

REMEMBERING AUGUSTA
PETRONE

Mr. GRASSLEY. Mr. President, on August 1, 2025, Augusta Petrone passed away peacefully at age 88, surrounded by members of her beloved family in her adopted home State of New Hampshire.

In honor of a life lived in service to others, I would like to memorialize her life and legacy. Augusta loved her family, enriched her community with civic leadership, and exhibited a fierce devotion to our country. Born in Massachusetts with marital ties to the Heartland and my home State of Iowa, she was a freedom-loving American who cared about people from all walks of life.

Barbara and I were fortunate to enjoy her friendship for the last half-century. As I mentioned, Augusta married an Iowa farm boy who graduated from West Point and went on to serve as a lieutenant in General Patton's 3rd Army in the Battle of the Bulge.

Joseph C. Petrone was from Marshalltown, IA. He met the love of his life in Washington, DC. They married in 1958 and led a life of public service that took them to places around the world. After Joe retired from the Army, the couple relocated to Marshalltown for about a decade. That is when our paths crossed and stayed connected for the next half-century.

Augusta was a workhorse, full of enterprise and engagement. During one of their residencies in Paris, she studied at the Sorbonne. She would go on to teach English and French to students around the world, including in Washington, DC, Seoul, South Korea, and Marshalltown, IA.

Augusta threw herself into grassroots politics, from local candidates to Presidential campaigns. In 2000, Augusta was an elector for New Hampshire who cast the 271st electoral vote for George W. Bush to win the razor-thin Presidential contest against Al Gore. In the previous Presidential election, I traveled with my good friend Bob Dole after the Iowa caucuses in 1996 to meet with Augusta on the campaign trail in New Hampshire. It was a special treat to stay in her beautiful home in the same bedroom that President Taft once slept in.

No matter the political party their friends and neighbors aligned, Augusta and her husband Joe encouraged their fellow citizens to get involved and make their voices heard. Indeed, upon her passing, Augusta requested that in lieu of flowers, people donate "at some level to their favorite U.S. political party." Her deep love of America transcended party lines, just like her warmth and generosity for all people, no matter if you were a repairman making a house call or a U.S. President serving in the White House.

One of the first campaigns she got involved with was my first run for Congress in 1974. She went door-to-door, knocking on the doors of Iowans in the Third Congressional District to support

my campaign. A decade later, she and her husband relocated to Des Moines to work on the Reagan/Bush ticket in the 1984 campaign.

Their next call to service took them to Geneva, Switzerland, where Joe served as U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations. Upon their return to the United States, they put down roots in New Hampshire, where Augusta became a prominent leader in Granite State politics and civic life.

In recent years, I had the pleasure to see Augusta when GOP leaders from New Hampshire came to Washington. I never missed this opportunity to see my long-time friend. We took mutual pride in the status of our respective States to hold the first-in-the-nation caucuses and primary that kicked off the Presidential nomination contest every 4 years. The people of Iowa and New Hampshire take very seriously the responsibility that comes with this privilege of being first in the Nation. Augusta thrived on it, and her ebullience was uplifting to everyone with whom she crossed paths.

Augusta was preceded in death by her husband of 58 years who passed away in 2016. Some people refer to Augusta as the "First Lady of Republican Politics." She was a force of nature and shared her generosity and gift of leadership with charming warmth and kindness.

Barbara and I send our condolences to her many friends and loved ones. May her memory be a blessing, and may her love of country inspire those who knew and loved her to never lose sight of the shining city upon a hill.

HONDURAS

Mr. WELCH. Mr. President, on November 30, the people of Honduras will choose their next President and members of the National Congress. The stakes could not be higher. I am deeply concerned both about the integrity of the elections and the ongoing problems of corruption and impunity in the country.

Given Honduras' history of fraudulent elections and the failure of the current government to take steps to ensure that the upcoming elections are free, fair, and transparent, it is incumbent on the Organization of American States, the United States, and other interested parties provide the support and observers necessary to mitigate opportunities for fraud. All candidates must be able to compete safely and fairly, and the Honduran people must be ensured the opportunity to cast their ballots in safety and without intimidation.

Unfortunately, there are already reasons to question the government's commitment to protect the integrity of the electoral process. Honduras' Attorney General's office has reportedly increasingly acted to influence and undermine the autonomy of the National Electoral Council, a cornerstone of free and fair elections. The Attorney Gen-

eral's office has also failed to investigate credible allegations of political intimidation, further exacerbating concerns about the Council's impartiality.

