

an abiding faith and the Holy Spirit in the days, weeks, and months ahead.

CELEBRATING THE 100TH
BIRTHDAY OF CONNIE PALACIOZ

HON. RON ESTES

OF KANSAS

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, January 16, 2025

Mr. ESTES. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to commemorate the 100th birthday of Connie Palacios, an American patriot and Wichita's very own "Rosie the Riveter."

Shortly after graduating high school in 1943, Connie volunteered to support our nation during World War II. Several family members were serving in the military, and she felt it was her duty as an American to contribute to the war effort as well.

Connie left her job as a laundress and joined Boeing's B-29 Superfortress assembly line in Wichita, Kansas. Starting at 50 cents an hour, she eventually doubled her wage, a testament to her hard work and dedication. In her role, she supported the production of the nose sections for the aircraft, manufacturing four sections each day. With the help of her partner, Jerri Warden, Connie contributed to the assembly of 1,644 B-29 bombers throughout the war, including one nicknamed "Doc."

In 2000, Connie was reunited with "Doc," which had been recovered from the Mojave Desert after decades of exposure to the elements. Remarkably, one of the pieces of the plane found in excellent condition was the nose section that Connie helped build nearly 60 years prior.

Connie became a vital part of the restoration team, volunteering three days a week for sixteen years until the aircraft was fully restored, taking to the sky again in 2016.

At the age of 97, Connie was honored as the inaugural member of the Kansas Women's Hall of Fame in Aviation. Today, I would like to once again honor her for a lifetime of service to our country. I thank Connie.

PROTECTION OF WOMEN AND
GIRLS IN SPORTS ACT OF 2025

SPEECH OF

HON. BETTY McCOLLUM

OF MINNESOTA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, January 14, 2025

Ms. McCOLLUM. Mr. Speaker, I rise in strong opposition to H.R. 28, which would open the door to invasive surveillance and physical inspections of young women and girls as a condition of their participation in sports.

Sports should be safe, accessible, and fair for everyone. Participating in sports helps young people develop skills like leadership and teamwork and builds their self-esteem. All children, no matter their gender, should have the opportunity to develop these skills in a supportive community.

Instead, this Republican-led Child Predator Empowerment Act puts the privacy, security, mental health, and physical well-being of young female athletes at risk. H.R. 28 would allow anyone to challenge and target kids with questions about their gender. It would subject

minors to deeply personal questions about their bodies and to physical inspections of their genitals by strangers without their parents present.

The reality is that there are already athletic associations that take issues like fairness and safety into account when determining gender-based eligibility guidelines for different sports at different levels of competition. Professional athletic organizing bodies like the International Olympic Committee and National Collegiate Athletic Association have already addressed participation for trans athletes within their respective sports. There is bipartisan recognition of the damaging impact of a complete ban on the participation of transgender children in youth sports, as evidenced by the vetoes issued by Utah Governor Spencer Cox, Indiana Governor Eric Holcomb, and North Dakota Governor Doug Burgum in response to similar legislation introduced and passed by their respective legislatures.

If we want to take action in this Congress to truly support female athletes and women's sports, then we could address issues like equal pay, ending institutional mistreatment of female athletes, and broadening opportunities for participation for historically excluded communities. We could work to protect athletes from sexual abuse, instead of taking up a bill that creates new conditions that predators can exploit. The majority of athlete sexual assault cases involve coaches, trainers, or other sports administrators, who could be inspecting young women and girls under this law.

The enforcement of H.R. 28 would cause lasting damage to student athletes and to school-based athletics, all while isolating and stigmatizing transgender and intersex youth. I urge my colleagues to vote against this deeply misguided legislation.

COMMEMORATING THE 1ST
ANNIVERSARY OF MITA

HON. ELEANOR HOLMES NORTON

OF DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, January 16, 2025

Ms. NORTON. Mr. Speaker, today, I congratulate the restaurant MITA, a rising star in the District of Columbia's thriving culinary scene, on its first anniversary, which was on December 29, 2024.

MITA, spearheaded by Chef Miguel Guerra and Chef Tatiana Mora, is a vegetable-forward, Latin American restaurant located in the historic Shaw neighborhood. In recognition of its culinary excellence and creative approach, MITA earned a Michelin star last year, affirming its status as a premier dining destination.

MITA is one of two new restaurants in D.C. to earn a Michelin star last year. Chef Guerra became the youngest Venezuelan chef to receive a Michelin star, and Chef Mora became the first Venezuelan female chef to earn a Michelin star.

I congratulate MITA, Chef Miguel Guerra and Chef Tatiana Mora for their accomplishments.

THE HAWAII INVASIVE SPECIES
PROTECTION ACT

HON. ED CASE

OF HAWAII

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, January 16, 2025

Mr. CASE. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to join my Hawaii colleague, Representative JILL TOKUDA, in introducing our bill to protect one of the most unique and fragile environments on Earth, our Hawaii, from devastating invasive species.

