EXTENSIONS OF REMARKS

HONORING THE LIFE AND LEGACY OF MR. JOE L. FISHER

HON. JOHN GARAMENDI
OF CALIFORNIA
IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, July 30, 2026

Mr. GARAMENDI. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to honor the life and legacy of Mr. Joe L. Fisher. The Richmond community mourns the loss of an extraordinary leader. Joe was a dedicated community advocate, respected businessman, trusted mentor, and man of faith whose decades of civic engagement and spiritual guidance left an enduring mark on the City of Richmond and the community.

Born in Jackson, Mississippi, in 1943, Joe moved to Richmond with his parents, Jesse and Idell Scott Fisher, in 1944. He attended Richmond High School, Contra Costa College, and Moler Barber College before purchasing his first home in Richmond's Coronado neighborhood at age 26.

Joe was a successful entrepreneur whose businesses became fixtures in the Richmond community. He owned three barber shops in Richmond, including the well-known Umoja Barber Shop. He also co-owned Les and Joe's Clothing Store, and managed Smith's Clothing in Oakland.

As Richmond evolved, so did Joe's vision for serving the community. He transitioned into real estate and founded Fisher Realtors. Through his work, he helped generations of Richmond residents achieve the dream of homeownership.

Joe was deeply committed to Richmond's civic life, particularly through the Coronado Neighborhood Council, where he served for more than twenty years. His leadership helped make Coronado's National Night Out celebrations among the most successful in the city. Joe was the first person to help my office establish faith-based meetings in the Richmond area. Through his tireless leadership and service, he supported my team in every way possible, enabling us to better serve the entire Richmond community.

Beyond his civic and business accomplishments, Joe was a devoted man of faith and extraordinary spiritual leader. Joe faithfully served the congregation at Southside Church of Christ in Richmond, California, where he was baptized in 1989. The Bay North Church of Christ congregations in Fairfield and Sacramento also recognized him as a faithful servant, an exceptional shepherd, and a gifted mentor who guided young business owners and welcomed them into his new convert's class. I extend my heartfelt condolences to his entire church family.

Throughout his life, Joe earned the admiration of fellow residents, business leaders, and elected officials because of his unwavering commitment to Richmond. His legacy is reflected not only in the businesses he built but in the lives he touched, the families he helped, and the sense of pride he instilled throughout the community.

On behalf of California's 8th Congressional District, I extend my deepest condolences to his beloved wife, Maxine Fisher, who was an unwavering partner in his ministry and service; to his children and grandchildren; and to his extended family and countless friends. Joe Fisher's legacy of faith, mentorship, generosity, and community service will live on across the Richmond community and beyond.

RECOGNIZING AND HONORING WEST TEXAS A&M UNIVERSITY PRESIDENT DR. WALTER V. WENDLER

HON. RONNY JACKSON
OF TEXAS
IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, July 30, 2026

Mr. JACKSON of Texas. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize and honor Dr. Walter V. Wendler as he will retire from his duties as President of West Texas A&M University on September 1, 2026, after a decade of distinguished leadership at WT and more than four decades of dedicated service to higher education.

Since assuming the presidency in 2016, Dr. Wendler has led West Texas A&M University with a clear vision rooted in service to the Texas Panhandle. Guided by the principle of regional responsibility, he championed the University's commitment to academic excellence, student success, and community engagement, while meeting the needs of the people and rural areas it serves through WT 125: From the Panhandle to the World.

Among his most notable accomplishments was the launch of the One West Comprehensive Campaign in 2021, the largest educational fundraising campaign in Texas Panhandle history. Initially established with a goal of fundraising $125 million, under Dr. Wendler's leadership, the campaign raised more than $208 million to support scholarships, academic programs, research initiatives, and campus improvements that will benefit students for generations to come.

Under Dr. Wendler's leadership, WT expanded research and workforce development in beef production, water conservation, soil health, food security, and agricultural innovation—areas that are critical to the Texas Panhandle and America's agricultural economy. Recognizing that the future of agriculture depends on innovation, he also championed stronger collaboration between WT's College of Agriculture and Natural Resources and College of Engineering, culminating in the establishment of the Panhandle Institute for Engineering Research. In Congress, I was proud to support the Institute's inaugural project to develop mobile desalination technology to expand water resources for the farming and livestock operations I represent in Texas' 13th Congressional District, reflecting the practical, problem-solving research that became a hallmark of his tenure.

Dr. Wendler's commitment to the Texas Panhandle extended well beyond agriculture. He consistently emphasized the importance of supporting local schools, strengthening educational opportunities in small communities, advancing research on water and energy resources, and addressing the unique healthcare challenges facing rural Texans. Under his leadership, WT expanded its efforts to prepare educators, nurses, and healthcare professionals to serve communities across the Panhandle, helping ensure rural Texans have greater access to quality education and healthcare closer to home.

