

Rather than assigning students to schools based solely on their ZIP Code, school choice places students and parents back where they belong, at the helm of decisionmaking concerning education.

Options like innovative charter schools, magnet schools, homeschooling, and scholarship programs personalize education and have revived new hope and opportunities for countless American families.

I would like to take a moment to commend and reflect on the progress achieved by the school choice movement in the last year. 2023 was a monumental year for expanding school choice across the country. A record 20 States implemented programs or legislation to make education alternatives available for millions of students.

Through these initiatives, these States have reasserted the rights of American parents to play a central role in selecting and pursuing the education model they believe suits their child.

I am proud to highlight that my home State of North Carolina was among these pioneer States and became the ninth State to pass universal school choice legislation. North Carolina and the 19 other States that passed legislation are amazing examples of putting students first.

However, too many of our Nation's students are kept from realizing their full potential because they do not have access to a high-quality education. The uncomfortable truth is that the one-size-fits-all approach to education is harming our students.

America invests over \$800 billion into education, yet the most recent National Assessment of Educational Progress found that reading scores declined to their lowest level since 1992, and math scores saw their largest decline since the initial 1990 assessment.

On the other hand, education choice has been proven to improve student achievement, attainment, and even character development.

We must fund students, not systems.

School choice puts education funding directly into the hands of parents. By allowing parents the discretion to use the funds already allocated for their child's education as they see fit, school choice ensures that students and schools are well matched and taxpayer dollars are used responsibly for programs and institutions that produce the best outcomes for students.

We were sent to Congress to represent the will of the American people, and 71 percent of Americans support school choice, according to recent polling.

I am proud of the advancements made for the parents who now have the rightful say in their child's education and for the students who can now unlock their full capabilities regardless of their financial situation, home address, or learning needs.

The next challenge we face is extending the promise of school choice to all 50 States. As Chairwoman of the Edu-

cation and the Workforce Committee, I am committed to promoting high-quality education for all Americans.

Madam Speaker, I wish everyone a happy National School Choice Week, and I look forward to celebrating more progress and milestones in 2024.

HONORING THE LIFE OF SONNY ADKINS, JR.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from South Carolina (Mr. NORMAN) for 5 minutes.

Mr. NORMAN. Madam Speaker, I rise today to honor the life of a truly great American, Mr. Sonny Adkins, Jr., who passed away on November 26, 2023.

Sonny was born in York County, South Carolina, and was the husband of the late Billie Jones Adkins, who was truly the love of his life.

In the early 1960s, Sonny started a business with his first sidekicks, as he called them, Billie Adkins and Sam Robinson. The name of his company was Adkins Oil Burner Service, later to become Adkins Heating & Cooling. Sonny ran his business every day focused on the care and love of his customers and built great relationships with all of the wonderful customers that he served.

Sonny ended up raising his own workers, as his children grew up and became the Adkins' employees. Sonny said many times, "I raised my own workers the way I wanted them to be." Each struggle he faced was a lesson to the family on how to live a full life.

In his recent days, he spent time riding his hay fields on a mule planning for the next hay season in his head. His planning included detailed instructions for the farmhands, also his family and friends, on what was needed to be done, and, more importantly, how to do it right, which was Sonny's way.

Sonny wore many hats. He was a God-loving man, a great teacher to his family, the land developer of Carrollton Place, and a farmer. However, the most important roles that he filled were being a wonderful son, brother, husband, father, uncle, paw paw, and friend.

At his funeral, there was a poem that was read that I think was so fitting for the life of Sonny Adkins. It goes like this:

Do not stand at my grave and weep.
I am not there; I do not sleep.
I am a thousand winds that blow;
I am the diamond glints on snow;
I am the sunlight on ripened grain;
I am the gentle autumn's rain.
Do not stand at my grave and mourn.
I am the dew-flecked grass at dawn.
When tranquil oceans meet the land
I am the footprints in the sand
To guide you through the weary day.
I am still here; I'll always stay.
When you wake up to morning's hush
I am the swift uplifting rush
Of quiet birds in circled flight.
I am the stars that shine at night.
Do not stand at my grave and cry.
I am not there; I did not die.

