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House of Representatives

The House met at 10 a.m. and was called to order by the Speaker pro tempore (Mrs. MILLER of Illinois).

DESIGNATION OF SPEAKER PRO TEMPORE

The SPEAKER pro tempore laid before the House the following communication from the Speaker:

WASHINGTON, DC,
March 5, 2025.

I hereby appoint the Honorable MARY E. MILLER to act as Speaker pro tempore on this day.

MIKE JOHNSON,
Speaker of the House of Representatives.

MORNING-HOUR DEBATE

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the order of the House of January 3, 2025, the Chair will now recognize Members from lists submitted by the majority and minority leaders for morning-hour debate.

The Chair will alternate recognition between the parties, with time equally allocated between the parties and each Member other than the majority and minority leaders and the minority whip limited to 5 minutes, but in no event shall debate continue beyond 11:50 a.m.

VIRGIN ISLANDS HISTORY MONTH

(Ms. PLASKETT of the Virgin Islands was recognized to address the House for 5 minutes.)

Ms. PLASKETT. Madam Speaker, today I rise to recognize the history of my home, the Virgin Islands of the United States.

March is Virgin Islands History Month, and I thought I would take this time to enlighten you as to the significance and the unique history, Madam Speaker, that informs my work here in Congress every day representing my ancestral home, the home of my family

for over 300 years, the U.S. Virgin Islands.

Officially, the Virgin Islands has flown seven flags over 500 years. Since 1917, the American Stars and Stripes have been proudly flown over our islands.

Previously, the Virgin Islands were a Danish possession, a hub of the slave-powered sugar industry. We were owned by Denmark, what is now considered to be home to the happiest people on Earth. Much of that happiness is based off the purchase by the United States of what was then the Danish West Indies in 1917 for \$25 million in gold bullion, which was able to move Denmark from a recession and depression into what we see now.

Those same people, those happiest people, still have not been able to say that the chattel slavery they were involved in, the great sugar-powered industry that they had on our islands, was based on something nefarious.

Before the Danes, the Spanish came for gold, the Dutch came to trade, the English came to raid, and the Knights of Malta came to control. Oh, and the French came, as well. They built a colony with extractive expectations only to watch the population die off from disease.

I have introduced legislation over 10 years as the Virgin Islands Delegate to Congress to directly reflect this history in an attempt to secure the place of the Virgin Islands history in the American consciousness and to enshrine the legacy's intangible articles of remembrances, which will allow the next generation of Americans raised in the Virgin Islands to know the history of their people and their Nation.

We enacted legislation to commemorate the 1733 slave rebellion on St. John, the first rebellion in the Western Hemisphere, and the mass suicide sacrifice which took place on the cliffs of Ram Head on St. John.

We passed legislation into law to designate St. Croix, the island of my par-

ents' birth, as a National Heritage Area. I championed legislation to recognize the historic significance of the self-emancipation of enslaved people of the Danish West Indies and to remember our 175th anniversary which just passed.

The territorial tax bills I have introduced are critical and will address longstanding issues and compensate for historic disadvantages, as well as to create jobs and middle-class incomes.

I came home in 2004 because there was a need for more lawyers, accountants, and architects because of the influx of other businesses in the Virgin Islands. We want to ensure that the worst thing that is happening to us now, our brain drain, is reversed.

To remedy the unintended results of historically inequitable provisions, since the 117th Congress, I have introduced legislation to place the territories on par with other States, which is not intended to favor the issue of status in any of the U.S. territories.

Every single power whose flag flew over our lands knew, no matter what the century, that the fertile lands of the Virgin Islands were in a geographic place of incredible strategic importance.

Since 1917, the Virgin Islands has been the most southern and most eastern point of the sovereign United States. From pirates, privateers, traders, and now drug dealers, gunrunners, oil refiners, transshipments, armadas, and naval submarines, all understood that the Virgin Islands had a strategic value, and this was deeply understood by the American military.

Lincoln's William Seward, who was the Secretary of State, wanted to purchase the Virgin Islands even back during the Civil War. He recognized its strategic importance to the United States, and our purchase in 1917, of course, was because of World War I and the fear of German submarines in the area.

□ This symbol represents the time of day during the House proceedings, e.g., □ 1407 is 2:07 p.m.

Matter set in this typeface indicates words inserted or appended, rather than spoken, by a Member of the House on the floor.



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There is so much more to discuss and that I want to share with Members about DiasporaLink and the National Defense Authorization Acts. Let's remember that everyone has a history, we should not forget that history, and let us celebrate it as we move forward.

YOSEMITE BELONGS TO THE PEOPLE

(Mr. MCCLINTOCK of California was recognized to address the House for 5 minutes.)

Mr. MCCLINTOCK. Mr. Speaker, a well-known bureaucratic response to any attempt to reduce government spending is called the Washington Monument strategy. If anybody suggests cutting the budget, then just shut down the Washington Monument until enough tourists complain to their Congressman.

We saw this strategy implemented with a vengeance during the government shutdown under Obama. All reservations at the national parks were canceled. Vendors were ordered to close, perishable deliveries were turned back, The National Mall was cordoned off, gates to the national parks were chained, and even highway turnouts with a view of Yosemite Valley were barricaded.

