

LEGISLATIVE SESSION

MORNING BUSINESS

Mr. VAN HOLLEN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate proceed to legislative session and be in a period of morning business, with Senators permitted to speak therein for up to 10 minutes each.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

REMEMBERING JOHN A. SPRING

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, in 2004, the city of Quincy, IL, elected a new mayor. In musing on how he intended to lead, he said: "It's not about me. One person can't make everything happen. You've got to have a team." And while it may be true that great leaders need great teams supporting them, John Spring was the kind of leader, mayor, and community advocate you wanted leading your team. Today, it is with great sadness that I share the news of John's passing.

A native of Rock Island, IL, John graduated from Quincy College where he met his future wife Karen, who sadly passed away in 2021. They were married for 50 years. A theme that remained consistent throughout John's life was his dedication to serving his community. He first answered the call to service through teaching. John worked as a teacher in St. Louis and in the Quincy Public Schools, before he was hired at Quincy Notre Dame High School in 1976 as a biology teacher and assistant basketball and football coach.

His time at Quincy Notre Dame would provide him with one of his first leadership opportunities, when halfway through the school year, he was asked to put aside his teaching duties and serve as the school's first full-time director of development. He readily accepted the challenge. However, what John was not told when he was offered the job was that the school was in financial trouble, having borrowed more than \$100,000 from a local bank to cover operation costs. For many, raising that sum of money would be an overwhelmingly daunting task. But believing in the importance of investing in quality educations for young people, John went to work. Soon after, the school's first fund drive—a way to raise money to cover the gap between the cost of running the school and the amount of tuition the school must charge—was born. It has since become a mainstay of Quincy Notre Dame's fundraising efforts.

Proving his leadership abilities and commitment to the school, John went on to become the executive director of the Quincy Notre Dame Foundation for 29 years. He loved the work. So, what might have compelled him to leave that role? A call to serve his community in another manner: as mayor. He first experienced Quincy's political scene as a member of the police and

fire commission, and when then-mayor of Quincy Chuck Scholz decided in the fall of 2004 not to run for a fourth term, John once again answered the call to serve his community. His vision was simple: making life better for everyone in the community.

John served as Quincy's mayor for 8 years. He was a community favorite. During his tenure, he focused on updating transportation infrastructure and regional partnerships as a way to foster long-term economic growth. And, surprising to no one who knew John, he found success. During his tenure, he led successful efforts to expand Amtrak service to the city, upgrade Maine Street, and implement a multiyear infrastructure plan. And during the 2008 recession that saw many communities suffer, under John's leadership, Quincy opened new businesses, lowered taxes, and helped the county report the second-best employment record in the State.

His contributions to the community did not go unrecognized. In 2018, John was inducted into the Quincy Notre Dame Hall of Fame, and recently, he was selected as a 2024 delegate to the Democratic National Convention in Chicago.

Like every good elected official ought to be, John was an attentive listener, a caring community member, and a truly decent man. In all things John did, he led with compassion, humility, and grace. He was a visionary leader who truly represented the best of us. Time and time again, his community called him to serve. And time and time again, he answered the call faithfully. Until the end, John would send my staff and me community updates and ideas to improve the lives of the citizens of West Central Illinois.

Loretta and I send our deepest condolences to John's children—Stacey, John, and Mike—and seven grandchildren as they cope with his tremendous loss. It was a privilege to call John a friend, and we will miss him dearly.

RECOGNIZING 40 YEARS OF METRA

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, if you walk around the streets of Chicago and ask people about how they get to and from the city—or around it—each day, I am sure many of them would tell you: Metra. Metra transports us to Cubs games—in fact, its busiest ridership day was November 4, 2016, during the Cubs World Series victory parade—and it makes sure we can get to work on time. Simply put, the people of Chicagoland depend on Metra rail to get from point A to point B safely and reliably. And this year marks 40 years of Metra's service to our city.

Chicago has a rich history when it comes to rail. A century ago, Chicago was the envy of cities across the country, with the largest public transportation system in the world. But by the late 1960s, the system was failing. To put the system back on track, in 1974,

the Chicago Transit Authority (CTA) created the Regional Transportation Authority (RTA). After a decade of reorganizing, restructuring, and reimagining what commuter rail could look like and who should be in charge of operating it, in 1985, Metropolitan Rail—or Metra—was born.

