

grow up and pursue their dreams. And yet, 63 years later, I had the extraordinary privilege of walking these Halls as Alabama's first Black Congresswoman. I never forgot that I am here because they are not.

Their sacrifice helped galvanize a movement that changed the course of our Nation. Their memory strengthens the resolve of the foot soldiers who march for justice. It helped inspire the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965. Their legacy brought America closer to living up to its promise of equality and justice for all.

But, Mr. Speaker, remembering those four little girls cannot simply be about looking backward. It must also be about what we do today because the freedoms that they died for are not guaranteed. Every generation has a responsibility to protect them and to advance it.

That is why we must teach our children the truth about our history. It is why we must never forget what happened on that day and that we must protect the sacred right to vote. It is why we must continue the fight for the equal justice and equal opportunity of every American. It is why, on this anniversary, we must recommit ourselves to the unfinished work of the civil rights movement.

Today, I ask my colleagues to pause and remember four precious children: Addie Mae Collins, Denise McNair, Carole Robertson, and Cynthia Morris Wesley.

May we honor their memory not only with our words but with our actions, and may we forever remember that the freedoms we enjoy today come at a tremendous cost—costs that are borne by Americans. We must uphold their legacy, extend their legacy, and we must never ever forget.

REMEMBERING FATHER VINCENT ROBERT CAPODANNO

(Ms. MALLIOTAKIS of New York was recognized to address the House for 5 minutes.)

Ms. MALLIOTAKIS. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to tell a story of one of Staten Island's most extraordinary sons, Father Vincent Robert Capodanno, who 59 years ago last week gave his life in Vietnam while serving as Navy chaplain.

His Medal of Honor citation tells us what he did in a moment of unimaginable danger. But to understand Father Capodanno, we must ask a deeper question: What kind of life prepares a man to walk willingly onto a battlefield under relentless fire unarmed because wounded men are coming for him?

The answer began long before Vietnam. His first mission took him to Taiwan, where he served the Hakka people. He learned their language so he could know them, understand them, and better serve them. He administered the sacraments, distributed food and

medicine, and cared for their spiritual and emotional needs. He worked with the youth, encouraging them throughout their scholastic challenges and achievements, some battling depression.

Service was not something he summoned in one heroic moment, but it was a pattern in his entire life. He carried that same conviction to Vietnam where he carried a cross, not a gun.

Father Capodanno refused to minister from a distance. He lived as the marines lived. He shared their brutal conditions because he believed he could not truly serve them without understanding their experience. He earned their trust and made their burdens his own. He prayed for them, and he comforted them.

On September 4, 1967, during Operation Swift, he crossed a battlefield under relentless fire to reach wounded marines. Wounded by a mortar blast, he refused treatment, directed the corpsmen to care for the other wounded, and continued his ministry. He was killed just inches from a wounded fellow American he was trying to save.

President Nixon posthumously awarded him the Medal of Honor in 1969, our Nation's highest military honor. Mr. Speaker, 20 years ago, in 2006, the Catholic Church gave him the title Servant of God, opening his path for sainthood.

Father Capodanno was a priest whose faith and dedication to others led him to make the ultimate sacrifice. His last act did not create the man we honor. It revealed him.

May his story inspire people from across our Nation and around the world.

HONORING SERGEANT MICHAEL SULSONA

Ms. MALLIOTAKIS. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to honor Sergeant Michael Sulsona—a decorated United States marine, gifted playwright, and beloved advocate for his fellow Staten Island veterans—who passed away sadly last week.

Some people serve their country for a chapter of their lives. Mike Sulsona served his country for an entire life.

Mike joined the Marines as a teenager and served as a rifleman in Vietnam. On January 15, 1971, while walking point during an enemy ambush, he stepped on a land mine and lost both of his legs above the knee.

He returned home with a Purple Heart and Bronze Star to a country that did not always give Vietnam veterans the respect they had earned. Yet, Mike refused to let his injuries define his future.

He earned a master of fine arts in writing and became an accomplished playwright and screenwriter, receiving four national awards, including The Kennedy Center Award for playwrighting. He also appeared in the Academy Award-winning film "Born on the Fourth of July."

But his greatest legacy was helping others.