Now, compare that to the government shutdown in the first Trump administration. Vendors remained in business, the public lands remained fully open to the public, no monuments were obstructed, no barricades were erected, and the gates to the national parks remained fully accessible.

Today, opponents of President Trump's war on government waste have revived the Washington Monument strategy to maintain a bloated Federal workforce that is crushing American taxpayers. Every dollar of discretionary spending, which fully or partially funds every department within the Federal Government, is now borrowed. Instead of long-overdue streamlining, the Democrats are pushing for a tax increase that will amount to about \$1,500 on a family earning just \$75,000.

At Yosemite National Park, in my district, disgruntled employees hung a giant American flag upside-down on El Capitan the other day, ruining the view for tourists who came to enjoy Yosemite's famous firefall. Remote cameras at the park are now blocked by protest signs. A Yosemite biologist told glib reporters that the staff cuts would doom the Sierra Nevada red fox to extinction. Others warned that layoffs would result in visitors stuck in restrooms and fires raging out of control.

This is human sacrifice, dogs and cats living together, mass hysteria, as a "Ghostbusters" character once put it.

What is the actual number of layoffs at Yosemite National Park that will bring the beautiful valley to rack and ruin?

Mr. Speaker, 10, the number is 10 probationary employees, 10 out of nearly

500 full-time winter employees, 25 if you include early retirements and no firefighters.

This begs some important questions: Is the park so poorly managed that only one employee has keys to the restrooms serving the 748,000-acre national park?

Apparently.

□ 1015

How will the Sierra Nevada red fox survive with only eight remaining biologists at Yosemite looking out for it rather than nine? I guess we will just have to find out.

How many of Yosemite's employees are working from home? We don't know because the park management won't tell us. We do know that 34 percent of National Park Service employees across the country were still working from home in 2023. Need to find the nearest unlocked restroom? Just email them.

Indeed, the employees who provide most of the visitor amenities, such as the hotels, shops, and restaurants, don't even work for the Park Service. They work for the park's private concessionaire.

It is true that hiring seasonal employees was delayed for a few weeks when the administration put a temporary hold on new hires, but that hold was soon lifted. These positions will actually increase by about 50.

More than a decade ago, when I first met with park management, I noticed a placard in the conference room. It read: Is it good for the park?

I suggested that was the wrong question. The right question is: Is it good for the park's visitors?

It is a matter of attitude.

The Yosemite Grant Act of 1864 was the first time that land was set aside for the use, resort, and recreation of the American people. It says nothing about the park's employees. They work for the people, who, in turn, have selected Donald Trump to exercise the executive powers of the government and charged him to take care that the laws be faithfully executed. He can't do that if he can't open the books, look at where the money is spent, and determine whether it is being spent efficiently and in accordance with the law or stop it when it isn't.

The antics of some of Yosemite's employees dishonor the silent majority at the park, who are genuinely devoted to public service.

As Hamilton said: "Here, sir, the people govern."

All 2.4 million employees in the Federal workforce exercise powers delegated by the President through our Constitution by virtue of his election. Any Federal employee who doesn't respect the authority of the people and the President they elected has no business working for them.

HONORING KEVIN G. BANES

(Mr. KENNEDY of New York was recognized to address the House for 5 minutes.)

Mr. KENNEDY of New York. Mr. Speaker, I rise today with a heavy heart to honor the life and legacy of my friend, Kevin G. Banes, a man whose kindness, passion, and unwavering dedication to others made this world a better place.

A cherished member of communities in both Buffalo and Albany, Kevin's journey began in South Buffalo, a tight-knit neighborhood where he would learn the value of hard work and the importance of giving back to his community.

Kevin would go on to attend Bishop Timon-St. Jude High School, where he built friendships that lasted a lifetime. He later earned his B.A. in communications from the University at Buffalo and a master's in public relations from the University at Albany.

Kevin had a unique ability to make everyone feel valued. Whether family, friends, colleagues, or strangers, he greeted each person with kindness, respect, and a genuine heart. His presence had a way of bringing people together, forging bonds that transcended time and circumstance.

Kevin didn't just build relationships. He built bridges. He connected with people, not just on a personal level but in a way that inspired action and change. He wasn't content in simply understanding the struggles of others. He made them his own, fighting tirelessly on their behalf at the State capitol.

Kevin was a steadfast champion for those who needed a voice. He knew that real advocacy wasn't just about policy, but it was about people and about making sure that every individual, no matter their circumstances, had the support and opportunity that they deserved.

Kevin's legacy is one of action, impact, and an unwavering belief in the power of community. His advocacy wasn't simply his job, but it was his calling.

Kevin poured his heart into the causes closest to him, championing the Special Olympics, Wildwood Programs, and Deaf Adult Services, not just with words but with relentless effort, strategic thinking, and an unshakable determination to deliver results. He knew how to navigate the complexities of government, how to bring people together, and how to turn passion into progress.

Kevin's work was never about personal recognition, but it was always about lifting others up.

The impact he made will continue to be felt in the countless lives he touched, the coalitions he built, and the relationships he nurtured with such dedication and compassion. His work set a standard for what advocacy looks like, one rooted in empathy, persistence, and commitment to making the world a better, fairer place for everyone.

Kevin is survived by his mother, Kathleen Banes; brother Jeffrey and