

EXTENSIONS OF REMARKS

HONORING LIEUTENANT COLONEL
RAYMOND “RAY” FALKE,
UNITED STATES NAVY

HON. TONY GONZALES

OF TEXAS

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Monday, December 15, 2025

Mr. TONY GONZALES of Texas. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to honor a remarkable American, Raymond “Ray” Falke, whose life reflects the very best of our Nation’s character, courage, and commitment to service.

Ray Falke was born on February 6, 1927, in Temple, Texas, to a hardworking family. His mother kept the home running, and his father delivered kerosene to local farmers for a dollar a day. Growing up with little material wealth, Ray learned early the value of perseverance and responsibility. At just 4:00 a.m. each morning, he rose to deliver telegrams and newspapers for the Temple paper before heading to school.

At the age of seventeen, motivated by patriotism and a sense of duty, Ray volunteered to join the United States Navy. His mother, already carrying the worry of one son missing in action and later confirmed as a POW in Italy, hesitated to sign the authorization. But Ray insisted, he felt called to serve. And with her signature and a heartfelt warning “Don’t screw up now; make me proud!”, Ray set his course.

Ray and a close friend chose the Navy over waiting to be drafted into the Army, and he soon found himself assigned to the USS *Geneva*, a transport ship in the Pacific. He served as one of the ship’s Radarmen, scanning the dark waters for threats during some of the most uncertain moments of the war.

Despite these dangers, Ray is the first to say he was fortunate. As a transport vessel, the *Geneva* never saw direct combat, and he carries deep gratitude for the luck and protection he felt during those perilous years. He was docked in Okinawa when the atomic bombs were dropped—a moment he recalls as both sobering and consequential.

When the announcement finally came over the ship’s PA system that the war had ended, the men of the *Geneva* erupted in cheers.

But Ray’s service to our Nation did not end there.

After the war, he joined the Navy Reserve, finished high school, and used the GI Bill to attend Texas A&M. Soon after, he received a commission in the United States Air Force. As a trained bombardier and navigator, he served with distinction through both the Korean War and the Vietnam War. Throughout each chapter of his military career, Ray demonstrated unwavering dedication to his mission, his fellow service members, and the country he loves.

Ray married before deploying to Korea and became the proud father of two daughters, Robin and Dawn. Today, at 97 years old, he lives a joyful life in San Antonio, surrounded by family and friends. He continues to gather with those he served alongside, honoring

memories, friendships, and the legacy of service that binds them all.

Ray Falke is, without question, a true American hero. His decades of service helped secure the freedoms of countless Americans—those living today and those yet to come. And he remains steadfast in his belief that “America’s role in the war was ensuring the Allied forces were victorious.”

Mr. Speaker, we are privileged to recognize Raymond “Ray” Falke an extraordinary veteran, a devoted family man, and a shining example of the ideals that define this Nation. May his story continue to inspire future generations to serve with the same honor, humility, and patriotism.

CELEBRATING COLONEL HERBERT STERN’S 107TH BIRTHDAY

HON. JOE NEGUSE

OF COLORADO

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Monday, December 15, 2025

Mr. NEGUSE. Mr. Speaker, today I honor Colonel Herbert Stern, the oldest living graduate of the United States Military Academy at West Point and to wish him a happy 107th birthday.

As a member of the Class of 1941, Colonel Stern and his fellow cadets were the first class to graduate directly into World War II. Colonel Stern’s distinguished service and heroism during the war included his brave actions during the Battle of the Bulge, for which he was awarded the Silver Star, and him and his men liberating a concentration camp in Salzwedel, Germany.

After World War II, Colonel Stern continued his military service in many high-profile assignments, including positions at the Army War College, NATO headquarters in Italy, and the Joint Advanced Study Group with the Office of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. Colonel Stern’s final military assignment was with the Central Treaty Organization in Turkey and Iran before retiring as a Colonel on September 1, 1968.

In addition to his service to our country, Colonel Stern was a devoted husband to his late wife of over 70 years, Rose; a father to his son Robert, a resident of Fort Collins, and his late daughter Betty; and grandfather to his 2 grandchildren and 2 step-grandchildren.

Colonel Stern turns 107 on Christmas Eve this year, and on behalf of the people of Colorado I thank him for his incredible service to our state and Nation and wish him a very Happy Birthday.

RECOGNIZING DECEMBER 21, 2025
AS WORLD MEDITATION DAY

HON. RAJA KRISHNAMOORTHI

OF ILLINOIS

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Monday, December 15, 2025

Mr. KRISHNAMOORTHI. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize Sunday, December 21,

2025, as World Meditation Day, which has been designated by the United Nations to celebrate the growing recognition of meditation as a practical tool for mental well-being and peace.

