

HONORING THE LIFE AND LEGACY
OF THE HONORABLE RUSSELL
THOMAS, JR., FORMER MAYOR
OF AMERICUS, GEORGIA

HON. SANFORD D. BISHOP, JR.

OF GEORGIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, July 21, 2026

Mr. BISHOP. Mr. Speaker, I rise today with a heavy heart, but with profound gratitude, to honor the life and legacy of one of Southwest Georgia's most devoted public servants, the Honorable Russell Thomas, Jr., former Mayor of Americus, Georgia, who departed this life on Wednesday, July 8, 2026, at the age of 91. A memorial service celebrating his extraordinary life will be held on Tuesday, July 21, 2026, at Americus First Methodist Church, with Reverend Tom Dowdy and Reverend Daryl Brown officiating.

Russell Thomas, Jr. was born in Baltimore, Maryland, on November 22, 1934, to Dr. Russell Thomas and Margaret Camp Thomas. In 1939, the family returned to Dr. Thomas's hometown of Americus, and from that day forward, Russell Thomas and Americus, Georgia belonged to one another. He graduated from Americus High School in 1952, earned a degree in Agricultural Management from Auburn University, where he was a member of Phi Delta Theta fraternity, and completed his military service as a medic in the United States Army Reserve.

Mayor Thomas built his career in agriculture and forestry, owning Thomas Farms, Inc. with his family and founding or co-owning Americus Creosote Company, T&T Logging, and Georgia Forest Products. But to Russell Thomas, the land was never merely a business. Long before conservation of the longleaf pine ecosystem became a national cause, he was protecting the native longleaf stands at Thomas Farms, quietly practicing the belief that productive timber management and wildlife conservation should go hand in hand. He was a steward in the oldest and truest sense of the word—a man who understood that we do not really own the land; we hold it in trust for our children.

The people of Americus first elected Russell Thomas, Jr. as their Mayor in November 1979, and he served from 1980 to 1988. They called him back in 1993, and he served again from 1994 to 2001—fifteen years in all of steady, visionary, and selfless leadership. In his first term, he worked with the City Council to confront substandard housing and expand housing opportunity. He would later join with Millard Fuller and Habitat for Humanity on the Sumter County Initiative, an audacious campaign to eliminate substandard housing in Americus and Sumter County—a partnership that helped make our corner of Georgia a beacon to the world for what neighbors can accomplish when they take up hammers and hope together.

Mayor Thomas may be best remembered for leading the multi-year effort to restore the historic Windsor Hotel. When many said the grand old landmark could not be saved, Russell Thomas simply refused to give up—and today the Windsor stands as the crown jewel of downtown Americus, a monument in brick and mortar to one man's stubborn faith in his hometown. He was likewise instrumental in the restoration of the Rylander Theatre, estab-

lishing it as the center of the performing arts in Americus, for which he received the Lifetime Friend of the Rylander Award in 2016. Under his leadership, in 2000, Americus was designated one of the first ten Georgia Cities of Excellence. In 1994, in recognition of his public service, the City of Americus named its public safety building the Russell Thomas, Jr. Public Safety Building—an honor rarely bestowed upon the living and richly deserved.

His service extended far beyond City Hall. He served on the Americus Board of Education from 1972 to 1980; as chairman of the Sumter County Board of Tax Assessors from 1976 to 1980; on the board of directors of The Charles L. Mix Memorial Fund, including more than twenty years as its chairman; on the South Georgia Technical College Foundation Board of Trustees; and on the governing board of the Rosalynn Carter Institute at Georgia Southwestern State University. Elected to the Board of Directors of Citizens Bank of Americus in 1985, he served as Chairman of the Board from 1985 to 1999—a period in which the bank was rated the number one community bank in Georgia—and remained on the board until 2025, serving his community's financial wellbeing across five decades.

Mr. Speaker, the record of offices held, and buildings restored tells us what Russell Thomas did. But it does not tell us who he was. Who he was could be found in his office at the back of the old Americus Hardware Store—another of his renovations—where, long past the age when most men retire, friends and neighbors stopped by daily to talk politics, business, and the affairs of the town he loved. Who he was could be found in his backyard, where this former mayor and bank chairman raised tomatoes and waged a good-natured annual contest with the backyard animals to see who could reach the ripe ones first. And who he was could be found riding the dirt backroads of Thomas Farms in his old Tahoe, with his faithful dog Barnabas at his side.

It is said that throughout his life, and in its most difficult times, Russell found solace and peace driving those backroads. And Mr. Speaker, I would ask my colleagues to sit with that image for a moment. Here was a man who buried a beloved wife, Andrea, after forty-five years of marriage; a man who bore the deepest grief a parent can know in the loss of his son, Russell, III; a man who carried the weight of a city on his shoulders for fifteen years. And when the sorrows came—as they come to every life—he did not grow bitter, and he did not withdraw from the people. He drove out to the land, under the longleaf pines he had protected, with his dog beside him, and he made his peace—and then he came back to his beloved Americus, and went back to work, and kept on serving. That quiet resilience, that faithfulness that outlasted heartbreak, is the truest measure of the man, and it is the inheritance he leaves to all of us who remain.

