

a unique status: the freely-associated Republic of the Marshall Islands, the Federated States of Micronesia and the Republic of Palau. These are island countries with which we share a long history dating back to the Second World War and before and an enduring relationship built on decades of shared interests and like values. These countries, also collectively known as the Freely Associated States, span an expanse of the Pacific ranging from just southwest of my State of Hawaii to our territories of Guam and the Northern Mariana Islands in the western Pacific, an area the size of the forty-eight contiguous States.

Under our Compacts of Free Association, our country can construct military bases on their soil and make decisions that affect our mutual security. In return, we provide financial assistance, access to some federal programs and enable free movement of their citizens to live and work in the United States.

The role these islands play in our national defense cannot be understated. For example, Palau asked our country to increase its military presence in its islands, and the Marshall Islands are home to what the Army calls "the premier missile test range in the world." In November, a Navy destroyer near Hawaii intercepted a mock ICBM launched from U.S. Army Garrison Kwajalein Atoll in an exercise viewed as an important accomplishment and critical milestone by our military. Vulnerable as this small island community is to COVID-19, it opened its closed borders to our citizens who needed to work at Kwajalein.

Given the importance of the Compacts, we must always demonstrate to the Freely Associated States and the world that the U.S. can be trusted to uphold its commitments. For example, I am very pleased that the final Fiscal Year 2021 omnibus funding bill includes \$5 million of a \$20 million debt the U.S. owes to the Marshall Islands in response to unilateral changes made to the investment tax and trade incentives in the initial version of the Compact of Free Association.

On the other hand, I was extremely disappointed that the outgoing Administration recommended providing \$2 million less for Fiscal Year 2021 than was agreed to in compensation for amending various education programs back in 2003. This underfunding erodes the trust that our allies and partners have for our commitment to the Compacts.

We must fulfill and take these obligations seriously, especially as we work to renew the economic provisions of these Compacts. I look forward to working closely with my colleagues in the coming Congress to remedy this error and address other issues that may arise relating to the Compacts.

Our alliances and partnerships worldwide, powered by shared interests and values, are America's greatest strengths, especially in this era of great power competition. Trust in our country's ability and willingness to honor our commitments must be the unshakeable foundation of these crucial relationships. We can and must do better to protect that trust.

PROTECTING SENIOR CITIZENS

HON. KWANZA HALL

OF GEORGIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, December 24, 2020

Mr. HALL. Madam Speaker, I rise today to address a most pernicious side effect of the pandemic.

Indeed, Madam Speaker, one of the most troubling parts of this pandemic is that our seniors are the most vulnerable.

They are uniquely susceptible to the harmful parts of this pandemic.

Often times, our senior citizens, who have worked many decades making our country great, are on fixed incomes, sometimes many miles from other loved ones.

It is sad and regrettable that this pandemic has created so much pain and death and uncertainty to this community.

But sadly, as happens from time to time in moments of suffering, there is also an insidious group of people who seek to profit off of this pain.

Madam Speaker, if we are serious about protecting our senior citizens during this pandemic, then our help must not stop at COVID tests, vaccinations or hospital care.

We must also ensure that individuals purporting to be fiduciaries and financial advisors do not take advantage of our seniors.

But unfortunately, this is not just limited to financial advisors. There are many probate attorneys preying on the elderly and the sick and those shut-in and in poor communities in Georgia's Fifth Congressional District and all over the country. We must work with organizations and Bar Associations to prevent this abuse.

Our seniors deserve to live their golden years in peace of mind. Our body recognizes that, which is why we have never wavered to pass legislation designed to ensure this reality.

We have passed social security and passed age discrimination laws. We must do more to ensure that they are protected from some of the darker elements of society.

TRIBUTE TO THOMAS J. "TONY" FITZGERALD, III FOR HIS LIFETIME OF SERVICE TO OUR COUNTRY

HON. ANNA G. ESHOO

OF CALIFORNIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, December 24, 2020

Ms. ESHOO. Madam Speaker, I rise today on my own behalf and on behalf of Representatives ZOE LOFGREN, JACKIE SPEIER, JIMMY PANETTA, ERIC SWALWELL, RO KHANNA, JERRY MCNERNEY and JARED HUFFMAN to honor the extraordinary leadership of Thomas "Tony" Fitzgerald, III, as he retires from his position as the Director of the Veteran Affairs Palo Alto Health Care System (PAVAHCS), an office that he assumed on June 25, 2017. He ably filled the enormous shoes left by former Director Lisa Freeman, and oversaw the delivery of health care to more than 93,000 veterans at the VA's Palo Alto facility. The PAVAHCS serves eleven Congressional Districts and ten counties, and has three inpatient facilities in Palo Alto, Menlo Park and Livermore, and outpatient facilities in seven other cities.

Mr. Fitzgerald earned his Bachelor's degree from American InterContinental University, and is a graduate of the Leadership VA program, and a member of the American Hospital Association and the American College of Healthcare Executives.

Mr. Fitzgerald served his country throughout his long and productive career. He was a medical non-commissioned officer in the U.S. Army for 16 years, and began his career with the VA in 1988 as a psychiatric nursing assistant in Chicago. Throughout his career he has been an ardent advocate for Veterans, their families and staff. He earned increasingly responsible positions with the VA and he moved to California and began his service with VA Northern California in 2000.

Tony Fitzgerald's accomplishments while at PAVAHCS make a very long list. Among some of the highlights are increased Veteran trust scores; high patient satisfaction scores; approval for an additional Fisher House; robust union partnerships; the hiring of 1,080 new employees in fiscal year 2020; and oversight of the largest construction portfolio in VHA's history (\$2.6B).

Mr. Fitzgerald has earned many honors including the Top Environmental Excellence Award and the Secretary of VA Alternative Dispute Resolution Award.

Madam Speaker, we ask the entire House of Representatives to join us in thanking Tony Fitzgerald for his extraordinary service to our country, and in wishing him every blessing in his well-earned retirement.

AFRICAN DIASPORA

HON. KWANZA HALL

OF GEORGIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, December 24, 2020

Mr. HALL. I rise today to address the issue of the African Diaspora.

The African Union defines the African Diaspora very broadly as people of African Descent living outside Africa. The UN estimates that there are about 200 million people of African descent outside Africa in various constituencies.

In Atlanta, we are blessed to have so many members of the Diaspora in our community and that community is anchored by incredible institutions like the African Diaspora Art Museum of Atlanta.

And I am heartened to see that our youth are also engaged in this conversation, such as the Young African Diaspora Initiative.

The last dozen years have been a source of whiplash. From 2009 to 2017, we had a president whose father was from Kenya, and who used the opportunity of his administration to strengthen ties between Africa and our Nation.

For the last four years, however, we have had a president who pays no heed to the richness and vitality of the African Diaspora. This was encapsulated by his vulgar epithet about some of the countries on the African continent.

But, in November, Americans decided to turn the page far away from this hate.

The election of President-Elect Joe Biden and Vice President-Elect Kamala Harris provides an opportunity.

We need to use the occasion of the Biden Administration to strengthen the ties with Africa while emphasizing the importance of the Global Diaspora.