

RECOGNIZING JOSHUA ABER-NATHY FOR ACHIEVING THE RANK OF EAGLE SCOUT

**HON. SAM GRAVES**

OF MISSOURI

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

*Monday, April 16, 2007*

Mr. GRAVES. Madam Speaker, I proudly pause to recognize Joshua Abernathy, a very special young man who has exemplified the finest qualities of citizenship and leadership by taking an active part in the Boy Scouts of America, Troop 264, and in earning the most prestigious award of Eagle Scout.

Joshua has been very active with his troop, participating in many scout activities. Over the many years Joshua has been involved with scouting, he has not only earned numerous merit badges, but also the respect of his family, peers, and community.

Madam Speaker, I proudly ask you to join me in commending Joshua Abernathy for his accomplishments with the Boy Scouts of America and for his efforts put forth in achieving the highest distinction of Eagle Scout.

HONORING BARBARA S. AUSTIN ELEMENTARY UPON ITS 20TH-YEAR ANNIVERSARY

**HON. KENNY MARCHANT**

OF TEXAS

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

*Monday, April 16, 2007*

Mr. MARCHANT. Madam Speaker, I rise today to recognize Barbara S. Austin Elementary, "Home of the Austin Mustangs" for its 20th anniversary of providing a superb education for the students of Coppell, Texas.

Barbara S. Austin Elementary School is proud to celebrate 20 years of excellence in education. Nestled in the center of Coppell, Texas, Austin Elementary is a neighborhood school that has provided thousands of students with an outstanding learning experience over the years.

Named after Barbara S. Austin, an actively involved community leader who served on the Coppell Independent School District Board of Trustees, Austin Elementary opened its doors in the fall of 1987 with over 500 students. Once a small community with one school housing kindergarten through twelfth grade, by August of 1987 Coppell had grown to include three elementary schools, two middle schools, and one high school. Austin Elementary was the first elementary school built with the new architectural plan that led the way for the additional seven elementary schools added over the next 10 years.

Mustang pride and the school motto, "Just for today, I will do my best!", are part of Austin's heritage. It has a student body comprised of a diverse mix of energetic students, parents who are supportive and involved in their children's education, and a dedicated and committed staff who do everything in their power to ensure success for all students.

In honor of this special anniversary, Austin Elementary is creating a "Thanks for the Memories" personalized brick patio to commemorate the many teachers and families that have been a part of Austin Elementary over the past 20 years. On April 29, 2007 at 2:30

p.m., a dedication ceremony will take place and all current and former staff, students and parents are invited to share in this celebration.

Madam Speaker, I am honored to have had this time to honor the 20th anniversary of Barbara S. Austin Elementary School.

THE 12TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE OKLAHOMA CITY BOMBING

**HON. DIANE E. WATSON**

OF CALIFORNIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

*Monday, April 16, 2007*

Ms. WATSON. Madam Speaker, this Wednesday, April 19, 2007 marks the 12th anniversary of the Oklahoma City bombing that claimed 168 lives and left over 800 injured. 19 of the victims were children. On the occasion of the 12th anniversary of the Oklahoma City bombing, I want to acknowledge those who lost their lives as well as the family and friends left behind. I further acknowledge the selfless sacrifice and courage Oklahoma City family members made in their embrace of 9/11 family members following the attacks on the World Trade Center in 2001. The exchange that has taken place since that time is great evidence of how Americans come together in time of need.

Let us never forget those who lost their lives on this day of infamy as well as the living who have been so profoundly affected by this national tragedy.

TRIBUTE TO ARMAND "SKIP" BECOTTE, JR.

**HON. BARNEY FRANK**

OF MASSACHUSETTS

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

*Monday, April 16, 2007*

Mr. FRANK of Massachusetts. Madam Speaker, last Friday, while we were in recess, the Massachusetts Lions Club held a very well-deserved testimonial for Armand "Skip" Becotte, Jr., who lives in the town of Fairhaven, Massachusetts, in the district I am privileged to represent.

Madam Speaker, as many Members know, the Lions Club has made as its highest priority helping people deal with health problems, particularly in the area of eyesight. They have also worked on hearing related issues. Personally, Skip Becotte has taken as his motto the words of the great Helen Keller, in her address to the Lions Club, "Help me hasten the day when there shall be no preventable blindness; no little deaf, blind child untaught; no blind man or woman unaided. I appeal to you Lions, you who have your sight, your hearing, you who are strong and brave and kind. Will you not constitute yourselves Knights of the Blind in this crusade against darkness?"

Currently Skip Becotte is the District Governor for the Massachusetts Lions District 33S, which includes much of Southeastern Massachusetts, including all of Cape Cod and much of the district that I represent. During his governorship the Lions in District 33S have given nearly \$200,000 to the Perkins School for the Blind, Massachusetts Eye and Ear Infirmary, Joslin Diabetes Center, New England Eye Center, Schepens Eye Research Institute and many other institutions.

Madam Speaker, Skip Becotte—winner of the Melvin Jones Fellow Award for outstanding service in 2001—is an extraordinary man. A retired police officer and father of five, his life exemplifies service to others. I congratulate the Lions Club for honoring this man and I am glad to share with my colleagues the story of his work because it is an inspiration to all.

