

Across the Nation, military families play a critical role in protecting our freedoms. They are the strongest base of support for the brave military servicemembers who risk their lives defending America.

When these troops make the ultimate sacrifice for our country, the emotional impact on their families is devastating. While nothing can replace a lost loved one, outdoor recreation has a proven track record of providing at least some measure of relief in times of profound tragedy.

In 2021, Congress permanently codified free lifetime passes to our national parks and public lands for Gold Star families in the Alexander Lofgren Veterans in Parks Act, a bill I proudly co-sponsored and helped champion through the Natural Resources Committee.

Unfortunately, the eligibility for these passes excluded families whose relatives were killed in incidents such as hazardous training accidents or due to a service-related illness.

H.R. 9516, however, will expand access to free lifetime America the Beautiful passes to Gold Star next-of-kin family members and family members of fallen veterans. This legislation is a meaningful way to support additional families whose loved ones were lost in their selfless service to our Nation.

I commend Representative CHAVEZ-DEREMER for spearheading this noble effort. Throughout this Congress, Representative CHAVEZ-DEREMER has demonstrated exemplary public service by working tirelessly with Members on both sides of the aisle to better serve her constituents. She introduced this bill after receiving outreach from a constituent family whose loved one passed away on Active Duty but was not eligible for these passes. Her advocacy on behalf of her constituents and our military families is commendable.

Mr. Speaker, I reiterate my strong support for this bill, and I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. HUFFMAN. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Mr. Speaker, I support this bill. The America the Beautiful National Parks and Federal Recreational Lands Pass covers entrance fees and day-use fees at national parks, national wildlife refuges, national forests, and other Federal recreational lands.

Of these, the military lifetime pass, or Gold Star pass, is a free lifetime pass available to our veterans and certain Gold Star families who have lost a family member during military service, the ultimate sacrifice, as the chairman mentioned. However, the Gold Star pass currently includes certain limitations regarding who qualifies.

This bill would expand eligibility for the lifetime Gold Star pass to include next-of-kin family members of fallen servicemembers who are not currently eligible. Specifically, this legislation would expand access to families of servicemembers who died in Inactive-

or Active-Duty training or in travel to or from training or duty stations.

Mr. Speaker, this bill would ensure that all those who have lost a family member in connection to their military service have access to our national parks and lands.

Those who have sacrificed so much for our Nation deserve this access to appreciate the wonders of our parks, historic sites, and natural beauty across the country. It is imperative that we ensure this benefit is not limited based on how a servicemember died during their service.

Mr. Speaker, I support the passage of this bill, and I urge my colleagues to do the same. I yield back the balance of my time.

Mr. WESTERMAN. Mr. Speaker, in closing, once again, I thank Representative CHAVEZ-DEREMER for her efforts to introduce this meaningful legislation. This bill would help reduce the financial burden on our military families who want to visit our national parks and expand their access to the healing powers of outdoor recreation.

Mr. Speaker, I urge the adoption of this legislation, and I yield back the balance of my time.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The question is on the motion offered by the gentleman from Arkansas (Mr. WESTERMAN) that the House suspend the rules and pass the bill, H.R. 9516, as amended.

The question was taken; and (two-thirds being in the affirmative) the rules were suspended and the bill, as amended, was passed.

A motion to reconsider was laid on the table.

□ 1900

RECOGNIZING HAL B. GOODE ON HIS RETIREMENT

(Mr. COMER asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute and to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. COMER. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize my good friend, Mr. Hal B. Goode of Washington County, on his well-deserved retirement as the executive director of the Central Kentucky Community Action Council.

Hal will be retiring after an extraordinary 6½ years of incredible leadership, where he has expanded vital community service outreach across multiple Kentucky counties, including many in the First Congressional District of Kentucky.

Under his direction, Hal has spearheaded numerous achievements, including opening two new Head Start facilities in my district, in Springfield and Lebanon.

The success of the Central Kentucky Community Action Council is a testament to Hal's belief that their service to those in need is a hand up, not a handout.

His ability to develop relationships with local communities has laid a

strong foundation for the CKCAC's future progress.

I thank Hal for his dedication to central Kentucky and wish him nothing but the best in a well-deserved retirement.

