

# EXTENSIONS OF REMARKS

## CELEBRATING THE 2025 SPARC HEROES AND LIFETIME ACHIEVEMENT AWARD HONOREES

### HON. JAMES R. WALKINSHAW

OF VIRGINIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

*Thursday, November 20, 2025*

Mr. WALKINSHAW. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize three outstanding honorees whose leadership, dedication, and compassion were celebrated at the 2025 SPARC Awards Celebration Gala, hosted by Specially Adapted Resource Centers (SPARC), an organization that plays an indispensable role in supporting young adults with severe and multiple disabilities in Northern Virginia.

For years, SPARC has filled one of the most significant gaps in our social safety net by providing meaningful day programs, therapeutic supports, and a sense of belonging to individuals who often age out of the K–12 system with few options for continued care. The honorees recognized this year represent the very best of our community's commitment to inclusion, dignity, and opportunity.

I am proud to honor and include in the RECORD the following honorees:

Chair Phyllis J. Randall, recipient of the 2025 SPARC Hero Award, whose steadfast leadership in Loudoun County has elevated disability services, strengthened community partnerships, and championed the rights and dignity of residents with complex needs. Her advocacy continues to make Loudoun County a more compassionate and inclusive place for all.

Ms. Jessica Burmester, recipient of the SPARC Lifetime Achievement Award, whose years of service, dedication, and hands-on commitment have had a direct and lasting impact on SPARC's mission. Her work has improved the lives of countless young adults and families, and her legacy will continue to shape SPARC for years to come.

George Washington University, honored as the 2025 Education Partner, recognized for its commitment to inclusive learning, community engagement, and preparing the next generation of professionals and advocates who support individuals with disabilities. Their partnership demonstrates the essential role that higher education institutions play in advancing disability inclusion.

Mr. Speaker, these honorees embody the values of service, compassion, and community that define Northern Virginia. Their work strengthens families, uplifts neighbors, and reflects the promise of a society where every individual, regardless of ability, is valued and supported. I ask my colleagues to join me in congratulating Chair Phyllis Randall, Ms. Jessica Burmester, and George Washington University on their well-deserved recognition.

## HONORING THE LATE JUDGE BABATUNDE AKOWE

### HON. BENNIE G. THOMPSON

OF MISSISSIPPI

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

*Thursday, November 20, 2025*

Mr. THOMPSON of Mississippi. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to honor the life, leadership, and public service of Judge Babatunde Akowe, a distinguished jurist, community advocate, husband, father and public servant whose recent passing leaves a profound void in the many communities he faithfully served.

Judge Akowe's life was defined by family, community and an unwavering belief in the power of civic engagement to transform lives. Judge Akowe was born and raised in Crown Heights, Brooklyn, and his life's work remained deeply rooted in his community.

His public service career was broad and impactful. Before ascending to the bench, he held roles across numerous institutions: he worked in the Brooklyn District Attorney's Office, served in the New York State Unified Court System, and served in the NYC Department of Consumer and Worker Protection.

In 2015, Judge Akowe completed the Congressional Black Caucus Institute (CBCI) Political Leadership Boot Camp, a significant milestone in his development as a civic leader. When the CBCI began its annual bootcamp, it was conceived to help to train young, ambitious public servants just like Judge Akowe. Notably, he went on to become one of the first members of that cohort to run for and win public office, underscoring both his ambition and his readiness to serve. His success signaled to aspiring leaders across the country that dedication, preparation, and audacity could indeed shape a pathway to elected office.

His distinguished judicial career reflected the same qualities that guided him throughout life: an unshakable sense of fairness, a commitment to equity, and a belief that justice must be both principled and compassionate. On the bench, Judge Akowe quickly earned a reputation for wisdom, humility, and an extraordinary ability to listen deeply—the facts, to the law, and to the humanity of those before him.

Judge Akowe was not only a public servant—he was a beloved family man. He is survived by his wife, Lauren, and their two daughters, Adia and Amara. His loss has deeply saddened his community, family and friends—with many noting that his life and judicial service were cut far too short. He was a friend to all, and for many, the first call made when visiting New York.

Mr. Speaker, the passing of Judge Babatunde Akowe is a tremendous loss to his family, his community, and the many institutions enriched by his service. Yet his legacy endures—as a trailblazer in political leadership training, as a respected judge, and as a public servant who believed deeply in democracy's promise.

I ask my colleagues to join me and the board and many alumni of the Congressional Black Caucus Institute's leadership training programs in honoring his memory, celebrating his service, and extending our heartfelt condolences to his family, friends, and all who knew and admired him.

