

It is appalling that while families gathered under fireworks to honor that sacrifice, the Trump administration was all too quietly forcing thousands of patriots from military service. These are Americans who have served with honor, distinction, and unshakable patriotism. They are brave, honorable, and committed patriots who have also dared to have the courage to say out loud that they are transgender. These are qualified, trained, and decorated servicemembers. They have deployed into combat, flown missions overseas, and led troops through danger.

Now, this administration is telling them that despite their qualifications and their exemplary quality of service that they can no longer serve, simply because of how they express their gender. That message is immoral, unfair, and un-American.

I represent Delaware's at-large district, a district that includes thousands, tens of thousands of Active-Duty servicemembers, veterans, and military families. In our State, service isn't abstract. It is personal. We see every single day what honor, discipline, and sacrifice looks like regardless of someone's gender identity.

These individuals met the same rigorous standards as their peers, the same physical exams, screenings, and background checks; and in many cases, under intense scrutiny, they didn't just meet those standards, they exceeded them.

Trans servicemembers are receiving glowing fitness reports and commendations. One was described by her commander as within the top 5 percent of officers I have encountered in 18 years of military service.

Another, an aviator with 60 combat missions under her belt, earned the strongest possible recommendation for promotion, and I quote her commander directly, who attested: "People thrive under her leadership."

A third, a noncommissioned officer and instructor, was called undoubtedly within the top 5 percent of NCOs I have worked with in my 22 years of service.

In a recent hearing, the Secretary of Defense even commended these patriots, only to frantically retract his praise when he decided that their being transgender, one small part of who these soldiers are, somehow outweighed their years of proven high performance and service to this country. These servicemembers were just dismissed by this administration.

The most powerful aspect of our military, the thing that makes it unique against our adversaries, is that it is a military of the people. In the United States, patriotism does not discriminate. In this country, if you are willing to serve, to fight for our core beliefs and to meet the standards, then we welcome you to stand with us, regardless of your race, religion, national origin, or any other aspect of who you are because you are an American, a patriot first.

This decision to remove proven patriots for no justification causes serious

weakness to our force. It turns away proven courage. It wastes billions in taxpayer investment, decades of hard-earned experience, and is a direct blow to readiness because this decision isn't about readiness. It is not about discipline or merit, and it is certainly not about cost.

It is about exclusion. It is about using identity as a wedge to divide and distract. It is a cynical politics, not sound policy. Our military, which should never be a political tool, is paying the price.

Across Delaware, from Georgetown to Wilmington, I have met transgender veterans who served this Nation with distinction. Some stepped forward while hiding who they were, forced to choose between their truth and their country. Others served openly when policy briefly aligned with principle. All of them served with honor.

□ 1210

Mr. Speaker, these are Americans asking to serve their country and to put their last full measure of devotion on the line, just like generations before them. The least we can do is let them.

We are not made safer by sidelining qualified patriots. We are not made stronger by narrowing the ranks of who gets to serve. We are not made freer by telling brave Americans that their truth disqualifies them from service.

This ban weakens our military. It betrays our values. It sends the cruelest possible message to some of our most dedicated citizens. It says their service is unwelcome and that one identity matters more than what they have done, what they have sacrificed, and what they fight for.

Mr. Speaker, I reject that message. I salute every transgender servicemember. I thank them. I see them. I honor them. I will not stop fighting for a country that is truly worthy of their service.

#### RECOGNIZING THE ACHIEVEMENTS OF THE ALPENA COMMUNITY COLLEGE REMOTELY OPERATED VEHICLE TEAM

(Mr. BERGMAN of Michigan was recognized to address the House for 5 minutes.)

Mr. BERGMAN. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize the extraordinary achievements of the Alpena Community College which is remotely operated and located in Alpena, Michigan, in the lower peninsula on the Sunrise Coast. The college's team is known as the Aquajacks. It is a great name, and it tells us right there what they are about.

The Alpena Community College remotely operated vehicle team, the Aquajacks, proudly represented Michigan's First Congressional District at the 2025 Marine Advanced Technology Education ROV World Championship hosted in Alpena, Michigan.

