

survived by her niece, Michelle Burch, and her great-nieces, Yasmin Woodard and Mikaela Woodard. Avel grew up in Northeast Portland, where the seeds of her activism were sown early by her mother and father, her grandmothers Alberta Randolph and Lessie Gordly, and by the women in her community.

Avel was committed to building, serving, and celebrating the Beloved Community, a central tenet of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr's leadership. A few weeks ago, Avel said she wanted to be remembered as a Brown Girl from Northeast Portland who believed in justice, hard work, and taking care of each other. At every stage of her remarkable life of service, Avel communicated what she believed through well-chosen words and through how she showed up for others. In the Oregon Legislature, with her students at Portland State University, in her faith community, in her many mentoring relationships and friendships, Avel conveyed what a former legislative colleague described as "a moral clarity" and what one mentee described as "a warm embrace."

After graduating from her neighborhood elementary school, Avel attended Girls Polytechnic High School. As one of the few Black students, this was her first experience of being in an environment that did not welcome her presence, actively encourage her learning, or value her intellect. She felt the contrast between the warmth and affirmation of her early years in Portland's Black community and her experience in a mostly white environment. It was during these years that Avel became aware of racism and developed ways to succeed despite ever-present barriers to achievement. Although she felt like an "alien, in unwelcome territory" at Girls Polytechnic High School, with her mother's help, Avel resisted being steered into vocational education classes and instead enrolled in academic and business courses. Her advocacy and preparation led to her first job after high school at Pacific Northwest Bell. Even though it was a good job with benefits, Avel was eager to work for the betterment of her community. She enrolled at Portland State University, where she was active in Black Cultural Affairs and the Black Liberation movement while earning a degree in the Administration of Justice. While at Portland State, she participated in Operation Crossroads Africa, student exchange program that brought her to Nigeria, Benin, Togo, the Ivory Coast, and Ghana. This trip to Africa was transformational, broadening her horizons as she experienced life outside of the United States in countries where she was no longer a minority. This was the beginning of her love of African history and culture. Her reverence for Black history and culture was reflected in the art and books she collected and shared throughout her life.

Returning to Oregon, Avel continued her advocacy. As a member of the Oregon Chapter of the Black United Front (BUF), she coordinated the BUF's Saturday School. Working with the American Friends Service Committee (AFSC), Avel helped secure key anti-apartheid victories in Oregon and during the 1980s and ran programs for the Urban League and the House of Umoja to provide opportunities for youth in North and Northeast Portland.

Avel's entry into political life came at the urging of those in her community and felt like an extension of work to which she was already committed. As someone who did not seek the limelight, she learned the power of well-prepared, respectful, and clear communication to change minds, hearts, and, importantly, laws. Initially appointed as a State representative in 1991, Avel was subsequently elected to serve three terms in the

Oregon Legislature. As an elected official, she focused on building relationships with her colleagues on both sides of the aisle and statewide. As she gained confidence and realized the power of her voice, she modeled both courage and vulnerability in her leadership. These qualities made her a trustworthy and valued colleague in the Legislature and in the Black Community.

In 1996, Avel was elected to the Oregon State Senate and became the first Black Woman to serve in that chamber. She was known as the "conscience of the Senate" because of her integrity and the mutual respect she shared with her colleagues. During her twelve years in the Senate, she made an indelible mark on Oregon. She sponsored the 2001 Senate Joint Resolution 31, which officially recognized Juneteenth in Oregon. She was the chief petitioner in 2002 for Oregon Ballot Measure 14, a constitutional amendment that removed racially discriminatory language from the Oregon Constitution, and for Measure 25, which raised Oregon's minimum wage. She brought a statewide focus on the health concerns of Oregon's Black, Indigenous, Latino, and Asian communities by forming the Racial and Ethnic Health Task Force and the Environmental Justice Committee. Her personal experiences and legislative acumen spurred her push for State Hospital Reform and to establish the Avel Gordly Center for Healing at Oregon Health and Science University to help address the gaps in access to mental health services in the Black community.

After retiring from the legislature, Avel began teaching as an associate professor in the Black Studies Department at Portland State. Pouring into students' lives and curating learning opportunities that connected them to Portland's Black community and to national and international movements inspired her. In 2011, she co-authored, with Patricia A Schechter, her memoir, *Remembering the Power of Words*, where she courageously opened up about her experiences of depression. She received an honorary Doctor of Letters from Portland State University in 2017. Avel participated in the African American Alliance and sat on the board of the Portland African American Leadership Forum. She generously offered her thoughts on political strategy and endorsed candidates. She was committed to mentoring emerging Black leaders and encouraging them to shine. Her commitment to supporting generations of new leaders has been institutionalized in the Avel Gordly Scholarship for Black Women. She valued her lifelong friends and the close, loving relationships she nurtured with women of the next two generations, who lovingly called her "Mama Avel." The love she gave and received from her community filled her heart with joy. She was a loving aunt, great-aunt, and an honorary grandmother. She was gratified to spend her final years with her son Tyrone, enjoying morning coffees, healing conversations, and prayer times together.

