

Black Americans, unfortunately, freedom has never simply been granted. No, our freedom has been fought for in courtrooms and classrooms, in churches and on picket lines. It has been demanded, defended, marched for, and sacrificed for generation after generation.

That struggle did not end on Juneteenth. It continued through the iron grip of Jim Crow and segregation. It continued across that bridge in Selma and through the streets of Birmingham, where children faced firehoses and police dogs while in pursuit of their rights. It continued at the ballot box through the long fight to secure not just the right to vote but the right to have that vote count equally and the right to claim a full and equal voice in American democracy.

The story of freedom in America is inseparable from the story of Black political power. The ability to vote, the ability to be heard, and the ability to elect leaders who understand our communities, those rights were not gifts. They were victories won through sacrifice. Today, those victories are under attack.

As we celebrate Juneteenth and America's 250th anniversary, we must ask a simple question: What does freedom mean if Black Americans are again denied a meaningful voice in this government?

That question is known well in Ohio's 11th Congressional District because of the leadership of one of my predecessors, the late Louis Stokes. Before he became the first Black Member of Congress from Ohio and a founding member of the Congressional Black Caucus, Stokes was fighting against efforts to dilute Black representation in northeast Ohio.

Louis Stokes understood something that remains true today: You do not have to stop someone from voting to take away their power. You can accomplish the same thing by drawing lines differently.

Lou Stokes spent his life proving that freedom requires representation and that democracy requires vigilance. The battles that he fought and that so many fought before him were not supposed to be fought again. The ground that was won through marches and blood, court cases and passed laws, and sacrifice and courage was supposed to be secure.

Yet, here we are. Ideological extremists on the Supreme Court have again shattered the very protections that generations of Americans fought to secure. The same Voting Rights Act that Lou Stokes helped to defend, the same law that transformed Black political participation in America, the same law that helped ensure communities could not simply be carved up, divided, and silenced, that same law has been ripped to shreds by a Trump-dominated Supreme Court.

Every generation inherits the responsibility to protect what previous generations sacrificed to achieve, and now

it is our turn. We cannot retreat. We cannot surrender the gains that were purchased at such a high cost. We must defend the equal representation with the same determination that won it in the first place.

Mr. Speaker, I will not watch our rights be taken away—not without a fight. Juneteenth isn't just a celebration. It is a promise, a promise to protect and preserve the freedom we were first denied, especially at a time like this.

RECOGNIZING LAILA EDWARDS

Ms. BROWN. Mr. Speaker, I rise to recognize the pride of northeast Ohio, Olympic gold medalist Laila Edwards of Cleveland Heights.

Earlier this year, Laila helped lead Team USA to their first gold medal win in women's hockey, playing in all seven games and contributing two goals and six assists. Her performance inspired fans across our Nation, but back home in northeast Ohio, we couldn't be more proud to call Laila one of our own.

From learning to skate at the Cleveland Heights Community Center to becoming the first Black woman to represent our country in Olympic hockey, Laila has broken barriers and demonstrated determination without ever forgetting where she came from.

This weekend, Cleveland Heights will host a parade in her honor, and I couldn't think of a better way to celebrate her, as children can now look at the ice and see new possibilities.

I thank Laila Edwards for representing our country with excellence, lifting up our community with pride, and inspiring the next generations. I congratulate Laila on her Olympic Gold Medal, and I congratulate the Cleveland Heights community for raising such a remarkable champion.

RECOGNIZING BILL STEVENS

(Mr. BAUMGARTNER of Washington was recognized to address the House for 5 minutes.)

Mr. BAUMGARTNER. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to honor Washington State University's Bill Stevens as he retires after 21 years of excellence, helping to shape the story of Cougar athletics.

Bill held the title of sports information director and senior associate athletic director for strategic communications, and has officially closed a chapter that spanned five athletic directors, seven football coaches, and endless memorable moments in Cougar history.

Bill served as one of the chief storytellers of WSU athletics and helped to shape how Cougar student athletes and programs were presented to the world. He graduated from WSU in 1987 and arrived back in Pullman in 2005 after spending 9 years with the Sacramento Kings and 5 years at UC Davis. He later went on to become one of the most respected communications professionals in all of college athletics.

Bill was able to quickly adapt to a fast-changing world of social media

and evolve WSU communication strategies to what we see today, and some of the challenges Bill faced during his time were significant.

