

his chair once a month every month until he retired. I could always count on his positive attitude and his steady hands.

Joe immigrated to the United States from Italy when he was 18 years old. He served in the Air Force and was married to the love of his life, Rita, for 65 years until she passed away.

He is survived by his two grandchildren, his daughter-in-law, and his son, Frank, who described his father as a "one-of-a-kind guy."

To know Joe was to love him. He was kind, openhearted, and possessed a unique ability to brighten anyone's day. We will miss the man who loved his family, worked hard, gave great haircuts, and made everyone laugh.

Joe, may you rest in peace.

WE ARE NOT A NATION IN DECLINE

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

Mr. COURTNEY. Mr. Speaker, one of the most ridiculous and, really, almost offensive narratives that is out there is that America is a nation in decline. You see it on social media. You see it at rallies that are being held all across the country.

I would suggest to all of my colleagues, if you really want to see the ultimate rebuttal of that argument, then you should go visit a facility like Naval Station Great Lakes, which is in north Chicago and is the largest training facility for recruits going into the Navy since 1911.

When I was at the national convention back in August, I had a chance to stop by and visit the Great Lakes Naval Station.

I spoke at a graduation ceremony for 946 enlistees. It was just a magnificent sight. It was the melting pot of America, recruits from all over the country, every corner, every ethnic group.

There were naturalized Navy recruits, immigrants who had come to this country and gone through the immigration process to now wear the uniform of our country.

I can tell you, those recruits were ramrod straight and were totally motivated and excited about the decision they made to serve our Nation. In my opinion, that is the best rebuttal to anyone who thinks that this country is headed in the wrong direction.

Last year, the Navy fell short in its recruitment efforts. Their target was 37,700. They ended up recruiting only 30,236.

As the ranking member of the Armed Forces Subcommittee on Seapower and Projection Forces, this is an issue of great concern because the tempo of Navy deployments, whether it is in the Middle East, whether it is in the Indo-Pacific, or whether it is in the North Atlantic is really at a high, high level. We need more people, and we need more good people.

Here is the good news. In 2024, the Navy is exceeding its recruiting targets. What we saw at Great Lakes in Chicago was that, in fact, this year, they are having to defer some of the recruits that have signed up coming out of high school this year, and they had to find more beds to accommodate the recruits that are coming into the service.

The young people of this country, in my opinion, that is the most powerful statement about them, the fact that they are willing to put their time and their lives into the decision to serve our Nation.

Another indicator, Mr. Speaker, is how our allies regard us.

Here is a picture from the Groton submarine base in southeastern Connecticut, which I have the honor to serve.

Last year, we passed a measure to establish the Australia, U.K., and U.S. security agreement, AUKUS, which provides for those three countries to unite in terms of pushing back and rebalancing the security environment in the Indo-Pacific.

Crucial to that is joint training of Australian Naval officers and enlisted persons who are going to be undertaking nuclear-powered submarines in the early 2030s built here in the U.S.

This is a graduating class of Aussies in Groton, Connecticut, the first enlisted group. They were tops in the class. They actually ranked higher than Americans who were part of the class that was there.

The excitement and enthusiasm, the passion that they have for their work, but also their love for America was just so powerful.

Talking to these young men who were there that day, one of their first graduates, an officer, was at the helm of the USS *Hawaii*, a Virginia-class attack submarine, and he drove it into the Navy station in western Australia in Perth.

Again, that training took place here in the U.S., in Groton. That is going to continue. There are over 100 more Australian Naval enlisted and officers that are going to come through this process.

Those countries are committed, and they see the U.S. as really at the center in terms of trying to provide peace and prosperity, supporting the rule of law, and maritime freedom in the Indo-Pacific, which is under such great stress and strain.

Again, we are not a nation in decline. The young people up at the Great Lakes Naval Station and our allies are coming to the U.S. to skill up and uplift in terms of making sure that the mission and the values and interests of democracies in this country are going to survive and prosper well into the 21st century.

Again, I congratulate those sailors, and I congratulate particularly those young 17- and 18-year-olds who enlisted and are in Chicago and who are going to do great things for our Nation.

ENFORCING THE OFA

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. STAUBER). The Chair recognizes the gentleman from North Carolina (Mr. EDWARDS) for 5 minutes.

