

## PERSONAL EXPLANATION

**HON. BRITTANY PETTERSEN**

OF COLORADO

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

*Tuesday, December 2, 2025*

Ms. PETTERSEN. Mr. Speaker, I missed all the votes in the vote series on December 1, 2025. Had I been present I would have voted YEA on Roll Call No. 307, final passage of H.R. 4423, No New Burma Fund Act; and YEA on Roll Call No. 306, final passage of H.R. 5348, Social Security Child Protection Act.

RECOGNIZING THE DEDICATED  
PUBLIC SERVICE OF REVEREND  
DR. DELLA J. OWENS-BARBER

**HON. JAMIE RASKIN**

OF MARYLAND

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

*Tuesday, December 2, 2025*

Mr. RASKIN. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize the public service of Rev. Dr. Della J. Owens-Barber in advance of her fourth anniversary banquet as Senior Pastor at the Saint James Christian Church on December 7, 2025. Rev. Dr. Owens-Barber is a dedicated pastor, scholar, community leader, and advocate for spiritual and social transformation. Over the past decade, she has played a key role in the nationwide campaign to advance a powerful moral agenda to end poverty.

As National Security Director for Repairers of the Breach, Rev. Dr. Owens-Barber has been a steadfast leader of the Poor People's Campaign and has championed an agenda against poverty and inequality. At a recent Poor People Campaign's Moral March on Washington, D.C., she spoke on behalf of millions of Americans who are uninsured and underinsured. As a result of her unflinching leadership in the campaign to address the needs of poor Americans, she has been both praised for her determination and arrested for non-violent civil disobedience. She has been central to the outstanding work of both Repairers of the Breach and the Poor People's Campaign.

Rev. Dr. Owens-Barber is an accomplished leader in her ministry, developing robust programs that engage and empower senior citizens, organizing community food giveaways and promoting mental health awareness. She has also fostered intergenerational connection through worship, education and outreach.

Rev. Dr. Owens-Barber previously led a distinguished career in law enforcement, higher education, youth development and social justice leadership.

Rev. Dr. Owens-Barber earned advanced degrees in Criminal Justice and Theological Studies and a Doctor of Ministry. She continues to lead community service through the North Carolina Council of Churches where she serves on the Board of Directors, the Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, and health advocacy networks. I am honored to recognize Rev. Dr. Della J. Owens-Barber on her fourth anniversary as Senior Pastor at the Saint James Christian Church and salute her for her passionate service to her community and our country.

## PERSONAL EXPLANATION

**HON. JOHN H. RUTHERFORD**

OF FLORIDA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

*Tuesday, December 2, 2025*

Mr. RUTHERFORD. Mr. Speaker, due to an illness in my family, I missed the following Roll Call votes on November 20, 2025. Had I been present, I would have voted YEA on Roll Call No. 303, and YEA on Roll Call No. 304.

HONORING SIRICO'S CATERERS ON  
ITS 100TH ANNIVERSARY OF  
SERVICE TO THE BROOKLYN  
COMMUNITY

**HON. NICOLE MALLIOTAKIS**

OF NEW YORK

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

*Tuesday, December 2, 2025*

Ms. MALLIOTAKIS. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize Sirico's Caterers of Brooklyn, New York, on the occasion of its 100th anniversary and to honor a century of family tradition, community service, and culinary excellence.

Originally, Frank and Rose Sirico brought their children from Little Italy, where they had lived for about ten years on Spring Street, to 13th Avenue in Brooklyn.

They moved to Dyker Heights after purchasing a property on 13th Avenue to expand their bread business, which they had established in New York City. Frank and Rose lived above the store and began their workday each morning at 3:30 a.m., turning on the ovens and preparing fresh Italian bread. Their oldest sons, Sal and Carmine, were responsible for baking the bread. During that time, Sirico's served both commercial and residential clients, delivering bread directly to customers' homes.

In the 1930s, when pizza gained popularity in America, the Sirico family began serving it as well, utilizing the same ovens used for baking bread and drawing on their Neapolitan heritage. This expansion soon led to the addition of pasta dishes and, ultimately, to the opening of a full-service restaurant, with Grandma serving as the first chef. The restaurant offered both indoor and outdoor dining and flourished following the repeal of Prohibition. Sirico's Restaurant and Bar endured throughout World War II, even as the sons left to serve their country. Frank and Rose, assisted by their daughters, continued to operate the business. Upon returning from the war, Carmine and Hercules helped grow the family enterprise further.

