

the underlying reason behind most of the social, economic, and fiscal challenges we've faced and what allows the federal government to treat our 3.2 million American citizens unequally under federal laws and programs.

I led negotiations on the Puerto Rico Status Act, which passed the House with bipartisan support in December 2022 and would have authorized a binding plebiscite among the constitutionally viable, nonterritorial status options—statehood or independence.

This bill served as the basis for the local referendum held this past November 5th, in which Puerto Rico supported statehood with 57 percent of the votes. This is the fourth time since 2012 that we have voted to express our desire to become a permanent part of the Union.

Mr. Speaker, these are just a few of the issues I have worked on, but I just want to thank the people of Puerto Rico for giving me the opportunity to serve as their voice in Congress.

I also thank my colleagues, who've worked with me, visited the Island, and have taken the time to understand and support our needs and federal priorities.

I thank my family, especially my husband, José, and our children, who inspire me to work harder every day.

There is much to be done and much progress to look forward to in Puerto Rico. As I begin to serve as Governor early next year, I look forward to remaining engaged with Congress to continue advocating for the Island, responsibly expedite the use of recovery funds, and foster economic growth.

HONORING DR. DANIEL N. BAKER FOR THREE DECADES OF OUT- STANDING LEADERSHIP AND SCIENTIFIC ACHIEVEMENT

HON. JOE NEGUSE

OF COLORADO

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, December 18, 2024

Mr. NEGUSE. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize the accomplishments of Dr. Daniel N. Baker, who, for the last three decades, has served as the Director of the Laboratory for Atmospheric and Space Physics (LASP), one of the longest-established and top-funded research institutes at the University of Colorado Boulder. In this position, Director Baker has been instrumental in advancing LASP and the university into an epicenter of space science research and aerospace workforce development crucial to Colorado and our Nation.

Director Baker simultaneously serves as a professor in three University of Colorado Boulder departments, including Astrophysical and Planetary Sciences, Aerospace Engineering Sciences, and Physics. During his tenure, Director Baker has published more than 900 papers, edited nine books, and won numerous prestigious awards for his research and leadership. He also has continuously contributed to the international advancement of topics in space physics.

Director Baker has built LASP into one of the top academic space research centers and the only one in the world to send an instrument to explore every planet in our solar system. Under his leadership, LASP grew from approximately 180 to 750 employees, about

one-quarter of whom are students. Over the years, the institute has provided hands-on training on numerous NASA missions for hundreds of CU Boulder students. Some of these students have returned to LASP as employees, while others now work at NASA centers and in aerospace businesses across the country, extending Director Baker's legacy for decades to come.

Under his guidance, CU's laboratory has helped revolutionize our understanding of the cosmos, conducting numerous important missions, including NASA's Cassini mission to Saturn, the New Horizons mission to Pluto, and SNOE, one of the space agency's first small satellite missions.

Director Baker's contributions will continue to be felt in Colorado, across the country, and throughout the world for decades to come. I want to congratulate him as he shifts to a new focus on space policy at the university and thank him for his stellar service to our community, Colorado, and the Nation.

HONORING REPRESENTATIVE CATHY McMORRIS RODGERS

HON. DAN NEWHOUSE

OF WASHINGTON

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, December 18, 2024

Mr. NEWHOUSE. Mr. Speaker, today I rise to recognize a dedicated leader, public servant, and good friend—Congresswoman CATHY McMORRIS RODGERS.

For nearly two decades, CATHY has been a champion for the people of Washington's 5th Congressional District and a powerful voice for rural America. From delivering for our veterans to advancing clean energy initiatives, she has left a lasting mark on our Nation.

Outside of her hard work as a Member of Congress, CATHY is a good friend. Over the years, we have joined forces in protecting the Pacific Northwest's hydropower operations and even hosted a high-turnout "Save the Dams" rally together in 2022 for the Lower Snake River Dams. I'll never forget shaking cowbells as we rallied the public behind our precious dams.

As she begins her well-deserved retirement, I extend my gratitude for all the work she has done for the Washington Delegation and wish her the very best for this next chapter of her life. I thank CATHY, for her service to our Nation and the communities across Washington's 5th Congressional District. She will be missed.

TRIBUTE TO CONGRESSMAN JOHN MCKEE SPRATT, JR.

HON. JAMES E. CLYBURN

OF SOUTH CAROLINA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, December 18, 2024

Mr. CLYBURN. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to pay tribute to a great South Carolinian and good friend. Congressman John McKee Spratt, Jr. transitioned to eternal rest on December 14, 2024, in York, South Carolina. His compassion, generosity, and wisdom will be remembered and cherished by all who were fortunate to meet him.

