a series of impactful gatherings. It convened in the same year at the Pinedale Community Center, focusing on critical topics such as health, economic well-being, and social justice. Distinguished by their deep experience in various organizations, the League's founding members

were no strangers to community engagement. They were committed volunteers, fundraisers, and educators who had often encountered roles relegated to auxiliary positions in male-led Hispanic organizations. The League was a platform to amplify their voices and elevate issues impacting Latinas.

As the Nation underwent the "feminine revolution," the League of Mexican American Women held a unique perspective. While they admired the broader women's movement, they believed that stronger leadership was needed within the Latina community. This sentiment was especially pronounced within the Chicano Movement on university campuses. Through this period of transformation, several college students joined the League, infusing it with energy and contributing to various programs. Throughout its journey, the League of Mexican American Women achieved significant milestones. Affiliation with the Comisión Femenil Mexicana National, Inc. in 1975 and participation in the ERA March in Washington, D.C. in 1980 highlighted their commitment to broader causes.

The League's legacy is interwoven with scholarship initiatives, community events, and partnerships that have transformed lives. From the Fiesta Navideña Fashion Show initiated by Betty Rodriguez, which has raised and awarded over \$511,000 in scholarships, to the Adelante Mujer Hispanic Conference, the League has exemplified dedication to education and cultural enrichment. Notably, the League fostered the Mariposa Project, designed to empower high school Latinas through education. The League's commitment to advocating for Latinas has remained steadfast. Over the years, it has inspired countless women to pursue higher education, secure leadership roles, and contribute to society. With its unwavering dedication, the League of Mexican American Women continues to inspire and empower, creating pathways of success for generations to come.

Mr. Speaker, I ask my esteemed colleagues to join me in celebrating the 50-year milestone of the League of Mexican American Women. Its legacy stands as a testament to the transformative power of collective action, determination, and commitment to uplifting our community.

RECOGNIZING THE ACHIEVEMENTS OF CHIEF TY SILCOX

HON. AARON BEAN

OF FLORIDA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, October 29, 2024

Mr. BEAN of Florida. Mr. Speaker, four years ago, I answered one of the scariest phone calls a man can receive. My wife, Abby, called me to tell me lightning struck our house, and it caught on fire while she was inside it. But by the grace of God and the quick work of the fire department, Abby, our son Walker and our dog Daisy escaped unscathed.

Mr. Speaker, I rise today to extend my personal gratitude for one of the heroes who has been helping families like mine and saving lives for nearly four decades, Fernandina Beach Fire Chief Ty Silcox. Chief Silcox is retiring on October 31, 2024 after a decade on the job. Under his leadership, the department grew into a modern, efficient force overseeing

100 emergency responders across fire, EMS, and ocean rescue services.

His visionary work included the design and construction of a state-of-the-art fire station and the strategic management of resources during natural disasters.

I ask my colleagues to join me today to recognize Chief Silcox. I thank him. Northeast Florida is a safer place because of him. Let's go get 'em.

RECOGNIZING SPINA BIFIDA AWARENESS MONTH

HON. CHRISTOPHER H. SMITH

OF NEW JERSEY

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, October 29, 2024

Mr. SMITH of New Jersey. Mr. Speaker, I rise to recognize October as National Spina Bifida Month, and to raise awareness and pay tribute to the more than 166,000 Americans living with Spina Bifida—the most common permanently disabling birth defect compatible with life. It is imperative we highlight the critical challenges to improved quality of life we must address to ensure each and every American can achieve their full potential.

The federal government has an obligation to advance research into devastating diseases and disabilities to help find cures and therapies and to identify preventative strategies. Equally important is federal support for programs and initiatives that help patients and their families as they struggle to live with these conditions, such as Spina Bifida.

Literally translated as "split spine," Spina Bifida is a condition that occurs when a baby's neural tube fails to develop or close properly. Typically occurring within the first 28 days of pregnancy while the neural tube is forming, Spina Bifida often develops before a woman even knows she is pregnant.

Sponsored by the Spina Bifida Association (SBA), National Spina Bifida Awareness Month is a time to highlight the needs of the community and recognize the importance of the work done year-round to advance research, programs, and policies aimed at meeting those needs.

