

CELEBRATING BATTALION CHIEF
JAMES JONES ON HIS RETIREMENT

HON. RUDY YAKYM III

OF INDIANA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, December 11, 2025

Mr. YAKYM. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize Battalion Chief James Jones of the South Bend Fire Department, as he retires after 35 years of outstanding service to the City of South Bend and to the state of Indiana.

Chief Jones began his career in April of 1991 and has spent more than three decades protecting the safety and well-being of our community. He has served with distinction in every role he has held, most recently as the Battalion Chief for C-shift, where his leadership, professionalism, and steady presence have earned the respect of both his colleagues and the citizens he served.

In 2016, Chief Jones faced a personal battle with prostate cancer. Throughout his treatment, he continued to report for duty and remained committed to the people who depended on him. This strength of character reflects the very best of public service and stands as an inspiration to all who know his story.

Today, we offer our deepest gratitude.

I thank Chief Jones for his devotion to duty, his courage in the face of adversity, and his unwavering commitment to our community. His service has made a lasting impact on our community, and he leaves a legacy of integrity, compassion, and dedication.

I ask my colleagues to join me in honoring Battalion Chief James Jones and congratulating him on his well-deserved retirement.

HONORING MS. DENYCE GRAVES

HON. KWEISI MFUME

OF MARYLAND

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, December 11, 2025

Mr. MFUME. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to honor Ms. Denyce Graves—world-renowned mezzo-soprano, visionary stage director, and tireless advocate for arts education—who has dedicated her career not only to performance, but to inspiring, uplifting, and empowering the next generation of artists.

Ms. Graves was raised in Washington, D.C., by her mother, Dorothy Graves-Kenner, a fierce believer in education. Dorothy assigned her children weekly enrichment projects and nurtured Denyce's early affinity for music—first in the church choir, and later in elementary school.

In elementary school, Ms. Graves experienced the transformative power of mentorship through her music teacher, Judith Grove, who recognized her talent and followed her all the way through high school. She attended the Duke Ellington School of the Arts, where she was introduced to classical music—and promptly fell in love with the art form.

After high school, Ms. Graves continued her studies at Oberlin College and Conservatory and at the New England Conservatory of Music, where she honed her vocal technique and deepened her understanding of performance.

Ms. Graves' early career was marked by both triumph and setbacks. She impressed at the Metropolitan Opera's regional auditions, but fell short in the finals, leading her to take a break from singing and work as a hospital secretary. Just as she began to consider leaving music behind, the Houston Grand Opera reached out and invited her to their young artists program, rekindling her career and setting her on a course for the world stage.

Shortly thereafter, Ms. Graves took the world by storm, captivating audiences at the Bastille Opera House in Paris, the Vienna State Opera, and other major houses across Europe and the Americas. Her growing international acclaim culminated in 1995, with her landmark Metropolitan Opera debut in the title role of Carmen. She brought to the role a gravitas and a fiery intensity that critics lauded as a defining interpretation. She brought that same commanding presence to the stage as Dalila in Samson et Dalila, establishing herself as one of the great operatic superstars of the modern era.

Throughout her career, Ms. Graves has been honored repeatedly for her artistic achievements and philanthropic leadership. She has won an Emmy and a Grammy, as well as the Washington Performing Arts' Ambassador of the Arts Award. She was named a U.S. Cultural Ambassador, sang at the National Prayer Service following the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks, and performed at President George W. Bush's second inauguration. Most recently, she received the Service to America Leadership Award from the National Association of Broadcasters Leadership Foundation, in recognition of her unwavering dedication to public service through the arts.

These honors reflect not only Ms. Graves' extraordinary talent, but also her commitment to using her talent in service of others. She is a teacher and mentor at the Juilliard School, the Peabody Conservatory, and the University of Toronto. She founded the Denyce Graves Foundation in 2021, with a two-pronged mission: to advance diversity in her field and to honor the legacies of historically overlooked voices. Their "Hidden Voices" program highlights and celebrates the artistic contributions of historically marginalized musicians, composers, and educators. Their flagship "Shared Voices" initiative connects Historically Black Colleges and Universities with top music conservatories, expanding access and fostering inclusion for the next generation of artists.

