

and the World Affairs Council for all that they do to make the Granite State such a wonderful place to work, live, and foster global connections.

ACKNOWLEDGING LEADERSHIP NIAGARA'S 2019 LEADERS OF THE YEAR AWARD RECIPIENTS

**HON. BRIAN HIGGINS**

OF NEW YORK

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

*Thursday, May 16, 2019*

Mr. HIGGINS of New York. Madam Speaker, I proudly rise to recognize the impressive record of achievement of Leadership Niagara, the longest running leadership development organization in New York State. Headquartered in Niagara Falls, a city I proudly represent and home to one of the Wonders of the World, this binational program provides individuals of all ages the skills necessary to forge a better and more productive future for themselves, their companies and the communities of Western New York and Southern Ontario.

For more than 35 years, Leadership Niagara has served as a premier leadership resource to those who demonstrate the passion, desire and willingness to work to effect positive change in all aspects of their lives, including the companies and communities they represent.

Leadership Niagara's mission to strengthen regional leadership is reflected in their time-honored tradition of the Annual Leader of the Year Awards Ceremony. Now in its 29th year, this program delivers a powerful message that builds on the example, motivation and success of those being recognized for their transformational leadership in a variety of fields.

This year, Leadership Niagara has selected five individuals and one organization that exemplify collaboration, innovation and leadership. They include Kenneth Sass, Lifetime Achievement Award, Father James J. Maher, Leader of the Year; The Niagara Falls Boys and Girls Club, Organization of the Year; Bonnie Kane Ph.D., Distinguished Alumni; Alicia Laible-Kenyon, Emerging Leader and Ethan Menges, Youth Leader. These honorees are most deserving for the strides they have made in the promotion of positive change and strong leadership regardless of title, age, education, industry or boundaries.

Kenneth Sass served a community in need with determination and kindness as the long-time president of Pinnacle Community Services, formerly Family and Children's Services of Niagara. Before retiring in December of 2018, Mr. Sass worked for Pinnacle Community Services for 25 years, the past 21 as president and CEO. It was during his tenure that he spearheaded two capital campaigns, totaling \$3.3 million, to build the agency's first new headquarters in 100 years and the Niagara Family Center, a multi-service collaboration between seven nonprofit agencies. Programs were also expanded and developed to better address serious issues including mental health, domestic violence, child abuse and chronic medical illnesses. His dedication to those he served epitomize what it means to be a compassionate leader.

Father James J. Maher's selection as Leadership Niagara's Leader of the Year is an in-

spired choice. A member of the Vincentian community, he was appointed the 26th president of Niagara University in 2013. Since becoming president, Father Maher has focused on advancing the academic reputation of the university, building an international and diverse campus community and shaping the university's commitment to the revitalization of Niagara Falls and Western New York. His deep commitment to the Vincentian mission of service is reflected in his actions and words that included his belief that "Niagara University should function as a bridge to people in everyday distress, isolation and poverty." Father Maher is that bridge.

The Niagara Falls Boys and Girls Club is Leadership Niagara's organization of the year for their commitment to serving the community and creating healthy youth and families. For more than 80 years, they have focused on academic success, career and leadership development. With an annual membership of over 1400 young people, ranging from five to twenty-one years old, the Niagara Falls Boys and Girls Club lives its mission to provide appropriate and diversified programs and activities that teach skills needed to build positive lives, attitudes & behaviors. An invaluable community asset, their dedication to education, healthy living and leadership provides a model to follow for other Western New York organizations.

Bonnie Kane, Ph.D., has been a Leadership Niagara member since 2017 and is being recognized as this year's Distinguished Alumni. Since receiving her M.A. in School Psychology from the University of Buffalo and a Ph.D. in Leadership and Policy from Niagara University, this principled and purposeful dynamo has worked in the Niagara Falls City School District as a school psychologist and as co-department chair for special education. Her commitment to lifting the lives of others is evidenced by her ability to listen, learn and guide students on career paths while promoting the importance of education and mentorship. Dr. Kane is a treasured resource whose belief in the dignity and rights of all people makes our community a better place to live.

This year's Emerging Leader is Alicia Laible-Kenyon, Executive Director of Elderwood Health Plan (Niagara Advantage). Responsible for the outcomes of this managed long-term care plan, Alicia has led this effort to provide access to affordable and quality health care for individuals with chronic health issues and older adults. Her efforts enable many others to remain healthy, independent and able to reside in their own homes. Unafraid of a challenge, her commitment to ensuring a healthier community makes her a worthy recipient.

Leadership Niagara understands age is no barrier to leadership and has recognized this potential in Ethan Menges of Lockport High School as this year's Youth Leader. As a student athlete, he leads by example on and off the field. Through his years at Lockport High School, he has been an active participant in career, education and life skills development programs through internships and community events. He understands that he and his classmates must be prepared and ready to be a part of positive and constructive interaction in today's world and is a model example of what it means to be a leader.

Madam Speaker, I congratulate Leadership Niagara for its significant contributions to the Western New York Community as they gather

together on May 17 to honor this year's most worthy recipients at the Leader of the Year Awards Ceremony.

HONORING UNITA ZELMA BLACKWELL

**HON. BENNIE G. THOMPSON**

OF MISSISSIPPI

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

*Thursday, May 16, 2019*

Mr. THOMPSON of Mississippi. Madam Speaker, I rise today to honor Ms. Unita Zelma Blackwell on her great contributions to civil rights activism.

Born in Lula in 1933 into a sharecropping family, Blackwell left Mississippi as a child to attend school in West Helena, Arkansas, because black children weren't allowed to consistently attend school at that time in the Mississippi Delta. Blackwell forfeited school at the eighth grade and began sharecropping with her family.

During the early 70s, Blackwell became an important pillar in the civil rights movement in the South. She served as a project director and field secretary for the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), helping organize voter drives for African Americans across Mississippi. These efforts landed her in jail at least 70 times.

In 1967, she co-founded Mississippi Action Community Education, a community development organization which helped districts to incorporate as towns. Incorporation enabled them to set their geographical boundaries so that they could have a legal identity-an important advantage when they wanted government help in installing streetlights or electricity.

In 1976, Unita Blackwell became the first African American woman mayor in the state of Mississippi (Mayersville, MS) where she developed the city's infrastructure with an annual \$30,000 budget. She also served as an adviser to Presidents Lyndon Johnson, Richard Nixon, Gerald Ford, Jimmy Carter, Ronald Reagan and Bill Clinton.

Blackwell's career path was very diverse: Key organizer, Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party, 1964; National President of the U.S.-China People's Friendship Association, 1977 through 1983; elected Mayor of Mayersville, 1976 through 2001; had the town incorporated, 1976; appointed by President Carter to the U.S. National Commission on the International Year of the Child, 1979; vice-chairman of the Mississippi Democratic Party, 1976 through 1980; established Mayors' Exchange Program between U.S. and China, 1984; national president of the National Conference of Black Mayors, 1990 through 1992.

Notable awards achieved by Blackwell: Southern Christian Leadership Award, 1990; Institute of Politics Fellow, John F. Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University, 1991; MacArthur Foundation Genius Grant, 1992; APA leadership award for elected official, 1994; honored with a Mississippi Freedom Trail marker, 2016.

Her son, Jeremiah Blackwell, Jr., informed Mississippi Today of his mother's death on Monday, May 13, 2019 at age 86.

Madam Speaker, today I honor the life of Ms. Unita Blackwell for her many contributions to education, civil rights, and the great state of Mississippi. Blackwell made a career of serving others, and her work had a direct and positive influence on the lives of thousands.