Avel's life and legacy teach us that in alignment with one's divine purpose, ordinary people can make an extraordinary difference in changing institutions, healing lives, and making the world a better place.

HONORING JASMINE BARNES, CPA

**HON. BENNIE G. THOMPSON**

OF MISSISSIPPI

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

*Thursday, March 12, 2026*

Mr. THOMPSON of Mississippi. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize Ms. Jasmine

Barnes, CPA, a financial strategist, senior audit leader, and civic servant whose work exemplifies integrity, accountability, and service to the public good. With more than a decade of experience across public accounting, financial institutions, and state government, Ms. Barnes has earned distinction for translating complex financial data into actionable insight that strengthens governance and protects taxpayer resources.

Ms. Barnes currently serves as Deputy Director of Internal Audit at the Mississippi Department of Transportation, where she oversees federally funded transportation programs, indirect cost compliance, overhead rate reviews, and multimodal project closeouts. Her leadership ensures cost allowability under federal regulations, reinforces audit integrity, and safeguards public funding across complex state and federal initiatives. She has completed hundreds of compliance reviews and routinely analyzes legislative measures impacting transportation finance and audit oversight.

In addition to her public service, Ms. Barnes is the Founder and Principal of J Barnes CPA, PLLC, where she advises individuals, businesses, and nonprofit organizations on tax resolution, compliance strategy, and financial systems improvement. Through negotiated settlements and proactive planning, she has secured more than \$110,000 in cumulative client savings while helping organizations build sustainable, compliant financial operations.

Previously, Ms. Barnes held senior audit roles at Trustmark Bank and HORNE LLP, where she led internal, external, and compliance audits, conducted risk assessments, and strengthened regulatory preparedness across financial institutions while mentoring emerging professionals.

In 2025, Ms. Barnes entered the political arena, securing the Democratic nomination for Jackson City Council, Ward 1, on a five-pillar platform centered on fiscal responsibility, infrastructure, public safety, economic development, and recreation. Her campaign marked a historic milestone for Ward 1 and highlighted her commitment to principled, solutions-oriented leadership.

Ms. Barnes is a 2024 Mississippi Business Journal Top 40 Under 40 honoree and a recipient of the 2025 American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials Dave G. Campbell Quality Award. She is a graduate of the University of Mississippi and is currently pursuing her Executive MBA at Millsaps College.

Beyond her professional achievements, Ms. Barnes remains deeply committed to mentorship, financial literacy, and educational engagement. She is a proud parent to her two sons, Kingston and Atlas, and believes that policy, professionalism, and purpose must work together to build stronger communities.

Mr. Speaker, I am honored to recognize Ms. Jasmine Barnes, CPA, for her exceptional service, leadership, and dedication to the people of Mississippi. Her work reflects the high standard of public stewardship our communities deserve.

RECOGNIZING ST. JOHN THE  
APOSTLE CATHOLIC SCHOOL

**HON. BETH VAN DUYNÉ**

OF TEXAS

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

*Thursday, March 12, 2026*

Ms. VAN DUYNÉ. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize the students and faculty of St. John the Apostle Catholic School in North Richland Hills, Texas for their participation in our 2026 Valentines for Veterans program.

Through this initiative, students created more than 35 Valentine's Day cards for veterans in our North Texas community, sharing encouragement, appreciation, and heartfelt support with those who have served. Their commitment to honoring our heroes helped make this project a tremendous success, contributing to over 1,800 Valentine's Day cards received by our office.

This outpouring of kindness reflects the deep gratitude for our veterans that remains strong throughout North Texas.

The creativity and compassion demonstrated by these students are a testament to the caring spirit present throughout their school. I commend them for their generosity and community involvement and thank them for helping make this year's Valentines for Veterans program so meaningful. It is an honor to represent them in Texas' 24th District.

CONGRATULATING WESTWOOD  
HIGH SCHOOL

**HON. JOE WILSON**

OF SOUTH CAROLINA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

*Thursday, March 12, 2026*

Mr. WILSON of South Carolina. Mr. Speaker, I am grateful to recognize Blythewood's Westwood High School boys' basketball team, "The Redhawks," as they defeated Greenville High School in the 2026 Class 5A Division II South Carolina High School League (SCHSL) State Championship. This marks the first basketball State Championship in team history.

The game was played on March 5, 2026, at Colonial Life Arena in Columbia, where Westwood celebrated a 67–55 win. The win finished off their record at 25–3 for the season.

The Westwood High team includes players Jayden Crews, Cylan McLeod, Quentin McGill, Jayven McClain, D'Marcus Thomas, Daytron Cockfield, Bryson Hardy, Desmond Grant, AJ Veal, Jesse Omeire, Jahlil Jenkins, Tristen Hudson, Jaylen Donaldson, Ariel Huell, and Chase Marshall. Alongside the players are talented coaches Trent Robinson and DeMonte Jacobs, as well as Statistician, Jessie Townsend.