CONGRATULATING SAVANNAH BUSINESS LEADER DAVID PADDISON

(Mr. CARTER of Georgia asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute and to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. CARTER of Georgia. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to honor Savannah business leader David Paddison, recipient of the 2025 Leadership Award from the Southeast Georgia Leadership Forum.

Mr. Paddison serves as the president of Sterling Seacrest Pritchard, a private insurance brokerage and employee benefits consulting firm in the southeastern United States.

Not only has David achieved business success during his more than 30-year career, but he has also advocated for community involvement and support of nonprofit organizations.

As a Savannah native, Mr. Paddison has been a leader on many boards within his community. He has served as the chair of the Savannah Economic Development Authority, Union Mission, the Armstrong State Foundation, and he currently holds numerous other board positions.

Along with his wife, Jeanne, Mr. Paddison founded the Savannah Wildlife Rescue Center to provide rescue and rehabilitation resources to the region's animals.

I sincerely congratulate Mr. Paddison for receiving this honorable award and for his outstanding contributions to the Savannah community. I congratulate my friend.

CELEBRATING THE 75TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE CITY OF SUWANEE, GEORGIA

(Mr. CLYDE asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute and to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. CLYDE. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to celebrate the 75th anniversary of the city of Suwanee in Gwinnett County, Georgia.

Folks have called Suwanee home for over 200 years, with Suwanee Old Town dating back as far as 1817. Yet, it wasn't until 1949 that Suwanee was officially chartered. At that time, the city was roughly 3.1 square miles, consisting of just a few hundred residents.

In the 75 years since, Suwanee has flourished, more than tripling in size, and expanding its population to over 22,000 Georgians. The once small agricultural town now boasts a charming downtown community, many prosperous businesses, and beautiful parks, offering an exceptional place for families to live and work.

In fact, in Fortune's "50 Best Places to Live for Families 2024" in the United States, the city of Suwanee ranked 27th in the entire Nation. That is incredible. I congratulate Mayor Jimmy Burnette and the city of Suwanee on this exciting milestone.

I am honored to represent the great folks of Suwanee in Congress, and I look forward to seeing the city thrive for many years to come.

UNDO THE DISINCENTIVES TOWARD FORMING FAMILIES

(Mr. GROTHMAN asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute.)

Mr. GROTHMAN. Mr. Speaker, I had an interesting conversation today with someone who deals with people in the lower economic classes.

It was an interesting conversation because it was along the same theme that I often speak about behind this podium. That is the frustration she finds in the poor communities where the clergy again and again encourage young people to get married. The young people inform the clergy that they can't do it because the United States Government has established a bunch of programs that make it financially advantageous to not get married.

Indeed, it is not unusual to have \$20,000 or \$25,000 or \$30,000-a-year penalties for couples who get married, as opposed to situations in which a man is not in the household.

Mr. Speaker, I strongly encourage my colleagues in this Chamber to, over the next few months, undo the horrid disincentives toward forming families that were put in by Lyndon Johnson and the Great Society.

CELEBRATING THE SERVICE OF THE HONORABLE MICHAEL C. BURGESS

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 9, 2023, the gentleman from Texas (Mr. WEBER) is recognized for 60 minutes as the designee of the majority leader.

GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. WEBER of Texas. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members may have 5 legislative days to revise and extend their remarks and include extraneous material on the topic of this Special Order.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Is there objection to the request of the gentleman from Texas?

There was no objection.

Mr. WEBER of Texas. Mr. Speaker, we are here tonight to celebrate the remarkable life and legacy of one of our good friends, a great Texan, a great mentor, a great Member of Congress, our friend and our colleague, Dr. MICHAEL BURGESS.

Sadly, Dr. BURGESS is stepping away from these hallowed Halls to hang up his boots back home. I am not quite

sure we are going to let him do that. We are going to give him grief over that, but he is leaving these hallowed Halls of Congress to hang up those great boots back home in the great State of Texas—check this out—after 22 dedicated years of service, not just to this institution, but to the people of America and the people of Texas.

Mr. Speaker, Dr. MICHAEL BURGESS has exemplified the very best of what it is not only to be a Texan, but to be a physician, a husband, a father, and a Congressman. He is the real deal, Mr. Speaker, with unshakeable resolve and a servant's heart.