## CELEBRATING BERT GUMKOWSKI'S 100TH BIRTHDAY

### HON. RUDY YAKYM III

OF INDIANA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

*Thursday, November 20, 2025*

Mr. YAKYM. Mr. Speaker, I rise to honor Mr. Bert Gumkowski of South Bend, Indiana, on the occasion of his 100th birthday.

Bert was born on January 1, 1926. He grew up in South Bend, where he developed a love for music and played in local school bands. At 18, he set aside an opportunity with the South Bend Symphony to serve his country in World War II. He served on an Army transport ship, completing six overseas missions and helping maintain morale on board.

After the war, Bert worked as a draftsman at the Studebaker Corporation. He joined the Naval Reserve in 1947 and was later activated during the Korean War, serving on the USS Twining during operations in the Pacific.

In 1950, Bert married Irene Cichon, and they were married for nearly 65 years raising three sons. He went on to a long career with Bendix, later Honeywell, where he designed brakes and earned 65 patents. He remained active in retirement and valued time with his growing family.

Bert is a devoted Notre Dame sports fan, a longtime attendee of Bendix retiree breakfasts, and a man rooted in family, faith, and community.

Mr. Speaker, reaching 100 years is a remarkable milestone. Bert Gumkowski's life reflects service, resilience, and dedication to those around him.

We congratulate him on this special birthday and thank him for his many contributions to his community and his country.

## HONORING 15 YEARS OF THE KOREAN BELL GARDEN

### HON. JAMES R. WALKINSHAW

OF VIRGINIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

*Thursday, November 20, 2025*

Mr. WALKINSHAW. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to commemorate the fifteenth anniversary of the Korean Bell Garden, a symbol of peace, cultural heritage, and enduring friendship between the Republic of Korea and the United States.

Fifteen years ago, through the visionary leadership of the Korean American Cultural Committee and NOVA Parks, an unused hillside was transformed into a remarkable landscape of beauty and meaning.

• This "bullet" symbol identifies statements or insertions which are not spoken by a Member of the Senate on the floor.

Matter set in this typeface indicates words inserted or appended, rather than spoken, by a Member of the House on the floor.

Their joint effort brought forth a lasting tribute to the values we hold dear: freedom, opportunity, and harmony. Central to this garden stands the Bell of Peace and Harmony, cast in Korea and installed to honor the spirit of unity and the shared commitment to democratic ideals that bind our two nations.

Situated within Meadowlark Botanical Gardens in Vienna, Virginia, the Korean Bell Garden has become a treasured landmark in the Commonwealth and throughout the Nation. It remains the only Korean Bell Garden of its kind in the Western Hemisphere, distinguished by its intricate engravings of flora and fauna native to both Korea and Virginia, symbols of the deep and natural connection between our cultures. The garden's traditional architecture, totem poles, and statuary further embody centuries of Korean artistry and philosophical reflection, offering visitors an enduring space for contemplation, appreciation, and peace.

As we mark this milestone, we recognize that the Korean Bell Garden represents far more than a place of beauty, it is a living testament to the bonds of friendship and cooperation between Korea and the United States, and to the shared values that continue to strengthen our partnership.

Mr. Speaker, I ask my colleagues to join me in honoring the fifteenth anniversary of the Korean Bell Garden and in expressing our deep appreciation for the Korean American community of Virginia's 11th Congressional District. May this garden continue to serve as a beacon of peace, hope, and harmony for generations to come.

#### PERSONAL EXPLANATION

#### HON. MICHAEL A. RULLI

OF OHIO

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

*Thursday, November 20, 2025*

Mr. RULLI. Mr. Speaker, had I been present, I would have voted YEA on Roll Call No. 298; YEA on Roll Call No. 299; YEA on Roll Call No. 300; YEA on Roll Call No. 301; and YEA on Roll Call No. 302.

#### RECOGNIZING CAPTAIN STEVE PETTY

#### HON. KAT CAMMACK

OF FLORIDA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

*Thursday, November 20, 2025*

Mrs. CAMMACK. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize and honor Captain Steve Petty, a United States Army veteran, who was inducted into the Florida Veterans Hall of Fame on November 5, 2025, for his outstanding service, leadership, and unwavering commitment to the health and dignity of his fellow veterans.

Captain Petty has dedicated his post-service life to ensuring that those who served our Nation receive the care, respect, and honors they have earned. As Director of the Veterans Resource Center in Ocala, Florida, he has led groundbreaking efforts to provide free Galleri blood testing for veterans exposed to carcinogens such as Agent Orange and burn pits—conditions that have claimed far too many lives long after the battles ended. Through his

leadership, veterans who served “boots on the ground” in the Vietnam War, Gulf War, and the Global War on Terrorism can now access this \$950 cancer screening at no cost, right in their own community. This lifesaving initiative—made possible through partnerships with the Marion County Hospital District and the Marion County Community Development Block Grant—stands as a model of community collaboration, compassion, and unwavering commitment to those who have borne the battle.

