

Ronnie loved his children, and he especially loved his grandchildren.

Serving in the military, he developed lifelong friends. Ronnie had many friends that served with him, and one in particular was Mike, who was more like a brother. They shared so many stories and laughed together, even their children call each other uncle. It was Uncle Mike and General Uncle Ronnie.

Mr. Speaker, Ronnie was a humble person, and he came from humble beginnings. He was driven by faith and his deep love for our country. We owe a great deal of gratitude and respect to Brigadier General Ronnie Griffin and his family.

Mr. Speaker, I am glad to honor a true American hero and one that I just so happen to call my friend, Ronnie. God speed.

#### ALWAYS ON WATCH

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

Mr. MAST. Mr. Speaker, my community lost three brave Palm Beach County Sheriff's Deputies in a very tragic crash: Deputy Ignacio "Dan" Diaz, Deputy Ralph "Butch" Waller, and Corporal Luis Paez.

I did know these men. I can't pretend that I knew them well, but we shared a handshake at various Veterans Days parades throughout the years, nods as we were in the same motorcade routes, and camaraderie as we fired up our Harleys and hit the road on motorcycle runs during times like the holidays, just like now.

These men, they were always present. They were always on watch because it was their calling to protect every person in our community from danger, whether they knew them well or not. They knew the hazards of their chosen profession. All day, every day, they patrolled inches away from death.

Yet, these men, they never hesitated. They never stepped aside and asked somebody else to face the danger. Each day, they woke up, they put on their badge, their body armor, they holstered their pistols, they left their families, and they went to work.

Courage for them was as natural as breathing. Plain and simple, they were warriors, strong, selfless, committed to protecting others. We thank God for these men. We thank God for their families who shared these patriots with us each and every day, and we thank God for their dedication to duty, which was a beacon of selflessness.

I ask that my colleagues rise and join me in a moment of silence to honor these brave men for their sacrifice. I would ask that the gallery rise as well since they are here listening and let us honor these deputies in a moment of silence. I ask that my colleagues rise to honor these deputies in a moment of silence.

#### IN SUPPORT OF FEDERAL WORKERS

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

Mr. LYNCH. Mr. Speaker, today I rise in strong support of more than 2.3 million dedicated civil servants that make up our Federal workforce, including nearly 30,000 Federal employees who work in my own congressional district.

As a former union president of Iron Workers Local 7, I am also proud to stand in solidarity with the American Federation of Government Employees, the National Treasury Employees Union, our postal employee unions, and over 30 other labor organizations that tirelessly advocate for fair wages, safe working conditions, and quality healthcare and pensions for our Federal workers.

With less than 40 days until the Presidential Inauguration, the new Trump administration has already announced its intent to target and scapegoat Federal employees, all in the name of cost reduction while at the same time extending trillions of dollars in tax cuts for the richest Americans.

This reflects a blatant disregard for the sacrifices made by Federal workers at the VA and elsewhere and the critical services that they deliver to the American people.

According to President-elect Trump, America's Federal workforce is full of: deep-state rogue bureaucrats, crooked and dishonest people who are destroying this country and who are going to be held accountable.

To this end, he is seeking to revive schedule F, a punitive employment classification that will strip career Federal employees of their due process rights and other statutory civil service protections. This new category would also pave the way for the administration to fire these nonpartisan workers at will and replace them with political loyalists.

President-elect Trump has also recently announced the creation of a so-called Department on Government Efficiency, or DOGE, Commission, an unofficial advisory panel that would purportedly serve to dismantle the government bureaucracy.

The co-chairs of this alleged department are two billionaires, Elon Musk, and Vivek Ramaswamy, who have vowed to conduct mass layoffs and employee relocations in order to reduce the size of Federal Government. As they tell it, most Federal employees don't even show up to work anyway.

These unwarranted attacks against our Federal workforce only serve to perpetuate false narratives that greatly undermine the value of public service and undermine the morale and ability of Federal employees to deliver essential services to the American people.

As former chairman of the Subcommittee on Government Operations

and the Federal Workforce, I can attest that these Federal workers are not rogue bureaucrats or deep-state actors. Rather, many, many of them are patriotic military veterans.

