

Kingdom. He then saw action in the Mediterranean, where his ship assisted in the invasion of Sicily. His final mission of the war was in the Pacific, part of a flotilla that participated in the invasion of the Philippines as well as the Battles of Iwo Jima and Okinawa. After the announcement of the Japanese surrender, his ship sailed into Tokyo Harbor to celebrate the end of the war.

Upon his return home, he settled in Baltimore, Maryland with his wife. However, he had the opportunity to travel the world as a radio technician for the Westinghouse Corporation. He spent time in Germany, Nigeria, and Iran before returning to Baltimore with his family. In his later years, Mi Kemp relocated to Delta, Pennsylvania where he lives with his son, Robert Kemp, Jr.

It is critical for us to recognize the bravery and sacrifice of members of the Greatest Generation that have helped us preserve the Nation that we so dearly love. Thanks to heroes like Mr. Kemp, that remind us to live life to the fullest and to serve others.

It is with great pride that I congratulate Mr. Kemp on a happy 100th birthday, and I sincerely thank him for his service to his country.

#### HONORING THE LIFE OF VERNIL MITCHELL

#### HON. JASMINE CROCKETT

OF TEXAS

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

*Wednesday, February 5, 2025*

Ms. CROCKETT. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to honor the late Vernil Mitchell, a beloved nurse, philanthropist, wife, mother and constituent of the Texas' 30th District who poured love and joy into her family and her community. Born January 19, 1940, in Ashdown, Arkansas, Vernil was the oldest of thirteen children born to Prince Richard and Leatrice Allen Richard. Her earthly journey ended January 20, 2025, in Dallas, the day after her 85th birthday. She spent much of her younger life with her Uncle Elbert and Aunt Ruth Bradley, and their six children.

From modest beginnings in southeast Arkansas, Vernil developed a strong work ethic and unwavering commitment to family. She broke new ground as the first in her family to go to college, enrolling at North Texas State College, known today as the University of North Texas, to pursue a degree in nursing. While attending Mt. Calvary Baptist Church, she met Charles Mitchell in Sunday school—a chance encounter that blossomed into a lifelong love. The couple welcomed their first child, Charles Jr., before moving to Washington D.C., where their second son, Keith, soon joined the family.

Vernil's career in nursing spanned over 40 years, serving as a Licensed Vocational Nurse in Washington, D.C., a visiting nurse with the Visiting Nurses Association in the Bronx, New York City, and helping her husband Charles open his own medical practice. Charles was one of Dallas' first black orthopedic surgeons, and Vernil served as the primary nurse in his orthopedic practice. They had a shared passion for travel, the arts, tennis, skiing, gardening, cooking and most importantly being with family.

Mrs. Mitchell's caring nature went beyond her patients. She worked tirelessly to support

the next generation of African American leaders. In Dallas, Vernil supported numerous charitable activities and was incredibly active in the community. She was a charter member of the Dallas chapter of the Continental Societies, Inc., and was an active member of the Dallas chapter of Jack and Jill of America, Inc. She was an active member of Friendship-West Baptist Church.

We ought to look to Vernil's commitment to uplifting others as a true example of devotion to service. Mr. Speaker, I send my sincerest condolences to her family, her friends, her former colleagues, and the entire Oak Cliff community. May her legacy live on through the people she loved.

#### RECOGNIZING SERGEANT CRAIG GONZALEZ

#### HON. JAMES COMER

OF KENTUCKY

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

*Wednesday, February 5, 2025*

Mr. COMER. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize Sergeant Craig Gonzalez of the Frankfort Police Department on being awarded the 2024 Medal of Valor for his bravery demonstrated while responding to a critical situation within Franklin County.

Without regard for his own safety, Sergeant Gonzalez played a crucial role in successfully resolving a life-threatening situation. Through his actions and support in the face of clear and obvious peril, Sergeant Gonzalez exemplified the highest standards of law enforcement professionalism and demonstrated extraordinary commitment to preserving human life.

