

TRIBUTE TO MARK ABERNATHY

HON. KEVIN MCCARTHY

OF CALIFORNIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, February 7, 2018

Mr. MCCARTHY. Mr. Speaker, I rise today in remembrance of Mark Abernathy, an incredible individual, close friend and trusted confidant, and to celebrate his life and service to our community in California's Central Valley, the great state of California, and our country. Mark will be missed by so many that have been influenced by his political acumen, his unparalleled wit, and his spirit and passion for his neighbors and community. He passed away on January 27, 2018, and I know that our community joins me in mourning this loss.

Mark was born and raised in the Land of Lincoln, appropriate given that the principles of Abraham Lincoln was a seminal influence that would eventually shape much of Mark's patriotism and worldview. From a young age, Mark learned the value of hard work and perseverance while growing up on the family farm with his sister Jill, his brother Mike, and his cousins, growing corn and raising hogs. During that time, he developed an adoration for baseball—and especially the St. Louis Cardinals—that would remain with him for the rest of his life. Mark attended Western Illinois University and paid his tuition fees by literally “singing for his supper” as a guitar player and singer for the “The Rising Sons,” a country western band that he was a member of all throughout college. He graduated with degrees in agriculture and biology and felt a call to serve his country shortly after, joining the United States Air Force during the Vietnam War and serving as a Captain and electronic warfare officer from 1968 to 1972.

The Air Force eventually brought Mark to California, where he first uncovered a natural talent for campaigning and an interest in local politics. While stationed at McClellan Air Force Base in Sacramento, he served as Chair of the Fairlake Young Republicans Club, where he met Cathy Swajian, who would become the love of his life and inseparable partner while raising two daughters and becoming a fixture in Republican politics.

Bakersfield welcomed the Abernathys when they moved in 1981, and Mark became involved in state and local politics through when he founded his political consulting firm, Western Pacific Research, which would grow to influence and create some of the most effective Young Republican groups and elect many elected officials on the local, state, and national levels through grassroots political campaigns. Mark was the type of person who never gave up—whether that meant working all throughout the night to finalize and execute campaign messaging or strategy, or just walking door to door to register voters and share his passion for community engagement. He adhered, and he made sure his campaigns adhered, to the values and principles enshrined in our Constitution and our nation's founding documents. Yet his great emphasis toward civic responsibility was only surpassed by his devotion to his faith and to his family, never missing a softball game or the opportunity to take his beloved daughters, Margaret and Madeline, to a baseball game. He was a

man of exceptional character and talent, and his unparalleled 97 percent candidate victory record serves as a simple testament to the success he had in mastering his craft.

Perhaps most telling of Mark's legacy are the many currently-serving elected officials whom he worked with and helped to shape, myself included. Many of my closest friends and colleagues in the Central Valley—as well as former Governor Schwarzenegger during the gubernatorial recall campaign—worked with and listened to Mark in order to win their campaigns and serve the community and country that has given so much to us all. Mark always stressed the importance of involving our youth in politics and bringing a sense of passion to all that one does. Mark's political talent made him incredible, but his devotion to God and ability to inspire faith in others is what made him exceptional. He never gave up hope that goodness and God's will would prevail with hard work and belief.

The city of Bakersfield, Kern County and the State of California have lost a brilliant mind and an integral citizen of the community, and Judy and I have lost a treasured friend. His passing was a shock to those who knew him, and we will miss his advice, humor, tenacity and character for years to come. But he will be remembered as a leader who inspired generations of Republicans to fight for their principles and beliefs and to remain bold in strengthening the ties among faith, family and community. On behalf of the House and the 23rd Congressional District of California, we remember the remarkable life of Mark Abernathy and extend our most heartfelt condolences to his wife, Cathy, and daughters, Margaret and Madeline.

HONORING EDWIN HAWKINS

HON. BARBARA LEE

OF CALIFORNIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, February 7, 2018

Ms. LEE. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to honor the extraordinary life of Edwin Hawkins, who passed away on January 15th at the age of 74.

An Oakland native, Edwin was a four-time Grammy winner and gospel music trailblazer, whose work inspired generations and helped shape the contemporary Gospel music industry.

His crossover hit, “Oh Happy Day”, was featured in the hit movie “Sister Act 2”, reached No. 4 on the Billboard pop chart and No. 2 on the R&B pop chart. And in 2007, he was voted into the Christian Music Hall of Fame.

Edwin was truly a man before his time. He was compassionate, caring, and never wavered from his faith.

I have known Ed for many years and he was a source of inspiration for me personally. He always spoke words of encouragement and like so many others, I am deeply grateful for his love and kindness, which brought me peace and joy over the years.

I offer my sincerest condolences to the family and friends of Edwin Hawkins.

CONGRATULATING JIM WOODS ON RETIRING FROM HIS ROLE OF PLATTSBURGH HIGHWAY SUPERINTENDENT

HON. ELISE M. STEFANIK

OF NEW YORK

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, February 7, 2018

Ms. STEFANIK. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to congratulate Jim Woods on retiring from his role as Plattsburgh Highway Superintendent.

For the past 30 years, Jim has been a dedicated member and leader of the Plattsburgh Highway Department. Jim joined the department on January 4, 1988, and served as the Deputy Highway Superintendent for four years before becoming the Highway Superintendent in 2011. As Superintendent, Jim oversaw the year-round maintenance of over 90 miles of road, working to ensure safe travel for North Country residents.

On behalf of New York's 21st District, I would like to thank Jim for his three decades of hard work and dedication to his community, and wish him all the best in the years ahead.

RECOGNIZING THE LIFE OF FALLEN MISSISSIPPI SOLDIER MARINE SERGEANT (SGT) DONNIE LEO FORD LEVENS

HON. TRENT KELLY

OF MISSISSIPPI

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, February 7, 2018

Mr. KELLY of Mississippi. Mr. Speaker, today I rise in memory of Marine Sergeant (Sgt) Donnie Leo Ford Levens who paid the ultimate sacrifice while defending our great nation on February 17, 2006, during Operation Enduring Freedom. Sgt Levens was killed when two CH-53E Sea Stallion helicopters crashed into the Gulf of Aden near Ras Siyyan, northern Djibouti, while on a training mission in the Godoria Range area.

Sgt Levens of Long Beach, MS, was assigned to the Marine Heavy Helicopter Squadron 464, Marine Air Group 29, 2nd Marine Aircraft Wing, II Marine Expeditionary Force, New River, N.C. He was deployed to Djibouti as part of the U.S.-led Combined Joint Task Force—Horn of Africa, a counterterrorism force. Sgt Levens was an Aircraft Ordnance Technician.

Sgt Levens's mother Margaret and brother Matt honored Sgt Levens by completing their studies at Mississippi Gulf Coast Community College in 2006. Margaret Levens said Donnie's courage inspired her to go back to school and earn a degree. President George W. Bush delivered the commencement address at the graduation ceremony held in Biloxi. President Bush praised Sgt Levens for his service and sacrifice.

Sgt Levens will be remembered for his courage and determination to keep America safe.