Under his leadership, West Texas A&M University also experienced renewed enrollment growth and expanded research activity, earning recognition as a Carnegie-designated Research College and University. This will further strengthen WT's role as a vital educational, cultural, and economic anchor for the Texas Panhandle.

Dr. Wendler's career reflects a steadfast belief in the transformative power of education and the responsibility of public universities to serve their communities. While Dr. Wendler may be retiring, his leadership will continue to leave a lasting impact on West Texas A&M University and the entire Texas Panhandle.

On behalf of all those I represent in Texas' 13th Congressional District, I want to thank Dr. Wendler for his many contributions to West Texas A&M University and wish him, his wife Mary, their two sons, and six grandchildren all the best in this next chapter. I say to my fellow Aggie, Gig 'em, and Go Buffs.

HONORING THE 160TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE BUFFALO SOLDIERS

HON. FRANK J. MRVAN
OF INDIANA
IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, July 30, 2026

Mr. MRVAN. Mr. Speaker, I rise to honor the 160th Anniversary of the formation of the Buffalo Soldiers and their invaluable contributions to our Nation.

On July 28, 1866, the Army Reorganization Act established six all-Black regiments in the United States Army. These six units were the 9th and 10th Cavalry Regiments and the 38th, 39th, 40th, and 41st Infantry Regiments. This legislation marked the first time African Americans were allowed to enlist in the United States Army, whereas previously they had only been allowed to serve in volunteer units during wartime.

Despite facing severe systemic racial discrimination and prejudice, the Buffalo Soldiers made significant contributions to the United States Army. While aiding in the expansion of the American West, these all-Black units were given the name ''Buffalo Soldiers'' by Native Americans in the Great Plains. This nickname referred to the soldiers' valor and fierce spirit, as well as the coats made of buffalo fur they

wore during the winter months. They fought in the American Indian Wars, rode into Cuba alongside Theodore Roosevelt and the Rough Riders at the start of the Spanish-American War, and soon after served in the Philippine-American War. These regiments also played a pivotal role overseas in the World Wars, as more than 200,000 African Americans served in World War I and more than 1,000,000 African Americans served in World War II.

In addition to their service in the United States Army, the Buffalo Soldiers were among the first park rangers assigned to preserve and protect public lands after the creation of the National Parks Service. While defending parks from fires, poaching, and littering, the Buffalo Soldiers also helped build campsites, roads, and trails. They are credited with creating the first marked nature trail and building the first museum in a national park.

On July 26, 1948, President Harry Truman signed Executive Order 9981 mandating the desegregation of the United States military. However, the executive order was not enforced until the Korean War in 1951, when Buffalo Soldier regiments were dissolved and soldiers were reassigned to integrated units. Over the course of 85 years, 40,000 Buffalo Soldiers selflessly served our country in a variety of peacetime and combat roles. The highest military distinction of the Congressional Medal of Honor has been awarded to 23 members of the Buffalo Soldiers.

As we honor the 250th anniversary of the founding of our country, I urge my colleagues to pass H.R. 1437, the Buffalo Soldiers Congressional Gold Medal Act of 2025, to award the Congressional Gold Medal to the Buffalo Soldier regiments in recognition of their vital service to the United States. For decades, the Buffalo Soldiers fought in conflicts abroad all while battling civil rights injustices at home. For their courage, perseverance, and patriotism, the Buffalo Soldiers are worthy of the highest praise.

Mr. Speaker, I ask that you and all my distinguished colleagues join me in honoring the historic legacy and significant contributions of the Buffalo Soldiers on the notable occasion of the 160th anniversary of their formation.

HONORING THE SERVICE OF SERGEANT J.J. DE LA CERDA

HON. VICENTE GONZALEZ

OF TEXAS

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, July 30, 2026

Mr. VICENTE GONZALEZ of Texas. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to honor the admirable career and dedicated service of Sergeant J.J. De La Cerda, Director of the Nueces County Veterans Services.

Sergeant De La Cerda has devoted his life to those who made the ultimate sacrifice. He is a proud veteran of the United States Marine Corps, serving honorably from 2001 to 2005 with the 1st Marine Division, 2nd Battalion, 11th Marines, and deployed twice in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom.

Throughout his military career, Sergeant De La Cerda distinguished himself through exemplary leadership and courage. In recognition of his service, he earned numerous honors, including the Iraq Campaign Medal with two Bronze Campaign Stars, the Navy and Marine Corps Achievement Medal with a Gold Star, and the Sea Service Deployment Ribbon with Bronze Star.

