

Congress has long recognized our obligation to care for those whose health was harmed in the line of duty. We established and strengthened the World Trade Center Health Program to provide medical monitoring and treatment for those exposed to toxic dust and debris at Ground Zero and other 9/11 sites.

That commitment reflects a core principle of our Nation: When Americans put themselves in harm's way to protect our country, we have an obligation to stand by them.

Congress did not act alone. Organizations like the FBI Agents Association have helped uphold that commitment, working tirelessly to ensure that FBI Special Agents and other personnel affected by the attacks receive both the care they deserve and the recognition their service and sacrifice have earned.

Over the past quarter-century, Congress has gradually come to understand a difficult truth: some sacrifices are visible immediately. Others reveal themselves years later. We have an obligation to honor both.

With that understanding, Congress expanded its commitment by passing the PACT Act, providing health care and benefits to veterans suffering from illnesses associated with burn pits and other toxic exposures during overseas deployments.

As someone who served in Iraq alongside our military and civilian personnel, I know these were not distant risks. They were realities of the environment in which so many Americans carried out their mission. So, our work is not finished.

Federal civilian employees, including FBI Special Agents and other public servants, deployed alongside our military during post-9/11 operations. They breathed the same toxic air and faced many of the same hazards, but they do not receive the same presumption that certain illnesses are connected to their service. They may have worn different uniforms, but they faced the same dangers.

That is why I recently joined my colleagues in introducing H.R. 8524, the bipartisan Kenya Merritt Renewing Our PACT Act. This legislation would close that gap and ensure that federal civilian employees who served alongside our Armed Forces receive the protections they deserve.

The Kenya Merritt Renewing Our PACT Act would establish a presumption that certain diseases associated with burn pits and other toxic exposures are work-related. It would apply to eligible federal employees who served in overseas contingency operations, providing a fairer and more consistent standard for workers compensation claims involving disability or death. I am especially proud that this legislation is named for FBI Special Agent Kenya Merritt.

Kenya was many things. He was a husband. A father. A son. An athlete. An exceptional Special Agent. Above all, he lived a life of service. When our Nation called, Kenya answered. He volunteered to deploy to Iraq in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom, serving alongside members of our Armed Forces and other public servants in a dangerous environment far from home. There, he was exposed to toxic burn pits and other hazards. Years later, he developed lung cancer linked to that exposure.

But even after learning of his diagnosis, Kenya continued to serve others. He became a determined advocate for federal employees who had served alongside our military, faced

many of the same toxic exposures, and yet lacked the protections available to those in uniform. Kenya passed away in 2024. But the cause he fought for lives on.

The legislation that bears his name would carry his work forward by protecting other federal employees who answered the same call to serve. This legislation recognizes a simple truth: Service is service. Sacrifice is sacrifice. We do not abandon those who served our country. And we do not leave behind those who stood shoulder to shoulder with our troops simply because they wore a different uniform.

As we mark the 25th anniversary of September 11, 2001, let us honor not only those we lost that day, but also those who continue to bear the physical and emotional consequences of the attacks and the conflicts that followed. Let us keep faith with all who answered our Nation's call by advancing the Kenya Merritt Renewing Our PACT Act. That is a promise worthy of the legacy of September 11, 2001.

HONORING MINISTER GARY D. JOHNSON

HON. FREDERICA S. WILSON

OF FLORIDA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, September 1, 2026

Ms. WILSON of Florida. Mr. Speaker, from the 24th District of the great state of Florida, I rise today to recognize and honor Minister Gary D. Johnson, a well-respected religious leader and dedicated community and international activist.

Minister Johnson is a member of 93rd Street Community Baptist Church in Miami and has been a lifelong champion for justice and quality of life for all people. He has served as a key liaison between Miami-Dade County's Christian community and local and statewide government officials to create public policy, programs, and coalitions that address the needs and social well-being of our community.

Minister Johnson co-founded the non-profit organization United for Family Values Foundation, and as its director has worked to establish a partnership between community organizations, law enforcement agencies, and residents. The goal being to combat and reduce violence in South Florida's urban communities, find alternatives for at-risk youth, and steer them toward getting an education or seek gainful employment.

Because of his reputation as a consensus builder and his tireless work to strengthen the leadership role of faith-based organizations, Minister Johnson was appointed Faith Outreach Director for the State of Florida for President Barack Obama's 2008 campaign.

To continue the work he began as Faith Outreach Director, Minister Johnson founded the non-profit organization Clergy for Change and continues to build upon the role of the church as a center for resources, direction, and advocacy.

Please join me in honoring Minister Gary D. Johnson for his commitment, dedication, and service to our community.