Of course, one of Bill's favorite memories came in October 2018, when ESPN's "College GameDay" finally came to Pullman after years of anticipation, fueled by flying the famous Ol' Crimson flag at every game day across the country. Bill was heavily involved in coordinating the media events surrounding this historic event.

Bill's efforts led to a national showcase of WSU and were capped by a dramatic victory over the University of Oregon, the fourth consecutive time that Wash. State University beat the University of Oregon Ducks in football.

Mr. Speaker, I thank Bill for his decades of hard work with Cougar athletics. The program wouldn't be where it is today without him.

Of course, one of the most memorable coaches that Bill Stevens helped work with was the one and only Mike Leach. When Mike and I taught the insurgent warfare and football class together, I saw firsthand Bill's incredible work in communications. That class received a lot of national media attention, and I thought Bill did a wonderful job of not only celebrating the Cougs but allowing Mike Leach to be Mike Leach.

RECOGNIZING SCARLETT KINVILLE

Mr. BAUMGARTNER. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to honor one of this year's Congressional Award Gold Medal winners, Scarlett Kinville from Spokane, Washington.

The Congressional Award is a public-private partnership by Congress to promote and recognize achievement, initiative, and service in America's youth ages 14 to 23.

Scarlett completed over 400 hours of public service volunteering as a therapeutic riding assistant, 200 hours of personal development as she managed a youth social enterprise focused on coffee, and 200 hours of physical fitness by increasing stamina through her daily biking routine and a 5-day, 4-night expedition trip, where she led a team storytelling expedition to Portland.

Scarlett had this to say about her experience: "The process of gaining the gold medal was fun. I gained the ability to manage my time and participate in meaningful activities in my community. I learned important life skills, such as leadership, teamwork, confidence, and responsibility, and I was able to help the community in ways I wouldn't have strived for otherwise. I believe I am more resilient and have developed a strong determination to grow and succeed personally and as a citizen since starting the Congressional Award process."

It is an honor to represent young leaders like Scarlett in Congress. Her achievement is a testament to her hard work, her character, and her commitment to serving others.

I congratulate Scarlett on this well-deserved recognition and look forward to all she will accomplish in the years

ahead. It is great to have Scarlett visiting Washington, D.C., this week. All of eastern Washington and, indeed, all of Congress and the Nation share in the pride of her accomplishment.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the Member from Delaware (Representative McBRIDE) for 5 minutes.

Ms. McBRIDE. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to honor the legacy and contributions of dedicated volunteers at the CHEER Community Center in Sussex County, Delaware.

Recently, CHEER hosted its annual Volunteer Appreciation Awards Ceremony in Georgetown to recognize neighbors who have tirelessly given their time to supporting older adults across the county.

CHEER's volunteer base is critical to their ability to provide meals, transportation, activities, companionship, and support services to the thousands of older adults who they serve. Last year alone, over 750 volunteers provided a combined 40,000 vital services that made CHEER's work possible.

CHEER's work and services are absolutely critical to the entire State, and especially Sussex County, where one-third of the population is 65 or older.

Maggie Smith, who volunteers daily at the Long Neck Center, where she assists with meals and running a weekly nickel poker game, among other responsibilities, was awarded the 2026 CHEER Volunteer of the Year award.

Maggie greets each new member by name and ensures those with mobility concerns are able to get their meals.

This honor, rightfully earned, represents something that we could all use more of: selfless dedication to the well-being of our neighbors.

I congratulate Maggie and all the nominees for the award, and I thank them for all that they do to keep Delaware's communities running and to deliver critical services to our neighbors.

COMMEMORATING SEPARATION DAY

Ms. McBRIDE. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to commemorate the liberation of Delaware from the corrupt and tyrannical yoke of the British Crown and the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania.

Mr. Speaker, 250 years ago, Delawareans stared fate and history in the eyes, picked up the quill, and began to write a new chapter.

Our Delawarean forebearers said plainly and with outsized ambition and determination: We can govern ourselves, and our future is ours to make.

No tyrant, whether they are in Pennsylvania or England, will have authority over the first and greatest State in the Union.

Separation Day is celebrated with overwhelming pride in my State, with my neighbors coming together annually each June in Old New Castle, one of the most historic towns in America, to honor our legacy and mark another year free from the despotism of the past.