Russell Thomas, Jr. was preceded in death by his beloved wife, Andrea Patterson Thomas; his son, Russell Thomas, III; his parents, Dr. Russell Thomas and Margaret Camp Thomas; his sister, Margaret T. Sullivan; and his brothers, Frank Gordon Thomas and John Laurence Thomas. He leaves to cherish his memory his children, Mary Frances "Mimi" Thomas, Anne Camp Thomas, Beth Thomas Cheek (James), and John Braxton Thomas; his daughter-in-law, Angie Ballard Thomas;

eight grandchildren: ten great-grandchildren; and a host of nieces, nephews, cousins, stepchildren, extended family, and friends who loved him dearly.

Mr. Speaker, the Scriptures teach us in Matthew 25:21, "Well done, thou good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord." Russell Thomas, Jr. was faithful—faithful to his family, faithful to his land, faithful to his hometown, and faithful to the God he served. On behalf of my wife, Vivian and the more than 765,000 residents of Georgia's 2nd Congressional District, I extend my deepest condolences to the Thomas family, and I ask my colleagues to join me in honoring the life, the legacy, and the extraordinary public service of the Honorable Russell Thomas, Jr.—Mayor, steward, builder, and friend—a good and faithful servant who has entered into the joy of his Lord.

HONORING THE LIFE AND SERVICE
OF ELLEN MARIE IKE

HON. JOSEPH D. MORELLE

OF NEW YORK

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, July 21, 2026

Mr. MORELLE. Mr. Speaker, I rise to honor the life and service of Ellen Marie Ike—more commonly known on Capitol Hill as Ms. Ellen—a Lead Teacher at the House of Representatives Child Care Center, who tragically passed away on June 13, 2026, at the age of 61.

For nearly a decade, Ms. Ellen cared for children from across the Capitol Hill community. Members and staff left their sons and daughters with her in the morning and went to work on the people's business, secure in the knowledge that their children were safe and loved. She returned that trust every day and was recognized repeatedly for the excellence of her service.

A native of Hartford, Connecticut, Ms. Ellen earned a scholarship to Livingstone College in North Carolina, where she sang in the Concert Choir and joined the Delta Sigma Theta Sorority. Her career began in retail, but her years teaching Sunday school made clear that early childhood education was her calling. After operating her own home-based daycare and teaching at other schools across the Washington metropolitan area, she joined the House Child Care Center in 2018, where she remained until her death.

An early childhood teacher shapes a person at the age when shaping matters most. Ms. Ellen spent the last nine years of her life doing that work in the shadow of the Capitol, for the families of the people who serve here—much of it through a serious illness she rarely let her classroom see. Hundreds of children learned their letters, self-worth, and what it means to be a friend from a teacher who gave them her best while fighting for her own health.

Mr. Speaker, I ask my colleagues to join me in honoring the life of Ellen Marie Ike, and in extending our condolences to her family and to her colleagues at the House Child Care Center, who carry on her work.

COMMENDING THE LATE MRS.
GUSSIE MAE HALL

HON. FREDERICA S. WILSON

OF FLORIDA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, July 21, 2026

Ms. WILSON of Florida. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize and commend the late Mrs. Gussie Mae Hall of Miami, Florida, an exceptional woman who has left an enduring legacy of humbleness, kindness and strength, and I include in the RECORD the following proclamation in her honor:

Whereas, Mrs. Hall was a tireless supporter of local African-American elected officials, and actively engaged in the democratic process by educating members of the community on the importance of the right to vote and encouraging their registration and participation;

Whereas, Mrs. Hall was a lifelong resident of South Florida who was born in Homestead, Florida, formally educated in the Miami-Dade County Public School system, and worked through her church, He Reigns Interdenominational Ministries, Incorporated, to improve our community;

Whereas, Mrs. Hall was an outstanding citizen, wife, mother and friend; 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, commend the late Mrs. Gussie Mae Hall for her years of loving and faithful service to her family, her church, and our community.

RECOGNIZING SHERIFF RICKY T.
BUCHANAN

HON. CHUCK EDWARDS

OF NORTH CAROLINA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, July 21, 2026

Mr. EDWARDS. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to honor Sheriff Ricky T. Buchanan on his retirement after over twenty years of exceptional and steadfast service to the people of McDowell County.

Sheriff Buchanan has devoted his life to public service, demonstrating integrity, courage, and an unwavering commitment to protecting his community. He began his public service as a volunteer firefighter with the Pleasant Gardens Volunteer Fire Department and as an EMT-Intermediate with McDowell County Medical Services. He went on to serve in numerous roles, including Patrol Deputy, K-9 Deputy, SWAT Operator, and Detective with McDowell County Drug Enforcement. He became the first person from McDowell County to be selected as a full-time Task Force Officer with the Drug Enforcement Administration before moving onto the North Carolina DMV License and Theft Bureau, where he advanced to Assistant District Supervisor in both the Charlotte and Asheville Districts.

