

Unnoticed by the mass media was how it came about that the Illinois legislature, overcome by corporate lobbyists, passed legislation allowing punitive damages for wrongful death disasters, and sent the bill to Illinois Governor J.B. Pritzker who signed it last Friday.

In the words of one state lawmaker, this effort started with “that lady from New England who drove down here (to Springfield, Illinois) and shamed us all.” That lady was my niece Nadia Milleron, who lost her daughter Samya Rose Stumo—an emerging leader in global health—to the defective Boeing 737 Max that crashed in Ethiopia on March 10, 2019, killing all 156 people on board. (Earlier on October 29, 2018, a similar also new Boeing 737 Max crashed off Indonesia’s coast, killing all 189 passengers and crew.)

Nadia was determined that families in the future who lost their loved ones to reckless corporate actions and crimes would not be told by Illinois courts that, were people rendered disabled, they could collect punitive damages—but not if their lives were taken. The cruel absurdity of this perverse rule that lets companies escape punitive damages under the law of torts (wrongful injuries) if their recklessness or greed kills their victims, but not if they injure them, was too much for Nadia to tolerate.

Driven by her love of Samya and her determination to end this gross injustice, she spent months away from her Massachusetts home in 2022 getting appointments with every Illinois Assembly person—177 of them—to plead her case in person. None of the naysayers she encountered in the lobbying circles around the legislature deterred her, not even some plaintiff trial lawyers.

By the sheer force of her legal and factual arguments, her moral authority and a few senior political advisors in Chicago, she laid the groundwork for action earlier last year. The Illinois Wrongful Death Act was championed by a young African-American state lawmaker, Rep. La Shawn K. Ford. Once it started moving through the Assembly (with little media attention) it gained momentum among the new Assembly leadership that carried through to the new leadership of the State Senate. Both legislative Houses are controlled by Democrats.

Nadia came to this challenge in Illinois, where the Stumo family civil tort litigation against Boeing is pending, with experience in battling the giant Boeing corporation’s power to get its way in Washington, DC. For months after Boeing’s homicides in Ethiopia (See, September 16, 2020, News Release from the House Committee on Transportation), Nadia and her husband Mike (both non-practicing lawyers), with the help of their two articulate sons, and other relentless, be-reaved families, worked the corridors and offices of Congress, pressing for public hearings and legislation. Their efforts, punctuated by public demonstrations, culminated in the passage of federal legislation to start the process of strengthening air safety regulations.

The Stumos and their family network also focused on the derelict FAA which, over the years, had transformed itself from a supposed aviation safety regulator to a weak, consultant’s role. The agency literally delegated regulatory decisions and inspections to deputized Boeing employees on the factory floor and in the design offices. Boeing and other aircraft manufacturers made sure that Congress did not object and indeed had Congress facilitate this delegation, including by keeping the FAA’s regulatory budget and skilled staff too small to regulate directly and forcefully.

Nonetheless, with astute and newsworthy press conferences and accurate responsiveness to media inquiries, the families pushed

the FAA to be a little more hands-on and probing than it was up to 2019.

When the punitive damage bill passed the Illinois legislature, Governor Pritzker had 60 days to either sign it or let it become law. He chose to sign it on August 12th without any ceremony, without having Nadia, the young Assemblyman Ford and other senior state lawmakers by his side. Had he made it an event, he would have memorably conveyed the key motivating belief in a democracy—that one person can make a difference!

Citizen Nadia blazed the way, shaming the foot-dragging Illinois Trial Lawyers Association (ITLA) into jumping on the bandwagon in Springfield once the bill’s momentum grew.

On February 27, 2023, I wrote a letter to the President of the Illinois Trial Lawyers Association, Patrick A. Salvi II, wondering why the ITLA hadn’t pushed this initiative over many past years and urged them to “make the maximum effort to secure passage.” Trial Lawyer Associations do not usually answer letters, but this one got through, with copies to other interested parties. (See the letter here).

