

Rico, a man who would go on to win two terms, a hard task in the history of the island.

After serving as Governor Rosello's chief of staff for 3 years, he moved to Washington, D.C., where he focused on building the Democratic Party within the Hispanic community. From 2001 to 2005, he served as the chair of the DNC's Hispanic Caucus, where he increased the party's Hispanic membership by over 30 percent. As chair, Alvaro rebuilt an unprecedented Hispanic campaign network and called for John Kerry to work toward winning Hispanic votes.

In 2004, he earned the honor of being named one of the 100 most influential Hispanics in the United States by the Hispanic Business Magazine.

Anyone who crossed paths with Alvaro knew he was a true man of the people and a fearless champion of Puerto Rico statehood. I remember the first time we talked about how important statehood would be for Puerto Rico.

He recalled the story of the mighty punga, a story in Chinese folklore that talked about a huge bird that played with other smaller birds on a tiny island and had a wingspan over 500 meters.

They would laugh at this giant bird, the mighty punga, with his awkwardness. He found out, through the hawk, that through thermal glides, he would be able to potentially fly like the other birds.

He set off, needing a year to reach the height required. When asked about this difficult task and his inability to fly, he said: "It is okay. We have a long way to go."

That is where Alvaro talked about statehood, about how it has been over 120 years, and about how we have an island that is larger in population than 26 States, yet it is taking over a century for us to even get to this point, but it is okay. Alvaro passed before getting to see it happen. We have a long way to go.

He is survived by three children, Alvaro, Carolina, and Natalia Isabel.

Alvaro, you will be dearly missed by myself, by so many in Florida, and on the island of Puerto Rico, but the fight will continue to live on.

RECOGNIZING K-9 VETERANS DAY

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Pennsylvania (Mr. THOMPSON) for 5 minutes.

Mr. THOMPSON of Pennsylvania. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize March 13 as K-9 Veterans Day, an opportunity to commemorate the working dogs that support our men and women in uniform.

This year marks the 78th anniversary of the establishment of the K-9 Corps.

After the attack on Pearl Harbor, the Army began training for the K-9 Corps in 1942, originally known as the War Dog Program. In the years that passed, the K-9 Corps has become a vital part of our Armed Forces operations.

Though military working dogs initially served as morale boosters for our soldiers, they were eventually trained and incorporated into combat. A dog's sense of smell is 5 to 10 times stronger than a human's, which has made them expert counterparts in detecting explosive devices.

More than 1,500 dogs served in the Korean war, 4,000 in Vietnam, and many more in Afghanistan and Iraq.

Like their human counterparts, our military K-9s eventually retire. Many dogs and their handlers develop a strong bond during their service together.

Sadly, prior to the year 2000, military working dogs were considered "equipment" and were either left behind or euthanized at the end of their service.

Today, retired military working dogs are put up for adoption, and their personal handlers get first priority to give them a home.

To further this effort, the American Humane Society works to unite our four-legged heroes with their handlers by raising funds to ensure their safe transport home.

Oftentimes, these retired dogs will serve as support animals to servicemembers who may be suffering from PTSD and other disabilities, both mental and physical. Our veterans can greatly benefit from the assistance and the companionship that a dog provides, and our K-9 veterans benefit from their newfound forever homes.

Our K-9 veterans have served our country, and they, too, deserve to be honored for their service.

RECOGNIZING NATIONAL RED CROSS MONTH

Mr. THOMPSON of Pennsylvania. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize March as National Red Cross Month.

This tradition began in 1943 when President Franklin D. Roosevelt issued the proclamation to designate the month of March to celebrate Red Cross volunteers, donors, and instructors.

The history of the Red Cross, however, goes back even further into American history. In 1881, Clara Barton established the organization right here in Washington, D.C., to better serve people in need. On June 5, 1889, Clara Barton and five volunteers came to Johnstown to respond to the Johnstown Flood.

For more than 100 years, the American Red Cross has worked to support those in need, whether they are men and women in uniform or victims of natural disaster.

Perhaps the organization's best-known program, the American Red Cross established the first nationwide civilian blood donation program in the 1940s.

According to the organization, someone in the United States needs blood every 2 seconds. There are regular blood donation drives right here on Capitol Hill, where we can all volunteer to donate blood that has the potential to save a life.

Less than 38 percent of the U.S. population is eligible to give blood, and

only 3 percent of those individuals donate annually.

The critical need for blood and the lifesaving potential that comes from a donation cannot be overstated.

The American Red Cross has always been a leader in this effort, and today, they still provide more than 40 percent of the blood products in the United States.

The success of the Red Cross relies on the generosity of the American spirit.

This month and all year long, I am thankful for their service to our Nation.

COMMENDING HEMET AND PALM SPRINGS FIREFIGHTERS

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from California (Mr. RUIZ) for 5 minutes.

Mr. RUIZ. Mr. Speaker, this week, members of the Hemet and Palm Springs Fire Departments gathered in Washington, D.C., for the International Association of Firefighters' annual legislative conference.

I met with several of them in my office and want to express my personal appreciation for their unrelenting service that so often goes above and beyond their call of duty.

Last December, tragedy struck in my district when three children and their father died in an apartment complex fire in Hemet, California.

Despite the dangerous and grim circumstances, Hemet first responders worked heroically and helped save lives.

Days later, the Hemet Fire Department, in a demonstration of kindness, joined with community members to give financial support for the victims' family and everyone affected by the fire.

They simply said they were closing the loop. From fire to getting them back on their feet, they saw it as their responsibility to help those who were afflicted.

This act of compassion shown by the first responders is just one example of the selflessness in which they live their lives every day.

Mr. Speaker, I thank the firefighters from Hemet and Palm Springs, and I thank first responders everywhere. Their heroism is as inspiring as it is impactful.

RECOGNIZING CATHERINE LANG

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Nebraska (Mr. BACON) for 5 minutes.

Mr. BACON. Mr. Speaker, I rise today in honor of Women's History Month to recognize a dedicated public servant from Nebraska's Seventh District. Catherine Lang's record of leadership and advocacy for the State's small business community has improved the lives of many Nebraskans.

Catherine earned both her bachelor of fine arts and juris doctor degrees