

New Mexico is home to a strong and proud veteran community with a deep military tradition, spanning from Holloman Air Force Base to White Sands Missile Range and from Kirtland Air Force Base to Cannon Air Force Base.

We owe it to those who have served to ensure that they can access healthcare, reliable transportation, and opportunities to succeed in civilian life.

That is why I am introducing a package of bills focused on real solutions: expanding healthcare access, improving transportation, and easing financial burdens for veterans pursuing an education.

No one understands these challenges better than my guest for the joint address, Master Sergeant Roland L. Cooper. Roland, known to many back home as “Coopdawg,” has spent years fighting for veterans in New Mexico.

As chairman of the Lincoln/Otero County Veterans Leadership Council, he has seen firsthand the barriers that rural veterans face: long travel times for medical care, unreliable transportation, and a system that too often overlooks them.

His advocacy directly shaped my New Mexico Rural Veteran Health Care Access Act, which will redraw the Veterans Integrated Service Network lines. This change will allow veterans in Otero County and Eddy County to receive care at a closer VA facility in El Paso rather than have to travel 4 hours to Albuquerque.

Access to care means little if veterans can't get there. That is why I am also introducing the Rural Veterans Transportation to Care Act, which expands transportation options for rural veterans so that no one has to miss an appointment simply because they can't afford the trip.

In rural communities across New Mexico and beyond, lack of transportation remains one of the greatest barriers to accessing healthcare. We also need to support veterans transitioning into civilian life. Education is a key part of that transition for many, but rising costs are making it harder.

The GI Bill book and supply stipend has remained at \$1,000 since 2008, even as the cost of textbooks has skyrocketed. My Veteran Education Assistance Adjustment Act will increase that stipend to \$1,400, ensuring that no veteran is forced to choose between buying books or paying their utilities or rent.

These bills were written with input from veterans who have lived these challenges. Even as we work to strengthen these resources, recent job cuts at the Department of Veterans Affairs are making access even harder.

Already, 2,400 VA employees have been dismissed. Another 1,400 were fired after them. These cuts include doctors, mental health professionals, and benefits processors. These are critical roles that veterans rely on. Behind these numbers are real people, real

consequences, and real veterans waiting longer for care.

VA employees have come forward anonymously, warning that these job cuts are affecting veterans' care and leading to many errors. Some of the people let go were even working on the veterans suicide crisis hotline.

VA services are already stretched thin. These job losses are making it worse. That is why I am proud to introduce these crucial bills and to host Roland “Coopdawg” Cooper today.

This is about the veterans in Otero County and Eddy County and all rural veterans who shouldn't have to choose between buying textbooks and paying rent or spending half a day on the road just to see a doctor for 20 minutes. It is about every veteran who has served this Nation with honor and deserves a government that stands with them, not one that makes them fight for the benefits that they have already earned.

Mr. Speaker, I urge my colleagues to support these bills. Let's ensure that veterans in my district and other rural districts across the Nation receive the care, benefits, and opportunities that they have earned because it should mean something when we say: “Thank you for your service.” It is our duty to back that up here in Congress.

RECOGNIZING THON

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Pennsylvania (Mr. THOMPSON) for 5 minutes.

Mr. THOMPSON of Pennsylvania. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize an extraordinary group of students at Penn State University for their dedication, passion, and unwavering commitment to a cause that truly changes lives.

For the past year, as Penn Staters have done for more than 50 years, these students devoted countless hours to supporting pediatric cancer patients through THON, the largest student-run philanthropic organization in the entire world.

THON is a yearlong fundraising effort culminating in a 46-hour dance marathon, providing critical financial and emotional support to more than 4,800 families battling childhood cancer.

On February 21, Penn State community students, staff, families, friends, and volunteers filled the Bryce Jordan Center for the 53rd annual THON, raising funds for the Four Diamonds foundation.

What began in 1973 as a small fundraiser organized by Penn State's fraternities and sororities, raising just \$2,000, has since grown into the largest student-run philanthropic organization in the world, with more than 16,500 student volunteers across Pennsylvania.

Since partnering with the Four Diamonds foundation in 1977, THON has ensured that not a single Four Diamonds family going through cancer treatment has received a medical bill,

thanks in large part to the tireless efforts of Penn State students.

The foundation itself was born from heartbreak and hope. Charles and Irma Millard established Four Diamonds in 1972 in honor of their son, Christopher, who had passed away from cancer at just 11 years old.