His teamwork and decisive intervention reflected greatly upon himself and upheld the finest traditions of the Frankfort Police Department. Sergeant Gonzalez has earned the respect and support of Franklin County. Sergeant Gonzalez voluntarily performed extraordinary acts of bravery. His actions went above and beyond and have made him deserving of this fine honor. I am confident that Sergeant Gonzalez will continue to serve as an exemplary role model for law enforcement officers across the 1st Congressional District and the entire Commonwealth of Kentucky.

#### HONORING THE CAREER AND ACHIEVEMENTS OF DR. RON DANIELS

#### HON. JONATHAN L. JACKSON

OF ILLINOIS

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

*Wednesday, February 5, 2025*

Mr. JACKSON of Illinois. Mr. Speaker, Dr. Ron Daniels is the President of the Institute of the Black World 21st Century and Founder of the Haiti Support Project. Dr. Daniels is a longtime advocate for the African diaspora in the U.S. and a leading figure in the field of Africana studies.

As a Distinguished Professor of history, political, science and Pan African studies, he has dedicated his career to preparing the next generation of leaders to lead in these vital fields.

As the Deputy Campaign Manager for my father, Reverend Jesse Jackson's 1988 Presi-

dential campaign, Dr. Daniels worked tirelessly to advance the vital issues and causes my father has advocated for decades. Dr. Daniels ran as an independent candidate for President in 1992 as an extension of his commitment to fulfilling the vision and mission of the Rainbow/PUSH organization.

Dr. Daniels has been a leading figure in some of the most significant social and political movements over the last six decades, including Freedom Inc. in Youngstown, Ohio; the African Liberation Day Support Committee, which spawned the first African Liberation Day (ALD) USA; the National Black Political Assembly (NBPA); National Black Independent Political Party (NBIPP); and the African American Progressive Action Network (AAPAN). Dr. Daniels played a key role in the formation of the National African American Leadership Summit (NAALS), and he was a member of the Executive Council of the National Organizing Committee of the historic Million Man March and Day of Absence in 1995 and the Millions More Movement in 2005. He currently serves as Convener of the National African American Reparations Commission (NAARC), which has emerged a driving force in the U.S. and global reparations movements.

Dr. Ron Daniel's work and career has advanced the interests of the African Diaspora in the U.S. and helped to enable Continental Africans, Afro-Caribbeans and Afro-Latinos to gain greater representation and recognition for their contributions in our Nation's history.

Mr. Speaker, I ask that my colleagues join me in recognizing his career and achievements.

#### APPRECIATING JOHN DAVID BAKER

#### HON. JOE WILSON

OF SOUTH CAROLINA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

*Wednesday, February 5, 2025*

Mr. WILSON of South Carolina. Mr. Speaker, South Carolinians will always be grateful and appreciative for the life of John David Baker. The following obituary from the program of a Service Celebrating the Life of John David Baker of February 4, 2025, assisted by Shives Funeral Home, so thoughtfully highlights his achievements for the community.

As the personal Congressman for John, and Republican Co-Chairman of the Israel Caucus, I especially appreciate his devotion with the American Israel Public Affairs Committee for the existence of Israel. John promoted AIPAC continuing the family tradition of his father David who was so appreciated by my predecessor, Armed Services Committee Chairman, Floyd Spence.

John David Baker, a lifelong Columbia resident, devoted philanthropist, and visionary leader in business and community service, passed away on February 2, 2025, at the age of 69 due to complications from Parkinson's disease. His life was defined by an unwavering commitment to family, faith, and the city he loved. He leaves behind an extraordinary legacy of leadership, generosity, and dedication to improving the lives of others.