I will digress for just a couple of seconds here on what this team actually

accomplished. For those who don't know the geography of Michigan, as I put my hands up, to those looking at me, this hand is the upper peninsula of Michigan. This hand is the lower peninsula of Michigan. Alpena is located right down here in the lower peninsula on the shores of Lake Huron.

Michigan's First District, which I am blessed to represent, encompasses 48.1 percent of the landmass of Michigan and more freshwater and deepwater shoreline than any other district in the United States. The only singular district that has a larger big water shoreline is Alaska, but that is all saltwater. That is the difference. We catch different kinds of fish in those two different kinds of waters.

What we have in Michigan surrounding the lower peninsula and capping the northern border of the upper peninsula before it transitions into Canada is some of the world's, if not the world's, finest, freshest, deepest, and clearest water that is available on the face of the Earth.

We use it for good. We fish in it. We farm in it. We experiment in it. We advance our country and also other countries in the world through research and development, especially when it comes to underwater activities, whether it is mapping the bottom of the ocean or looking at cables and pipelines that go from continent to continent. All of that education and training on the front end is what is happening at Alpena Community College in my district.

We see all the smiles and happy faces of the team here. They were excited by not only competing but also winning such a prestigious award. These talented students, who both live and study in northern Michigan, showcased remarkable ingenuity, teamwork, and technical skills. They earned an impressive third-place finish against nearly 80 teams from 22 States and 18 countries.

After months of design and testing, their ROV successfully completed complex tasks, while the team impressed judges with their professional presentations and real-time strategic thinking.

Their performance is a testament to Alpena Community College's commitment to hands-on STEM education. I commend their mentor, David Cummins, and their entire faculty for fostering such excellence.

Mr. Speaker, it is with great pride that I recognize the Alpena Community College Aquajacks. These students not only represent the future of my district but also highlight the critical role that skilled innovators play in strengthening our Nation's infrastructure and advancing our national security.

#### IMPROVING COMMUNITY ZIP CODES

(Mr. COURTNEY of Connecticut was recognized to address the House for 5 minutes.)

Mr. COURTNEY. Mr. Speaker, this week we are going to be taking up legislation on H.R. 672, an act to establish new ZIP Codes for certain communities.

This measure is aimed at fixing problems in about eight communities all across the country where the post office's ZIP Code allocation system has just completely fragmented these towns and cities because of the proliferation of ZIP Codes that have occurred and been implemented in some of these towns.

It is a bipartisan bill. I am one of the bipartisan cosponsors. I represent one of those towns, which is Scotland, Connecticut, in eastern Connecticut.

Scotland, Connecticut, is a community that was established back in the 1700s. It was incorporated in the 1800s. It is a small town. The last census was 1,576 people. There are 625 residents in the town.

Mr. Speaker, it is almost hard for people to believe me when I tell them this, but it has six ZIP Codes in a community with 1,500 people. It creates havoc in terms of people doing their ordinary business through the post office.

First Selectman Dana Barrow of the town of Scotland described in a letter to the House Committee on Oversight and Reform:

"Due to the town's ZIP Code configuration, Scotland residents face daily frustration with packages being misdelivered, service providers being unable to find their properties, and digital ordering or registration systems refusing to accept their address information. But the issue goes beyond inconvenience. People have paid taxes to the wrong town and sent their children to the wrong schools. Town party committees and voluntary associations cannot effectively reach residents by mail. Public health statistics seriously understate the burden of disease in our town, and other survey data also misrepresent us. A high percentage of absentee ballot applications that we were required by law to send out . . . were returned—not because the people weren't in town, but because the USPS computer scanning system rejected their addresses. The situation is clearly damaging to us individually and as a community."

What this bill does is it just simply says for Scotland and a number of other communities that have been identified by the community that basically we are going to unify a ZIP Code for those communities so they don't have to, again, experience what Scotland First Selectman Dana Barrow described.

Last night, the post office actually sent out a letter of opposition to the bill to all Members of the House Chamber. They actually had the nerve to say that passage of this bill would significantly degrade mail service in the affected communities.

Mr. Speaker, it is hard to imagine how the mail service for the people of the town of Scotland could be any

worse than the situation that exists today where they have six ZIP Codes for a population of 1,500 people.