John Spratt was born on November 1, 1942. He grew up in York, South Carolina, a small

mill town where his family has roots dating back to the Revolutionary War. John was a precocious child, known for his inquisitiveness and curiosity. After graduating from York High School in 1960, where he served as Student Body President, John attended Davidson College and pursued a degree in history. John's peers at Davidson saw the same intellect in him as his friends did in York, and similarly elected him Student Body President of the university. After graduating, he studied philosophy, politics, and economics on a Marshall Scholarship at Oxford University before attending Yale Law School in 1966. Following law school, he served three years as an Army Captain at the Pentagon, earning a Meritorious Service Medal. In 1971, John returned home to York to practice law at his father's firm and pursue various business interests. Over the next decade, he became a leader in the York community.

John's exposure to politics came at a young age. His father was an influential figure in the York County and South Carolina Democratic Parties, and he encouraged John's participation in the political process. Although John served as a delegate to the 1964 Democratic National Convention, it wasn't until nearly two decades later, in 1982, that he pursued elected office. When Representative Ken Holland of South Carolina's 5th Congressional District decided not to seek reelection, John won the Democratic primary handily and breezed through the general election to become the 5th District's Representative. He would hold that seat for the next 28 years.

A man of profound decency, extraordinary intelligence, and an unmatched work ethic, John became one of Congress's most effective legislators. He never feared working across the aisle to get things done and perfected the art of finding common ground while standing firm on his principles. His unique ability to find that common ground allowed him to fend off challengers time and again even as the political environment in South Carolina shifted beneath him.

During his service on the House Armed Services Committee, John chaired multiple subcommittees and eventually became the second highest-ranking Democrat. His interest in nuclear issues led him to lead the first foreign delegation to the Soviet Union to tour nuclear weapons plants, and he played a central role in passing the 1992 moratorium on U.S. nuclear testing. John also played a key role in helping the Catawba Tribe gain long-sought federal recognition, bringing together Catawba leaders and local landowners to negotiate a deal that met both sides' approval.

John's proudest accomplishments in Congress came when he assumed the powerful role as the top Democrat on the House Budget Committee in 1997. When President Bill Clinton expressed support for a balanced budget, John and his friend Erskine Bowles, Clinton's Chief of Staff, were tasked with negotiating with Republicans on a bill that preserved critical investments in education, health care, and social programs while cutting government spending. The resulting Balanced Budget Act of 1997 created the first federal budget surplus in 30 years and the budget hasn't been balanced since.

When Democrats regained the House majority in 2006, John became chair of the House Budget Committee. When President Barack Obama made health care reform a

central focus of his first term, it was the House Budget Committee, with John as Chair, that helped shepherd the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act through Congress in 2010. John knew his role in pushing the bill forward would likely cost him his seat in Congress—and it did—but it was a price he was willing to pay for the good of the country.

John is survived by his childhood sweetheart and wife of 56 years, Jane Stacy Spratt; three daughters, Susan, Sarah, and Catherine; and five grandchildren. When he retired from Congress, John returned to his home community of York and served as a Visiting Distinguished Professor of Public Policy at Winthrop University and on the board of the Committee for a Responsible Federal Budget.

Mr. Speaker, serving in this Body with John Spratt was one of the most rewarding experiences of my life. He was a friend and confidant, a colleague and counselor, a mentor and partner. His love of country and respect for humanity were always on display. He was an inconspicuous genius and the most ordinary, extraordinary person I have ever known. I will always remember his wise counsel, quick wit, and endless kindness. John represented the best of America, and America is better off because of him. We will miss John dearly, and may he rest in peace.

RECOGNIZING JUDGE WILLIE EARL LOCKETTE

HON. SANFORD D. BISHOP, JR.

OF GEORGIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, December 18, 2024

Mr. BISHOP of Georgia. Mr. Speaker, it is my honor and pleasure to extend my personal congratulations and best wishes to an exceptional community leader and outstanding public servant, Judge Willie Earl Lockette, on the occasion of his retirement as the Chief Judge of the Superior Court of Dougherty County.

A native of Turner County, Georgia, Judge Lockette received his bachelor's degree in History and Political Science from Fort Valley State College (now University) where he began his lifelong journey as a member of the Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, Inc. Following his time at Fort Valley State College, Judge Lockette completed his juris doctorate degree from the University of Illinois, College of Law at Champaign.

For almost three decades, Judge Lockette has been a distinguished jurist and public servant in Dougherty County. He has built quite an impressive career, which began with his position as a Staff Attorney with the Albany, Georgia Regional Office of Georgia Legal Services Programs, Inc. (GLSP), where he litigated federal and state cases on behalf of indigent Georgians. In 1991, he was appointed as an Associate Judge of the Magistrate Court of Dougherty County, and in 1993, he was appointed to Chief Judge. In 1996, Lockette declared his candidacy for Judge of the Superior Court of Dougherty County, and won a decisive victory over a well-established, well-financed opponent. Judge Lockette's win was historic. With his election he became the first African American to win a county-wide contested election in the Dougherty Judicial Circuit. Judge Lockette would go on to win six additional terms, be-

coming the Chief Judge of the Superior Court in 2009.