In fact, our Federal workforce consists of nearly 650,000 U.S. armed service veterans, or more than 30 percent of all Federal employees. In fact, the vast majority of Federal employees work in service to care for 18 million veterans and their families who are served and cared for by the Department of Veterans Affairs, which employees nearly 490,000 doctors, nurses, medical staff, social workers, and other healthcare professionals, caring for our Nation's veterans.

□ 1115

Our Federal workforce also consistently shows up to work, even during national emergencies, as reported by the Partnership for Public Service. Frontline Federal employees are deployed in the field nationwide as Border Patrol agents, food inspectors, postal workers, TSA officers, forest firefighters, FEMA disaster response personnel, clinical biologists, and other jobs that support public safety in times of crisis.

According to the Office of Personnel Management, only 15 percent of Federal workers actually live in the D.C. area with 85 percent of Federal workers stationed in communities across our Nation.

In stark contrast to President-elect Trump and his billionaire DOGE co-chairs, Federal employees are not looking to get rich. The Federal Salary Council reports that in 2024, Federal workers earned nearly 25 percent less on average than their private sector counterparts. Recent strikes by the autoworkers, UPS Teamsters, Kaiser healthcare personnel, and other private sector workers have resulted in historic and well-deserved wage increases, in some cases more than 20 percent.

Meanwhile, to ensure the continuity of government services, Federal workers are expressly prohibited by statute from participating in a strike. They must stay on the job. Asserting the right to strike and even belonging to a union that asserts the right to strike against the Federal Government is a violation and a felony and punishable by imprisonment. In the interest of public safety, frontline Federal employees also stay on the job without pay for the duration of every government shutdown.

Nevertheless, every Federal worker proudly takes an oath of office that reflects their commitment to our Nation, to public service, and dedication to carrying out their agency mission on behalf of the American people.

Mr. Speaker, sadly, Elon Musk has even resorted to publicly naming Federal employees who he would like to fire on social media. Our Federal workforce deserves better. I urge my colleagues on both sides of the aisle to join me in strong support of America's

Federal workers in the face of escalating threats on their service.

#### FAREWELL TO CONGRESS

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentlewoman from California (Mrs. STEEL) for 5 minutes.

Mrs. STEEL. Mr. Speaker, I rise to thank my constituents, colleagues, and friends for the wonderful 4 years I have spent serving in the people's House. It has been the privilege of a lifetime to serve Orange and Los Angeles Counties in Congress.

From helping my constituents to passing life-changing legislation, the work we have done has truly mattered.

Only in America can a first-generation immigrant who speaks English as a third language rise to become a Member of this body.

When my parents fled communist North Korea for freedom in South Korea, they never would have imagined that their daughter would be standing here today.

On behalf of my beautiful, diverse district, my team and I have accomplished a great deal. We have delivered significant funding to improve our Orange County beaches through sand replenishment. We have also provided important infrastructure investments to our communities. We have expanded healthcare access by expanding telehealth coverage. We have led the fight for lower taxes.

Legislation I have sponsored on its way to becoming law includes legislation to expand language access in telehealth for non-English speakers and expand mental health support for youth in foster care.

I have been a strong advocate for defending human rights across the globe and taking on the communist regimes who abuse them.

These accomplishments are not mine alone. I want to give a heartfelt thank you to the members of leadership, committee chairs, and my colleagues who helped pave the way, and, of course, my wonderful staff.

Speakers KEVIN MCCARTHY and MIKE JOHNSON have ably led this body and supported me every step of the way. The same is true of STEVE SCALISE, TOM EMMER, and ELISE STEFANIK. My friend CATHY MCMORRIS RODGERS has also been a great mentor to me and helped me along the way. My colleagues in the California delegation have likewise joined me in supporting causes important to our State.

I have been also blessed to serve on great committees. On the Ways and Means Committee, we have promoted an economy that benefits all Americans. Under the leadership of chairman JASON SMITH, Congress will reauthorize the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act with improvements that benefit American workers and job creators.