Over the course of his career, Sheriff Buchanan distinguished himself through his professionalism, dedication to justice, and ability to lead with strength and compassion. His leadership as an instructor preparing the next

generation of law enforcement officers has earned the respect of colleagues and ensured the future of justice across North Carolina.

Sheriff Buchanan's impact extends far beyond his official duties. He is a committed partner in community health, substance abuse prevention, and local philanthropy, offering steady leadership on numerous boards and initiatives that strengthen McDowell County and improve lives. Today, he continues to serve as president of the North Carolina Sheriffs' Association, a testament to the trust and admiration he has earned statewide.

Mr. Speaker, Sheriff Buchanan's career reflects a rare combination of service, sacrifice, and heart. His legacy is one of honor, devotion, and deep love for the community he has protected for decades. On behalf of the United States House of Representatives, I extend my deepest gratitude to Sheriff Buchanan and offer my best wishes as he enters a well-earned and fulfilling retirement.

HONORING THE LIFE AND LEGACY
OF DAN FORDICE

HON. SAM GRAVES

OF MISSOURI

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, July 21, 2026

Mr. GRAVES. Mr. Speaker, I rise to honor the life and legacy of Dan Fordice, a veteran, businessman, accomplished warbird pilot, and patriot, who devoted his life to serving others, preserving our Nation's military history, and honoring America's veterans.

Dan approached every chapter of his life with a strong sense of duty and purpose. His 13 years of service in the United States Army and Mississippi Army National Guard shaped the leadership and patriotism he later brought to his family business, the construction industry, historic aviation, and his work supporting veterans. Throughout his life, Dan remained guided by his faith, his family, and his commitment to giving back.

Following his service, Dan continued his family's legacy at Fordice Construction Company, serving as Vice President until his retirement in 2023. He followed in his father's footsteps by serving as National President of the Associated General Contractors of America from 2022 to 2023. His leadership brought people together throughout the industry and ensured contractors of every size had a voice.

As an accomplished warbird owner and pilot, Dan demonstrated his deep appreciation for aviation history through the operation and preservation of World War II-era and other historic aircraft. He served on the Commemorative Air Force General Staff Board of Directors, proudly flew his P-51D Mustang, Charlotte's Chariot II, and helped return the original C-47 That's All, Brother to Europe for the 75th anniversary of D-Day. Through these remarkable aircraft, Dan helped bring history to life for countless Americans.

Dan's dedication to America's veterans extended far beyond the cockpit. He founded the Southern Heritage Air Foundation to preserve veterans' stories and educate future generations about their service and sacrifice. In 2013, he founded the Warrior Bonfire Program to

support post-9/11 Purple Heart veterans through fellowship and opportunities for healing and recovery. Whether flying a historic aircraft, listening to a veteran's story, or leading the construction industry, Dan served others with conviction, compassion, and humility.

Mr. Speaker, I ask my colleagues to join me in honoring Dan Fordice for his service to our country, his leadership in the construction and aviation communities, and his lifelong dedication to America's veterans. His legacy will live on through the historic aircraft and stories he preserved, the veterans he supported, the organizations he helped build, and the countless people he inspired. My prayers are with his family and all who knew and loved him. May Dan have blue skies.

COMMENDING DR. FREEMAN T.
WYCHE, SR.

HON. FREDERICA S. WILSON

OF FLORIDA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, July 21, 2026

Ms. WILSON of Florida. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize and commend Dr. Freeman T. Wyche, Sr., an inspirational man of God and a revered spiritual leader in the Miami's Liberty City community, who has served as Senior Minister of the Liberty City Church of Christ for thirty-five years, and I include in the RECORD the following proclamation in his honor:

Whereas, Dr. Wyche is dedicated to his church and to his community, having chaired and served on the boards of many civic and educational organizations in Miami-Dade County and the State of Florida;

Whereas, Dr. Wyche was mentored by the late renowned Dr. Marshall Keeble, and has earned several degrees from the University of Houston, New York Theological Seminary, and Faith College;

Whereas, Dr. Wyche provided an invaluable service to his country having served as an air traffic controller and a hospital administrator in the United States Air Force, and achieving the rank of Master Sergeant before retiring at Homestead Air Force Base in 1990;

Whereas, Dr. Wyche's unwavering devotion to God has been evidenced by his decades of ministration, teaching, evangelizing, and counseling across the Nation and around the world; 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, commend Dr. Freeman T. Wyche, Sr. for his years of faithful service to his family, his church, and our community.

PERSONAL EXPLANATION

HON. BRAD KNOTT

OF NORTH CAROLINA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, July 21, 2026

Mr. KNOTT. Mr. Speaker, due to an unforeseen conflict, I was unable to cast my vote for H.R. 8823 and H.R. 4541.

Had I been present, I would have voted YEA on Roll Call No. 250 and YEA on Roll Call No. 251.