This observance will culminate in a global moment of stillness at 10:00 a.m. Eastern Time, when events across Illinois, throughout the United States, and around the world will unite communities in a shared moment of peace and connection during the holiday season, supporting mental well-being, resilience, and unity.

This meditation will be led by Gurudev Sri Sri Ravi Shankar. For more than 45 years, Gurudev has dedicated his life to promoting peace, advancing human values, and serving communities around the world.

Mr. Speaker, I wish to extend my deepest gratitude to Gurudev Sri Sri Ravi Shankar for his work in promoting meditation, and I encourage my colleagues to join in a moment of silence in recognition of World Meditation Day.

PERSONAL EXPLANATION

HON. GREG CASAR

OF TEXAS

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Monday, December 15, 2025

Mr. CASAR. Mr. Speaker, had I been present, I would have voted NAY on Roll Call No. 334, H.R. 3668, Improving Interagency Coordination for Pipeline Reviews Act.

HONORING THE LIFE AND SERVICE
OF RENAE SHIRCLIFF

HON. TIM WALBERG

OF MICHIGAN

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Monday, December 15, 2025

Mr. WALBERG. Mr. Speaker, it is my special privilege to recognize Renae Shircliff of Hillsdale as the Veteran of the Month for December and honor her for her distinguished service to our great Nation.

After graduating high school in 1984, Renae enlisted in the United States Army, serving proudly as an Army Specialist 4th Class, 63 Hotel Tank Mechanic and duty driver for her Commanding Officer. Her excellence and commitment were recognized early in her career, earning her the Army Achievement Medal for her service in Stuttgart, Germany.

Even after leaving active duty, Renae never stopped serving; she simply shifted her focus to ensuring that her fellow veterans received the care, benefits, and respect they deserved. In 2013, Renae joined the Hillsdale County Veterans Affairs Office, and by 2018, she had risen to Director and Veterans Service Officer, a role in which she became a driving force for change and advocacy.

Her dedication earned her prestigious recognition, including the 2016 Pat Ford Award

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Matter set in this typeface indicates words inserted or appended, rather than spoken, by a Member of the House on the floor.

from Hillsdale College and the Leo Leggett Award from the American Legion in both 2017 and 2023. Under her leadership, Hillsdale County veterans collectively received more than \$32 million in VA benefits in both 2022 and 2023, and an additional \$17 million in 2024. These benefits were pivotal in ensuring our veterans receive the care they deserve and improving the quality of life for their families. Renae has personally guided countless veterans through the process of securing the benefits they have so rightfully earned, providing both expertise and compassion.

Renae Shircliff is truly a cornerstone of the veteran community. I am honored to share her story today, and I urge my colleagues to join me in celebrating the accomplishments of this remarkable veteran and public servant.

HONORING THE LATE BRYAN JOHNSON

HON. SUZAN K. DELBENE

OF WASHINGTON

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Monday, December 15, 2025

Ms. DELBENE. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to honor the late Bryan Johnson. During his 53-year career as a radio and television journalist with KOMO News, Mr. Johnson's tenacious reporting and compassionate storytelling made him a staple in households across Western Washington. Mr. Johnson spent his career telling the stories that mattered most to Washingtonians. He held power to account, asking tough questions of local officials and becoming a trusted source of news for communities across our region. His work as a journalist strengthened our democracy and left a lasting impact on our communities.

Mr. Johnson emigrated from the United Kingdom as a child and settled in Washington State in 1948. He graduated from Vashon High School and the University of Washington before beginning a career in broadcast journalism at age 19. Over the next two decades, he rose to become a news anchor and director at KOMO Radio before moving to television full-time in the 1980's. For more than a half-century, Mr. Johnson reported on the local and national events that directly impacted Washington families, from the 1980 eruption of Mount St. Helens to the inauguration of President Obama in 2008. For his reporting, he was awarded the National Unity in Broadcasting Award and several local Emmys, and in 2013 he was inducted into the NATAS Northwest Gold Circle. Throughout his more than five decades with KOMO, Mr. Johnson's colleagues and competitors alike lauded his grace, warmth, and kindness. Mr. Johnson was also a devoted father, grandfather, and husband to his wife Peg.

Mr. Johnson will be remembered as a dedicated journalist, a loving father, and a beloved presence in communities throughout Western Washington. Mr. Speaker, I ask my colleagues to join me in honoring Bryan Johnson and the legacy his work has left behind.

RECOGNIZING CHIEF MASTER SERGEANT ROBERT S. SMITH

HON. SCOTT PERRY

OF PENNSYLVANIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Monday, December 15, 2025

Mr. PERRY. Mr. Speaker, I am honored to recognize Chief Master Sergeant Robert S. Smith on his retirement from service to our Nation in the United States Air Force and Air National Guard.