As co-chair of the Congressional Spina Bifida Caucus, I've had the honor to work alongside SBA to advance Spina Bifida awareness, research, and public health efforts in Congress. Founded in 1973, SBA is the Nation's only organization solely dedicated to advocating for and assisting those living with and affected by this debilitating birth defect.

Through its nearly 60 chapters in more than 125 communities, SBA brings expectant parents together with those who have a child with Spina Bifida. This interaction helps to answer questions and concerns, but most importantly it lends much needed support, solidarity, inspiration, and hope.

Mr. Speaker, Spina Bifida is a birth defect that can happen to anyone. Every day, an average of eight babies are affected by Spina Bifida and approximately 3,000 pregnancies are affected by this birth defect each year.

We do not know the exact cause of this condition, but research has found that if a woman takes 400 mcg of folic acid every day before she becomes pregnant, she reduces her risk of having a baby with Spina Bifida or another neural tube defect by as much as 70 percent.

No two cases of Spina Bifida are ever the same and so this birth defect is commonly referred to as the “snowflake condition.” Children born with Spina Bifida typically undergo dozens of surgeries before they reach the age of 18. And during their lifetime, someone with Spina Bifida will face at least \$1 million in medical expenses, including multiple surgeries, and most can expect to spend much of their lives in a wheelchair or walking with braces.

Despite these challenges—and thanks to advances in research and medicine, along with policies supportive of children with disabilities—nearly two-thirds of Americans currently living with Spina Bifida have made it to adulthood. And while these strides are certainly worth celebrating, people with Spina Bifida—particularly adults—continue to face a crisis of care that could be largely prevented with the right resources and policies.

For instance, while we have a coordinated system of care designed to treat children with Spina Bifida in the U.S., there is no equivalent for adults. The result is that adults face a “care cliff” and enter a very fractured medical system where they are unable to find physicians willing or even knowledgeable enough to provide treatment, as Spina Bifida is still largely taught in medical schools as a pediatric condition and education has failed to keep pace with the rapid rise in the adult Spina Bifida population.

Thousands of adults are left with few options other than to seek care in the emergency room or continue to see their pediatric care team until insurance will no longer cover their care because of their age. And to make matters worse, many of these adults rely on Medicaid as their insurance provider, so even if they have the means to travel to an adult specialist, if they are located in another state—as is often the case—their coverage is denied. Across the country, there are more than 100 pediatric clinics devoted to caring for children with Spina Bifida. There are only 20 whose focus is on adults.

Constituents in my district are fortunate to be in proximity to Children’s Hospital of Philadelphia, home to the Spina Bifida Program, which offers comprehensive and expert care from diagnosis through adulthood. We offer great thanks to the medical professionals and researchers who endeavor to improve the quality of life for individuals living with Spina Bifida and their families.

At the federal level, we can and should make dramatic improvements in the ability of adults with Spina Bifida to access quality care by increasing the funding of the CDC’s National Spina Bifida Program—the only federal program tasked with improving the care and outcomes for people living with Spina Bifida.

In 2008, the Federal Spina Bifida Program created a National Spina Bifida Patient Registry to collect the scientific data needed to evaluate existing medical services for Spina Bifida patients, and to provide clinicians, researchers, patients, and families a window into what care models are effective and what treatments are not making a measurable difference.

Building on this in 2014, the Spina Bifida Program funded the development of a Spina Bifida Collaborative Care Network to identify and to disseminate best practices for the care of people with Spina Bifida at all ages.

However, with only \$7.5 million in annual funding—and this amount has been stag-

nant—there are only 11,000 patients in the national registry, limiting the ability of medical professionals to glean knowledge that would advance research in areas critical to improving quality of life. Even modest increases to this funding would make an enormous difference.

Additionally, we should urge NIH to work collaboratively across their many divisions to better understand Spina Bifida. As Spina Bifida can affect every organ and every system in the human body, a collaborative effort undertaken by NIH could result in research that would lead to better care for both this generation and future generations of Spina Bifida patients.

