

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

five children, and grandfather of seven grandchildren, he has balanced family life with a profound dedication to uplifting those around him. His career began in healthcare, where he served as a certified Physician Assistant, Phlebotomist, and X-ray Technician, among other roles. His leadership further extended into public service, including time as my District Coordinator and as a mentor with the Mississippi Department of Corrections Outreach Program.

Spiritually, Pastor Cozart has been a guiding light for many. He faithfully served as a youth minister at New Jerusalem M.B. Church

and St. John M.B. Church before becoming the pastor of New St. Phillips Missionary Baptist Church in Sledge, Mississippi, where he has served with distinction for 23 years.

Pastor Cozart is also academically accomplished. He holds a Bachelor's and Master's Degree in Counseling, a Doctoral Degree in Theology, and numerous certifications in healthcare and public service. His dedication to education and lifelong learning reflects his deep commitment to personal growth and community advancement.

Today, as the newly appointed County Coroner, Pastor Cozart continues to serve with in-

tegrity, compassion, and respect—upholding the dignity of every individual and family he encounters. His leadership and collaboration with the Board of Supervisors have been instrumental in supporting a strong and thriving community.

Mr. Speaker, I ask my colleagues to join me in honoring Pastor Larry G. Cozart for his lifelong dedication to service, his community, and his faith. His legacy of leadership, compassion, and commitment will continue to inspire us all.