Since then, Metra has grown into a remarkable operation. With 243 stations on 11 rail lines, Metra is the fourth busiest commuter rail system in the country and the largest outside of New York City. Not only do I represent a State that has long been the railroad center of the country, but working railroads is a tradition in my family. I grew up in East St. Louis, IL, and both of my parents worked for the New York Central Railroad. My two brothers and I also worked for that same railroad. Because of this, I care deeply about making rail travel as good as it can be for Illinoisans. And Metra continues to deliver. It emerged from the pandemic with steadily improving customer satisfaction that hit 92 percent in 2022. Then, in 2023, Metra opened the year by securing its largest ever Federal grant through the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law's Mega Program: \$117 million to rebuild 11 bridges along its Union Pacific North Line. And by the end of last year, Metra had seen the largest ridership increase of any transit agency in the Chicago region—a 37 percent increase—providing more than 32 million rides.

But Metra does more than just transport people; it responds to the needs of our city. Look no further than their All Stations Accessibility, or "ASAP" Program, an effort for which Metra was awarded more than one Federal grant to make its stations, trains, and platforms more accessible. While the Americans with Disabilities Act prohibits discrimination against Americans with disabilities and requires newly constructed buildings to be fully accessible, several legacy stations in Chicago remain inaccessible. Metra's ASAP initiative aims to make all stations accessible by 2038. Additionally, Metra ensures accessibility as it concerns affordability. In 1984, a one-way ticket to the farthest station cost \$5.80. Today, you can travel to the same stations for just \$6.75, which would cost \$17.50 if that 1984 price kept up with inflation.

Metra also has made a substantial commitment to sustainability. As the climate crisis impacts our planet, sustainable transportation has been an increasing sector of interest. Metra knows this, and they will be among the first in the Nation to operate zero-emission train sets. These train sets will allow Metra to retire some of its oldest, most polluting diesel locomotives and reduce their carbon emissions, making Chicago's transportation cleaner and more reflective of the city's value of sustainability.

A final example that demonstrates Metra's commitment to Chicago is

their proposal to reconstruct and improve the 59th-60th / University of Chicago Station stop. These improvements are crucial because they will support anticipated ridership increases to the Obama Presidential Library, making the space more accessible to Chicagoans and visitors.

For so many Illinoisans, Metra is essential to getting around the Chicagoland area in an affordable and accessible way. Metra is public transportation that is just about as good as it comes. I join people across the Chicagoland area in thanking Metra for its 40 years of service to our city. Here is to many more years of safe, efficient, and dependable service.

ADDITIONAL STATEMENTS

TRIBUTE TO JIM EHRLICH

• **Mr. BENNET.** Mr. President, I rise today to recognize Jim Ehrlich on his retirement as executive director of the Colorado Potato Administrative Committee, or CPAC. Jim served in this role for nearly two decades. During that time, he advocated for common-sense agriculture policy rooted in his experience in Colorado's San Luis Valley.

CPAC, founded in 1941, is a Federal and State Marketing Order that supports San Luis Valley potato growers and shippers. The organization has helped farmers adopt new potato varieties and, each year, ensured high-quality standards for more than 2 billion pounds of Colorado potatoes.

Jim was born in Brighton, CO, and was raised on his grandparent's dairy farm after losing his mom at an early age. After serving in the Air Force, he moved to Colorado's San Luis Valley in 1996 to serve as the regional manager of the Coors Barley farm and grain elevator. He started at CPAC in 2006.

Over the years, I have worked with Jim on many issues important to Colorado's potato growers. We ensured potatoes are classified as a vegetable, are available in school lunches, and can be sold throughout Mexico. Jim has taught me about water and drought policy as well, including the complicated groundwater management challenges of the San Luis Valley.

Jim has also been a leader in his community beyond agriculture: He serves on the Rio Grande Basin Roundtable and the San Luis Valley Health hospital board. He is always a wise, pragmatic voice on the challenging issues faced by his community. Jim is direct, honest, kind, and humble, and I am proud to consider him a friend. On behalf of his family, growers and community, it is an honor to recognize and celebrate his work on behalf of rural Colorado.●

HONORING THE WOMEN VETERANS OF SW MISSOURI AMERICAN LEGION POST 1214

• **Mr. SCHMITT.** Mr. President, I rise today to honor the tenth anniversary

of the Women Veterans of Southwest Missouri American Legion Post 1214.

The men and women who serve our country during war represent the courage, bravery, and resilience of the celebrated "Greatest Generation," who demonstrated selflessness and diligence in the face of great adversity and struggle. Every citizen played their part to help in the war effort, whether that entailed fighting on the frontlines or bolstering manufacturing and domestic production. Everyone who stepped up to answer the call of duty deserves our honor and respect.

