

EXTENSIONS OF REMARKS

HONORING VETERANS ROGER
HOPKINS AND BETSY JENKINS

HON. JEFFERSON VAN DREW

OF NEW JERSEY

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, November 19, 2024

Mr. VAN DREW. Mr. Speaker, today, I want to celebrate the story of two American heroes from the Air Force and Navy who not only served the country in Afghanistan but also started a beautiful relationship. Roger Hopkins and Betsy Jenkins, two individuals who had never crossed paths, found their destinies intertwined in a remarkable twist of fate when they heard each other's voices on the radio in the heart of Afghanistan. They were both on deployment, with Betsy working for the Combined Joint Task Force, while Roger was embedded with the primary assault team for the Kunar–Nuristan when the gunfire started. Roger was on a no-fail mission, a critical operation considered highly dangerous due to the hostile environment in Afghanistan. This mission was of utmost importance, as its success was crucial for the safety and security of the region. After a successful completion, Betsy was the much needed escort out of the city, which was a daunting task given the ongoing conflict, marked by frequent enemy attacks and the constant threat of ambush. During this intense situation, Betsy's calm and composed voice, a rare sound for Roger and the Airmen, became their beacon of hope. Using the aerial views from the standard operating picture, she skillfully and bravely guided the convoy out of the city, demonstrating her exceptional leadership and tactical skills that earned the entire team's respect. Betsy's female voice of calm was not something that Roger and the Airmen were used to, and Roger became determined to figure out who this voice was. In a display of true warrior spirit, Roger, determined to find the hero who led them out, used every means at his disposal, including an Afghan translator, to track down Master Chief Betsy Jenkins of the United States Navy, a testament to his unwavering commitment and deep admiration for her. Roger used his charm to ask Betsy what she missed most other than her family, which she responded with, "mangos and avocados." In almost unheard-of fashion, Roger delivered her mangos and avocados in less than a week. This was the beginning of their relationship and as Betsy would say, showed her "without a doubt, Roger saw no obstacles, only opportunities." Roger and Betsy have dedicated much of their lives to serving their country, often at great personal sacrifice, and have enjoyed outstanding military careers. Roger retired as Master Sergeant, having served as the Senior Enlisted Advisor to the Special Operations Command of the Pacific's Medical Directorate, providing unconventional Special Forces mission support. His career was marked by numerous commendations and successful missions, a testament to his dedication and bravery. He also served at the Pentagon and, after September 11th, re-

trained as a part of special operations command as a Para-rescue man and subsequently did a total of nine combat deployments across three countries in 23 years of service. Betsy has been in the United States Navy for 23 years, with her first 12 serving U.S. Naval forces in Japan, South Korea, Thailand, Greece, New Caledonia, and other countries before deploying to Afghanistan in 2014. She is currently supporting NAVIFORES as the Information Systems Technician Rating Advisor. Her awards include the Defense Meritorious Service Medal, three Navy and Marine Corps Commendation Medals, and three Navy and Marine Corps Achievement Medals, as well as many others. She and Roger have seven beautiful children they are raising in our great Nation, and I am sure they will learn from their parents' excellent leadership and service. God bless Roger and Betsy, and God bless our United States of America.

HONORING CHIEF DARREN PYTEL

HON. MIKE THOMPSON

OF CALIFORNIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, November 19, 2024

Mr. THOMPSON of California. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to honor Police Chief Darren Pytel, upon his retirement after 41 years of service to our Davis community. Chief Pytel's career exemplifies commitment to community, service, and excellence, and his legacy in Davis will continue to inspire future generations.

Chief Pytel grew up in Davis, choosing to remain in his hometown, where he would ultimately dedicate his life's work to enhancing public safety and community trust. Chief Pytel earned his bachelor's degree in criminal justice at Sacramento State University, and later a Juris Doctorate at Lincoln Law School.

Chief Pytel began his career as a police cadet in 1983 and advanced through nearly every rank within the Davis Police Department. He served as a bike enforcement officer, police officer, sergeant/watch commander, lieutenant, and Assistant Police Chief before being named Police Chief in 2015. His leadership has guided the department through some of its most challenging moments, including the tragic loss of Police Officer Natalie Corona, the COVID–19 pandemic, and the spring 2023 homicides.

Throughout his tenure, Chief Pytel led the Davis Police Department with a focus on progressive policing, building trust, and fostering partnerships with the community. In recognition of Chief Pytel's innovative approach to policing, he received the Multi-Cultural Community Council Administration of Justice Award for establishing the Alternative Conflict Resolution process, which allows for peaceful conflict mediation and community-based resolution.

Chief Pytel has also served as an educator, teaching aspiring public safety professionals in Sacramento City College's Administration of Justice Department since 2007. After his re-

tirement from the police department, Chief Pytel will continue his teaching role at the college while residing in Fair Oaks with his wife, Melissa. Together, they look forward to spending more time with their four children and five grandchildren.

