

HONORING THE 10TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE AFRICAN AMERICAN FIREFIGHTERS HISTORICAL SOCIETY

HON. ELIJAH E. CUMMINGS

OF MARYLAND

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, January 30, 2019

Mr. CUMMINGS. Madam Speaker, I rise today to recognize the 10th Anniversary of the African American Firefighters Historical Society. The African American Firefighters Historical Society was founded in Baltimore, Maryland on January 23, 2009 by two, now-retired, members of the Baltimore City Fire Department: Firefighter George Collins and Lieutenant Michael Jensen. It was started as part of an event celebrating the 55-year reunion of the first African Americans appointed to the Baltimore City Fire Department. While researching the history of African-American firefighters in Baltimore, it did not take long before they discovered that nearly every fire department around the country had its own story of African Americans contributing to their ranks.

The mission of the African American Firefighters Historical Society is to collect, preserve and disseminate historical data and information relating to the contributions made by firefighters of color, and others who have contributed to such history. This material is used to educate and mentor firefighters and the communities that they serve.

The Historical Society is also a 501(c)(3) charitable organization, and it hosts an annual Salute Dinner. This dinner honors African-American firefighters, entities, individuals, and dates that are significant to the fire service history of African Americans. It is the only event of its kind in the world, and they are proud that the dinner has become their signature event.

All the honorees over the last 10 years have been extremely deserving of their recognition. Most have never had their contributions acknowledged. These individuals are humble men and women, who would tell you that they were just doing what needed to be done. Whether it be to acknowledge a heroic act or some other significant act, such as being the first to reach a rank or position, accomplished by firefighters, the African American Firefighters Historical Society is always interested in finding these individuals. The organization also welcomes information about organizations who have reached historic milestones or anniversaries relevant to African-American firefighters.

To show just how relevant The African American Firefighters Historical Society has become, I would like to take a moment to share the stories of some of its honorees.

Stories of people like Edward Collic, who faced significant hurdles to becoming Baltimore City Fire Department's First African American Lieutenant Pilot. During promotion testing, Collic was given ten additional navigation questions by his Coast Guard examiner, effectively turning what is normally a 4-hour test into an 8-hour exam. Still, he passed and was reluctantly given his 100 Ton Masters Licenses. Collic worked as an Acting Lieutenant for thirteen years, being passed over for promotions several times despite consistently scoring first or second on the promotion exam.

In some cases, he was deliberately removed from the top of the list. Collic was finally promoted, possibly becoming Maryland's first African-American Fireboat Lieutenant. With a reputation for being the best Lieutenant Pilot, one night he was sought out by his Battalion Chief to respond to a train that had derailed with hazardous material on board. He took his fireboat up the Susquehanna River to Port Deposit, Maryland, on what would become the longest run in BCFD history.

The Society has also honored people like Mrs. Carrye Brown, on the 20th Anniversary of her appointment to the highest fire service position in the country. In January 1995, Brown was nominated by President Bill Clinton to be our Nation's first woman and first African American to head the U.S. Fire Administration. In that role, she was responsible for legislation, regulations and standards for all fire departments in the country. To this day, Mrs. Brown holds the record for the longest serving person in that position.

They also paid tribute to civil rights lawyers Kenneth L. Johnson and Gerald A. Smith. On December 6, 1971 they filed suit against the City of Baltimore to address discrimination in hiring and promotions within the city's fire department. This landmark decision changed the hiring and promotions processes in both the city's fire and police departments, benefiting countless individuals. Their 1973 victory cemented the legacy of their clients and rendered their firm a dominant force in civil rights litigation on the east coast.

The Society has also honored the Gorham Family. A tragic fire in August 1946 destroyed the home of Leroy and Lillian Gorham. Tragically, the couple lost three children: Jean, who was 5, Ruth who was 2, and Leroy Jr., who was only 11 months year old. In response, the community came together to establish Chapel Oaks Volunteer Fire Company in Prince George's County, Maryland. Without any knowledge or experience, men from all over the area started Maryland's only African-American Volunteer Fire Department. By the year's end, they purchased a fire engine and equipment and began providing fire protection for the Deanwood Park/Chapel Oaks Community. They have serviced Prince George's County ever since.

The African American Fire Fighters Historical Society has presented approximately 200 flags flown over the U.S. Capitol for honorees on significant dates of their accomplishments; obtained almost 1,000 Citations, Proclamations, Resolutions, Certificates of Recognition and Letters of Acknowledgment for honorees; successfully advocated for legislation to have a fire house named for an honoree; been instrumental in building partnerships, financing the design, and advocating for local government to establish The Racheal M. Wilson Memorial Park and Garden at the location of Racheal M. Wilson's death, the first woman killed in the history of the Baltimore City Fire Department, and sponsored Baltimore High School students' trips to Washington, D.C. for Capitol Hill tours and to visit my Braintrust panels at The Congressional Black Caucus Foundation Annual Legislative Conference.

As the African American Firefighters Historical Society reflects on their many accomplishments, they ask, "what's next?" George Collins, Founder and President states:

"We are looking forward to creating a brick and mortar entity in the form of a fire

fighter museum. This will showcase the unknown and often buried contributions of so many African Americans in the fire service. Yet we will always fulfill the purpose of our organization. Give people their flowers while they can smell them, show them acknowledgments of their accomplishments while they can see it, and tell them how much you appreciate them while they can hear it."

For these reasons, we stop to highlight the endeavors of The African American Firefighters Historical Society over the past 10 years.

HONORING BRIAN McDONALD AT CONGRESSMAN VELA'S BLACK HISTORY MONTH CELEBRATION

HON. FILEMON VELA

OF TEXAS

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, January 30, 2019

Mr. VELA. Madam Speaker, I rise today to honor Brian McDonald for his contributions to the Rio Grande Valley.

Mr. McDonald received a B.A. in Political Science and History from Texas A&M University, and a J.D. from the Thurgood Marshall School of Law at Texas Southern University. After law school, Mr. McDonald settled in the Rio Grande Valley, where he handled state prosecutions in the Cameron County District Attorney's Office.

Mr. McDonald's outstanding work and commitment to public service led him to his current position as an Assistant United States Attorney with the United States Attorney's Office in Brownsville. In this capacity, he dedicates his efforts to keeping the community safe through the prosecution of federal crimes. Our community is a better place thanks to his pursuit of justice for all people.

Mr. McDonald serves as a board member of the Cameron County Young Lawyers Association, where he works to connect young lawyers to the community through service programs.

I am pleased to recognize Mr. McDonald for his successful career thus far in Texas' 34th Congressional District. We are all thankful for his dedication to serving justice, and inspiring the next generation of lawyers in the Rio Grande Valley. I ask my colleagues to join me in recognizing his potential and commending him in advance for his bright career.

INTRODUCTION OF PRIVATE STUDENT LOAN BANKRUPTCY FAIRNESS ACT

HON. STEVE COHEN

OF TENNESSEE

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, January 30, 2019

Mr. COHEN. Madam Speaker, I rise today in support of the Private Student Loan Bankruptcy Fairness Act, a bill I introduced earlier today with my colleagues DANNY DAVIS and ERIC SWALWELL. This bill would provide critical relief to Americans in severe financial distress who are struggling with overwhelming private student loan debt.

Before 2005, private student loans issued by for-profit lenders were treated in bankruptcy like most other unsecured consumer debt,