Mr. Speaker, the remarkable career of Ms. Denyce Graves reflects a rare combination of artistic excellence and passionate leadership in education. Through her performances, advocacy, and mentorship, she has opened doors for countless artists and enriched the cultural fabric of our Nation. I am proud to celebrate this visionary artist whose story will inspire generations to come.

RECOGNIZING MOODY HIGH
SCHOOL FOR WINNING THE
AHSAA CLASS 1-5A STATE CHAMPIONSHIP IN GIRLS' FLAG FOOTBALL

HON. MIKE ROGERS

OF ALABAMA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, December 11, 2025

Mr. ROGERS of Alabama. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize the Moody High

School girls' flag football team for winning the Alabama High School Athletic Association (AHSAA) 1-5A State Championship.

At Protective Stadium in Birmingham, Alabama, on December 3, 2025, the Moody flag football team, with a record of 22-3, secured the school's first state championship in flag football over Montgomery Catholic School with a score of 28-17.

The championship team from Moody, Alabama, is led by Coach Wren Moore and is the school's first flag football state title.

Mr. Speaker, please join me in recognizing the Moody girls' flag football team, Coach Moore and the coaching staff, the faculty and fans on this exciting win for the school. I congratulate them and Go Blue Devils.

HONORING THOMAS UNERFUSSER
WITH A CONGRESSIONAL VETERAN COMMENDATION

HON. PAT FALLON

OF TEXAS

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, December 11, 2025

Mr. FALLON. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize Captain Thomas Unerfusser of Denison, Texas, and to honor him with a Congressional Veteran Commendation. Captain Unerfusser honorably served in the United States Air Force from 1985 to 2006.

Captain Unerfusser began his distinguished military career as an enlisted airman, achieving the rank of Technical Sergeant (E-6) before earning his commission as an officer, and rising to the rank of Captain (O-3E). His service took him to Altus Air Force Base, Loring Air Force Base, Vandenberg Air Force Base, and numerous other locations around the world. Throughout his career, he served in the Persian Gulf War, Operation Desert Shield, Operation Desert Storm, Operation Provide Comfort, Operation Desert Calm, Operation Northern Watch, and other classified missions across Europe and Africa.

For his exemplary service, Captain Unerfusser received numerous honors, including the Meritorious Service Medal, the Air Medal, the Air Force Commendation Medal, and the Air Force Achievement Medal. His dedication and excellence also earned him recognition as Boom Operator of the Year and Honor Guard of the Year, reflecting his professionalism, precision, and leadership both in the air and on the ground.

Following his distinguished military career, Captain Unerfusser continued his service to others by joining the Denison Police Department, where he achieved Master Police Officer certification. After retiring from the department, he continued his commitment to justice and public service as a Grayson County District Attorney Investigator. Captain Unerfusser remains active in the veteran community as a lifetime member of the Sherman Veterans of Foreign Wars, the Perrin Air Force Base Museum, the Air Force Sergeants Association, and the Air Force Association.

I am deeply honored to recognize Captain Thomas Unerfusser for his courage, patriotism, and lifelong devotion to serving others. He exemplifies the very best of Texas' 4th Congressional District and of the United States of America.

RECOGNIZING AVON HIGH SCHOOL
ON WINNING THE DIVISION II
STATE FOOTBALL CHAMPION-
SHIP

HON. ROBERT E. LATTA

OF OHIO

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, December 11, 2025

Mr. LATTA. Mr. Speaker, it is with a great deal of pride that I rise to pay a very special

tribute to an outstanding high school football team in Ohio's 5th Congressional District. The young men of the Avon High School football team have represented their school ably on their way to achieving the Division II State Football Title. In their effort to surpass all other teams in the Division II State Football Playoffs, the Avon Eagles overcame the challenges posed by intense competition.

In pursuing the State Championship, the Avon Eagles defeated the Cincinnati Anderson Raptors to win their second straight state foot-

ball championship. The members of this very special team have shown that their sport requires an individual effort for a team result. Their hard work and dedication, both on and off the field, in achieving this accomplishment, is truly outstanding.

Mr. Speaker, I ask my colleagues to join me in paying special tribute to the Avon High School football team. On behalf of the people of the 5th District of Ohio, I am proud to recognize this great achievement.