On July 16, 2025, Counselor Ana Paola Hall resigned, citing intense political pressure and threats against her and her family. Hall's departure leaves only two counselors and underscores the broader issue of political intimidation targeting electoral officials, which threatens the Council's ability to function. Further, the government has reportedly failed to implement the system for transmitting election results—intended to ensure the transparent and timely reporting of election results—increasing the risk of post-election disputes.

These troubling developments undermine public confidence and make even more important the role of Honduran civil society in helping to prepare for and monitor the fairness of the elections. *Articulacion Ciudadana por la Transparencia y la Justicia* and *Movimiento Indignados* are examples of organizations that have worked for years to strengthen the institutions of democracy and the rule of law in Honduras.

I also want to call attention, again, to the continuing threats and violence against members of the Guapinol, Tocoa, and other communities in the Bajo Aguan region of Honduras. It is a troubling reminder of the urgent need to counter the corrupt and abusive legacy of former President Juan Hernando Hernandez. Hernandez is serving a 45-year sentence in a U.S. prison, but the Honduran people remain victims of his violent legacy and of the failure of his successor to combat the corruption that is entrenched in Honduras or to take the steps necessary to end impunity.

Many brave Honduran activists and journalists have been targeted and killed for nothing more than exposing the truth and resisting illegal actions. It has now been a year since the murder of Honduran environmental activist Juan Lopez, one of many victims of vigilante violence. Mr. Lopez had been wrongly imprisoned and prosecuted for speaking out against corrupt officials who seek to profit from an open-pit iron oxide mine and the Ecotek Thermoelectric Project.

In addition to Mr. Lopez, there have been six other assassinations of members of the Guapinol water defenders. No one has been prosecuted or punished for those crimes, nor for the murders of other environmental and human rights defenders in Honduras.

Juan Lopez, like Berta Caceres whose murder in 2016 was linked to officers of the company responsible for the hydroelectric project she and others in her indigenous community opposed, was a courageous defender of the environment and of the rights of the Honduran people.

Following Mr. Lopez's murder last year, I urged the Honduran Government to take several steps immediately in response to the pattern of violence: Call for an international commission of experts to support the Honduran prosecutor's investigation, to ensure the investigation of Mr. Lopez' murder is thorough and impartial; protect human rights defenders at risk in the Bajo Aguan region; and investigate the abuses and corruption denounced by Juan Lopez and the pattern of violence against the Guapinol defenders.

As far as I am aware, none of those steps have been taken. Nor has the Castro government followed through on her campaign promise to support the establishment of an international commission to combat corruption and impunity.

As a result, impunity for these crimes and the vitriolic attacks against nongovernmental organizations by officials in the executive and legislative branches of government have continued.

My State of Vermont and Honduras have been partners since 1966, just 2 years after the founding of Partners of the Americas. Vermonters have always had an interest in Honduras—its history, people, culture, and development. One of many examples is the Honduran Tolupan Education Program, which arranges for Vermonters and other volunteers to travel to indigenous villages in Honduras to help build community libraries where none exist. Vermonters want Honduras to succeed as a democracy where justice and economic opportunity are available to all its citizens.

After 8 years of President Hernandez and 4 years of President Castro, the Honduran people deserve better. I hope that whoever wins in November will use their office to improve the lives of the people, rather than to enrich themselves. And I hope that the people of the communities in the Bajo Aguan will no longer have to live in fear that powerful companies and corrupt officials will steal their land, pollute their rivers, and murder them for peacefully defending the natural resources that are rightfully theirs.

WELCOMING ECUMENICAL PATRIARCH BARTHOLOMEW

Ms. ROSEN. Mr. President, today I rise to welcome His All-Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew to our Nation's Capital. Visiting from Greece, Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew was elected in October 1991 as the 270th archbishop of the 2000-year-old church founded by the Apostle Andrew. He has demonstrated extraordinary leadership within the Orthodox Christian community and across the global religious and environmental landscapes.

Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew was ordained as a deacon in 1961 and a priest in 1969. Throughout his ministry, he served as an assistant dean of the Theological School of Halki, personal secretary to Patriarch Demetrios, Met-

ropolitan of Philadelphia, and later Metropolitan of Chalcedon, before being elected ecumenical patriarch in 1991. He has steered spiritual unity among Orthodox Christians, convened the first Synaxis of Orthodox primates in 1992, supported the restoration of autonomous churches in Eastern Europe, and granted autocephaly to the Orthodox Church of Ukraine in 2019.

The Patriarch's role extends far beyond his ecclesial leadership. Widely known as the "Green Patriarch," he has pioneered the integration of ecological awareness with theological ethics, declaring environmental destruction a sin, establishing an annual Orthodox Day of Prayer for Creation, and convening numerous international symposia blending faith, science, and environmental stewardship. His efforts have earned him global recognition, including the U.S. Congressional Gold Medal and the Templeton Prize.

Patriarch Bartholomew's tireless work ethic and dedication has bridged religious traditions, championed interfaith dialogue, advanced environmental justice, and fostered unity among diverse Christian communities. On behalf of Nevada's Greek Orthodox community, it is an honor to welcome him to Washington, DC.

ADDITIONAL STATEMENTS

TRIBUTE TO BRANDON BAGWELL AND HIS STUDENTS

• Mr. BOOZMAN. Mr. President, I rise today to honor an exceptional Arkansas educator, Mr. Brandon Bagwell of Harmony Grove Middle School in Benton, and to recognize the extraordinary efforts of his students commemorating the legacy of our Nation's military veterans. Their commitment to honoring service and preserving history reflects the very best of our State and values.

Through the National History Day program, Mr. Bagwell and his students received a grant from the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. This distinguished recognition provides educators and their students with the opportunity to research and enshrine the memories of those who have served our Nation. By providing learning institutions with funding, the National History Day organization serves to encourage historical understanding and engagement among young people.

Over the course of the 2024-2025 school year, Mr. Bagwell and his students undertook a meaningful effort to honor two Korean war-era veterans, U.S. Marine Corps Private First Class Myrtis Lee "Linda" Baxter Baker and U.S. Air Force Master Sergeant Leroy Mazel Smith, both of whom are what the program calls "Silent Heroes." These two veterans served honorably, and their sacrifices and contributions remain woven into the fabric of American strength and freedom.

With his guidance, Mr. Bagwell's students conducted extensive research

analyzing primary and secondary sources, engaged in community conversations, and conducted interviews with family members to apply historical context to the two veterans they selected. Through their work, the teacher-student team explored the veterans' lives before the war, their home communities during the 1950s, their military service, and their experience as veterans, often uncovering details previously untold. At the culmination of their research, the team filmed eulogies at their local veteran cemeteries to ensure these veterans received the honor they deserve.

In a time when fewer Americans have personal connections to those who served in uniform, efforts like this bridge the gap between past and present. Mr. Bagwell's classroom is not only a space for academic growth, but also a place where service and citizenship are actively cultivated. His leadership along with his students' dedicated efforts ensures that our veterans' sacrifices are remembered with dignity and passed down to future generations.

Among 71 educators from across the country, Mr. Bagwell was named a National History Day Teacher of the Year nominee—a testament to his dedication to, and impact on, the students in his classroom. Arkansas is fortunate to have educators like Mr. Bagwell who go above and beyond to inspire curiosity, empathy, and civic responsibility. The commitment and diligent efforts demonstrated by his students have not only honored these veterans but have also set a powerful example for their peers across the State and country. I congratulate Mr. Bagwell and his students for their remarkable work. •

TRIBUTE TO JESSICA VISK

• Mr. BOOZMAN. Mr. President, I rise today to recognize an outstanding Arkansas educator, Mrs. Jessica Vick of Bay High School, for her exceptional work in preserving the legacy of our Nation's fallen servicemembers. Her dedication to historical education and civic engagement exemplifies the values we hold dear in Arkansas and across the Nation.

Throughout the 2024-2025 school year, Mrs. Vick participated in a distinguished program sponsored by the American Battle Monuments Commission—ABMC—and facilitated through the National History Day program. This initiative empowers educators to research and commemorate "Silent Heroes," American servicemembers who gave the ultimate sacrifice and are memorialized at ABMC cemeteries or memorials.

Mrs. Vick undertook a profound journey to honor one such hero, U.S. Marine Corps Private First Class James Rickey Maxwell, detailing his life before the war as well as his military service. Her research incorporated primary and secondary sources, and whenever possible, she connected with family members and local residents to add