Mr. EDWARDS. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to express my deep opposition to circumvention of the merit-based process, and instead, grant Federal recognition to the Lumbee community through political means.

Mr. Speaker, I am proud to have the representatives of the Eastern Band with us in the gallery today. The Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians are the descendants of those that fought to stay in their traditional homelands in the face of forcible Federal removal efforts.

Some Cherokee, including a man named Junaluska, made the forced journey and then walked back to the mountains of western North Carolina to return home.

It must be noted that the Lumbee community has no standing treaties with the Federal Government, no reservation land, and no common language.

As Members of Congress, one of our most sacred duties is making sure that laws are drafted and implemented in an objective and an equal manner.

For over 40 years, the Department of the Interior has carried out a merit-based process, as set out by Congress and administered by the Office of Federal Acknowledgment, the OFA, to make determinations on Federal recognition of Tribes.

If the administration or Congress allows the Lumbee to bypass the OFA, it sends a clear message that other groups with dubious claims for Tribal recognition can also avoid the deliberation and scrutiny that the OFA petition process is designed to provide.

We need the OFA process to protect Indian Country and the public. The process requires verification that the persons who claim to be Tribal members actually have Native American descent.

Believe it or not, the OFA has determined that some petitioning groups are comprised entirely of people that can't demonstrate Native American ancestry; not a single person.

Regarding the Lumbee, in one fell swoop, the Federal Government would recognize a Tribe that would then soon be the largest in the country, and all enrolled members would likely gain full access to all Federal benefits, which will further strain the Bureau of Indian Affairs and Indian Health Services' already stressed budgets.

As a member of the Interior, Environment and Related Agencies Subcommittee on House Appropriations, I am proud that we funded the needs of the Indian Health Service and other critical priorities for our Nation's Tribes in fiscal year 2025, the bill that was recently approved in the House.

That said, if the overall Tribal population covered by the services is allowed to swell by tens of thousands of

people, many of whom have no native ancestry, I fear that necessary appropriations cannot feasibly keep pace.

That is the crux of the issue. If there was an actual merit-based system behind the Lumbee case for Federal recognition, they would go through the OFA process as set out in the current law.

As they know, it won't hold up under a deliberative process. They have instead sought to seek special treatment through other avenues, all in the face of credible opposition by multiple federally recognized Tribes.

More than 140 established Tribes from across the country have said that the Lumbee and other groups should go through the Federal recognition process at the Department of the Interior to demonstrate the merits of their claim to be a Tribe. I agree.

I urge all my colleagues to take these concerns into account, and I hope that the merit-based process put in place by Congress decades ago on Federal Tribal recognition will be adhered to.

Mr. Speaker, while I have the floor, I would also like to urge you and my colleagues to move H.R. 7227, the Truth and Healing Commission on Indian Boarding School Policies Act, to create a commission to get a better understanding of the grievous wrongs done to Native American children in federally run boarding schools.

Our Tribal nations deserve the dignity to understand what happened to their family members at these schools. It is the very least this country can do.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The chair would remind Members that the rules do not allow references to persons in the gallery.

□ 1045

HONORING BLACK ARTISTS

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentlewoman from California (Ms. KAMLAGER-DOVE) for 5 minutes.

Ms. KAMLAGER-DOVE. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to honor the lives of Frankie Beverly, James Earl Jones, and Tito Jackson, three remarkable individuals who have left an undeniable mark on the arts and Black community.

Frankie Beverly, the smooth-voiced, gospel choir boy turned Maze front man, was a cornerstone of R&B and soul music for over five decades. Timeless hits like "Before I Let Go" have become anthems in the Black community, serving as the soundtrack to countless celebrations, romances, and moments of reflection.

Beverly's music, characterized by his blend of funk, soul, and gospel influences, speaks to the heart of the Black experience. His unwavering commitment to his craft and his refusal to compromise his artistic vision have earned him the respect of peers and fans alike, paving the way for Black artists to thrive after him.

His impact extends beyond music. He has been a voice for unity and pride within the Black community, using his platform to promote positivity. I was proud to honor him when he performed in Los Angeles on his farewell tour just a few months ago.

Frankie Beverly was a musical storyteller, poet, and icon. I am grateful he lived authentically and encouraged us to do the same.