Born in Columbia, South Carolina, on July 5, 1955, John was the son of JoAnn and David Baker and one of five siblings. He attended the University of South Florida before earning a Bachelor of Science in Business Administration and Finance from the University of

South Carolina in 1977. Following in his father's footsteps, John spent over four decades shaping Columbia's landscape as a Managing Partner of Baker Commercial Properties (formerly Baker & Baker), where he played a pivotal role in the city's economic and commercial development until his retirement in 2021.

John's true passion, however, was giving back. His commitment to philanthropy started early; in high school, he started volunteering for the March of Dimes and served as Teenage Chair for the Richland County chapter. What began as collecting donations on Columbia street corners evolved into a lifetime of leadership, earning him the Elaine Whitelaw Volunteer Service Award in 2005, the highest honor bestowed by the March of Dimes.

John was a driving force behind major initiatives in education, literacy, healthcare, and Jewish causes. He served two terms as Chairman of the Richland County Public Library Board of Trustees, and following his tenure, RCPL was named Library of the Year (2001) by the American Library Association. In 1999, he founded Step Into Reading, a statewide effort that provided more than 250,000 books to children in need, and he was deeply involved with the Richland County Public Library Foundation, the Richland School District Two Foundation, and the Forest Lake Educational Foundation.

His humanitarian efforts extended through his work with United Way of the Midlands, where he served as Chairman in 2003 and was named Humanitarian of the Year in 2011 for his leadership in early childhood education. He was also involved in the Juvenile Diabetes Research Foundation, the American Cancer Society, and the American Heart Association.

John's civic engagement in Columbia included leadership roles with the Lexington Medical Center Foundation, the Township Auditorium Board of Trustees, the Federation Center of the Blind, the South Carolina Council on Economic Education, the Columbia Action Council, Columbia Jaycees, Columbia Sertoma Club, and the Central Carolina Community Foundation Board.

John's efforts were recognized with South Carolina's highest civilian honor, the Order of the Palmetto in 2002.

His advocacy for Israel was equally significant. He served on the National Campaign Cabinet for Israel Bonds, leading South Carolina's first-ever \$10 million Israel bond purchase in 2002 and securing millions more in subsequent years. John was honored with the Ben Gurion Award (2002) and Yitzhak Rabin Award (2018) from Israel Bonds. He also served on the National Council of the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC).

John was a pillar of Columbia's Jewish community, serving as President of Tree of Life Congregation, an active member of Beth Shalom Synagogue, and an early supporter of Chabad of South Carolina and the Columbia Jewish Day School. He served as Columbia Community Co-Chair of the Jewish National Fund and was active in Jewish Federations of North America.

Anyone who met John knew that his love of baseball and jazz music were as much a part of him as his philanthropic work. In the mid-1980's, he helped organize the annual trip by the Atlanta Braves Caravan where players would visit children in area hospitals and raise money for local charities. A devoted Braves fan and avid collector of baseball memorabilia, he was a longtime supporter of the National Baseball Hall of Fame in Cooperstown, New York, where a donated portrait of his dear friend, Hall of Fame pitcher Phil Niekro, remains on display. His passion for jazz music led him to become a

radio DJ later in life, hosting "Jazz in the City with John Baker" on 92.1 FM, where he shared his deep knowledge and appreciation for the genre with listeners across the Midlands.

In 2006, John was diagnosed with Parkinson's disease, yet he never let it diminish his spirit, humor, or generosity. He continued working, mentoring, and giving back, inspiring all who knew him with his resilience.

John is survived by his wife of 34 years, Marcie Stern Baker, and their daughter, Gabbi Baker, of New York. He is also survived by his siblings Kenny Baker (Sharon), Frank Baker (Melanie), and Dale Baker, his sister- and brother-in-law Beryle and Pierre Jaffe, and many beloved nieces and nephews. He was preceded in death by his parents, JoAnn and David Baker, and his sister, Debbie Brookshire.

John's family wishes to express their deep gratitude to his longtime caregivers: John House, Leonard Bailey, Marvin Goodly, Darian Moorner, Chuck Baltimore, and John Hartley, whose unwavering support brought him comfort and dignity in his final years.