HONORING MELINA SPATHARIS FOR HER DEDICATION TO THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

HON. LISA C. McCLAIN

OF MICHIGAN

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, September 1, 2026

Mrs. McCLAIN. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize my staffer Melina Spatharis, whose last day in House Republican Conference will be this Friday. After over a year of dedicated service to the House, Melina is moving to Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, to continue her career in academia.

Melina was an invaluable asset to our Conference team and will be missed dearly. A dedicated staffer, she often stayed far beyond the end of the workday to ensure she fully prepared and supported my Chief of Staff as his Executive Assistant. Melina was and will continue to be deeply endeared by the entire office—she was a joy to work with, and consistently assumed a positive attitude, paired with a kind demeanor. Regardless of how difficult a day was, Melina exhibited virtue, honor, and patriotism in all things she did, said, and the way she treated others—a truly rare trait. As we bid Melina farewell, we will always be grateful and indebted to her for service to her country and the impact she had on our lives.

RECOGNIZING THE ARLINGTON COUNTY FIRST RESPONDERS AND PUBLIC SAFETY PERSONNEL

HON. DONALD S. BEYER, JR.

OF VIRGINIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, September 1, 2026

Mr. BEYER. Mr. Speaker, as our Nation marks the 25th anniversary of the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks, I rise to recognize the courage, dedication, and sacrifice of firefighters, paramedics, emergency communications personnel, police officers, and public safety professionals in Arlington County, Virginia, and in communities across our Nation.

For Arlington, September 11 is not only a National Day of Remembrance. It is part of our history. On that day, when American Airlines Flight 77 struck the Pentagon, Arlington's first responders answered the call with extraordinary courage, skill, and resolve. They responded in the face of danger, uncertainty, fire, smoke, and devastation to help save lives and protect our community.

Twenty-five years later, we continue to remember the victims, the survivors, the responders, and those who have carried the physical and emotional burdens of that day ever since. We also recognize that the duty to serve did not end on September 11. Every day, firefighters and paramedics continue to respond to emergencies, enter dangerous situations, provide lifesaving care, and stand with members of the community in their most difficult moments. Such work demonstrates unparalleled bravery and discipline.

Firefighters run toward burning buildings when others are running out. Paramedics provide care in moments of fear, pain, and crisis. Emergency communications personnel answer

the first calls for help. Public safety professionals carry responsibilities that are both physically demanding and emotionally profound.

As we honor their bravery, we must also recognize the burdens they bear. Our responsibility is not only to thank those who serve, but to support their health, wellness, resilience, and long-term well-being.

On this solemn anniversary, I ask my colleagues to join me in recognizing the Arlington County Fire Department and all firefighters, paramedics, emergency communications personnel, police officers, and public safety professionals who protect our communities. We honor those who answered the call on September 11, those who continue to carry its legacy, and those who serve every day with courage and compassion.

May we never forget the lives lost on September 11, the bravery of those who responded, and the continuing service of the men and women who are always there for us in our moments of greatest need.

HONORING MAYOR ANDRE D.
PIERRE

HON. FREDERICA S. WILSON

OF FLORIDA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, September 1, 2026

Ms. WILSON of Florida. Mr. Speaker, from the 24th District of the great state of Florida, I rise today to recognize and honor the former mayor of the City of North Miami, Andre D. Pierre, for his leadership, his vision and contributions to the economic growth of the city and to education. North Miami is the fourth largest city in Miami-Dade County and home to more than 60,000 residents.

Since Mayor Pierre's election in 2009, the city has received four national awards: The All-America City Award, Playful City 2012, Playful City 2013, and the National Medal for Museum and Library Services.

The mayor's support of local businesses and recruitment of new restaurants, a major drug store, a large-chain grocery store and a museum, have contributed greatly to the economic health of the City of North Miami.

Mayor Pierre's focus on education has resulted in hundreds of scholarships being awarded to hardworking and deserving students seeking to further their education and young adults pursuing a career in law enforcement. Without these scholarships, many students and young adults in the city might not otherwise have the means or opportunity to further their education and pursue careers.

To fund these scholarships, Mayor Pierre established the North Miami Education Foundation, Incorporated, the North Miami Adult Education Center, the Florida International University First Generation Scholarship and the North Miami Memorial Scholarship.

Mayor Pierre is also a celebrated Haitian American, who has been recognized for his work with Haitian immigrants and his advocacy for immigration reform.

Please join me in honoring former mayor Andre D. Pierre for his commitment, dedication, and service to his constituents and the City of North Miami.

HONORING DR. IRWIN ARIAS ON
HIS 100TH BIRTHDAY

HON. JAMIE RASKIN

OF MARYLAND

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, September 1, 2026

Mr. RASKIN. Mr. Speaker, I rise to wish my constituent, Dr. Irwin Arias—Win, as he is known to his friends—a very happy 100th birthday. And what a century it has been. Dr. Arias is one of the world's leading experts on the human liver. He has had a dazzling career as one of the world's most accomplished medical researchers at the National Institutes of Health (NIH). Dr. Arias is also a beloved mentor, teacher, friend, husband, father and grandfather. I am proud to recognize his extraordinary life during this centennial milestone and express my gratitude for the lifesaving contributions that he has made to medicine.