I have watched him up close and personal these last 12 years. With absolute unshakeable resolve and a servant's heart, MICHAEL BURGESS has tackled some of the most challenging issues facing our Nation. He has always had the needs of Texans and Americans at the forefront, both of those, Texans and Americans.

As one of the very few physicians in Congress, Dr. BURGESS' expertise has been an absolute guiding light on healthcare policy, and his unwavering advocacy for the unborn has been a testament to his absolutely deep moral convictions.

Dr. BURGESS, let me say: Thank you. Thank you, thank you, thank you.

Mr. Speaker, I could tell you things about him from being with him in a Texas lunch and knowing him personally and watching him up close and personal as he sits on what we call "The Texas Row" back here. I don't have enough time to tell you about the stories and the discussions we have had and what it revealed about the man, Dr. MICHAEL BURGESS.

I could be here for a long time. I don't know how much time you have, Mr. Speaker, but I can be here for a long time.

In Texas, we believe in rolling up our sleeves, getting the job done, and never backing down from a fight. Let me tell you all: That epitomizes one Dr. MICHAEL BURGESS, who has done that right here in what I call these hallowed Halls of Congress.

His dedication to conservative principles and his commitment to values that make not only Texas strong, but this country strong, has left an indelible mark on this institution.

MICHAEL, we are sad that you are leaving. I am still not sure we are going to let that happen, but bless you, brother.

As you return to the Lone Star State, we know that you will continue to embody the spirit of Texas, where faith and family and freedom remain at the center of everything we do.

Mr. Speaker, Dr. MICHAEL BURGESS epitomizes that. He really epitomizes that.

So, Dr. BURGESS, as you step into the well-deserved next chapter, we must also recognize the support of your beautiful wife, Laura, who has been your steadfast partner throughout these 22 years of service.

You know what they say, behind every great leader is a strong family, but it is one that he built. It is one that he built, and his bride, Laura, has shared in those sacrifices that come with public service, standing by him with grace and strength.

Before I begin to conclude, I do want to yield to my friend also from Texas, Dr. BRIAN BABIN, for his comments as we absolutely salute Dr. MICHAEL BURGESS and applaud him and just absolutely love the work that he has done.

Mr. Speaker, I yield to the gentleman from Texas (Mr. BABIN).

Mr. BABIN. Thank you, my friend, RANDY. I appreciate you having this Special Order for such a very, very close friend.

I rise today, Mr. Speaker, to recognize really a close friend, a fellow Texan, Dr. MICHAEL BURGESS, for his distinguished career of 22 years, serving here in the U.S. House of Representatives.

I thank you, MIKE, for being a wonderful mentor over the years, and for showing me and so many others of our colleagues just how to serve the American people with integrity and with honor and the shining example that you have been to all of us here.

No matter the topic, your position on the Energy and Commerce Committee, as the chairman of the Rules Committee, or at one of our Doctors Caucus meetings over the years, you have always been an invaluable resource to me and countless others. We will miss your knowledge, your expertise, your brilliant intellect, your wise counsel, and how well you represented our great Lone Star State.

Your legacy will carry on for many, many generations to come, and I thank you for being a dedicated public servant, a proud Texan, and a great American, without any question.

I also want to extend our deepest sympathies and our prayers at the recent tragic and untimely loss of your daughter, Christine.

We want to wish you, Laura, and your entire family all the best. Godspeed, my friend. May God bless you all. We will see you soon, and I want to keep in contact with you for the rest of our days.

God bless you. Thank you.

Mr. WEBER of Texas. I thank Chairman BABIN for his great remarks, his heartfelt words, because he shares the sentiment of all of us, Dr. MICHAEL BURGESS.

I yield to the gentleman from Oklahoma (Mr. LUCAS) for his remarks.

Mr. LUCAS. Mr. Speaker, I thank Congressman WEBER for the opportunity to participate in this important discussion this evening.

I can't think of a person who I have interacted with for the last 22 years that I have enjoyed any more than Dr. BURGESS.

Sitting in that general area back there, occasionally he would veer away from "The Texas Row" and interact with the Okies, where we analyzed the