

HONORING THE RETURN OF SAM JOHNSON AND THE 45TH ANNIVERSARY OF OPERATION HOMECOMING

**HON. KENNY MARCHANT**

OF TEXAS

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

*Thursday, February 15, 2018*

Mr. MARCHANT. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize and honor the 45th anniversary of my friend and hero, Congressman SAM JOHNSON, returning home from his imprisonment in a North Vietnamese prison camp during the Vietnam War. Operation Homecoming, which occurred from February through April in 1973, returned 591 American prisoners of war held during the Vietnam War.

During SAM's tenure of nearly three decades in the United States Air Force, he unfortunately spent nearly seven years as a prisoner of war in Vietnam. During his time in captivity, SAM endured various forms of torture, designed to break his will. His continuous defiance caused his Vietnamese captors to place Congressman JOHNSON in a notoriously cruel prisoner of war camp, nicknamed the "Hanoi Hilton." Even after being subjected to 42 months of solitary confinement and repeatedly tortured, SAM never let his captors defeat his resistant spirit and will. On February 17, 1973, SAM was able to return home to Texas, where he was greeted by his family.

Colonel JOHNSON retired after 29-years in the United States Air Force, serving as a director of the Air Force Fighter Weapons School, a commander of the 31st Tactical Fighter Wing at Homestead Air Reserve Base, a commander with an air division out of Holloman Air Force Base, and a pilot in the Air Force Thunderbirds. Flying over 62 combat missions and being a combat veteran of both the Vietnam and Korean Wars, SAM encapsulates patriotism and dedication to his country. For his service, SAM was awarded two Silver Stars, two Legions of Merit, the Distinguished Flying Cross, and a Bronze Star, among other well-earned awards.

It is a privilege and an honor to serve alongside one of my personal heroes and true friends. We first served together in the Texas State Legislature from 1987 until 1991, when Congressman JOHNSON was elected to represent Texas' 3rd Congressional District. Since being elected in 2005 for the 24th District of Texas, I have been fortunate to continue to serve alongside SAM not only in the House of Representatives, but on the Ways and Means Committee as well. My esteemed colleague epitomizes service and dedication to our country, with a full and accomplished career of public service after serving valiantly in our military.

Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to recognize the 45th anniversary of Congressman SAM JOHNSON's release, and congratulate him on his lifetime of service. I ask all of my colleagues to join me in recognizing the anniversary of SAM's return to the United States; and in remembering this anniversary, we also remember all of those captured and imprisoned defending our liberty and freedom.

HONORING WENDY PIASECKI AS EDUCATOR OF THE YEAR

**HON. BRIAN HIGGINS**

OF NEW YORK

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

*Thursday, February 15, 2018*

Mr. HIGGINS of New York. Mr. Speaker, today I rise to honor Mrs. Wendy Piasecki as she is presented with the 2018 Educator of the Year award by the West Seneca Chamber of Commerce at Kloc's Grove. Mrs. Piasecki exemplifies dedication as an educator, and West Seneca is fortunate to benefit from her talents.

Forty years ago, Mrs. Piasecki began her career by earning her Master of Music degree in composition theory. At age 40, Mrs. Piasecki boldly decided to go back to school and attain a teaching certificate.

Mrs. Piasecki devoted her career to music education in and outside of schools. In her two decades plus in the West Seneca Central School District, Mrs. Piasecki has taught music education and theater at nearly every grade level and at every school. She has tutored students outside of school in music theory and piano. Outside of the classroom, Mrs. Piasecki has helped students in extracurricular activities, such as preparing for the Erie County Music Educators Association Music Festival, chaperoning students' trips to the Young People's concert at Fantasy Island, directing musicals, and even presenting student performers at the Junior Musical Theater Celebration at Shea's Theater, one of Buffalo's finest performance venues.

Educators like Mrs. Piasecki, who invest themselves in the children and our community, are part of what makes Western New York such a special place. Because of her dedication, parents can rest assured that their kids will be attending school in a supportive environment that allows them to explore their creative sides while receiving a first-rate education.

Mr. Speaker, once again I want to honor Mrs. Wendy Piasecki as she receives the West Seneca Chamber of Commerce's 2018 Educator of the Year award. Her personal devotion to teaching serves as a model for future educators and an inspiration to all of us who believe in public service.

HONORING THE LIFE OF MRS. LOVEY ANNA LEAVELL

**HON. MARCY KAPTUR**

OF OHIO

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

*Thursday, February 15, 2018*

Ms. KAPTUR. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to commemorate the generous, path-breaking life of Mrs. Lovey Anna Leavell of Sandusky, Ohio. Lovey passed from this life on Saturday, January 22, 2018 after a short illness. She will be truly missed by her family and friends. Lovey was indefatigable.

