

sisters Leebie and Orly. Hersh grew up to be a curious and intelligent young man. His family lived in Richmond, Virginia—where they and Hersh were devoted community members, known for their kindness and love of learning—before eventually settling down in Jerusalem, Israel where Hersh spent his formative years.

Hersh was enthusiastic about his love for soccer and especially enjoyed cheering on the Hapoel Jerusalem Football Club. He used his passion for soccer to help his community as a member of the Malha Brigade, the team's official fan club. As a member of the club, he participated in community events and advocated for unity through an initiative to bring Israeli and Palestinian children together through a common love for soccer. His room displayed a sign that reads "Jerusalem is for everyone" in English, Hebrew, and Arabic.

At the age of 18, he fulfilled his duty and served as part of the Israel Defense Forces. While he fulfilled different duties during his time of service, he enjoyed being a medic most—helping and healing others. He concluded his service honorably in April 2023.

His love for people and for learning grew as he traveled the world. After a summer trip across Europe, Hersh returned to Israel and attended the Nova desert rave on October 7, 2023, where attendees were attacked by terrorists. Hersh lost his arm during this attack while trying to protect and help others—always a caring and loving friend to all. Hersh was captured, held hostage for nearly a year, and was tragically murdered by Hamas terrorists. Yet throughout the 320 days he was held hostage, it was the image of his joyful eyes and his broad smile that brought continued attention and a global focus to the plight of the hostages and the need for the world to prioritize their return.

As we—here in the halls of Congress and across our country—remember the tragedy of the day that stole Hersh from his family and friends and ultimately took him from this world, we also celebrate the joy and kindness he brought to everyone he touched throughout his 23 years. We honor the young man who became known to the world for his extraordinary compassion, joyful spirit, and ultimately his bravery. We mourn with his family—his beloved parents and sisters—and friends, and we also join them in honoring his extraordinary life. I know each of his loved ones will carry on his legacy by continuing his work—by promoting peace, charity, and love. May his memory be a blessing.

Mr. Speaker, please join me in honoring the remarkable life and legacy built by Hersh Goldberg-Polin. To his family, friends, and loved ones—may the memories of love and light that were built with Hersh bring them peace and comfort as they honor his life in years to come.

RECOGNIZING THE PLANT CITY FIRE RESCUE DEPARTMENT

HON. LAUREL M. LEE

OF FLORIDA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, December 19, 2024

Ms. LEE of Florida. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to honor Plant City's Firefighters, a group of incredible individuals who have dedi-

cated their lives to serve our community, as they celebrate the swearing-in of new firefighters and the Plant City Firefighter of the Year.

Congratulations to Cameron Hall, John Furlow, and Christian Torres on earning their badge as the newest members of the Plant City Fire Department. Becoming a firefighter requires immense courage, dedication, and a willingness to put others before oneself. I look forward to seeing the great impact they will have on our community.

I would like to extend my congratulations to Captain Jason Mesa, who has been named Plant City's Firefighter of the Year. Captain Mesa's ability to lead by example, particularly during the most challenging times, is a testament to his remarkable character and service. I thank him for everything he does to keep Plant City safe.

I salute Battalion Chief James Wingo for his 30 years of unwavering service in the Department. Thirty years is an exceptional achievement—I thank him for his service.

Lastly, I extend my deepest appreciation to all the men and women of the Plant City Fire Department. They are the first responders we turn to when disaster strikes, and they show up, without hesitation. During Hurricane Milton, we saw the true extent of their dedication, as they worked tirelessly to protect our residents, secure our neighborhoods, and help our community. On behalf of the people of Florida's 15th District, I want to thank them.

I thank them for their service, their sacrifices, and their unwavering commitment to our community.

HONORING TRACY DISCHERT VERNER

HON. CORI BUSH

OF MISSOURI

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, December 19, 2024

Ms. BUSH. Mr. Speaker, I rise today, along with the people of St. Louis, in recognition of the outstanding work of Tracy Dischert Verner, a dedicated advocate for equity and financial inclusion in Missouri's First District. Through her tireless efforts, Tracy has sought to dismantle the systemic barriers that have long impeded many St. Louisans from accessing the banking services they need to achieve financial stability and security.

Tracy's work within the banking system has focused on increasing access to financial tools that are essential for building generational wealth. She has been a champion for those who have been historically excluded and marginalized, developing innovative programs that serve those with the greatest need in our community.

Through her leadership, Tracy has expanded access to vital financial services for thousands of St. Louisans, including providing access to direct deposit for thousands of young workers, which enables them to participate more fully in the economy. She has established college savings accounts for thousands of students in St. Louis Public Schools, helping to ensure that higher education remains an attainable goal for the next generation. She has partnered with workforce development agencies, recidivism programs, crisis intervention services, and emergency shelters

to provide comprehensive banking solutions to individuals in transition, including unhoused individuals and women in crisis. Throughout her work, she has ensured that individuals who have been justice-involved have the tools they need to rebuild their financial futures and re-enter the workforce with confidence.