We are so fortunate today that our country is benefiting from the talent and contributions of the first generation of adults living with Spina Bifida. Today, I honor and celebrate all of them, along with their care partners, and also remember those we have lost to this condition. And I urge my colleagues to not only increase funding for the National Spina Bifida Program, but to work together so that these Americans receive the care and treatment all of us want for our families and loved ones.

I invite my colleagues to join me in this mission and join me in the Spina Bifida Caucus to broaden our efforts and advance the goal of a better future for people living with Spina Bifida.

RECOGNIZING PA-1’S HOMETOWN HERO: JIM McDEVITT

HON. BRIAN K. FITZPATRICK

OF PENNSYLVANIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, October 29, 2024

Mr. FITZPATRICK. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize an extraordinary individual from Pennsylvania’s First Congressional District someone who has gone above and beyond the call of duty in service to both our community and our country. It is with great respect and admiration that I recognize Jim McDevitt, one of our district’s distinguished Hometown Heroes.

Hometown Heroes are not defined by titles or accolades but by the quiet power of their actions. They are distinguished by their unwavering integrity, the strength of their character, and their steadfast commitments to the people and places they serve. They are the foundation upon which our communities stand—the ones who lift others up, inspire hope, and in doing so, call us all to higher standards of service, and compassion. Jim McDevitt has embodied this spirit in ways that words can scarcely capture.

Jim’s lifetime of service began in 1959 when he joined the U.S. Coast Guard at just nineteen years old. For seven years he diligently served our Nation as a patrol boat operator, safeguarding our shores and ensuring the safety of countless lives. Following his honorable service in the Coast Guard, Jim answered the call to serve once more and embarked upon a career as a Philadelphia Police Officer. Upon retirement, his devotion to service continues in a profoundly meaningful role honoring his fellow veterans. Jim, a member of Sons of The American Legion Post 798 in Warminster, has sounded taps at more than 5,000 burials, honoring veterans at their final resting place. This act of reverence, performed

with Jim’s signature unwavering precision and heartfelt respect, is his way of offering a final goodbye to those who served our Nation with honor. When asked why he continues to serve in this role, he replied, “I’m going to continue to do it until I can’t.” Jim’s lifetime of service to our community and country and unwavering commitment to his fellow servicemen and women exemplify the true essence of selfless service, sacrifice, and love of country and neighbor.

Mr. Speaker, it is through the work of people like Jim McDevitt that our communities thrive, and our Nation grows stronger. His actions and service remind us that progress is not forged in grand gestures, but in the cumulative power of selfless acts. He embodies the timeless American values of resilience, generosity, and compassion, showing us that the future is built by those who care deeply, act decisively, and give without hesitation.

On behalf of Pennsylvania’s First Congressional District, I extend my deepest gratitude to Jim McDevitt for his extraordinary service. I ask my colleagues to join me in honoring this exceptional individual, whose leadership and spirit of service will inspire generations to come. May his example remind us of the boundless potential within each of us to make our communities, country, and world a better place.

SPINA BIFIDA AWARENESS MONTH

HON. KEVIN HERN

OF OKLAHOMA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, October 29, 2024

Mr. HERN. Mr. Speaker, I rise today in honor of National Spina Bifida Awareness Month to pay tribute to the numerous individuals and their families across our country living with this condition.

Spina Bifida is a condition I am very familiar with. My sister and my niece both suffer from spina bifida. I know how it can impact a family.

Spina Bifida is the nation’s most common permanently disabling birth defect-compatible with life. Spina Bifida stems from a hole in the spinal cord, a condition known as a neural tube defect, as the spinal column fails to close properly during development in the womb, and it impacts virtually every major organ system. Children born with Spina Bifida typically undergo dozens of surgeries before they become adults. Adults living with Spina Bifida face myriad physical health, mental health, and other challenges, such as unemployment and limited access to quality primary and specialty care.

There are currently an estimated 166,000 individuals in the United States living with Spina Bifida, approximately 65 percent of whom are adults. This disease is now witnessing its first generation of adults, an incredible milestone, considering that the original designation of Spina Bifida as a childhood condition meant that the vast majority did not experience life beyond youth.

We have taken tremendous steps forward in recent years due to dedicated medical research, but there is so much we still don’t know.

Unfortunately, funding for Spina Bifida is limited. The only place in the Federal Government that is specifically studying this complex