Mr. Speaker, we honor Chief Darren Pytel today for his service, his commitment to our Davis community, and the integrity with which he led the Davis Police Department. His career and leadership have left an indelible mark on our community, and his contributions will continue to benefit our city of Davis for years to come. It is truly fitting and proper that we recognize Chief Pytel's legacy here today.

PERSONAL EXPLANATION

HON. PAUL A. GOSAR

OF ARIZONA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, November 19, 2024

Mr. GOSAR. Mr. Speaker, on November 14, 2024, I missed vote No. 462, on passage of the Critical Mineral Consistency Act of 2024. Had I been present, I would have voted YEA on Roll Call No. 462.

PERSONAL EXPLANATION

HON. GARRET GRAVES

OF LOUISIANA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, November 19, 2024

Mr. GRAVES of Louisiana. Mr. Speaker, had I been present, I would have voted YEA on Roll Call No. 466.

PERSONAL EXPLANATION

HON. TERESA LEGER FERNANDEZ

OF NEW MEXICO

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, November 19, 2024

Ms. LEGER FERNANDEZ. Mr. Speaker, I was unable to vote on November 12, 2024. Had I been present, I would have voted YEA on Roll Call No. 456; and NAY on Roll Call No. 457.

MOURNING THE LOSS OF DON
VALPREDO

HON. VINCE FONG

OF CALIFORNIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, November 19, 2024

Mr. FONG. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to mourn the passing of my friend Donald John Valpredo, a respected member of our community and a pillar of modern agriculture.

Mr. Valpredo passed away on October 31, 2024, at the age of 85, leaving behind a remarkable legacy of leadership, determination,

• This "bullet" symbol identifies statements or insertions which are not spoken by a Member of the Senate on the floor.

Matter set in this typeface indicates words inserted or appended, rather than spoken, by a Member of the House on the floor.

and family pride. Whether through the many companies he founded and managed or as a respected horseman, Don's loss is deeply felt by all who knew him.

Born on January 5, 1939, to Jeanne and John Valpredo of Mettler, California, Don inherited a proud Italian heritage, fitting his later affectionate moniker of "The Don" or "El Don." His father had likely been the first pioneer to drill deep enough to find water in the Mettler area and the Valpredos established their roots there. After Don graduated from Garces Memorial High School, he then attended the University of California, Davis, where he graduated with a degree in Agronomy. He then went to serve our country in the U.S. Coast Guard, which, coupled with its premier academic training, provided a firm foundation to become a true visionary of agricultural excellence in Kern County.

Returning to Mettler after his service, Don partnered with his father, John, in farming. Don was gifted and soon found himself serving in a variety of executive roles. He served as President of Ridge Ginning Company and became an aggressive entrepreneur by founding Kern Ridge Growers, Val-Mar Farms, Bako Sweet, and Country Sweet Produce, among other companies. As a mark of the prevailing Valpredo family legacy, Don's son, Michael, was also a founder of Country Sweet Produce and continues to serve as its President. Under Don's leadership, his farms have grown to now produce over 20 crops year-round across thousands of acres. His businesses today are marked by innovations like water conservation, recycling, and employee co-ownership.

Nor can we forget Don's lifelong passion for horses, which adhered to him after the first horse he bred won her first race. Don's leadership within the horseracing industry shaped the California Thoroughbred Breeders Association (CTBA). Don served as CTBA President four times and once as chairman. In 2017, Don was inducted into the CTBA Hall of Fame for his forty years dedicated to building the sport and the California Cup Sprint. His work in helping to establish the California Cup Sprint—which was later renamed in his honor and is held at Santa Anita Park every January—stands as a lasting tribute to his leadership in developing this industry and racing community in California. Don served as a Commissioner and Vice-Chairman of the California Horse Racing Board, director of the Thoroughbred Owners of California for thirteen years, and served on the board of directors of the Breeders' Cup. Yet Don was not only a leader in equine associations, but also a winner of competitions. Don's 'Soviet Problem' won Calbred Horse of the Year in 1994, and he would always look back fondly on his time with that special steed.

Don is survived by his wife Sally, son Michael, daughters Natalia Fritz and Alexis Mosely, and seven grandchildren. Amanda and I send our condolences to this incredible family who have lost a great patriarch and leader.

Mr. Speaker, I urge my colleagues to join me as we celebrate Don Valpredo's amazing life and legacy. From the fields of Mettler to the racetrack at Santa Anita Park, Don Valpredo will be dearly missed.