Beyond his work in advancing preventive care, Captain Petty has also been instrumental in ensuring that every Marion County veteran interred at the Bushnell National Cemetery receives full military honors—a solemn and sacred recognition of their service to our Nation. Captain Petty's dedication exemplifies the very best of the veteran community: leadership through service, compassion through action, and a steadfast refusal to leave any brother or sister behind. His induction into the Florida Veterans Hall of Fame is not only well-deserved—it stands as a testament to what one individual can accomplish when driven by love of country and devotion to those who have borne the battle.

On behalf of Florida's 3rd Congressional District, I offer my deepest congratulations to Captain Steve Petty, his wife Joan, and all those at the Veterans Resource Center who continue to serve those who served us.

#### HONORING THE LIFE AND SERVICE OF OFFICER HOWARD “HOWIE” LIEBENGOD

#### HON. JAMES R. WALKINSHAW

OF VIRGINIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

*Thursday, November 20, 2025*

Mr. WALKINSHAW. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to honor the life of Officer Howard “Howie” Liebengood for his tremendous service to our Nation as a U.S. Capitol Police officer on January 6, 2021. Officer Liebengood proudly served with the U.S. Capitol Police for over 15 years and demonstrated incredible courage, commitment, and honor during his decorated career.

Officer Liebengood was on duty at the U.S. Capitol during the events of January 6, 2021. In the days that followed, he continued to serve, carrying the immense and often unseen toll felt by so many officers in the aftermath of that tragic day. He tragically passed on January 9, 2021, at the age of 51. At the time of his passing, he lived in Vienna, Virginia, where he was a valued member of the community.

Officer Liebengood's story is quieter and harder to speak about, not because his service was any less meaningful, but because the nature of his loss reflects the unseen burdens that many public servants carry. It is precisely for that reason that his life and service must be remembered with dignity. Service and suffering that go unseen still matter, and those who bear such weight in silence deserve our lasting gratitude.

Officer Liebengood's colleagues would often describe him as steady, kind, and deeply committed to the shared mission. These qualities made him an incredible officer, a trusted partner, and a genuine friend within the U.S. Capitol Police.

Officer Liebengood's life and legacy have been recognized with several significant hon-

ors. In 2022, he was posthumously awarded the Defenders of Democracy Award by the University of Virginia's Center for Politics for his brave service on January 6th and his efforts to protect our democracy alongside his fellow officers. That same year, Officer Liebengood was awarded the Congressional Gold Medal, the oldest and highest civilian award in the Nation. In 2023, he was awarded the Presidential Citizens Medal, which recognizes citizens who have performed exemplary deeds of service for their country or fellow citizens.

Mr. Speaker, I ask my colleagues to join me in remembering Officer Howard “Howie” Liebengood and in extending our deepest condolences to his family, friends, and fellow officers. His steadfast service to the United States Capitol Police will not be forgotten.

#### RECOGNIZING PHIL AND LAURIE DAVIS AS A COMMUNITY CHAMPION IN PENNSYLVANIA-16

#### HON. MIKE KELLY

OF PENNSYLVANIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

*Thursday, November 20, 2025*

Mr. KELLY of Pennsylvania. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize and honor Phil and Laurie Davis for their extraordinary service to the veteran community of Crawford County and the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania.

Phil Davis proudly served in the United States Army from January 21, 1970, to December 3, 1971. He deployed to Vietnam from January to October 1971, serving his country during one of the most challenging periods in our Nation's history.

On November 28, 1988, the Veterans of the Vietnam War, Post 52 was established in Meadville, Pennsylvania. Phil was among the founding members who helped launch the post and shape its mission of supporting veterans in need. When the National Organization later went bankrupt and closed, Post 52 refused to let its mission end. In 2019, the post reorganized, completed all necessary work to become an independent 501(c)(19) organization, and expanded membership eligibility to veterans of all eras, ensuring that no veteran seeking help would be turned away. This decision dramatically increased the number of veterans they have been able to serve.

It was at Post 52 that Phil and Laurie met, forming a partnership rooted in service and compassion. They were married in 1995, and together they have dedicated decades to supporting their fellow veterans. Phil has served as Commander of Post 52 many times over the years, and has held the position continuously since 2020. Laurie has long served as the Quartermaster, ensuring that the post remains organized, responsive, and financially sound. Their leadership has been essential to sustaining the post's mission and expanding its impact.

Phil and Laurie's commitment goes far beyond titles. They provide Walmart gift cards and gas cards to the Crawford County Veterans Service office so that any veteran who walks in without food, resources, or fuel can receive immediate assistance. Their generosity has provided critical support to veterans in crisis and has exemplified the values of honor, service, and community.