Tracy Dischert Verner's service has had a profound and lasting impact on Missouri's First District. Her unwavering commitment to equity, economic empowerment, and justice has transformed countless lives. As we honor her achievements, let us also carry forward her vision of a community where no one is left behind, and where everyone has the opportunity to thrive. Tracy's legacy is a reminder that meaningful change is possible when we dedicate ourselves to uplifting others, and we are forever grateful for her extraordinary contributions.

CELEBRATING THOMAS RAY DIX'S 100TH BIRTHDAY

HON. GUY RESCHENTHALER

OF PENNSYLVANIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, December 19, 2024

Mr. RESCHENTHALER. Mr. Speaker, I rise to celebrate Thomas Ray Dix, a World War II veteran, who will turn 100 years old on December 26, 2024.

In 1943, Mr. Dix enlisted in the Navy and attained the rank of a Motor Machinist's Mate Second Class. He was sent to the Pacific Theater where he served aboard the USS *Hemminger* (DE 746). Mr. Dix participated in several missions, trained submarines for war patrols, and engaged in antisubmarine operations. In the Pacific Theater, the USS *Hemminger* (DE 746) supported the search for Lieutenant General Millard F. Harmon and escorted supplies during the Battle of Okinawa.

Thereafter, Mr. Dix served on the USS *Minivet* (AM-371). In October 1945, he arrived in Japan to sweep sea lanes for mines leftover from the war. On December 29, 1945, the ship struck a mine and began sinking, but thankfully, Mr. Dix survived and returned home to his family.

Following his honorable military service, Mr. Dix returned to southwestern Pennsylvania to start his career and continue his public service. He stayed active in the Normalville Veterans of Foreign Wars club, where he often recalled heroic stories of his service in World War II. In 1963, Mr. Dix became the co-owner of Anchor Cement Block Works, where he ran the company with his brother, Edwin Dale Dix. He became a Deacon at the Indian Head Church of God and served on the Donegal School Board in Westmoreland County. Mr. Dix remains active in many community organizations, including the VFW, and lives in the home he built with his late wife, Valetta, 70 years ago. He is an important member of our community, and we thank him for his years of service to our Nation.

Mr. Speaker, I ask that the House join me in celebrating a true American hero, Mr. Thomas Ray Dix, on his 100th birthday.

COMMENDING SECRETARY OMER OSMAN FOR 35 YEARS OF SERVICE TO THE ILLINOIS DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

HON. DARIN LaHOOD

OF ILLINOIS

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, December 19, 2024

Mr. LAHOOD. Mr. Speaker, today I rise to honor and congratulate Omer Osman on his retirement from the Illinois Department of Transportation (IDOT) after 35 years of service to the people of Illinois.

Secretary Omer Osman was born in Kerma, Sudan, the son of Zumrawi and Fatima Osman. He was the fourth of eleven children, all receiving a college education. Osman received his bachelor's degree in engineering from Southern University followed by his master's degree in engineering from Bradley University in Peoria, Illinois.

Beginning as a civil engineering trainee in Peoria, Osman quickly ascended to the position of District Bureau Chief of Operations, followed by Region 5 Engineer, Chief Engineer, Director of Highways, and Deputy Secretary. On June 1, 2019, he was confirmed as the Secretary of the Illinois Department of Transportation, the thirteenth person to hold that title and the first person of color.

In his capacity as Secretary of Transportation, Osman had the responsibility for oversight of 80 airports, an expansive waterway infrastructure, 300,000 miles of roads and bridges, and a railroad system that transports 25 percent of the country's freight passing through Illinois.

Secretary Osman is credited by the Administration with increasing diversity at all levels of the Department of Transportation, as well as improving access to department partnerships for minority and female owned businesses.

Secretary Osman's accomplishments during his tenure leading the Illinois Department of Transportation include, but are not limited to, the new Mississippi River Bridge and Route 24 widening, relocation of Illinois Route 3 in East St. Louis, the Interstate 74 Mississippi River Bridge in the Quad Cities, the interstate 74/155 interchange reconstruction in Morton, the Interstate 74 Murray Baker Bridge, the Illinois Route 13 expansion between Carbondale and Interstate 57 in Marion, and the rehabilitation of the US 150 Illinois River Bridge in Peoria.

Secretary Omer Osman will forever be known as one of Peoria's greatest public servants. It is my privilege to congratulate him on his retirement and we wish him, his wife Dr. Magda Osman, sons Khalid and Waleed, and daughter Nadeen the best in the future.

HONORING RICK RICKER, A DEAR FRIEND AND BROTHER

HON. CLAY HIGGINS

OF LOUISIANA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, December 19, 2024

Mr. HIGGINS of Louisiana. Mr. Speaker, I rise to honor Richard Everett Ricker, a dear friend and brother. Rick Ricker was a legend in Louisiana, and he was kind enough to give

me a job when I very much needed one in 1984. Rick Ricker became like a father to me through the years, and our friendship was unbreakable. Honestly Mr. Speaker, I don't believe I would be standing before you today as a Congressional servant to We the People, if Rick Ricker had not guided me through some of the darkest periods of my life. For the last forty years, Rick has always been there for me. In fact, Mr. Speaker, Rick introduced me to my wife Becca almost twenty years ago. I just cannot fully explain how much Rick has meant to me and my family.