Invasive species pose an especially grave threat to Hawaii's ecosystems, natural resources and agricultural communities, in part due to Hawaii's unique geography. Hawaii is the most isolated island chain and one of the most ecologically diverse places in the world. We are 2,282 miles from the Continental United States, 2,952 miles from Japan and 4,772 miles from Washington, D.C., with no other islands in close proximity.

We have within our constrained borders ten of the thirteen world climate zones, with ecosystems ranging from desert to tropical, where plants and animals that found their way to Hawaii evolved like nowhere else. Hawaii has the world's highest percentage of endemic species—90 percent of terrestrial and more than 25 percent of marine species are found nowhere else on Earth. These species include the Hawaiian scarlet honeycreeper, the 'i'iwi; the flowering evergreen; and the state mammal of Hawaii, the 'iliihioikauaua (Hawaiian monk seal).

However, tragically, in large part due to invasive species, Hawaii has become the endangered species and extinction capital of the world. The Pacific Islands are home to 44 percent of the threatened and endangered species listed under the Endangered Species Act, and Hawaii currently has 578 species listed as endangered or threatened, more than any other state. Many of these species are critically endangered and face an extremely high risk of extinction in the wild. Although we will never know the true number of species that have gone extinct in Hawaii, in 2023 alone eight Hawaiian species were declared extinct.

The threat to our state tree, the 'ōhi'a lehua, is also illustrative of our growing crisis. Used for poi boards and outrigger canoes, the 'ōhi'a lehua is important to Hawaiian culture and the islands' watersheds. As the first tree to grow in new Hawaii lava flows, 'ōhi'a grows throughout the watershed creating new soil, stabilizing steep mountain ridges and comprises approximately 80 percent of Hawaii's native forests. However, rapid 'ōhi'a death, or ROD, caused by an invasive fungal pathogen, kills 'ōhi'a trees quickly, and threatens the stability of Hawaii's native forests. Since its discovery on Hawai'i Island in 2014, ROD has spread to Kauai, Maui and Oahu, and has killed hundreds of thousands of trees.

Hawaii's unique circumstances also have given rise to one of our Nation's most diverse and productive agricultural communities. With a year-round growing cycle, our crops have ranged throughout our history from the highest quality sugar and pineapple and cattle to tropical specialty crops like fruit and cut flowers in the highest demand worldwide.

Yet it is exactly because these crops like our natural resources have adapted to Hawaii's uniqueness that they are the most susceptible to devastation from external species

against which they have no natural defenses. Invasive species have drastically impacted agriculture in Hawaii, threatening some of the island's most valuable crops in the state's third-largest industry.

Another prime and very current example of the challenges we face is the coconut rhinoceros beetle. It has become a menacing invader in Hawaii, wreaking havoc on the islands' palm trees and posing a serious threat to both the environment and the economy. This formidable beetle, with its massive size and powerful mandibles, burrows into the trunks of coconut palms and other tropical crops, such as kalo and bananas, causing extensive damage. According to the Hawaii Invasive Species Council, once the beetles bore into these plants, they can kill them, jeopardizing the entire ecosystem, agriculture and food security.

The destruction of coconut palms by the beetle is especially harmful. These trees are vital to Hawaii's agricultural production, supplying coconuts for food, cosmetics and traditional practices. Additionally, they serve as iconic symbols of the islands' tropical landscape. With no natural predators to keep its numbers in check, the beetle's rapid spread continues to outpace control efforts, making it a growing crisis for Hawaii's environment, economy and cultural heritage.

Yet despite these incontrovertible and growing impacts of external species on Hawaii's natural resources and economy, existing federal law leaves Hawaii largely defenseless against increasingly destructive invasives.

Imports by air and sea, the only means of in-bound transportation to our island state, lack any effective regulation to screen out invasives. This is despite a fairly rigorous screening of exports from Hawaii to the Continental United States to screen out invasives from Hawaii viewed as harmful to mainland agriculture (invasives that, ironically, were invasives into Hawaii to start with).

Our bill, the Hawaii Invasive Species Protection Act, will require the U.S. Department of Agriculture Animal and Plant Inspection Service (APHIS), in cooperation with other federal departments and the State of Hawaii, to conduct visual, x-ray and canine inspections, as appropriate, on person, baggage, cargo and any other article destined for direct movement to the State of Hawaii. The inspections will search for high-risk invasive species and agricultural materials. The inspections will be conducted at airports, ports and postal sorting facilities prior to direct travel to the State of Hawaii.

Our bill further requires APHIS to work with the State of Hawaii to develop and publish a list of the high-risk invasive species and agricultural materials for the State of Hawaii. It pays for these inspections by increasing Agriculture Quarantine Inspection fees to cover the full cost of inspection.

If we truly care about the threat that continued and escalating invasive species pose to one of the most invaluable and unique ecosystems on earth, in addition to our unique economy and way of life, then the stark reality is that this bill is what it will take. Again, it is not revolutionary when compared to other island countries, most notably New Zealand, that have not only recognized this threat but actually have done something about it.