On behalf of all South Carolinians, I congratulate the Westwood High Redhawks on this impressive achievement and I wish them the best of luck as they defend their title in the upcoming season. This victory of the Westwood High Redhawks is well-deserved for the team, coaches, families, and community for all their hard work and support, making their dream come true.

HONORING THE MIAMI CHAPTER  
OF JACK AND JILL OF AMERICA,  
INC.

**HON. FREDERICA S. WILSON**

OF FLORIDA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

*Thursday, March 12, 2026*

Ms. WILSON of Florida. Mr. Speaker, from the 24th district of the great state of Florida, I rise today to recognize the Miami Chapter of Jack and Jill of America, Inc., on the occasion of their 60th anniversary of leadership, service, and cultural awareness. I include in the RECORD the following Proclamation:

Whereas, the Miami Chapter of Jack and Jill of America, Inc. has been a cornerstone of leadership, service, and cultural awareness throughout Miami-Dade County for the past 60 years, fostering the growth and development of African American children and their families; and

Whereas, since its founding in 1964 under the leadership of Geraldine Arrington, the Miami Chapter has grown to represent 47 families and 71 children, aged 2 to 19 years old, with a mission to stimulate and implement the educational growth of Jack and Jill children through the organized efforts of their parents; and

Whereas, the Miami Chapter has been actively involved in public service, hosting regional and national conferences, implementing impactful programs, and supporting critical social causes, including partnerships with organizations like the NAACP and initiatives addressing community needs; and

Whereas, the chapter's legacy includes decades of leadership development for its youth, extensive community outreach projects, and active participation in national programs of Jack and Jill of America, Inc., embodying its mission to nurture future leaders; and

Whereas, nationally, Jack and Jill of America, Inc., founded in 1938, encompasses 271 chapters and more than 50,000 family members dedicated to advancing opportunities for African American children, fostering cultural pride, and promoting community service; and

Whereas, the Miami Chapter continues to build on its proud legacy under the current leadership of President Anetra Poindexter, culminating in the celebration of its 60th Diamond Anniversary during the 2024–2025 program year; and Now, therefore, be it

*Resolved*, That I, Frederica S. Wilson, a member of the United States House of Representatives, representing the 24th Congressional District of Florida, recognize that the Miami Chapter of Jack and Jill of America, Inc. is commended for 60 years of exemplary service and leadership in our community. We honor the chapter's commitment to enriching lives, empowering families, and cultivating a brighter future for all.

RECOGNIZING CENTRAL HIGH  
SCHOOL

**HON. BETH VAN DUYNÉ**

OF TEXAS

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

*Thursday, March 12, 2026*

Ms. VAN DUYNÉ. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize the students and faculty of Central High School in Keller, Texas for their participation in our 2026 Valentines for Veterans program.

Through this initiative, Student Council members created more than 55 Valentine's

Day cards for veterans in our North Texas community, sharing encouragement, appreciation, and heartfelt support with those who have served. Their commitment to honoring our heroes helped make this project a tremendous success, contributing to over 1,800 Valentine's Day cards received by our office.

This outpouring of kindness reflects the deep gratitude for our veterans that remains strong throughout North Texas.

The creativity and compassion demonstrated by these students are a testament to the caring spirit present throughout their school. I commend them for their generosity and community involvement and thank them for helping make this year's Valentines for Veterans program so meaningful. It is an honor to represent them in Texas' 24th District.

RECOGNIZING MENTAL HEALTH  
AMERICA OF LANCASTER COUNTY  
FOR 70 YEARS OF SERVICE

**HON. LLOYD SMUCKER**

OF PENNSYLVANIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

*Thursday, March 12, 2026*

Mr. SMUCKER. Mr. Speaker, I rise to honor and recognize Mental Health America of Lancaster County for reaching a milestone 70 years of service.

This 70-year anniversary marks the foundation of the Mental Health Association of Lancaster County in 1956, after the Community Service Association, the Visiting Nurse Association, Lancaster Medical Group, representatives from nearby schools and courts, and the Psychology Department at Franklin & Marshall College collaborated to establish a mental health clinic. The purpose was twofold: to provide accessible mental health care, and to promote public understanding of mental illnesses.

The organization became an independent affiliate of Mental Health America in 1977 and changed their name to Mental Health America of Lancaster County in 2007. They provide peer advocacy services, assist those dealing with financial barriers to care, educate the public on mental health, and much more. These programs are made possible through the generous Lancaster community, which has provided financial support, volunteer efforts, and partnership.

Mental wellness affects everyone, and Mental Health America of Lancaster County has long played an important role in supporting the wellbeing of our community. As the organization celebrates its 70th anniversary, I extend my appreciation to its leaders and staff for their dedicated service and lasting contributions to Lancaster County. I wish them another 70 years of continued success.

RECOGNIZING GRAPEVINE FAITH  
CHRISTIAN SCHOOL

**HON. BETH VAN DUYNÉ**

OF TEXAS

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

*Thursday, March 12, 2026*

Ms. VAN DUYNÉ. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize the students and faculty of