For more than four decades, Mike devoted himself to veterans suffering

from Agent Orange exposure and post-traumatic stress, as well as homeless veterans, amputees, and burn victims. He helped them with their paperwork. He made phone calls on their behalf. He answered their call whenever they needed him, day or night.

Mike also fought tirelessly to have fellow Marine Sergeant Angel Mendez' Navy Cross upgraded to the Medal of Honor, an effort we were proud to work alongside him on and will continue on his behalf.

Mike once said: I put my name on the dotted line to be my brother's keeper.

That is exactly how he lived. He turned pain into purpose and a lifetime of service.

My prayers are with his sons, Vincent and Philip; his grandchildren, Lucas and Madison; and all who loved him. I also remember his wife, Frieda, his partner in life and service, who passed away just months before him.

Mr. Speaker, our community and country will never forget him. Semper Fidelis.

□ 1230

HONORING MICHAEL FIGURES

(Mr. FIGURES of Alabama was recognized to address the House for 5 minutes.)

Mr. FIGURES. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize the anniversary of the most defining day of my life to date, September 13, 1996, a fall afternoon.

My mother walked into a waiting room at the University of South Alabama's medical center and announced to a collection of friends, family, and colleagues that my father, Michael Figures, had died. He had suffered a brain aneurysm at the house at the dinner table a couple of nights before and ultimately passed away.

Mr. Speaker, my father was a lot of things to a lot of people. He was a State senator. He was a civil rights advocate. He was a lawyer and a community leader. To me, he was just Daddy.

By any assessment, he exceeded expectations of a Black kid born in 1947 in Mobile, Alabama, in a neighborhood called The Bottle.

He went on to excel academically, went to Stillman College in Tuscaloosa, and was one of a handful of students who were selected to integrate the University of Alabama Law School, and he did that.

Mr. Speaker, 3 years later, he walked out as the first African American to graduate from the University of Alabama Law School.

He didn't stop there. He got elected to the State senate. Because of the Voting Rights Act, he was one of the first three African Americans to walk into that chamber since Reconstruction.

He used that position, as well as being a lawyer, to continue to advocate for rights and to continue to advocate for equality and fairness in communities. You can imagine that Alabama,

at that time, had not experienced them.

He didn't stop there. In 1981, the Ku Klux Klan lynched a young man in Mobile, Alabama, named Michael Donald. My father ultimately brought the lawsuit that resulted in the bankruptcy of the Ku Klux Klan.

I remember that when my father passed away, the condolences started pouring in. President Clinton called the house, and then-Secretary of Labor Alexis Herman called the house, and then Jesse Jackson.

Then, there was one who surprised me: George Wallace—that George Wallace, who, just a few years before my father had integrated University of Alabama Law School, had stood in the schoolhouse doors, famously, to block enrollment of African Americans coming into the school. Later on, their lives would cross paths. As Governor Wallace was winding down his terms as Governor, my father was in the State senate.

As a kid, though I did not fully comprehend or understand the magnitude of my father's impact or who he was or what he was and what he meant to so many people, I knew one thing: that the respect that I saw shown to him as a kid, whether it was at a park ball-field, in the aisles at Home Depot, or at a gas station, I knew I wanted to be like that when I grew up.

This is in an era where Gatorade commercials were plastered around at the time telling kids that "I want to be like Mike," but the Mike I wanted to be like was not a basketball player. He wore a suit to work, and he was my father.

Those footsteps that he left, I would later walk in them. I followed those same footsteps to the University of Alabama, where I got my law degree. I followed those same footsteps to the career that I had at the Department of Justice in seeking to make government work for everybody. I followed those footsteps here to Congress because my father, though he never served in Congress, was a State senator. He was the first Black president of the Alabama State Senate.

He was the named plaintiff, believe it or not, in the Voting Rights Act case that created the first opportunity district for an African American to represent Alabama since Reconstruction, a seat that is now occupied by Congresswoman TERRI SEWELL. He literally paved the pathway for me to be here some 30 years after his death.

Mr. Speaker, I can stand here today with just a simple message to my father, and that is: I am here because of him. That 10-year-old boy, or barely 11-year-old boy back in September of 1996, became a man, and not just any man. He became a Congressman who can stand on this floor in this House and deliver this speech because of what he and because of what my mother did for me.