Our country, over time, has been helped immeasurably by outraged mothers (and fathers) turning their unabating mourning over the loss of their children into laser beam intensity behind health and safety laws to save other parents and children from similar tragedies. (Note e.g., Mothers Against Drunk Driving).

These civic heroes defy all odds to challenge and prevail. The odds don’t faze them; they have a higher calling to achieve.

Unfortunately, neither Governor Pritzker nor the mass media seized this dramatic moment for exemplary recognition. The law, however, now is on the books to further more humane and deterrent purposes, thanks “to that Lady from New England who shamed us all.”

REMEMBERING GEREMIAH LOFTON

HON. BENNIE G. THOMPSON

OF MISSISSIPPI

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, February 20, 2024

Mr. THOMPSON of Mississippi. Mr. Speaker, I rise to remember Geremiah Lofton—an intelligent, hardworking, and charismatic former member of my staff—who passed away on January 22, 2024.

A proud native of Port Arthur, Texas, Geremiah was the son of Gina and Kenneth Lofton, Sr. He graduated from Memorial High School and went on to earn a bachelor’s degree in business administration from Huston-Tillotson University in Austin, Texas, a Historically Black College.

Dedicated to public service, Geremiah served as an intern at the Department of State during college and moved to Washington, D.C., after graduation. He joined the staff of the Committee on Homeland Security in 2019, first as an intern and later as a staff assistant and a committee clerk, while pursuing his master’s in public administration at The George Washington University.

After earning his master’s degree, Geremiah continued his congressional service by assisting the Select Committee on the January 6th Attack on the United States Capitol.

Geremiah was an exemplary and engaging member of my staff. His work was excellent and his warm, kind personality won him many friends on the Committee and across Capitol Hill.

In 2022, Geremiah became special assistant and briefing book coordinator for the Secretary of Homeland Security, where he served for nearly 2 years as a valued member of the Department of Homeland Security team.

Geremiah was also active in the community, as a member of Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, Incorporated, and Eastern Star Baptist Church in Port Arthur.

Geremiah left us too soon, and he will be greatly missed not only by his loved ones in Port Arthur but also his Capitol Hill family and friends. We are better for having known Geremiah and are grateful for his many contributions to the Committee, the community, and our country. My heartfelt sympathies and sincere condolences are with the Lofton family at this most difficult time.

INTRODUCTION OF THE MCINTIRE-STENNIS ACT DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA EQUALITY ACT

HON. ELEANOR HOLMES NORTON

OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, February 20, 2024

Ms. NORTON. Mr. Speaker, today, I introduce the McIntire-Stennis Act District of Columbia Equality Act, which would correct an apparent oversight in the exclusion of the District of Columbia from eligibility for funding under the McIntire-Stennis Act.

The Act provides the states and certain territories with formula funding to support state designated institutions’ cooperative forestry research programs. The funding available under this Act assists the states and territories in carrying out forestry research programs at state forestry schools and colleges and developing a trained pool of forest scientists capable of conducting needed forestry research.

District of Columbia residents pay full federal taxes and therefore District of Columbia is treated as a state under federal programs, with limited exceptions. The Act defines “State” to include Puerto Rico, the Virgin Islands and Guam, whose residents do not pay full federal taxes. D.C.’s exclusion from the Act makes it ineligible for federal funding that would support research at D.C.’s public university, the University of the District of Columbia (UDC). The College of Agriculture, Urban Sustainability and Environmental Sciences at UDC, the nation’s only urban land-grant university, offers programs that complement D.C.’s ongoing forestry efforts and serve individuals in D.C. and beyond. Rectifying D.C.’s exclusion from the Act would ensure equal treatment for D.C. and provide UDC a fair share of resources.

I urge my colleagues to support this bill.

HONORING THE LIFE AND CAREER OF MARTIN “BO” BURKE

HON. JOE COURTNEY

OF CONNECTICUT

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, February 20, 2024

Mr. COURTNEY. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to honor the life and legacy of one of Connecticut’s great leaders in our state’s legal profession and government who sadly passed

recently, Mr. Martin “Bo” Byran Burke. A true gentleman, Bo represented thousands of clients, guiding them expertly through legal difficulty and, at times, crisis. The positive impact he made on countless individuals, families, and small businesses is incalculable. He also enthusiastically participated in politics and government out of both a sense of civic duty and his abiding devotion to our democracy and constitution.