John's impact on Columbia and beyond will be felt for generations; not only in the buildings he developed, the institutions he supported, and the programs he helped build, but in the countless lives he touched through his kindness, generosity, and unwavering belief in the power of giving back.

#### HONORING CHIEF WILLIAM D. LEIGHTY'S SERVICE TO THE COMMUNITY

##### HON. LLOYD SMUCKER

OF PENNSYLVANIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, February 5, 2025

Mr. SMUCKER. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to congratulate and give thanks to William D. Leighty for his 36 years in law enforcement, selflessly serving his community.

Lancaster native William Leighty has served in law enforcement across the county. Beginning his career at the Lancaster County Sheriff's Office, he then served as a police officer with New Holland Borough and East Cocalico Township. In 1999, William Leighty became the Chief of Police of Clay Township, where he oversaw the merger of three police departments into the Northern Lancaster County Regional Police Department.

In 2017, Chief Leighty returned to New Holland law enforcement as their Chief of Police. During his tenure, he built positive community relationships through his partnerships with local nonprofits and by organizing events like National Night Out.

Once again, I want to thank Chief Leighty for his invaluable career serving and protecting Lancaster County communities. I wish him the best in his well-deserved retirement.

#### RECOGNIZING OFFICER MAURICE BYRD

##### HON. JAMES COMER

OF KENTUCKY

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, February 5, 2025

Mr. COMER. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize Officer Maurice Byrd of the Frankfort Police Department for being awarded the 2024 Medal of Merit Citation for his bravery while responding to a structure fire.

Once Officer Byrd and Officer Guevara arrived at the scene of the fire, they immediately took action to rescue a mentally disabled female trapped inside the burning structure. After finding the front door was unsafe to enter, they went to the rear of the structure and scaled a fence to reach the victim. With Officer Guevara supporting Officer Byrd, they executed a critical rescue operation by reaching through a smoke-filled window to remove the trapped female from the building moments before the structure was completely engulfed. Through successfully executing this critical rescue operation, Officer Byrd showcased great bravery in the face of distress. Their actions demonstrate the utmost professionalism and capability beyond day-to-day requirements.

Officer Byrd voluntarily performed extraordinary acts of bravery. His actions went above and beyond have made him deserving of this fine honor. I am confident that Officer Byrd will continue to serve as an exemplary role model for law enforcement officers across the 1st Congressional District and the entire Commonwealth of Kentucky.

#### RECOGNIZING THE RETIREMENT OF JANA BRIGHT MCGINNIS

##### HON. MIKE ROGERS

OF ALABAMA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, February 5, 2025

Mr. ROGERS of Alabama. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize the retirement of Jana McGinnis as Head Coach for the Jacksonville State University softball team.

Jana, a native of Spring Garden, Alabama, spent 31 years as the head coach of the Jax State softball team. She retired with a 1,038-607 career and the all-time 30th most wins among Division I coaches. That record number wins are the eighth-most-all-time by a Division I coach at the same institution and give her more games won than any coach in the university's history. Jana was a two-time All-Gulf South Conference guard in basketball at Jax State. She holds the school's career and single season assists records. After graduation, she started coaching at Cherokee County High School and within two years brought home a state title.

In 1994, she took over as head coach of the softball team at Jax State winning the Trans America Athletic Conference title in her third season and advanced to the 1996 NCAA Regional. It was the first conference title for Jax State at the Division I level in any sport.

Jana spent most of her career in the Ohio Valley Conference winning regular season or tournament championships in 11 of her 17 seasons in OVC and won both in the same season three times. She has also been named OVC Coach of the Year, a conference-record six times. The Jacksonville State University softball complex has been named Jana McGinnis Field to recognize her success over the years.

Mr. Speaker, please join me in recognizing Jana on her retirement and thanking her for her dedication and service to Jacksonville State. I congratulate Jana.