Of course, Separation Day is about more than the past. It serves as a re-

minder that democracy is not guaranteed or inherited. It calls on each generation to face challenges with resolve and to take action to secure our liberties.

Just as Delawareans have always reminded our fellow Americans, the real heroes of democracy are the ordinary people who believe that a better future is worth fighting for.

More importantly, 250 years ago, those patriots understood something that we should all remember today: There are no kings in a democracy.

This year, as we mark the semiquincentennial of both the greatest State in the Union and our country, may we recommit ourselves to the unequivocal rejection of tyranny in all of its forms.

To my friends from Pennsylvania: You wish you were us.

To all of my friends and constituents in Delaware: Happy Separation Day.

HONORING RUTH PATRICK THOMAS

(Mr. BACON of Nebraska was recognized to address the House for 5 minutes.)

Mr. BACON. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize and honor the late Mrs. Ruth Patrick Thomas, an Omaha icon and pioneer for the North Omaha community.

Living a wonderful and blessed 105 years, Mrs. Thomas' life is marked by service and love for all, touching the hearts of many in each of the various roles she maintained.

Graduating from the University of Nebraska in Lincoln in 1943, Ms. Thomas wed Francis Thomas the same year and joined him in caring for the home and family business, the Thomas Funeral Home.

Active in the community, she also devoted her efforts to the League of Women Voters for nearly two decades, directed the YWCA, and focused on cultivating kinship within her neighborhoods.

Behind her service to others, Mrs. Thomas championed many milestones, such as being one of the first board members to vote in favor of desegregating Omaha Public Schools, being the first of three women at Zion Baptist Church to be appointed to trustee, and, in 1954, enrolling and graduating from the College of Mortuary Science in St. Louis as the only female and African-American person in her class.

Her lifetime of accomplishments has been recognized by the NAACP with the NAACP Freedom Fighter's Award and with a Diamond Award bestowed by the Delta Epsilon Omega Chapter of the Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Inc., for over 75 years of service.

Mr. Speaker, to the family and North Omaha friends of Mrs. Thomas, I offer my deepest condolences on her passing, and I stand with pride to have had such a wholesome and selfless person to be a part of developing our community.

RECOGNIZING LAVON STENNIS WILLIAMS

Mr. BACON. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to honor and recognize a true ex-

ample of resiliency, generosity, and commitment to serving others, my friend LaVon Stennis Williams from Omaha, Nebraska.

LaVon is a woman of many titles: attorney, author, entrepreneur, and mentor. Perhaps her most defining characteristic is her unwavering commitment that our past does not define our future and that history, when preserved, can be a powerful tool for healing.

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A graduate of Creighton University with her bachelor's and juris doctorate degrees, LaVon has spent her life building bridges. In 2012, drawing from her own personal journey, she founded Re-Connect, Incorporated. This nonprofit has served over 500 individuals, helping those currently or formerly incarcerated navigate the difficult transition back into society. Through her Success Prep curriculum, she teaches a philosophy that our communities desperately need: the mindset of being better, not bitter.

But LaVon's service to Omaha doesn't stop at professional development. She understands that to move forward, we must also look back. She transformed her private doll collection into a doll museum of African-American history. This museum houses a collection of over 3,000 historic dolls, and it is free for all.

Far more than simple artifacts, these figures serve as a unique lens through which people can examine these three centuries of Black history and culture. This museum stands as a testament to her belief that understanding where we have been is essential to determining where we are going.

Whether she is writing children's books to honor the legacy of the Tuskegee Airmen through her publishing house, TwoBee Publishing, or coaching a client toward a new career path, LaVon Stennis Williams is a builder of dreams.

LaVon Stennis Williams has made extraordinary contributions to Nebraska's Second Congressional District, and we are grateful for her tireless work in preserving our Nation's history by empowering its future.

I thank LaVon Stennis Williams.

HONORING JAQUIE ALGEE

(Mrs. RAMIREZ of Illinois was recognized to address the House for 5 minutes.)

Mrs. RAMIREZ. Mr. Speaker, I rise to honor and celebrate Jaquie Algee, a powerful and loving champion for justice, humanity, and solidarity.

As the daughter of civil rights activists from the south who marched alongside Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Jaquie's political education began at home. She was raised on the stories of neighbors fighting side by side to defend their dignity and to realize their collective liberation. Those early lessons shaped her consciousness and became the foundation on which her impressive life's work is built.