Born in 1940 to Edmond and Francis Burke, Bo was a true son of New England. His passion for his community and region defined his life's choices. After graduating from Colgate University with a Bachelor's in English, Bo continued his studies as he pursued a Juris Doctor from Albany School of Law. Although Bo's first foray into law was in New York State, he soon returned to his home state, passing the Connecticut Bar Exam in 1968.

Bo's career as a lawyer was long, eventful, and widely respected. His work ethic was unparalleled, and he was modest about his accomplishments. His small-town practice in Vernon, Connecticut was always centered on representing people, not large institutional clients. Today that model might be viewed by some as out of date, but Bo knew that such representation is at the heart of the oath he took when he was admitted to the bar. Bo was also committed to improving the profession. Bo served on the Connecticut Judicial Review Council, the Connecticut Law Revision Commission, and the Committee on Government Administration and Policy and the Governor's Commission on Judicial Reform. He additionally wrote for numerous law journals, such as the Connecticut Law Journal and the Connecticut Bar Journal. Bo opened his own practice in Vernon where he had immeasurable success. He focused on law, Title XIX, special needs, trusts, veterans' benefits, probate, and real estate. He took upon immense responsibilities as he briefed and argued over 12 reported appellate cases. Bo was understood by those around him to be a wise and trustworthy lawyer due to his extensive experience and mastery of the law.

Bo applied his vast knowledge of law and government to an amazingly accomplished one term in the Connecticut General Assembly. In 1974 he ran and won the 56th Assembly seat, representing Vernon. In his single term, he took on the incredibly important and difficult task of writing our state's freedom of information act. Opening state and local government to the press and public was extremely challenging. Yet, because of his diligent, talented ability to shape the bill and win consensus, the measure passed and was signed into law by Governor Ella Grasso. That law has withstood the test of time and still provides sunlight on the processes of government which is essential to a healthy democracy. After his two years of representation for the constituents of district 56, he decided to redirect his focus from elective office back to his law practice and town government. He transitioned to positions within the towns of Vernon and Rockville. For many years, he served both as Town Attorney and Assistant Town Attorney of Vernon. Bo endlessly served his town and state and was a champion of protecting democracy.

As someone who understood the opportunities created from receiving advanced education, Bo took it upon himself to improve and advocate for education with his town. Of

course, a big reason for his interest was his long and beautiful marriage to his talented wife Ellen, who taught hundreds and hundreds of children in the Vernon Public Schools. He served as counsel on the Vernon Education Foundation to being a member and Chairman on the Board of Trustees at the Rockville Public Library. Between Bo and Ellen, Vernon's education standards remained high, which is part of the reason two schools received blue ribbon awards from the U.S. Department of Education, something which is a great source of pride in Vernon.

Bo's career was one element of his multifaceted and exciting life. Since the mid-60s, he had been a continuous vacationer in Maine. For much of this time, he owned a camp on Flying Pond in Vienna, Maine. The days spent in Maine were calm and relaxing and gave Bo breaks from his demanding career as a lawyer.

It has been a great honor to personally know Bo. I met him when I was a young lawyer in Vernon many years ago and had the benefit of practicing law in the same community for many years. His example of strong advocacy and common-sense willingness to find common ground to settle disputes still resonates with me to this day. In 1986, I ran for the same seat he held in the general assembly and with his help, I was fortunate enough to prevail. He was always willing to provide counsel and advice which I deeply appreciated. Twenty years later he supported my election to the U.S. Congress, which was so special and meaningful to me.