As I sit here today, it is only my dream and my hope that one day, my

children, the children who I have of my own—I have four now of my own just like my father—that one day they can also look to me with the same admiration, with the same twinkle in their eyes that I did with my father and say, "I want to be like my daddy," and that based on the work that we have done in our lives, that that pathway is made easier and possible for them.

RECOGNIZING SALT LAKE TEMPLE OF THE CHURCH OF JESUS CHRIST OF LATTER-DAY SAINTS

(Mr. KENNEDY of Utah was recognized to address the House for 5 minutes.)

Mr. KENNEDY of Utah. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize a landmark moment in the history of my home State of Utah as we open the doors next April through October for the public open house of the renovated Salt Lake Temple of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

For generations, this iconic structure has stood as a beacon over Salt Lake City and a symbol of faith recognized around the globe. To stand here today and witness its restoration is to stand at the intersection of our rich history, modern ingenuity, and enduring spiritual devotion.

We cannot fully appreciate what we see today without looking back to where it began. In 1853, Brigham Young stood on that very ground, struck his cane into the earth, and declared that this would be the spot where they would build a temple.

What followed was 40 years of staggering sacrifice. Early pioneers quarried massive granite blocks from Little Cottonwood Canyon and hauled those multi-ton stones 4 days across rough terrain by ox team. When times were lean and hardship was near constant, those faithful men and women gave their labor, their meager savings, and their very lives to complete that house of the Lord.

They did not build for comfort or temporary convenience. They built for eternity.

Today, Mr. Speaker, we pay tribute to a new generation of pioneers: the incredible work crews, engineers, artisans, and tradespeople who have labored on this project over these past several years. Restoring a historic granite structure while seismically retrofitting it with state-of-the-art base isolators deep beneath the earth is an absolute engineering marvel. It required thousands of skilled hands—masons, carpenters, electricians, steelworkers, and historic preservationists—working with absolute dedication.

Every man and woman who wore a hardhat on that site worked not just with extraordinary skill but with deep reverence. They have ensured that this foundation will stand firm for generations to come.

Over the coming months, the temple will be open so that millions of people from every State in our Union and every corner of the world may pass

through these open doors. They will come from all walks of life, representing diverse faiths, cultures, and backgrounds.

I advise every visitor wanting to take these free tours to go online and order tickets right away. For those who will be coming, we welcome them with open arms.

This open house is more than an architectural showcase. It is an invitation to peace. It offers our neighbors and friends a rare opportunity to experience the beauty, order, and serenity that reside inside those walls.

For faithful members of the church, a temple is not merely a place of Sunday worship, nor is it a simple monument. It is literally the house of the Lord, the most sacred place on Earth. Only the home can compare in sacredness. Inside those holy rooms, individuals step away from the noise and anxiety of the world to make sacred promises with God. It is where families are connected in this life and beyond and where people find godly solace and guidance.

As this temple reopens its doors, it stands renewed, strengthened against the elements, and preserved for the future. It serves as a testament to what can be accomplished when faith, hard work, and community come together. May this holy house continue to be a light unto the nations, a blessing to the State of Utah, and a sanctuary of peace for all who enter.

PENDING RETIREMENT

(Mr. SUBRAMANYAM of Virginia was recognized to address the House for 5 minutes.)

Mr. SUBRAMANYAM. Mr. Speaker, I rise today because I have heard from many of my constituents whose Federal retirement benefits are still delayed. They have been waiting months for retirement applications that are stuck in limbo at Federal agencies.

Career civil servants who spent decades serving this country are waiting to receive the benefits that they have paid into all of these years. The delayed timeline not only impacts their financial security, but it also breaks the promise we made to civil servants.

This is another symptom of the impacts of DOGE on the Federal Government, including cuts to the H.R. departments that help process retirements. Our constituents deserve better after dedicating their careers to service.

Mr. Speaker, I call on this administration to honor the commitment we made to civil servants and process these retirements expeditiously.

USING FLOCK CAMERAS FOR WARRANTLESS SEARCHES

Mr. SUBRAMANYAM. Mr. Speaker, imagine if someone followed you around everywhere you went with a notepad logging every single one of your moves, everywhere you went, and everything you did, and then reported that to a private company that sells that data to law enforcement or to the highest bidder.