We have also done great work on the Education and the Workforce Committee to promote quality education for all students. This includes fighting

the rise of anti-Semitism on campuses, a fight that Chairwoman VIRGINIA FOXX has strongly championed. Dr. Foxx has been a partner for me in helping reduce Communist China's influence in education through my DETERRENT Act.

As we have talked about so much on the Select Committee on the Strategic Competition Between the United States and the Chinese Communist Party, the CCP is truly America's number one adversary.

I have passed legislation to ban our military from using seaports reliant on Chinese technology. I have also worked to strengthen Taiwan's military readiness through the TAIWAN Security Act.

Congress must keep their eye on the CCP and build on this progress.

For now, I will be heading back to my home in sunny California. While my time in Congress is ending, I will always look for ways to serve the country that I love. I will always treasure the friendships I have made both in Washington and Southern California. Like all journeys, this one is ending for a new one to begin.

#### AUTO INSURANCE

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentlewoman from Michigan (Ms. TLAIB) for 5 minutes.

Ms. TLAIB. Mr. Speaker, my residents still pay the highest auto insurance rates in the Nation. Auto insurance discrimination continues to keep our residents in the cycle of poverty.

I want to ask the American people and the auto insurance industry: What does your education level, your marital status, your occupation, your employment status, your credit score, your ZIP Code, or your homeownership status have to do with whether or not you are a good driver?

Right now, the auto insurance industry is determining rates based on these nondriving factors, so I introduced the Prohibit Auto Insurance Discrimination Act with my good colleague Representative WATSON COLEMAN. One of the factors, again, to determine driving ability should not be these nondriving factors, yet my residents still see and face higher insurance rates.

University of Michigan's Poverty Solutions did a study showing somebody with a DUI, driving under the influence, was paying three times less than the person with no DUI violation. The difference was the person with the DUI had a higher credit score than the person that had a better driving record. Again, these factors should not be determining people's auto insurance rates.

Again, that is why it is important for us to be able to support the PAID Act to prohibit auto insurance discrimination. My colleagues must join me in passing this important critical bill to address these shameless practices by the auto insurance industry.

#### SOCIAL SECURITY IS VITAL

Ms. TLAIB. Mr. Speaker, Social Security is a vital part of our social safety net in our country. It keeps more people out of poverty than any other governmental program, nearly 23 million people.

I wasn't surprised when the number one question and concern that was brought up in our telephone townhall throughout the district—over 9,000 people participated—was what is going to happen to Social Security. For most seniors, Social Security is their largest source of income.

Cutting Social Security would be a disastrous policy choice for our communities, and it would absolutely be a choice that is decided here, not a necessity.

We should be strengthening and expanding Social Security, not cutting it.

That is why I support the Social Security Expansion Act. It is very critical because it would increase benefits by \$2,400 annually and ensure that program is funded for the next 75 years.

We must protect Social Security. Every senior in our country deserves to retire with dignity, and every person living with a disability deserves to live with economic security. I won't let them cut Social Security on my watch.

#### WATER IS LIFE

Ms. TLAIB. Mr. Speaker, we all know that water is life. Safe, accessible, affordable drinking water is a human right.

In 2021, I was proud to be able to work with the Energy and Commerce Committee and Congresswoman DINGELL to establish the Low Income Household Water Assistance Program where we helped establish a \$1.2 billion program to help many of our families pay off their water bills and debts and keep people's water connected, especially during the pandemic.

This program saved countless lives. Millions of Americans today are still struggling to keep up with their water bills and many have their water shut off.

We introduced the Half-Century Update for Water Access and Affordability Act to establish a permanent low-income drinking water assistance program within the EPA. Our program will dedicate funding every single year to keep people's water flowing. We do it for gas. We do it for electricity. Why don't we do it for water? The program will include reconnection assistance, but what I also love, it will help with water efficiency upgrades like plumbing repairs to many of our families that live in old homes.

We are going to set up a community advisory committee made up of residents, nonprofits, utilities, and other local stakeholders to help advise the EPA how to implement this program more effectively.

Mr. Speaker, the H2O UP Act will ban the practice of water shutoffs as punishment for not being able to afford your bills. This is the richest country in the world, and we know it is just