James Earl Jones, a titan of stage and screen, captivated audiences worldwide for decades with his commanding presence and iconic voice. From his groundbreaking role as the first African-American President in "The Man" to his unforgettable voice performances as Darth Vader and Mufasa, Jones regularly broke barriers and inspired generations of aspiring performers.

From Broadway to the silver screen, Jones' range shined bright, so much so that he was one of 27 people to ever achieve an EGOT designation.

Beyond his artistic achievements, Jones was a vocal advocate for civil rights and a role model for aspiring Black actors. He proved that with talent and perseverance, you can reach the pinnacle of success in the entertainment industry.

James Earl Jones will forever be remembered for his powerful, majestic voice that carries nostalgia across generational barriers.

As a founding member of the legendary Jackson 5, Tito Jackson was a pivotal figure in shaping the landscape of popular music. Alongside his brothers, Tito helped break down racial barriers in the entertainment industry during the 1970s. His distinctive guitar playing contributed to the group's unique sound, influencing countless musicians across genres.

Later, Tito established himself as a solo artist, continuing to create music that touched fans worldwide.

His dedication to preserving the Jackson family's musical legacy while supporting various charities demonstrated his commitment to both artistry and the Black community.

We shall honor his legacy by continuing to support Black artistry and encouraging youth in Black communities to pursue their musical dreams.

These three men—Frankie Beverly, James Earl Jones, and Tito Jackson—have not only entertained us but have also served as beacons of excellence, perseverance, and cultural pride. Their contributions to the Black community and to the arts are immeasurable, and their legacies will continue to inspire future generations.

Please join me in honoring them today for their talent, dedication, and enduring impact on American culture.

HONORING THE LIFE OF SIKA DWIMFO

Ms. KAMLAGER-DOVE. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to honor the life of Sika Dwimfo, a prolific artist, jeweler, and businessowner, who was an integral part of the fabric of our Los Angeles community. He was widely known as

Sika and also the godfather of Leimert Park.

The son of a tailor, Sika developed a love for art and a strong sense of personal style that he would carry with him for the rest of his life.

In 1971, he moved from Chicago to L.A. in search of warmer weather and a place to complement his free-spirited energy. He set down his roots in my district, and in 1992 established Sika Gallery on Degnan Boulevard. The shop, which I was honored to visit in February, sells African jewelry, art, and clothing. Over the years, it has become a beloved and integral part of the historic Leimert Park neighborhood. His daughter, Milan, helps run the gallery today.

Though Sika is no longer with us, his legacy lives on, not only through his business, but through Sika Dwimfo Corridor, a street that was named in his honor in June.

Please join me in honoring Sika's memory. His authenticity, creativity, and gentle spirit made Los Angeles a better place.

CELEBRATING THE LIFE OF FRANCISCO YBANEZ

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentlewoman from Texas (Ms. DE LA CRUZ) for 5 minutes.

Ms. DE LA CRUZ. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to honor a true American hero from my home State of Texas, Mr. Francisco Ybanez.

Born on September 28, 1922, near George West, Mr. Ybanez has lived a life of dedicated service to our Nation. Before World War II, he joined the Civilian Conservation Corps, but when his country called upon him to serve in the military, he answered with courage and commitment.

Enlisting in 1942 at Fort Sam Houston, Mr. Ybanez became a marksman, rifleman, and a AAA auto weapons crewman for the 601st. He fought bravely in the Pacific, serving in the Philippines and Okinawa, earning numerous honors, including the Asiatic Pacific Medal with two Bronze Stars, the Philippine Liberation Ribbon with two Bronze Stars, and the World War II Victory Medal.

Today, at almost 102 years old, Mr. Ybanez resides in Alice, Texas, surrounded by generations of his beautiful family. His legacy of service and sacrifice is an inspiration to all Americans. I ask my colleagues today to join me in celebrating his extraordinary life. I wish Mr. Ybanez a happy birthday.

CONGRATULATING CHIEF ROMAN FLORES

Ms. DE LA CRUZ. Mr. Speaker, today I rise to congratulate and recognize Chief Roman Candelario Flores as the new fire chief of Alamo, Texas. Chief Flores brings over two decades of invaluable experience in firefighting and emergency response to his new role, making him a tremendous asset to the city of Alamo and its residents.