By the early 1960s, Sirico's had developed into three distinct businesses, managed by brothers Carmine and Hercules: a pizzeria in one building, a restaurant in another, and a catering hall where the outdoor garden had once been. By 1980, the catering operation had become so successful that the res-

taurant and pizzeria were closed in order to focus entirely on catering. Under the leadership of Jim and Hercules, Jr., Sirico's has continued to serve the Dyker Heights community, hosting thousands of weddings, communions, sweet sixteens, and dinner dances, and remaining a proud Brooklyn institution for generations.

As Sirico's celebrates a century of success and four generations of family leadership, it stands as a testament to Brooklyn's enduring spirit of hard work, hospitality, and community.

## PERSONAL EXPLANATION

**HON. ANDY BARR**

OF KENTUCKY

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

*Tuesday, December 2, 2025*

Mr. BARR. Mr. Speaker, I missed two suspension votes due to previously scheduled personal events. Had I been present, I would have voted YEA on Roll Call No. 306, and YEA on Roll Call No. 307.

## PERSONAL EXPLANATION

**HON. BRIAN BABIN**

OF TEXAS

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

*Tuesday, December 2, 2025*

Mr. BABIN. Mr. Speaker, due to illness, I was not able to vote. Had I been present, I would have voted YEA on Roll Call No. 306, and YEA on Roll Call No. 307.

## PERSONAL EXPLANATION

**HON. MICHAEL A. RULLI**

OF OHIO

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

*Tuesday, December 2, 2025*

Mr. RULLI. Mr. Speaker, had I been present, I would have voted YEA on Roll Call No. 306, and YEA on Roll Call No. 307.

## PERSONAL EXPLANATION

**HON. JOHN H. RUTHERFORD**

OF FLORIDA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

*Tuesday, December 2, 2025*

Mr. RUTHERFORD. Mr. Speaker, due to an illness in my family, I missed the following Roll Call votes on November 21, 2025. Had I been present, I would have voted YEA on Roll Call No. 305.

## PERSONAL EXPLANATION

**HON. PRAMILA JAYAPAL**

OF WASHINGTON

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

*Tuesday, December 2, 2025*

Ms. JAYAPAL. Mr. Speaker, I missed Roll Call votes No. 306 and No. 307 on December

1, 2025. Had I been present, my votes would have been: Yea on Roll Call No. 306 and Yea on Roll Call No. 307.

HONORING SERGEANT MICHAEL  
VERARDO

**HON. RICHARD HUDSON**

OF NORTH CAROLINA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

*Tuesday, December 2, 2025*

Mr. HUDSON. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to honor Sergeant Michael Verardo.

As the Representative from North Carolina's 9th District, I have the honor of representing Fort Bragg.

I am devastated, but grateful. It is the honor of my life to represent the incredible men and women of our Airborne and Special Operation's community, including my friend Michael.

To his wife Sarah and their precious three girls, Renee and I are so deeply sorry for this loss, and we were honored to stand together last week at Arlington National Cemetery.

We lost a true American hero with the passing of our friend Sergeant Michael Verardo.

An infantryman in the 82nd Airborne Division, Mike was severely wounded by an IED in Afghanistan that nearly took his life in 2010. He fought for his life and he fought to stay with his family, resulting in more than 120 surgeries and years of painful recovery.

Most of us would look at that day in 2010 as the worst day of our lives. Michael called it his "Alive Day." He chose to see every day after that as a gift. Another chance to love Sarah, to be a dad to his three little girls, to cheer on his New England Patriots (nobody is perfect), to enjoy his dogs, and to live in the country he believed was worth fighting for.

Michael did more than survive. Together with Sarah, he turned his own suffering into service. Their work with the Independence Fund and their advocacy in Washington and around the country changed lives.

Presidents listened. Cabinet Secretaries listened. Members of Congress listened.

Michael and Sarah helped shift how our Nation thinks about the most severely wounded veterans and the families who are right there with them.

His story advanced care at the Department of Veterans Affairs and the Department of War, evident by the presence of Secretary Collins and Secretary Hegseth at his interment ceremony at Arlington National Cemetery on November 19th.

Back home in North Carolina, Michael was a leader in his church and community. He showed up for Veterans. He competed in adaptive sports. And through it all, he was first and foremost a loving father and husband.

Sarah has said something I believe every American needs to hear: when it comes to our military and our veterans, everything should be purple. There should be nothing political in how we honor them, how we care for them, or how we remember them. Michael had that rare ability to make people on both sides of the aisle want to do better for our troops and their families.

Sarah called it the honor of her lifetime to be Michael's wife and caregiver. All of us have watched her live that out with strength and grace. Sarah, is a true inspiration.

In a moment like this, when answers are hard to find, I am reminded of Proverbs 3:5: "Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding." She has walked that verse, day after day.