Dr. Arias was born in Rockville, New York in 1926. His first scientific research experience was a high school fellowship tied to the 1939 World's Fair, when he designed experiments to study light transmission in plastics. This fellowship ignited Dr. Arias's passion for science and exposed him to brilliant peers who would go on to their own impressive scientific careers. In college, Dr. Arias enlisted in the Navy as part of the Nation's mobilization to defeat fascism during World War II. He managed to complete his service while taking classes at Harvard College. He graduated from Harvard in 1946 and, urged on by his academic advisors and mentors, applied to medical school. After graduating medical school at the State University of New York, Dr. Arias spent six years as an intern and resident at Boston City Hospital.

In Boston, Dr. Arias began treating patients suffering from a variety of liver conditions and spent two years researching liver pathology. His work attracted the notice of Dr. Irving London, the founding Professor of Medicine at the Albert Einstein College of Medicine, who invited Dr. Arias to become one of the first assistant professors for the new medical school. At Albert Einstein, Dr. Arias went on to lead interdisciplinary treatment teams of doctors and scientists who worked together to provide innovative care to their patients. He formalized this approach within the Marion Bessin Liver Research Center, which he founded in 1974, and which became the first liver research institution to be supported by NIH. To this day, the Center supports interdisciplinary teams and mentors new generations of brilliant researchers dedicated to liver treatment.

Dr. Arias built on this experience as he helped establish the Department of Physiology within the Tufts University School of Medicine. At Tufts, Dr. Arias continued to mentor generations of medical students and researchers and urged them to see the overall human and social context of their studies. He set up courses that taught physiology students to think of their patients first before their medical problems. Wherever he could, Dr. Arias emphasized experiential learning with multidisciplinary teams and set up new courses for medical students and researchers to collaborate on real problems. Dr. Arias's pedagogy attracted national attention, and he brought this novel approach to NIH by setting up the Demystifying Medicine program with his colleague, Dr. Ruth Kirschstein. To this day, the

Demystifying Medicine series pushes the boundaries of translational research—bridging important gaps between scientific research and medical practice—and has become a global model for the international scientific community.

In addition to his great talent and passion for translational research and collaboration, Dr. Arias is a formidable researcher in his own right. During his research career, he and his collaborators have discovered mechanisms of inheritable jaundice, learned how ABC transporters mediate bile transport, and identified the proteins that regulate hepatocyte polarization, mitochondrial fusion, ATP production and bile transporters. Dr. Arias has also mentored generations of young researchers and medical students at NIH, including Dr. Anthony Fauci. A lifelong teacher and scientist, Dr. Arias continues to coordinate the Demystifying Medicine program and operate a lab at NIH.

Dr. Arias is the loving husband of Dr. Lyuba Varticovski, beloved brother of Joan Gordon, loving father of Jonathan, Linda, Wendy, Nancy and Diana and the devoted grandfather of Daniel, Rick, Alex, Beau, Madeline, Sarah, Noah, Henry and Sofia. He is an avid traveler and fitness enthusiast. I am proud to salute my constituent Dr. Arias for his outstanding contributions to science and society and wish him a happy 100th birthday.

PERSONAL EXPLANATION

HON. NANETTE DIAZ BARRAGÁN

OF CALIFORNIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, September 1, 2026

Ms. BARRAGÁN. Mr. Speaker, I missed votes on August 31, 2026. Had I been present, I would have voted YEA on Roll Call No. 284, and YEA on Roll Call No. 285.

HONORING BISHOP WALTER
HARRIS RICHARDSON

HON. FREDERICA S. WILSON

OF FLORIDA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, September 1, 2026

Ms. WILSON of Florida. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize and honor one of South Florida's most respected and heralded religious leaders, Bishop Walter Harris Richardson, as he celebrates his 47th pastoral anniversary at the Church of God Tabernacle (True Holiness) in Miami, Florida.

Bishop Richardson was ordained and installed as the first Bishop of The Church of God Tabernacle (True Holiness) in 1996. He was ordained a minister on November 30, 1946. Bishop Richardson was named Pastor of The Church of God Tabernacle (True Holiness) in 1965 and has, since that time, served as pastor and overseer. He was elevated to the position of Elder in 1967.

As head of The Church of God Tabernacle (True Holiness), Bishop Richardson has expanded the church's service to the residents of the greater Miami-Dade County community through its non-profit organization BUTIFNOT, Incorporated. Under his leadership, The Church of God Tabernacle (True Holiness) also now has congregations in Belle Glade, Florida and Valdosta, Georgia.