Before his passing, Christopher wrote a story about a brave knight seeking the four diamonds of courage, wisdom, honesty, and strength, qualities his parents knew were essential in the fight against cancer. In his memory, they created Four Diamonds to support families facing the same battle.

This year, from 6 p.m. on Friday, February 21, until 4 p.m. on February 23, Penn State students stood for 46 hours straight, demonstrating incredible resilience and dedication.

Mr. Speaker, the true impact goes beyond their endurance. This year, Penn State students raised a record-breaking \$17,737,040.93. This surpasses THON's 2024 record-breaking total by nearly \$800,000. To date, Penn State students have raised more than \$250 million in the fight against pediatric cancer over the last 53 years.

If my colleagues ask any Penn State student, they will be the first to say that THON isn't about them. It is about the children. It is about the families getting to celebrate birthdays, piano recitals, science fairs, graduations, and every other moment a child should experience free from the fear of cancer.

THON exists so that, one day, no parent will ever have to hear the words: “Your child has cancer.”

Mr. Speaker, I am incredibly proud of these students at my alma mater and, more importantly, of the brave children and families who fight this battle every day.

Mr. Speaker, I congratulate everyone who made THON 2025 a record-breaking success.

We Are.

PREEMINENT ANTIPOVERTY PROGRAM FOR ELDERLY AND CHILDREN

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Connecticut (Mr. LARSON) for 5 minutes.

Mr. LARSON of Connecticut. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to speak directly about the Nation's preeminent anti-poverty program for the elderly and the Nation's preeminent anti-poverty program for children. This is something that Congress and the administration need to focus on.

My colleagues can imagine how many Americans, whether they are here today or listening at home, reacted when they heard over the weekend that Elon Musk, the wealthiest man in the world, the billionaire, said that Social Security is a scam and a Ponzi scheme.

That Ponzi scheme that assists over 70 million Americans is hardly a Ponzi scheme, nor is it a scam. The real scam

is to tell the American people that you need \$2 trillion and assign that to a billionaire who has no accountability, did not have to go through Senate approval, is not a government employee, and isn't even a volunteer. Yet, he is placing his will on a Republican-led Congress in both the House and Senate.

All that is needed is three Republicans to stand up and say: No. Wait a minute. This is not what the Nation needs. We do not need to cut Social Security benefits. We need to enhance them.

Mr. Speaker, as my colleagues are aware, in the Speaker's district alone, there are 189,000 Social Security recipients who haven't received an increase in benefits in more than 50 years. There are 147,000 retirees, 20,000 disabled workers, 8,700 widows, 3,700 spouses, and over 9,000 children who are depending upon Congress to fulfill its responsibility and job.

Furthermore, a fact that most Members don't realize is that, in the Speaker's district in Minnesota, \$325 million per month goes to those Social Security recipients. It hasn't been adjusted in more than 50 years.

It is long overdue for Congress and for the citizens of this country to demand of their Congress that they take a vote to let the people know where they stand. Members should let the people know whether they are going to stand with them and the Nation's number one antipoverty program for the elderly and children or stand with Elon Musk and Trump to make sure that \$2 trillion is cut so that it can make way for further tax cuts for the Nation's wealthiest 1 percent.

At over \$500 billion, I would think Mr. Musk might say: Do you know what? This is a great Nation that has provided me these great opportunities. How about we care for them the same way this Nation has cared for us?

He won't lose a moment of sleep at night. For more than 40 million Americans, Social Security is the only benefit that they have. Whether it is in Minnesota or Connecticut, they will be losing sleep over the fact that they are worried about whether or not they are going to be able to get their benefits, the thing they rely on to put food on their table and to heat and cool their homes.

This is no extravagant item that people are asking for. This is something that they have earned and paid for. Their government continues to not act and respond the way that they should do.

Mr. Speaker, we need a vote. The Speaker owes it to his people. We owe it to ours. Let's have a vote and give these individuals the Social Security benefits that they need.

CELEBRATING 30TH ANNIVERSARY OF AMELIA ISLAND CONCOURS D'ELEGANCE

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Florida (Mr. BEAN) for 5 minutes.

Mr. BEAN of Florida. Mr. Speaker, the king of auto racing, Richard Petty, was once asked when the first car race was. He replied: The day they made the second car.