In addition to his legal background, Judge Lockette has served in several other leadership roles in the Albany-Dougherty County community. In 2001, he answered the call to gospel ministry and went on to become an ordained minister. For 12 years, he served as a Pastor's Assistant at the New Grove Missionary Baptist Church. Today, Judge Lockette is the Pastor of the Greater Pines Chapel Missionary Baptist Church where he continues to shepherd his congregation and serve the greater community. Additionally, for nearly 10 years, Judge Lockette served as an Adjunct Professor of Political Science, History and Public Administration at Albany State University.

In addition to his extensive career, Judge Lockette was the recipient of several awards and distinctions. He was the inaugural recipient of the coveted Dan Bradley Award for Public Service and has also been nominated for appointments to several judgeships, to include the Georgia Court of Appeals, the United States Magistrate Court, and the United States District Court.

Judge Lockette has accomplished so much throughout his life, but none of this would have been possible without the Grace of God and the love and support of his wife, Helen Hamilton Lockette and their four children, 12 grandchildren, and 5 great-grandchildren.

Sir Winston Churchill often said: "You make your living by what you get; you make your life by what you give." Southwest Georgia is truly a better place because of Judge Willie Lockette's service to his community as an attorney, judge, pastor, professor, and neighbor. His dedication and his expertise as a public servant are unparalleled, but his heart for helping others has made his life's work truly special.

On a personal note, Judge Lockette has been my friend for many years. He never told me what he thought I wanted to hear; he told me what he thought I needed to hear. I will forever cherish his sage counsel and advice which has been invaluable to me as I have served in Congress.

Mr. Speaker, I ask my colleagues to join my wife, Vivian, and me, along with the more than 765,000 people of Georgia's Second Congressional District, in extending our sincerest appreciation and best wishes to Judge Willie Earl Lockette upon the occasion of his retirement from an outstanding career of public service.

TRIBUTE TO KEVIN JEFFRIES

HON. KEN CALVERT

OF CALIFORNIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, December 18, 2024

Mr. CALVERT. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to pay tribute to and congratulate Riverside County Supervisor Kevin Jeffries for his 12 years of dedicated service to the Riverside County Board of Supervisors. Kevin will be stepping down from the Board of Supervisors this month, marking the end of a decades-long career in public service.

Kevin has been a resident of Riverside County since 1971 and was a successful small business owner. His first foray in public service came in 1977 as a Volunteer Fire

Captain for the Riverside County Fire Department. Just a few years later, in 1980, Kevin was elected to serve on the Board of Directors of a local Park & Recreation District. Eager to improve local water infrastructure and protect residents from water and sewer rate increases, Kevin successfully ran for a seat on the Elsinore Valley Municipal Water District Board of Directors in 1990, and on the Western Municipal Water District Board of Directors in 1998.

In 2006, Kevin was chosen by voters to represent Riverside County in the California State Assembly. In Sacramento, Kevin took on the challenging task of fighting to stop the regulatory and tax onslaught on California's small businesses. In 2012, Kevin was elected to the Riverside County Board of Supervisors. As Supervisor, Kevin has made an effort to balance Riverside County's growth with investments in necessary infrastructure and public safety. Thanks to his advocacy, Riverside County continues to be a source of affordable housing, safe family-friendly communities, and economic opportunity, and is well-positioned for years to come.

On a personal note, I count Kevin as a close friend. I have appreciated his advice, humor, and support over the years and look forward to many more. I thank Kevin for his friendship, leadership, and his lasting impact in creating a better future for Riverside County.

HONORING THE SERVICE OF OWATONNA MAYOR TOM KUNTZ

HON. BRAD FINSTAD

OF MINNESOTA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, December 18, 2024

Mr. FINSTAD. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to honor the service of Tom Kuntz, a friend and fellow southern Minnesotan who has served the Owatonna community for the past twenty years.

In 2004, Tom was elected Mayor of Owatonna, where he found his true calling in public service. Throughout his five-term tenure, Owatonna experienced remarkable growth, with a revitalization of the city's downtown area, the relocation of Owatonna Hospital, an expanding industrial park, completion of the four-lane U.S. Highway 14 project between Owatonna and Dodge Center, and the construction of a new, state-of-the-art high school—just to name a few.

Tom has been a fixture in Owatonna for decades, fiercely advocating for the city's economic growth and development, bringing his vision to the role of mayor. A good leader knows it's not about the position, it's about listening to people. Tom listens more than he speaks, and in his twenty years as mayor, has undoubtedly made a difference in the lives of many Owatonians, displaying the kind of leadership we should show to our kids and grandkids. He is a true embodiment of who we are in southern Minnesota.

Tom not only leaves behind enormous shoes to fill, but also a legacy that Owatonna will remember for generations.

I congratulate Tom on his well-deserved retirement, and wishing him and his wife, Shelby, the best in this next chapter.