HONORING THE FORT KNOX VETERAN SERVICE OFFICE

**HON. RON LEWIS**

OF KENTUCKY

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

*Monday, April 16, 2007*

Mr. LEWIS of Kentucky. Madam Speaker, I rise today to pay public tribute to the men and women who work in the Fort Knox Veteran Service Office. These dedicated individuals from my congressional district are deserving of our respect and admiration.

Recent global events have rightfully renewed our focus on those brave men and women, past and present, who have answered our Nation's call to service. In times of war and in times of peace we must always show our gratitude for those who have worn the uniform of the United States military.

Through their work at the Fort Knox Veteran Service Office, Paul Schlisser, Clint Meshew, Jaydean Maschak, and Mildred Meshew have made it their mission to assist fellow veterans and their survivors in obtaining benefits they have earned. Collectively, the group helped over 900 individuals in Kentucky's Second Congressional District in 2006.

As the home of Fort Knox, my district has a high population of veterans. Our government has a special responsibility to support programs and initiatives that ensure premium health care and economic stability for those Americans who stood selflessly in harm's way to preserve our most fundamental freedoms. The Fort Knox Veteran Service Office continues to do exemplary work supporting this important endeavor.

It is my great privilege to honor Paul Schlisser, Clint Meshew, Jaydean Maschak, and Mildred Meshew today before the entire House of Representatives for their continued service to our country helping fellow veterans and their survivors who need their support. They are a group of outstanding citizens worthy of our collective honor and appreciation.

IN RECOGNITION OF BISHOP ARETHA E. MORTON

**HON. MICHAEL N. CASTLE**

OF DELAWARE

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

*Monday, April 16, 2007*

Mr. CASTLE. Madam Speaker, it is with great pleasure that I rise today to recognize Aretha E. Morton for being appointed as State Bishop for my home state of Delaware in 2006.

This great honor has been bestowed upon her due to her long-standing dedication to the Baptist church. I congratulate Bishop Aretha E. Morton on an outstanding career in ministry. She began her career by singing and recording in several different Gospel groups. By

the age of twenty-one, she made the decision to commit her life to the ministry and preached her first trial sermon. Her hard work as a preacher was acknowledged in 1983, when she became the pastor of Tabernacle Baptist Church, making her the first female Baptist Pastor in the State of Delaware. Ten years later, she was given another great honor when the Wilmington Fire Department appointed her as Chaplain for the Wilmington Fire Department. This honor made her the first woman and the first African American Fire Chaplain.

In 1995, she connected her church with the Full Gospel Church Fellowship. This church, now named the Tabernacle Full Gospel Baptist Church, has become the largest affiliate church of its kind in the Delaware area. In 2002, she was named the Full Gospel Baptist Church Fellowship's District Overseer of the Year. Her success in ministry continued when she became one of the first female bishops in the Full Gospel Church Fellowship International. Fellow clergy refer to her as "Mother" and in September of 2005 she was even listed on Gospel Today's "World's Most Loved Pastors" List, illustrating her respected, humble and revered reputation.

After over 40 years of bringing her love, talents, and enthusiasm to the Baptist ministry, she was appointed Bishop of the Baptist Church for the State of Delaware. I can think of no candidate more deserving of our recognition and praise than Bishop Aretha E. Morton. I congratulate Bishop Morton on an exceptional career of service and dedication.

RECOGNIZING TRAVIS JAMES FOSTER FOR ACHIEVING THE RANK OF EAGLE SCOUT

**HON. SAM GRAVES**

OF MISSOURI

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

*Monday, April 16, 2007*

Mr. GRAVES. Madam Speaker, I proudly pause to recognize Travis James Foster, a very special young man who has exemplified the finest qualities of citizenship and leadership by taking an active part in the Boy Scouts of America, Troop 264, and in earning the most prestigious award of Eagle Scout.

Travis has been very active with his troop, participating in many scout activities. Over the many years Travis has been involved with scouting, he has not only earned numerous merit badges, but also the respect of his family, peers, and community.

Madam Speaker, I proudly ask you to join me in commending Travis James Foster for his accomplishments with the Boy Scouts of America and for his efforts put forth in achieving the highest distinction of Eagle Scout.

TRIBUTE ON THE PUBLIC SERVICE OF RON GRIFFIN AND HIS SON, KYLE

**HON. SCOTT GARRETT**

OF NEW JERSEY

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

*Monday, April 16, 2007*

Mr. GARRETT of New Jersey. Madam Speaker, last month, one of my constituents, Ron Griffin, journeyed to Iraq. His son, Kyle,

had been killed while serving in Iraq. Mr. Griffin wanted to meet with men and women who were now serving there and with Iraqi citizens who were living through the war there.

His trip was not sanctioned by our Government. In fact, the State Department and Pentagon tried to talk him out of taking it for fear for Mr. Griffin's safety. But, showing the same determination and commitment that his son and his son's fellow servicemembers demonstrate to the world every day, Mr. Griffin found his way to Iraq any way.