Lovey's involvement and commitment to her hometown of Sandusky was known by everyone in the area. Her life of service to her community started at the historic Second Baptist Church where she served as Church Secretary, Choir Director, teacher, and Sunday school superintendent. It is also here where

she would meet her husband of 60 plus years, Daniel Leavell.

Once her children became school age and began to attend Sandusky City Schools she became active in the school system as well. When her children were young she worked for the school district as a teacher's aide, bus driver, and served as the Treasurer for the Sandusky Band Parents Association. Her dedication to the Sandusky City schools continued always. Even after her children graduated, she continued her connection to the school by working as a substitute teacher.

Civil rights was a cause that Lovey was committed to as well. As a lifetime member of the Sandusky NAACP, she worked on a number of committees for her local branch. She would help set up meetings at which local politicians would be able to talk about issues dealing not only with civil rights, but also other important issues that impacted the community. Her commitment to civil rights was one of the main reasons she decided to become a realtor. Throughout her life she saw the damage that was being done to minorities due to the effects of redlining. It was her commitment to civil rights that made her want to become a realtor in order to help people obtain the American dream of home ownership.

Lovey Leavell was on a first name basis with every elected official that represented the city of Sandusky, from local up through the federal level. It was not uncommon for politicians and candidates to call her and her husband Dan for advice. She was a lifelong Democrat, her views on politics were perhaps best described by Sandusky Mayor Dennis Murray when he said this about Lovey, "She was never about the games of partisanship. She believed totally in people and in the core things that Democrats stand for—equality, opportunity and good government."

Later in life when most people would decide to relax and enjoy their retirement years, Lovey decided it was time for her to get a college degree. She received two degrees, associates and then bachelors, both from BGSU Firelands. Her time at Firelands was filled not only with classwork but also with trips to the United Nations in New York, involvement with student government, and several other groups. The students there would come to know her as "Grandma Lovey". During her time there she made such an impression on the students, staff, and faculty she was awarded the Links to Progress Award, the highest honor any person can receive from BGSU Firelands.

During Lovey's final years she served on the Ohio 9th congressional military academy nomination committee in 2015 and 2016. She continued her service on the James McBride Arboretum at BGSU Firelands. She never stopped being a realtor or working for civil rights with the NAACP. Even with her impressive life accomplishments, there was one thing Lovey felt she was missing: a Sandusky High School diploma. It was something she had wanted for more than half a century. In September of 2017 the Sandusky School Board presented her with an honorary high school diploma for her life time commitment to education and her involvement in the community.

Lovey is survived by her husband Dan, children Dan Jr., Doug and Deanna, a number of grandchildren, family, and friends. We offer them our prayers and hope that they comfort in the wonderful memories of this extraordinary woman, our dear friend Lovey. She will

be remembered with affection and gratitude for a lifetime dedicated so affectionately to making our part of the world a fairer and more loving place in which to live.

HONORING MR. LERONE BENNET,  
JR.

**HON. BENNIE G. THOMPSON**

OF MISSISSIPPI

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

*Thursday, February 15, 2018*

Mr. THOMPSON of Mississippi. Mr. Speaker, I rise to honor a remarkable public servant and hometown hero, Mr. Lerone Bennet, Jr.

Mr. Bennet was a native of Clarksdale, Mississippi, and was an editor at Ebony Magazine during the time the publication published the photos of Emmett Till. In addition, he was also a journalist, author, and historian. A friend and Morehouse College classmate of Rev. Dr. Martin L. King, Jr., Mr. Bennet worked tirelessly in the struggle for Civil Rights. In 1994, Mr. Bennet was appointed to President Clinton's Committee on Arts and Humanities. He also served as an early adviser on the development of the Smithsonian's National Museum of African American History and Culture.

During the last years of his life, Mr. Bennet suffered from vascular dementia. Last night, at 89-years-old, he passed away.

Today, we honor the life of Mr. Lerone Bennet, Jr. and his family.

HONORING ANGELO NERO

**HON. JOHN J. FASO**

OF NEW YORK

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

*Thursday, February 15, 2018*

Mr. FASO. Mr. Speaker, it is with great respect and honor that I rise today to recognize the retirement of Columbia County Coroner, Angelo Nero.

Mr. Nero retired January 1 of this year, after dedicating over forty years of his life as Columbia County Coroner. He is remembered for his professional, compassionate, and timely service during his career.

Angelo provided exceptional service to the people of Columbia County, while maintaining a professional relationship with local law enforcement and first responders. His colleagues knew they could always depend on Angelo to respond to phone calls at all hours of the night.

During his career, Angelo served as Valatie village trustee and mayor for ten years. Prior to his service at the local level, he served in our Armed Forces during the Korean conflict.

Angelo's selfless service to Columbia County and our nation is greatly appreciated, and I wish him and his wife Barbara the best in their next adventure.