And it is certainly not revolutionary when compared to longstanding domestic restric-

tions on exports from Hawaii, leading to the basic point that if these invasive species prevention requirements are good enough for the rest of the country and much of the world then they're good enough for Hawaii.

Mr. Speaker, I am grateful to this House for their understanding and careful consideration of Hawaii's challenge and opportunity and ask for our bill's expeditious passage.

HONORING THE 40TH ANNUAL DR.
MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR.
YOUTH ORATORICAL COMPETITION

HON. EUGENE SIMON VINDMAN

OF VIRGINIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, January 16, 2025

Mr. VINDMAN. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to honor the 40th Annual Martin Luther King, Jr. Youth Oratorical Contest, hosted by the Prince William County Alumnae Chapter of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Incorporated.

Since 1985, the members of the Prince William County Alumnae Chapter of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc. have hosted this community event in honor of Martin Luther King, Jr. Day. This year marks the 40th anniversary of this meaningful tradition. This event has evolved into a youth oratorical competition, bringing together students in grades 6–12 from Prince William County Public Schools and surrounding areas. It offers students with a unique opportunity to research, write, and deliver an oration that honors the life and legacy of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

Dr. King's legacy continues to inspire people of all ages, including today's youth. His commitment to justice, equality, and nonviolence has profoundly shaped our Nation, urging us to confront injustice and work for a future where all treated with dignity and respect.

This year's speech topic: "Fulfilling the Promise of Democracy: My Voice, My Choice, My Future," is inspired by Dr. King's powerful call for America to live up the ideals of the Constitution and Declaration of Independence by being "true to what you said on paper."

I congratulate the following contestants in the 40th Annual Martin Luther King, Jr. Youth Oratorical Contest: Middle School Contestants: Soluchi Eze—Benton Middle School; Chizaram Feliz-Ujorji—Pennington Traditional School; Ezana Tesfaye—Mary G. Porto Traditional School. High School Contestants: Jordyn Nesbitt—Gainesville High School; Rabab Raza—Osborn High School; Naomi Samuel—Battlefield High School.

Mr. Speaker, I ask that my colleagues join me in commending the Prince William County Alumnae Chapter of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc. for showcasing the power of Dr. King's tireless commitment to equality and in congratulating the talented students of the 2025 MLK Youth Oratorical Contest. Let us learn from this next generation and consider how we may honor Dr. King's legacy by continuously seeking justice and leading with light in our own communities.

HONORING HOWARD KOCH'S 100TH BIRTHDAY

HON. J. LUIS CORREA

OF CALIFORNIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, January 16, 2025

Mr. CORREA. Mr. Speaker, I rise to recognize Howard Koch, a World War II and Korean War veteran who is celebrating his 100th birthday on January 19, 2025.

Raised in Oakland, California, Koch developed a love of skiing and rock climbing at a young age—skills that would eventually lead to his unique call to service during WWII in the 10th Mountain Division. At 13 years old, Koch learned to ski at the Donner Summit Sugar Bowl Ski Resort, paying for lessons with money he earned from his paper route. His dad would drop him at the Southern Pacific train station and, with rented skis in hand, he would ride up the mountain by himself. He would arrive early in the morning and sleep in the snow until the slopes were open for skiing. Koch soon learned to make his own skis and began his life as an outdoorsman as a member of the Sierra Club.

After graduating from high school at 16 years old, Koch attended UC Berkeley as a geology/mining engineering major. A natural athlete, Koch played baseball and was a right guard on the football squad. He still remembers winning a game against USC at the Los Angeles Coliseum.

By the time he turned 18 in 1943, the United States had been at war for two years and he knew he would be drafted. The military was advertising for volunteers who could ski and rock climb to join a division that, at the time, was called the Ski Troops. Eventually renamed to the 10th Mountain Division, this group was America's only mountain and winter warfare fighting unit.

Koch knew this Army unit was where he belonged. He was sent to Camp Hale in Colorado, high in the Rockies to join an elite group of champion skiers, mountain climbers, and European mountaineers for training. In what would be its biggest victory, the 10th completed a night climb on Riva Ridge to land a surprise attack against German troops who were entrenched in the snowy mountains of Italy.

After climbing Riva Ridge, a famous battle that is documented in the film "Fire On The Mountain," Koch was field promoted to 1st Lieutenant and went on with his Division to help capture Mount Belvedere. Soon after, Koch became ill and was sent to the hospital in Livorno, where he stayed for several weeks and then sent back to his company near Torbole.

Before the Nazis surrendered to the 10th Mountain Division commanders, the company commander was injured. At the urging of the sergeants in Koch's platoon, Lt. Colonel Henry Hampton appointed Koch as "acting company commander." He was 20 years old and the youngest 1st Lieutenant. Koch retained this status through the surrender and was then sent with his troops to Slovenia, where he ran a climbing school to keep the soldiers fit and to train replacement troops.

In July 1945, Koch was shipped back state-side to train for amphibious landings with the intent of being shipped to North Tokyo Bay to help end the war. While heading home, the war drew to a close.