Rick Ricker was a fighter, and he waged a valiant battle to the very last minute of his life, but Rick has gone home to the Lord.

Rick loved golf, and Harley Davidson motorcycles, and fast cars. He drank and laughed and loved life. Rick Ricker lived, Mr. Speaker. He lived an edge of life that most men will never understand, and I can say without doubt that he dearly loved his family. He was so, so proud of his sons and the men that they became, he gave me a thousand updates on them through the years. If pure love is a measure of a man's struggle to be a good father, Rick Ricker set a shining example, because he made it very clear how much he admired and loved his sons. When Rick's wife died, many years ago, he was injured in his heart in a way that changed him forever. Rick and I have just been through so much together. When my father died in August of 1989, I called only two men that night, and one of them was Rick. I cried with him, and he comforted me the way only a loving father can.

Richard E. Wicker is survived by his two sons, Brent and Brian; four grandchildren, Amber, Isaiah, Kaleb, and Elora Ricker; three brothers, Fred, Peter, and Jim; one sister, Peggy, and a multitude of nieces and nephews. The virtue and success of his family today will forever mirror the love that Rick had for them.

I will miss Rick terribly as my brother. I am prayerful that we will meet again in the kingdom. Lord Jesus, please hold Rick close and cover him with your grace.

MOURNING THE LOSS OF GENE "THE PUMPKIN MAN" RHODES

HON. BILL HUIZENGA

OF MICHIGAN

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, December 19, 2024

Mr. HUIZENGA. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to mourn the loss of a true Southwest Michigan icon, Gene "The Pumpkin Man" Rhodes. As the owner and operator of a local family farm in Kalamazoo County for more than 60 years, customers could count on Gene not just for their fall pumpkins, but also for countless memories with family and friends.

Inspired by his late wife Carol, Gene transformed his family farm into the pumpkin-themed destination it is today. He was well-known for his orange dress shirt, tucked into his orange slacks, held up by his orange suspenders, and perhaps most notably, his orange 2005 Cadillac with the license plate "Pumman." Visitors to the farm would also be greeted by pumpkin-themed furniture, decorations, and even a pumpkin-headed man and his wife. It was Gene's passion and light-

hearted spirit that helped make visits to the Pumpkin Patch special for so many.

As a Michigan Centennial Farm, the Rhodes farm has been in Gene's family since 1885. The farm has continuously sold pumpkins since 1957 and now produces hundreds of tons of pumpkins each year.

For many in Southwest Michigan, Halloween meant a visit to Gene the Pumpkin Man. Gene provided cherished memories and experiences to families spanning generations, leaving behind a rich legacy. He will be truly missed.

Mr. Speaker, please join me in celebrating the life of Southwest Michigan's most famous pumpkin farmer: Mr. Gene Rhodes, the Pumpkin Man.

HONORING THE 400TH BIRTH ANNIVERSARY OF MATA GUJRI JI

HON. THOMAS R. SUOZZI

OF NEW YORK

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, December 19, 2024

Mr. SUOZZI. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to honor the 400th birth anniversary of Mata Gujri Ji, who in 1704, at age 81, was the first female Sikh civil rights activist to face imprisonment, torture, and execution, all for the sake of liberty. Sikhs around the world celebrate her life during the Safar-E-Shahadat—the last week of December—which is the holiest week for Sikhs. As a member of the Sikh Caucus, I join the worldwide Sikh community in recognizing this important quadricentennial anniversary.

Mata Gujri Ji was the mother of the tenth Sikh Guru, Guru Gobind Singh Ji, and the wife of Guru Teg Bahadur Ji. When Guru Gobind Singh Ji was nine years old, the monarchy of that time started clamping down on religious freedom and civil liberties. Guru Teg Bahadur Ji stood up to the monarchy's oppression and, as a result, faced imprisonment. Mata Gujri Ji stood by his side and encouraged him to continue fighting for freedom.

Guru Teg Bahadur Ji was given an ultimatum. He could either abandon his struggle against the monarchy or face execution. Mata Gujri Ji and Guru Gobind Singh Ji encouraged Guru Teg Bahadur Ji not to abandon his principles. Guru Teg Bahadur Ji was later executed.

Mata Gujri Ji continued to fight for civil liberty as she raised Guru Gobind Singh Ji. She was a pillar of strength for the Sikhs of her time and many from around the world sought her advice. Mata Gujri Ji taught Sikh women that they should be both kind and courageous.

In December 1704, the monarchy imprisoned her and her younger grandchildren, 9-year-old Baba Zorawar Singh Ji and 7-year-old Baba Fateh Singh Ji. They were kept in the Thanda Bud, or the cold tower, where government officials went to escape the hot Indian summers. That month, the Thanda Burj reached deadly freezing temperatures. Mata Gujri and her grandsons were not given food, water, or warm clothing and endured daily torture.

During their time in the cold tower, a devotee named Moti Mehra Ji bribed prison guards to sneak in warm milk for Mata Gujri Ji and her grandsons. Once the regime discovered this, Moti Mehra Ji's entire family was publicly executed.