SUPPORTING H.R. 8371, ELIZABETH DOLE 21ST CENTURY VETERANS HEALTHCARE AND BENEFITS IMPROVEMENT ACT

HON. GERALD E. CONNOLLY

OF VIRGINIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, November 19, 2024

Mr. CONNOLLY. Mr. Speaker, every day, we lose an average of 17 veterans to suicide. This statistic is not just a number; it represents real lives, families, and communities torn apart by tragedy. Behind each of these 17 daily losses is a story of service, sacrifice, and struggle. These are our neighbors, friends, and family members who have worn the uniform with pride and honor. They are mothers and fathers, sons and daughters, whose absence leaves an irreplaceable void in countless lives. The ripple effect of each suicide extends far beyond the individual, impacting spouses, children, parents, friends, and fellow veterans. It creates a cycle of grief and trauma that can persist for generations.

As members of Congress, it is our responsibility to address this heartbreaking reality with the urgency and dedication it demands. Answering the call of duty to our veterans, I was proud to work with Senate Veterans Affairs Committee Chairman JON TESTER to put forward H.R. 4157, Not Just a Number Act, legislation included in this Veterans omnibus package as Section 149 that would require the Department of Veterans Affairs to expand its scope when studying veteran suicide data. Instead of focusing solely on VA health care utilization, this bill mandates a more holistic approach, considering factors such as education, job training, housing, and other relevant socioeconomic factors. By broadening our perspective, we aim to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the complex, interconnected factors that contribute to veteran suicide. This approach will paint a more accurate picture of the multifaceted challenges our veterans face, enabling us to develop more effective support systems and interventions.

While the Not Just a Number Act is a crucial step forward, we must recognize that addressing veteran suicide is an ongoing commitment. This bill lays the foundation for a more comprehensive understanding, but our work will not end with its passage. We must be prepared to adapt our strategies based on the insights gained and continuously improve our support systems. This is merely the beginning of a long-term mission to safeguard the lives and well-being of our veterans.

We owe our veterans a debt of gratitude that can never truly be repaid. It is our responsibility to ensure that they feel our unwavering support and appreciation every single day. Let us honor our troops not just in words, but in our actions, by standing alongside them and their families. Together, let us ensure that they feel the depth of our appreciation and support at every step of their journey. I urge my colleagues on both sides of the aisle to support this critical legislation. By passing the Not Just a Number Act as Section 149 of the Elizabeth Dole 21st Century Veterans Healthcare and Benefits Improvement Act, we demonstrate our commitment to those who have served our nation and do everything in our power to prevent veteran suicide. If you or a veteran you know is in crisis, please call the Veterans Cri-

sis Line at 988 and Press 1, or text 838255. Help is available 24/7, and you don't have to be enrolled in VA benefits or health care to connect with caring, qualified responders.

RECOGNIZING BERT V. MASSEY II

HON. AUGUST PFLUGER

OF TEXAS

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, November 19, 2024

Mr. PFLUGER. Mr. Speaker, I rise to recognize the passing of former Mayor Bert Massey of Brownwood, Texas on November 13, 2024. Mr. Massey was born in Brownwood on October 3, 1943, and he was a pillar of leadership in his community throughout his life. Mayor Massey graduated from Brownwood High School and went on to earn a Bachelor of Arts from the University of Texas in August 1967, followed by a Doctor of Jurisprudence from the University of Texas School of Law in January 1969. He served on the District Court for the Northern District of Texas and the United States Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals.

Mr. Massey served on the city council from 1978 to 1984 and as Mayor of the City of Brownwood from 1984 to May 2010, while practicing law as a partner for Massey & West. As the longest-serving Mayor, Mr. Massey was instrumental in countless public infrastructure and quality-of-life projects. Among these are the renovations of the Depot Civic and Cultural Center, the construction of the Martin & Francis Lehnis Railroad Museum, the relocation of City Hall to Center Ave., the construction of the Joint Law Enforcement Center, the relocation of the Senior Citizens Center, the construction of the Bert V. Massey II Sports Complex and the Camp Bowie Family Aquatic Center.

Along with his years of service to his community, Mayor Massey was a devoted husband, father, and grandfather. He was known for his wealth of knowledge, engaging stories about his beloved community and his warm smile. Mayor Massey's dedication to the Brownwood area and love for his family will be deeply missed by all. I am proud to honor Mayor Massey's many incredible contributions to the City of Brownwood, and I extend my deepest condolences to his family and all who had the privilege of knowing him.

NORTHFIELD FIRE COMPANY'S 100TH ANNIVERSARY

HON. JEFFERSON VAN DREW

OF NEW JERSEY

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, November 19, 2024

Mr. VAN DREW. Mr. Speaker, I am honored to congratulate the Northfield Volunteer Fire Company on its 100th anniversary, marking a century of exceptional service. Over the years, many dedicated firefighters have been part of this outstanding department, with several serving for over 50 years. A few of their veterans recall their involvement in negotiating a deal in 1968 for land on Burton Avenue, where the current firehouse and training area are located. Times were different back then, as firefighters responded to calls in the 1960s and '70s with gear that was assigned on a "first