Mr. Speaker, I am proud to immortalize him today. He has been a great inspiration not just for me, but for his family, community, and beyond. His loss is deeply felt by his family members, including his wife, Ellen Schopfer Burke; his sons, Matthew, Jonathan, Andrew, and Sullivan Burke, and their wives; his sister, Susan Evans Burke, and his cousin Mary Jane Dempsey. He will also be missed by the community at large, which has seen many improvements directly due to Bo's efforts and deep commitment to others. His deep and nuanced understanding of the law assisted many constituents in defending their rights as American citizens. I am grateful to know that Bo's legacy will carry on within and beyond my district, as others follow in his footsteps.

RECOGNIZING BELVIN D. WARE
AND MACEDONIA MISSIONARY
BAPTIST CHURCH IN MACON,
GEORGIA

HON. SANFORD D. BISHOP, JR.

OF GEORGIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, February 20, 2024

Mr. BISHOP of Georgia. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize the appointment of a dedicated servant leader and a true visionary for the Macedonia Missionary Baptist Church of Macon, Georgia, Minister Belvin D. Ware. Minister Ware was elected by the church to serve as Head Pastor in December of 2023, and he was officially installed at the church on February 18, 2024, at 3:00 p.m.

A native of Macon, Georgia, Belvin D. Ware was born to the union of Denise T. Jones and Lawrence F. Ware, Jr. both of Macon, Georgia. Minister Ware completed his childhood

education in Macon and is a graduate of Central High School's Class of 1996. He is currently in the process of completing a Bachelor of Science degree in Biblical Studies. Minister Ware is also a United States Marine, joining in 1998 and reaching the rank of Staff Sergeant (E6) where he served for over sixteen years before receiving an Honorable Discharge.

Minister Ware first accepted Christ at the young age of seven years old at Macedonia Missionary Baptist Church, and he accepted the call to ministry in December of 2012. He gave his initial sermon on September 29, 2013, at New Life Family Worship in Jacksonville, North Carolina where he also received his License of Ministry. In July of 2018, Minister Ware accepted a full-time position at Macedonia Missionary Baptist Church as the Servant Leader of Children, Youth, and Young Adults. After one year of successfully mentoring the church's youth and bringing them closer to the Lord, Lead Pastor Eddie Smith ordained Mr. Ware as a Minister of Gospel in October 2019 and named him Assistant to the Pastor.

During his tenure as Servant Leader of Children, Youth, and Young Adults, Minister Ware was responsible for evaluating, planning, and implementing a thorough course of action for the youth to grow in their faith. He facilitated Bible Study and Youth Church, oversaw the baptisms of eight young people and grew youth membership at Macedonia through outreach at local colleges and universities. Furthermore, Minister Ware has been instrumental in local community outreach—most notably his ministry at Bruce Elementary School where he visited at least twice a month to mentor at risk youths and facilitate two coat drives in which Macedonia Missionary Baptist Church donated over 250 winter coats to underprivileged youth. Following his efforts at the school, the Bibb County Board of Education selected Minister Ware to be a sitting member on the board to hire Bruce Elementary's next principal. Additionally, as Assistant to the Pastor, Minister Ware began the process and coordinated training with Middle Georgia Food Bank to establish Macedonia as a local agency to establish a food bank on church grounds.

Minister Ware has been recognized numerous times for his professional achievements. He is a recipient of the Navy and Marine Corps Achievement Medal, Certificate of Commendation, and Letter of Appreciation. He was recognized by the Middle-Georgia Black Pages as a Young Entrepreneur and Professional in 2019 and was also nominated for Leadership Macon in 2022, a year-long program that introduces a class of rising community leaders to the successes and challenges in Macon-Bibb County's public, private, and nonprofit sectors.

Former Congresswoman Shirley Chisholm once said that “Service is the rent that we pay for the space that we occupy here on this earth.” Belvin Ware has paid his rent many times over and still continues to give a prodigious amount of love and service back to his community. He is currently the Executive Director for Heal the Hood Empowering Movement, a community initiative to cure violence and to bring economic power back to the Macon community through mentoring, job placement, and prison reform. He is also a Co-founder of the Concord Project which is a partnership between the local clergy and the Bibb County Sheriff's Office.