Today, the women veterans of southwest Missouri are still committed to service. After valiantly serving their country, they now serve in their communities. Whether Active Duty or retired, these women share a special comradery and sisterhood that unites them. Granted a temporary charter in December 2014 followed by a permanent charter in November 2015, the Women Veterans of Southwest Missouri American Legion Post 1214 marked the first post of its kind in the southwest region of Missouri. The Women Veterans of Southwest Missouri American Legion Post 1214 are faithful to the four pillars of the American Legion; they participate in programs to support our national security, promote Americanism, facilitate veterans' affairs and rehabilitation, and care for children and youth.

The American Legion continues to be a cherished force of good in the communities they inhabit, offering familiar traditions and selfless service that make a positive difference in the lives of so many people. They embody the best of America, and I wish the members of this post the best as they continue to serve their communities.●

TRIBUTE TO LIEUTENANT COLONEL CLAUDIA WIGGLESWORTH

• **Mr. TUBERVILLE.** Mr. President, we often think of the holiday season as a time for giving. For LTC Claudia Wigglesworth of Daleville, she exhibits this spirit of generosity all year long. The daughter of an Army sergeant, Claudia had originally planned to become a music teacher. But after participating in ROTC in college, she decided she wanted to continue her dad's military legacy.

Claudia used her leadership skills in several different roles within the military, including as a company commander in the Gulf War, at the Pentagon, at the Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe, and as inspector general for Fort Jackson in South Carolina. She says that one of her most rewarding roles was serving as a recruiting battalion commander following the 9/11 terrorist attacks. Her parting legacy was helping ensure that America was equipped with the manpower to defend itself following that day.

Claudia retired from the military in 2005 after 23 years of service. She and her husband Charlie—also an Army

veteran—decided to move back home to Daleville. Claudia began giving of her time and talents to make her community a better place by organizing a food drive and environmental projects that still take place every year. She decided to run for city council, before running and being elected as the mayor of Daleville. Claudia's leadership during her tenure as mayor proved instrumental in expanding Daleville's Flight School Training Support Services, solidifying Daleville as the home of the largest helicopter simulation training center in the world.

She also volunteers countless hours with numerous regional organizations that help those in need in the Wiregrass and across the State. Claudia is the district chair for the Lions Club International Foundation and is a trustee for VFW Post 6020.

Alabama is grateful for Claudia's generosity that is making our State a better place to call home every day. It is my honor to recognize her as the December Veteran of the Month.●

MESSAGES FROM THE HOUSE

ENROLLED BILLS SIGNED

At 12:43 p.m., a message from the House of Representatives, delivered by Mrs. Alli, one of its reading clerks, announced that the Speaker has signed the following enrolled bills:

S. 3960. An act to amend title 35, United States Code, to provide a good faith exception to the imposition of fines for false assertions and certifications, and for other purposes.

H.R. 2950. An act to authorize the Secretary of the Interior, through the Coastal Program of the United States Fish and Wildlife Service, to work with willing partners and provide support to efforts to assess, protect, restore, and enhance important coastal landscapes that provide fish and wildlife habitat on which certain Federal trust species depend, and for other purposes.

H.R. 5302. An act to designate the Air and Marine Operations Marine Unit of the U.S. Customs and Border Protection located at 101 Km 18.5 in Cabo Rojo, Puerto Rico, as the "Michel O. Maceda Marine Unit".

H.R. 5536. An act to require transparency in notices of funding opportunity, and for other purposes.

H.R. 5799. An act to designate the checkpoint of the United States Border Patrol located on United States Highway 90 West in Uvalde County, Texas, as the "James R. Dominguez Border Patrol Checkpoint".

H.R. 7218. An act to amend title III of the Public Health Service Act to extend the program for promotion of public health knowledge and awareness of Alzheimer's disease and related dementias, and for other purposes.

H.R. 7438. An act to require the Secretary of the Treasury to mint coins in commemoration of the FIFA World Cup 2026, and for other purposes.

H.R. 7764. An act to establish a commission to study the potential transfer of the Weitzman National Museum of American Jewish History to the Smithsonian Institution, and for other purposes.

H.R. 8932. An act to establish an earlier application processing cycle for the FAFSA.

The enrolled bills were subsequently signed by the President pro tempore (Mrs. MURRAY).