Many funerals we go to, the sermon doesn't match the man, but with

Sonny Adkins, the words definitely matched the man, and what a tribute to a life well lived.

CELEBRATING 100 YEARS OF ST. AUGUSTINE ART ASSOCIATION

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Florida (Mr. RUTHERFORD) for 5 minutes.

Mr. RUTHERFORD. Madam Speaker, I rise today to recognize and celebrate the St. Augustine Art Association's 100th birthday.

Founded on January 18, 1924, 100 years ago today, the St. Augustine Art Association has now become the 13th oldest continually operating art association here in the United States.

The association plays an integral role in preserving and promoting the artistic heritage of St. Augustine, Florida, the oldest continuously inhabited European settlement in the continental United States and has been described as the epicenter of the local arts community.

The St. Augustine Art Association Art Center is open year round and is free to the public, welcoming over 10,000 visitors annually. The gallery hosts exhibitions, concerts, workshops, classes, lectures, and artwork from more than a thousand different artists of all backgrounds.

Thanks to the art center's involvement, these contemporary artists are able to keep St. Augustine's present day art colony alive and thriving.

The St. Augustine Art Association also provides outreach programs that serve several groups within the community, including the blind, local public school students, elder groups, and community businesses. These groups are all given access to the association's user-friendly gallery there in the heart of St. Augustine.

On behalf of Florida's Fifth Congressional District, I am proud to recognize the St. Augustine Art Association for its contributions to our community's local culture, history, and community. We wish them a happy 100th birthday.

RENAMING VA CLINIC IN HONOR OF ELWIN SHOPTEESE

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Kansas (Mr. LATURNER) for 5 minutes.

Mr. LATURNER. Madam Speaker, I rise today in support of renaming the VA outpatient clinic in Kansas City, Kansas, after Captain Elwin "Al" Shopteese.

Captain Shopteese was born and raised in Mayetta, Kansas, and was a member of the Prairie Band Potawatomi Nation. Upon graduating high school, he enlisted in the Kansas National Guard and served as part of Company E, 137th Infantry Regiment.

He deployed to Europe during World War II and fought in both the invasion of Normandy and the Battle of the Bulge. Captain Shopteese received the

Bronze Star and Purple Heart for his service and selfless sacrifice to our Nation.

After returning to Kansas following the Korean war, Captain Shopteese served as a Tribal council member of the Prairie Band Potawatomi Nation and helped create the Indian Community Alcoholism Resources Expeditors Recovery Home.

Captain Shopteese's profound legacy of service to our country and to the Native American community will live on for generations to come. I am proud to join my fellow Kansans in introducing legislation to rename the clinic after this American hero and a member of the Greatest Generation.

HONORING THE LIFE OF KEN BROCK

Mr. LATURNER. Madam Speaker, I rise today to honor the life and memory of Ken Brock, a dear friend of mine and a pillar in the southeast Kansas community.

Ken graduated from Fort Scott High School and served in the Kansas Army National Guard before founding Names and Numbers, a business that published easy-to-use local phone books. Ken grew Names and Numbers with his wife, Debbie, into one of the leading independent directory companies in the country.

In addition to being a successful entrepreneur and major job creator, Ken was passionate about strengthening our communities and bringing new economic development to the region. He served as the chairman of the Highway 69 Association and successfully led the charge to expand Highway 69 to a four-lane route from Kansas City to Pittsburg. Ken was also active on the Pittsburg State University campus, serving on numerous boards and advisory committees.

Growing up in southeast Kansas, I know firsthand the profound impact Ken had on our region. Ken was a joyful person, a dedicated person, always putting his family, community, and country ahead of himself. He is someone you would have wanted on your side, and I was glad that he was on mine.

It has been an honor to get to know him and his family over the years, and I am grateful for all that he has done. Ken Brock passed away this past December, but his legacy of faith, family, and community will not be forgotten.

CELEBRATING THE LIFE OF SENATOR BOB MARSHALL

Mr. LATURNER. Madam Speaker, I rise today to honor the life and memory of State Senator Bob Marshall, who passed away this past September.