Michael's daughters should know their dad is a hero. Not only because of that tragic day in Afghanistan, but because of how he lived every day afterward. They will always be able to say, "My dad was Sergeant Michael Verardo," and our country will know exactly what that means.

For the rest of us, the way forward is clear. We must honor Michael's legacy by caring for the heroes he fought beside and their families. We must keep working to deliver real care and real support for those who come home bearing the scars of war. And we must especially take care of those who come home with hidden scars. We must remember that we stand together as Americans, united in gratitude for men like my friend Michael.

May God bless the Verardo family.

May God bless the memory of Sergeant Michael Verardo.

May God bless the United States of America.

CELEBRATING THE SANTA FE  
PRIDE CENTER GRAND OPENING

**HON. TERESA LEGER FERNANDEZ**

OF NEW MEXICO

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

*Tuesday, December 2, 2025*

Ms. LEGER FERNANDEZ. Mr. Speaker, I rise today in celebration of a new beacon of hope and belonging in our Land of Enchantment. The doors of the QC—Santa Fe's first LGBTQIA+ Center—have opened, and those doors open a space where every New Mexican can breathe freely, stand proudly, and be wholly themselves.

In this home of chosen family, community, and courage, Santa Feans will gather not just for events or activities, but to share joy, to be seen, and to be embraced without condition. The QC adds its own bright colors to Santa Fe's already vibrant tapestry—a testament to the leadership of the Human Rights Alliance Executive Director Kevin Bowen and the entire community's tireless passion, persistence, and commitment to equality in Santa Fe and throughout New Mexico.

It brings me such joy to know that these advocates continue to fight for equality in New Mexico and uplift members of our beautifully diverse community. I stand in firm solidarity with the QC and its mission to protect the rights of all New Mexicans—regardless of who they are or who they love.

RECOGNIZING THE RETIREMENT  
OF BERSHEBA AUSTIN

**HON. MIKE ROGERS**

OF ALABAMA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

*Tuesday, December 2, 2025*

Mr. ROGERS of Alabama. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize the retirement of Bersheba Austin as Human Resources Director for the City of Anniston, Alabama.

Bersheba received a Bachelor of Business Administration from Faulkner University in

2008, an associate's degree in science from Gadsden State Community College in 1995 and a Bookkeeping and Accounting Diploma from Ayers State Technical College in 1982. She is a 1995 graduate of Cleburne County High School.

Bersheba came to work for the City of Anniston in August of 2000 as Clerk Typist. She moved up the ranks to Payroll Clerk, Personnel Specialist, and finally Human Resources Director. Bersheba has dedicated 25 years to the City of Anniston.

She is a member of the Alabama Association of Public Personnel Administrators and the Public Sector Human Resources Association. She also served in leadership roles for the IPMA-HR Southern Region organization.

Bersheba is blessed with two daughters, Ashley Burton and Alayna Pernell, and two grandchildren. On December 10, 2025, an event will be held to celebrate her retirement at the Anniston City Meeting Center.

Mr. Speaker, please join me in recognizing Bersheba Austin on her retirement and thanking her for her dedication and service to the City of Anniston. I congratulate Bersheba.

RECOGNIZING AMERICAN PATRIOT  
PENNY JUSTICE

**HON. JOHN H. RUTHERFORD**

OF FLORIDA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

*Tuesday, December 2, 2025*

Mr. RUTHERFORD. Mr. Speaker, today I rise to recognize and congratulate Penny Justice on her selection as the winner of Florida's Employer Support of the Guard and Reserve Patriot of the Year Award. This annual award ceremony celebrates our great American servicemembers, first responders, and citizens and recognizes men and women who, through their actions and words, exemplify servant leadership and patriotism.

Mrs. Justice has made exceptional contributions in support of service members, veterans and their families in Northeast Florida, and has demonstrated extraordinary patriotism and dedication to our Nation's ideals.

On this historic occasion, I congratulate and recognize Penny Justice. I thank her for her dedication and leadership. Congratulations to Penny and may God bless her.

HONORING PASTOR LARRY G.  
COZART

**HON. BENNIE G. THOMPSON**

OF MISSISSIPPI

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

*Tuesday, December 2, 2025*

Mr. THOMPSON of Mississippi. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to honor the distinguished life and service of Pastor Larry G. Cozart, a revered member of our community whose dedication and leadership have left an indelible mark on countless lives. Born and raised in Clarksdale, Mississippi, Pastor Cozart has devoted more than 40 years to serving his community through ministry, healthcare, and public service.

Pastor Cozart's journey is a testament to his unwavering commitment to service. As the devoted husband of Veleria P. Cozart, father of