SERBIA AND THE USA

**HON. TED POE**

OF TEXAS

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

*Thursday, February 15, 2018*

Mr. POE of Texas. Mr. Speaker, it is a distinct honor for me to talk about the great rela-

tionship we have with Serbia as co-chair of the Congressional Serbia Caucus along with EMANUEL CLEAVER of MO.

Serbia is a great friend of the United States. As a Texan, I have great admiration for the people of Serbia. Our strong opinions and habit to speak our minds make us natural allies.

In fact, one of the first people to settle Texas was a Serbian named Dorde Sagic, or George Fischer as he was known in the U.S. After settling in Texas, Sagic went on to become a justice of the peace in my hometown of Houston.

But Serbia has contributed much more to the cause of justice than just Mr. Sagic keeping the early streets of Houston safe.

Today we honor the service of Serbia's armed forces who have fought side-by-side with Americans to preserve justice during history's most horrific conflicts.

In 1918, President Woodrow Wilson gave a speech marking the fourth anniversary of Austria-Hungary's invasion of Serbia. Speaking of the bravery of the Serbian armed forces, President Wilson said:

"Nobly did they respond. So valiantly and courageous did they oppose the forces of a country ten times greater in population and resources . . . While their territory has been devastated and their homes despoiled, the spirit of the Serbian people has not been broken."

As a Texan, I admire such defiance against overwhelming odds.

Like President Wilson, I am proud to share the stories of Serbia's bravery here in Washington.

I believe the most meaningful for Americans is the story of the Halyard Mission during the dark days of the Second World War.

While under Nazi-occupation, the Serbian people demonstrated their bravery as they played a crucial role in the largest rescue operation of American airmen in history.

In 1944, American bombers were flying frequent missions to strike Germany's vital oil supplies in Romania as part of the allied advance into Europe.

The 15th Air Force led this effort by launching nearly 20,000 sorties into Eastern Europe, with many of the missions flying over Nazi-occupied Yugoslavia. As many as 1,500 pilots and airmen were shot down during these courageous air raids.

Serbiens, who had been resisting German forces since 1941, risked their own lives to rescue American aircrews and hide them from patrolling Nazis.

For months these brave and noble Serbians cared for and protected American and allied pilots.

By August 1944, the Allied forces, including the 15th Air Force and Office of Strategic Services, devised a daring operation to evacuate the hundreds of Allied pilots being sheltered by the Serbian resistance.

American aircraft flew into enemy territory and evacuated these airmen from an air field built and protected by local Serbians near the village of Pranjani.

For over 60 years this operation was kept secret. But now we can remember the courage of our Serbian friends and say thank you.

The spirit of the Halyard mission still lives on today as a remarkable story of resistance and heroism.

As was the case in both World Wars, Serbia and the U.S. still face shared threats.

About 600 foreign fighters in Syria have come from the Balkan states. ISIS and al-Qaeda terrorists present a threat to Serbia and the region just as they present a threat to the U.S.

We must continue coordinating with our Serbian partners to stop returning terrorists and neutralize networks that recruit fighters in the Balkans.

The U.S. is also working with Serbia to improve its independent judiciary and fight corruption. A democratic Serbia with a strong rule of law is in America's interests.

But there are others who do not support this goal.

Russian disinformation efforts are designed to keep Serbia in its sphere of influence and poison our warming friendship.

Nevertheless, Serbia's integration to the West has continued to move forward.

In 2006, Serbia joined NATO's Partnership for Peace program and, in 2015, signed an Individual Partnership Action Plan with the alliance to strengthen cooperation.

Recently the European Union announced that Serbia could join the EU as early as 2025. I applaud this step which will strengthen Belgrade's political institutions and economic ties with the West.

Together we share the same dreams of a bright and free future for both our countries.

We are blessed to have brave men and women that ensure our futures are bright and free.

Thanks to the Serbian armed forces for standing with America in the wars of the past and in the challenges we will face together in the future.

And that's just the way it is.

HONORING CORA BEASLEY

**HON. VIRGINIA FOXX**

OF NORTH CAROLINA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

*Thursday, February 15, 2018*

Ms. FOXX. Mr. Speaker, when tragedy struck in 1957, the Surry County, North Carolina community came together, honored its' own, and remained strong.

I rise to commemorate the selfless sacrifice of Mrs. Cora Beasley, a third grade teacher. Sixty-one years ago, a fire consumed Flat Rock Elementary School in Surry County. Mrs. Beasley ignored the danger and helped students out of a second-floor window, saving their lives.

During the blaze, Mrs. Beasley attempted also to save third-grader Larry Adams, but sadly, they both perished. This month, the Flat Rock School community will rename its main building the Cora F. Beasley Building, a fitting tribute to one woman's selfless heroism.

I salute the efforts of this tight-knit community and offer my prayers for Mrs. Beasley, Mr. Adams, their families and all of those affected by the fire that day.