Bob Marshall attended the University of Kansas, where he became a four-sport letterman and played basketball alongside the legendary Wilt Chamberlain. He was a tremendous athlete and a tremendous competitor, something I learned firsthand.

Upon graduating KU, Senator Marshall was commissioned as a second lieutenant in the Marine Corps and flew vital reconnaissance missions dur-

ing the Cuban Missile Crisis. He left active duty in 1965 and became a commercial airline pilot for the next 33 years before switching gears and taking on the role as athletic director at Fort Scott Community College.

Bob was elected to the Kansas State Senate in 2009, where he served on the transportation, economic development, education, and local government committees, securing crucial funding for universities across our State.

Senator Marshall worked tirelessly to strengthen our communities and serve hardworking Kansas families. I am honored to have the opportunity to have gotten to know him. He will be greatly missed in Kansas.

CONGRATULATING RANDY LINCK ON HIS RETIREMENT

Mr. LATURNER. Madam Speaker, I rise today to congratulate senior investigator Randy Linck on his retirement from the Brown County Sheriff's Office.

Randy dedicated more than four decades to protecting Kansas families in the Brown County community, making him the longest serving law enforcement officer in county history. He started his law enforcement career as a reserve deputy and eventually served as deputy investigator and undersheriff.

In addition to his work as a law enforcement officer, Randy was an EMT for the Brown County Rescue Squad and the county emergency preparedness coordinator.

I am grateful for Senior Investigator Linck's 40 years of service and sacrifice to northeast Kansas. I wish him and his family the best in his well-deserved retirement.

RECESS

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to clause 12(a) of rule I, the Chair declares the House in recess until noon today.

Accordingly (at 11 o'clock and 14 minutes a.m.), the House stood in recess.

□ 1200

AFTER RECESS

The recess having expired, the House was called to order by the Speaker at noon.

PRAYER

The Chaplain, the Reverend Margaret Grun Kibben, offered the following prayer:

Eternal God, teach us to number our days, not that we would count down to the next milestone or fear the future ahead of us, but that we would come to value and to appreciate the moments You have given us.

Teach us to number the days of our work, that we would understand that each day matters. The decisions we make, the encounters we have, the

privilege we have been given to labor in Your vineyard, all that we do contributes to the work to which You have entrusted us.

Teach us to number the days with our loved ones, that we would seize the opportunity to acknowledge even the smallest gesture of love and appreciate the greatest favor You have bestowed on us, to share this life with the precious people we call friends and the special ones we know as family.

Teach us to number the days of our lives, that we would use our time on Earth to appreciate the freedoms You have endowed us, to seek the wisdom You reveal to us, and to demonstrate the mercy and love You have shown us.

Teach us to number our days, that we may live this day wisely.

We offer this prayer in Your sovereign name.

Amen.

THE JOURNAL

The SPEAKER. The Chair has examined the Journal of the last day's proceedings and announces to the House the approval thereof.

Pursuant to clause 1 of rule I, the Journal stands approved.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The SPEAKER. Will the gentleman from Illinois (Mr. QUIGLEY) come forward and lead the House in the Pledge of Allegiance.

Mr. QUIGLEY led the Pledge of Allegiance as follows:

I pledge allegiance to the Flag of the United States of America, and to the Republic for which it stands, one nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.

CORPORAL BILL SCHROEDER

(Ms. DE LA CRUZ asked and was given permission to address the House for one minute and to revise and extend her remarks.)

Ms. DE LA CRUZ. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to honor a local hero, Corporal Bill Schroeder, who is retiring after 28 years in law enforcement. Starting as a reserve deputy, he joined the Guadalupe County Sheriff's Office in 2001 and exemplifies public service.

Corporal Schroeder is a father, a mentor, and a community pillar who has inspired many to serve, including his daughter, a dispatcher at the sheriff's office. As a true salt of the earth, he leaves a legacy of friendship, courage, and integrity that will continue guiding us.

On behalf of this distinguished body, I thank Corporal Schroeder and congratulate him on his well-deserved retirement. His family, friends, and I are so proud of him. He fought the good fight, he finished the race, and he kept the faith all the while.

May God bless him, and may God bless Texas.