In the face of constant media and political attention on Iraq, sometimes it seems that the negative news dominates coverage and it is easy to forget the many positive acts about which we may never hear. Mr. Griffin is on a mission to show the world how extraordinary the men and women serving in Iraq are and how hopeful they and the Iraqi people are for a better future. He says that what he saw in Iraq can be summed up in three words: "Professionalism. Humanity. Spirituality." And, I would like to share his thoughts on his trip in his own words:

I journeyed to Iraq for this is where my son died helping to free a nation. I came on my own dime without the sponsorship of anyone. I simply desired to experience through my own eyes a sense of what the true reality of life on the ground in Iraq is from the words of and the ability to observe the people who populate the Kurdish area in the northern and eastern portion of Iraq and from our service members wherever I had the honor of meeting with and speaking to the true American Idols of our lifetime.

I went not as some distraught father searching for that elusive feeling of closer that all so many believe that I must attain in order to move on. I abhor that statement. It is not the manner in which I mourn or honor my son and every other Fallen Hero. Each day of my life I endure the numbing sadness that is the reality of Kyle's death while in simultaneously I have been comforted and supported by the fathomless depths of human kindnesses. I am saddened for all those who never had the pleasure of meeting my son, the other Fallen Heroes or any of those other magnificent individuals who have served and serve us this day. You have lost more than I have for I have been honored to have walked among greatness.

I came however with a pre-disposed political bent that is in total support of our mission and for doing whatever and for how long it takes for the successful completion of our mission. Having spent nearing two weeks living among the Kurdish people, journeying from Erbil to Duhok to Barzan and countless locations in between and then traveling from Harbor Gate on the Turkish border in the north down through Mosul, Tikrit and finally to Baghdad with the members of our magnificent military I am today an American father who knows unquestionably and steadfastly that the price my son paid to liberate Iraq was worth every ounce of blood and sweat he sacrificed. However it is not from the political perspective that I have reached that conclusion but rather from the depths of the humanity of the Kurdish people and the majesty in which our military conducts themselves while in service to us.

Somewhere in the recesses of my consciousness I am continually reminded that somehow I have been put on this path for a purpose and that could not have been made more perfectly clear than by what I have experienced these past two weeks. I have long bridled under the incessant negativity that the vast majority of the media portrayed as the reality of Iraq. That notion was ripped

from my perspective when I was told outright by the Soldiers that they knew that regardless of how many ribbons they helped out, schools they opened, or lives they improved on any given day that if one bomb went off in Baghdad the story that would be told would be the boom story. They felt bad for the American people for they would then not be able to share in the joyous satisfaction that the soldiers and the Iraqi people had experienced. They are over that and now so am I. Likewise I was somewhat consumed with the hypocrisy of those who mouth the words of support for the troops while calling their mission a failure and wanting to end it. I thought that such statements were hurting the troops as they served us. I am now ashamed of my lack of insight to what indeed is the reality of Iraq, or at least that part of and the people of that part that I journeyed through. Almost universally the troops told me that they simply do not have the time to be involved in the political aspect of what they are doing for to do so would interfere with the performance of their job and that is the primary mission to every Soldier. It finally became clear to me from my many conversations that while they, like most human beings would most certainly would appreciate the unending support of the American people especially as they endure all the hardships of being Soldiers, they will perform every task assigned to them for they are consummate professionals through and through. They do their job because they are individuals of the highest moral character who have sworn an oath to protect and defend this country and nothing will prevent them from doing just that. To watch them do their jobs is likened to viewing Tiger Woods march through a golf course. The Soldiers just wear different clothes.

Stepping off the plane in Erbil, a city of over 1 million residents and the capital of the Kurdish region, you can not help but be stunned by the majestic vistas, impressed by the precision and competency of the personnel at the airport and be totally astonished by the expansion that is taking place on every section of the now Erbil International Airport and the city itself for you must continually remind yourself that indeed you are in Iraq! The physical part of the Kurdish region is simply breathtaking in its scope and beauty, while the emotional aspect is riveting in its intensity and vibrancy. Freedom permeates from every inch of this land and in that sense of security, optimism resounds. The entire region appears to be one vast construction site with building and improvements going on everywhere. One only has to travel but a few short blocks in any direction and the examples of rapid and real progress stun your senses. I have likewise traveled to the hinterland where the amenities of life are Spartan but in both locations the quality of the Kurdish people bring joy to all those that have the privilege of meeting them. They seem to have been born with a perpetual warm and engaging smile and a sincere and genuine greeting for all those that they come in contact with. Eye contact is never absent from the conversation, nor is the ever-present wry smile that can burst into uncontrolled laughter at any time. One need to only ride down the road from Erbil to Khanzad, a 15 Km drive from central Erbil to experience the joy of these wonderful people. There are endless picnics ongoing during this month of celebration. Children laugh, play and fly their kites, men play music or dance while the women in festive and shimmering colored native dress organize the feeding of everyone.

Each and every conversation is filled with the personal atrocities that they have all endured. Atrocities that they will forever remember and will not allow anyone to forget