Mr. Speaker, America is in love with the automobile, and nothing celebrates that better than The Amelia. It started 30 years ago in northeast Florida as the Amelia Island Concours d'Elegance. This year, it celebrates its 30th anniversary with hundreds of exceptional vehicles descending on Amelia Island, Florida, to delight car lovers of all ages.

Mr. Speaker, I don't know how they do it, but it seems they top themselves each year, and The Amelia is definitely going to be one of the best this year.

In the words of their vice chairman, Matt Orendac: History comes to life on the fairways at The Amelia, where enthusiasts are guaranteed to discover new automobile stories and personalities.

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This year, one of the four drivers to win the Indy 500 for a record four times, including the most recent driver to do so, Helio Castroneves, will be the Amelia's 2025 honoree.

Mr. Speaker, attendees this year will ooh and ahh over 500 unique and specialized automobiles and enjoy seminars, auctions, films, ride and drives, dinners and parties, and, of course, the crowning jewel of the Amelia, Sunday's Concours d'Elegance.

At the core of the event every year, Mr. Speaker, is a commitment to give back to the community. The Amelia has donated a whopping \$4 million to local charities and continues to have an incredible \$30 million economic impact annually on Amelia Island and all of northeast Florida.

Mr. Speaker, nothing can compare to the automobile wonder of the Amelia, and it is an event that I am proud to host in my district. I wish them a hearty congratulations on their 30th anniversary. Here is to the next 30 years.

Mr. Speaker, let the show begin.

HONORING A DECORATED GREEN BERET, ARMY SERGEANT FIRST CLASS MELVIN MORRIS

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Florida (Mr. HARIDOPOLOS) for 5 minutes.

Mr. HARIDOPOLOS. Mr. Speaker, today, I rise to honor a resident of Cocoa, Florida, a true American hero and decorated Green Beret, Army Sergeant First Class Melvin Morris. His extraordinary courage in Vietnam reflects the very best of our Nation's values.

In 1969, while leading his Special Forces team, then-Staff Sergeant Morris braved relentless enemy fire to recover a fallen comrade and safeguard classified information for our country.

Despite being shot many times, he fought through enemy positions, ensur-

ing his mission's success. For his valor, he received the Distinguished Service Cross, but history had more to say.

Decades later, a review of military records rightfully upgraded his honor.

In 2014, he was awarded the Medal of Honor, recognizing the courage and sacrifice that may have been overlooked for too long.

Sergeant Morris' service did not end in combat. He continued to inspire future generations, reminding us that a nation must always recognize its heroes.

Mr. Speaker, today, I salute Sergeant First Class Melvin Morris and his unwavering dedication to duty.

HONORING THE LIFE OF ALAN HOLMES STAHL

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Georgia (Mr. CARTER) for 5 minutes.

Mr. CARTER of Georgia. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to honor the life of Mr. Alan Holmes Stahl, a man of service, dedication, and unwavering love for his family.

Born in 1926 in Winthrop, Massachusetts, he enlisted in the Navy at the age of 17, serving aboard the USS *LST-875* and USS *LST-900* during World War II.

After his honorable discharge in 1946, he attended Oklahoma State University and married the love of his life, Barbara Jane Todd.

Together, they raised two children in Savannah, Georgia, and welcomed three cherished grandchildren.

Alan built a successful career with AT&T, retiring at 55 to dedicate his time to community service. He was deeply involved in volunteer work, serving his church, local organizations, and the Bradford Public Library.

A man of strong values and undeniable sense of humor, he brought joy to all who knew him. Known for his kindness, wit, and love for bourbon and chocolate, he left an unforgettable mark on his family and his community. His legacy of generosity, humor, and service will live on in those he inspired.

CELEBRATING 25TH ANNIVERSARY OF WOODBINE OPRY

Mr. CARTER of Georgia. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to congratulate the Woodbine Opry on its 25th anniversary and to celebrate its legacy of old-time music and community gatherings.

The Woodbine Opry is located in Woodbine, Georgia, and is one of the longest running, free live music venues in the State of Georgia. The Woodbine Opry has provided bluegrass, gospel, and classic country music to southeast Georgia for the last 25 years, ever since it renovated the Old Woodbine School to house the venue.

Even though the auditorium in the Old Woodbine School seats less than 200 patrons, the Opry's live streams and social media pages have 15,000 to 20,000 viewers each month from music lovers all over the Nation and the world.