Since his honorable discharge in 2005, Sergeant De La Cerda has continued his lifelong dedication to veterans through a distinguished career in public service. He began by overseeing State Veterans Cemeteries in Mission and Corpus Christi, Texas, and now serves as the Director of Nueces County Veterans Services, where he works to ensure veterans and their families receive the recognition and benefits, they deserve. For his tireless work, he has been awarded the Texas Veterans Commission Top Performer Award and the Corpus Christi Mayor's Committee for Veterans Affairs Veteran Advocate of the Year Award.

Sergeant De La Cerda has made a lasting impact on the lives of countless veterans across South Texas. From assisting veterans with federal benefits claims to ensuring our Nation's heroes receive dignified final honors: he has exemplified the highest ideals of public service.

Mr. Speaker, on behalf of Texas's 34th Congressional District, I extend my deepest gratitude to Sergeant De La Cerda for his courage, integrity, and the personal sacrifices he made in devotion to our community. He is a source of pride and inspiration for all South Texans, and I am honored to recognize his contributions.

HONORING JOE NEVES ON HIS RETIREMENT

HON. VINCE FONG

OF CALIFORNIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, July 30, 2026

Mr. FONG. Mr. Speaker, I rise today, along with my colleague Representative VALADAO, to honor Joe Neves as he retires from the Kings County Board of Supervisors after an honorable 32 years of service. As the longest-serving seated board member in California history, Mr. Neves has shown a long-standing commitment to service in our community.

If there is one defining characteristic of Mr. Neves' tenure, it is this: true leadership is rooted in common sense, a deep connection to the community, and an unwavering commitment to putting hardworking families first.

Throughout his time on the Board, Mr. Neves played a pivotal role in advancing energy projects that created new sources of revenue for local landowners and schools while helping power regional operations. He was also a major force behind the development of solar energy zones on fallowed, water deprived farmland, repurposing unused land into productive assets that support both the local economy and California's energy future.

Long hailed as a community champion, Mr. Neves has dedicated himself to finding middle ground, consistently working to keep administrative operations running smoothly. This dedication is evident in the work that the Kings County Board of Supervisors has accomplished during Mr. Neves' three decades as board member. This includes boosting state and federal investment into the County's community and educational hubs, such as a $13 million investment in the Hanford and Lemoore public library branches.

His commitment to agriculture and public service has also earned him numerous honors throughout his career. Last year, Mr. Neves was recognized as Ag Supporter of the Year for his steadfast advocacy on behalf of the Kings County agricultural community. He has also been named Lemoore Citizen of the Year and received the Tachi Tribe Award, reflecting the deep personal relationships and broad respect he has earned across the county.

Mr. Speaker, please join Representative VALADAO and me in congratulating Joe Neves on 32 years of dedicated service on the Kings County Board of Supervisors and wishing him a happy and healthy retirement.

HONORING THE LIFE OF U.S. ARMY VETERAN RALPH CHECCHIO

HON. THOMAS H. KEAN, JR.

OF NEW JERSEY

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, July 30, 2026

Mr. KEAN. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to honor the life of U.S. Army Veteran Ralph Checchio, a life-long Scotch Plains resident, who will be remembered for his service, character, and devotion to country and community.

Ralph Checchio was a proud veteran of the United States Army, having served honorably as a sergeant in the 27th Artillery Division during the Vietnam War, spending time in both Korea and Vietnam before being honorably discharged. In answering our Nation's call, he demonstrated the courage, duty, and sacrifice that define the American servicemember.

At home in Scotch Plains, Ralph Checchio started a successful career as a local business owner and operator of Checchio Paving, leading a family-owned business for over five decades. Active in the community, he served as chair of the Scotch Plains Fourth of July Fireworks Committee, Annual Car Show Committee, chair of the Scotch Plains Construction Board of Appeals, and as a member of Scotch Plains 9/11 Memorial Committee.

Ralph Checchio also devoted his time to fellow veteran causes, through his leadership and stewardship of the Memorial Day Parade Committee, Vietnam Veterans Memorial Committee, Veteran Banner Program Committee, Memorial Day Concert Committee, and Feed the Veterans Committee.

Furthermore, Ralph Checchio's commitment to his community earned him the Americanism Award from the Scotch Plains UNICO, as well as the Good Scout Award from the Boy Scouts of America.

Ralph Checchio's life reflects the spirit of selfless service, whose strength of character and unwavering patriotism shaped our Nation. His story inspires all of us and serves as a reminder of the enduring values that strengthen our communities.

Mr. Speaker, I ask my colleagues to join me in honoring the life of Ralph Checchio and his distinguished military service and civic commitment, while expressing our profound gratitude for his contributions to our state and to our Nation. We extend our deepest condolences to his family.