Chief Smith entered the U.S. Air Force in December 1987, completing the Aerospace Ground Equipment Apprentice course in June 1988. During his active component service from June 1988 to October 1999, Chief Smith performed numerous support functions within the Maintenance Group and Logistics Group, as well as Quality Assurance Inspector and Exercise Evaluation Team Member.

Chief Smith deployed in support of myriad missions, including Operation Provide Comfort, Northern Watch, Southern Watch, Iraqi Freedom, Enduring Freedom, and Unified Protector. In 2013, he completed a tour at the Air National Guard Readiness Center as the subject matter expert for the A4/M Equipment Management section.

Currently, Chief Smith is the Command Chief Master Sergeant of the 193d Special Operations Wing based in Middletown, Pennsylvania—not only one of the largest Air National Guard units in the Country, but a premiere one unlike any other—a profound testament to his leadership skills. He serves as the Senior Enlisted Advisor to the Wing Commander on all issues affecting mission effectiveness, health, morale, readiness, enlisted development, and mentoring of approximately 1,900 Airmen.

Throughout his decorated career, Chief Smith earned a multitude of awards and decorations, to include the: Meritorious Service Medal (w/4 OLC); Air Force Commendation Medal (w/4 OLC); Air Force Achievement Medal; Pennsylvania Commendation Medal; General Thomas J. Stewart Medal; and the Major General Thomas R. White, Jr. Medal.

Chief Smith is a member of the National Guard Association of the United States, the Pennsylvania National Guard Association, the 193d Special Operations Wing Association, and VFW Post 9738.

Mr. Speaker, I am honored and privileged to recognize Chief Master Smith on his retirement upon more than 38 years of service to our Nation in uniform—26 of those in the Pennsylvania Air National Guard. His tireless service and dedication to his fellow Airmen and the United States of America set the standard by which we all should be judged.

HONORING THE LIFE OF PAUL DEPREY

HON. JARED HUFFMAN

OF CALIFORNIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Monday, December 15, 2025

Mr. HUFFMAN. Mr. Speaker, I rise along with my colleagues, Representatives NANCY PELOSI, JOHN GARAMENDI, SETH MOULTON, and ED CASE to honor the life and legacy of Paul DePrey, who passed away on October 10,

2025, at the age of 58. A devoted public servant for more than 30 years, Paul demonstrated an unwavering commitment to environmental stewardship, conservation, and the mission of the National Park Service.

Born in Edmundston, New Brunswick, Paul earned his bachelor's degree in history and anthropology from the University of Maine. He later moved to Bellingham, Washington, where he completed his master's degree in anthropology at Western Washington University. It was during this time that he met his wife, Cari Kreshak, whom he married in 1995.

Paul launched his career as an archaeologist for the USDA Forest Service in the Cascade Mountain Range of Oregon and Washington, before serving in the USDA Office of the Secretary and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. There, Paul contributed to the Northwest Forest Plan, the Headwaters Land Exchange, the Presidential Forum at Lake Tahoe, and critical efforts to improve federal-tribal relationships and advance endangered species conservation.

In 2001, Paul joined the National Park Service, where he served with distinction for nearly twenty-five years. Paul first served as Resource Manager at Whiskeytown National Recreation Area and then at Joshua Tree National Park. In 2008, Paul became Superintendent of the Pearl Harbor National Memorial, where he oversaw the construction of a new visitor campus and renovation of the USS Arizona Memorial. During his tenure, he worked closely with the Japanese Cultural Center of Hawai'i to establish the Honouliuli National Historic Site, a vital preservation that remembers the stories of Japanese Americans incarcerated during World War II and serves as a powerful reminder of the need to protect civil liberties in times of conflict.

Paul later served as Superintendent of Salem Maritime and Saugus Iron Works National Historic Sites, where he acted as the National Park Service liaison to the Essex National Heritage Area. Under his leadership, Paul expanded visitor access to park resources, addressed historic preservation concerns, and broadened interpretive programs to include Indigenous, colonial European, and Black histories found in New England coastal communities.

In 2022, Paul was appointed to Superintendent of San Francisco Maritime National Historical Park, where he led the complex task of temporarily relocating the park's fleet of national historic landmark ships to Mare Island, site of the Mare Island Naval Shipyard and the Nation's first naval base on the Pacific Ocean.

Paul was widely admired as an exceptional leader who put people first, whether it was a twenty-year veteran of the park or a new gateway community member at Mare Island and Vallejo. Paul perfectly balanced stewardship and recreation, ensuring the preservation of maritime history and culture while also revitalizing and reimagining the role of recreation at Aquatic Park. While Paul left us too soon, his legacy as a leader and person will endure. Paul is survived by his wife, Cari; children, Sebastian and Ronan; his parents and sisters.

Mr. Speaker, I respectfully ask that you join us in extending condolences to Paul's family and many friends and in expressing our appreciation for his decades of exemplary public service to our Nation.