Luckily, we have Members of Congress like the gentleman from Florida (Mr. DIAZ-BALART) who chairs the committee and who is bringing the bill out later this week. He has the common sense to understand that the post office needs to get their act together and go into a very finite and manageable number of communities and aggregate the ZIP Codes so that people, again, can get the services they rely on.

I am a strong supporter of the post office. It is in the Constitution. It is mandated we have a Postal Service in this country. People depend on it to get their medications, to get important documents, and to receive their monthly Social Security payments.

To have a dysfunctional system that is completely self-inflicted and man-made because of the organization of the post office is just unacceptable.

Mr. Speaker, again, despite the post office's somewhat hysterical, out-of-touch opposition that they announced last night, I am here on the floor to publicly call on all my colleagues to join Mr. DIAZ-BALART from the Republican side, myself from the Democratic side, and a host of other cosponsors to get this modest and obviously commonsense bill passed and sent to the Senate and then to the President's desk.

□ 1220

#### SUPPORTING PAWS IN MOTION

(Mr. BEAN of Florida was recognized to address the House for 5 minutes.)

Mr. BEAN of Florida. Mr. Speaker, when danger strikes, it is not just about boots on the ground. It is about paws in motion.

Today, I rise in defense of those who cannot speak for themselves but serve our Nation with unmatched loyalty, discipline, and courage. I am talking about canines and horses that serve our law enforcement officers on the front line every single day.

From narcotics detection to crowd control, search and rescue to border patrol, these animals are more than sidekicks. They are trusted teammates, and just like their human handlers, they face real threats, danger, and consequences.

That is why, today, I am introducing the Leo K9 Protection Act, a straightforward bill to strengthen the penalties for those who assault or injure these animals in the line of duty.

I am proud to champion the Leo K9 Protection Act alongside the dedicated team at K9s United, whose tireless advocacy ensures that our service animals are treated not just as tools but as heroes.

Under my legislation, the Federal penalty will be up to 15 years when someone uses a deadly weapon to harm a Federal police animal. In addition, this legislation will expand the Federal

statute to apply to any State, county, or local police animal assisting a Federal agency.

The effort is not just symbolic. It is timely and necessary. Last year, 21 police canines made the ultimate sacrifice in the line of duty, including K9 Leo of Marion County, Florida, who the bill is named after and who is pictured right beside me.

Mr. Speaker, these animals run toward danger, not away from it. We owe them far more than a belly rub or a scratch behind the ears. Mr. Speaker, they fight for us. Now, it is our turn to fight for them.

Mr. Speaker, I urge my colleagues to support this critical legislation.

#### TAKING ON WNBA

(Ms. CRAIG of Minnesota was recognized to address the House for 5 minutes.)

Ms. CRAIG. Mr. Speaker, soon, the Minnesota Lynx will play the New York Liberty at home in Minneapolis.

As some Minnesotans may remember, I made a friendly wager with a New York Member of Congress last year at the beginning of the Minnesota Lynx-New York Liberty WNBA final series. That bet included that I would don a Liberty jersey and give a speech congratulating them from here on the House floor if they won the series. I would have, but I won't. Why won't I? Because the truth is that Minnesota didn't lose game five.

I was there in New York. The Liberty didn't win. The WNBA gave it to them.

Let's stop pretending that what happened in game five of the WNBA finals was just a bad call. It wasn't.

The Minnesota Lynx clawed their way through the playoffs. They defied the odds. They outworked every team and every narrative. In the final seconds of a championship game, on the biggest stage, they didn't get outplayed. They got erased.

Even from the House floor, right here in the Chamber, I can hear the New York fans protesting, but I know them well enough from Madison Square Garden that night to know that if this had happened to them, their outrage would be the same with much more colorful language.

A phantom foul, five seconds left, Alanna Smith playing legal defense on Breanna Stewart, who, let's be honest, is the league's marketing golden girl. The contact? It was embellished, marginal at worst, but the whistle blew. The game and the title were handed to New York on a silver platter.

When the Lynx challenged the call, the officials reviewed themselves. The same people who made the call decided to stand by it.

That is not accountability. That is the system protecting itself. That is the fix being called in.

Meanwhile, Napheesa Collier, the heart of the Lynx, an All-Star, a force in the paint, didn't shoot a single free throw the entire game. Now, tell me,