Bettie is an active member of St. Paul Baptist Church. This year she will celebrate 70 years of marriage, 70 years, to her husband, Jesse McDonald.

I personally thank these three women for making a difference and leaving a legacy of future Black leaders in Omaha. We owe them much gratitude and recognition.

□ 1045

THE CURRENT STATE OF THE COVID–19 PANDEMIC

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentlewoman from Illinois (Ms. UNDERWOOD) for 5 minutes.

Ms. UNDERWOOD. Mr. Speaker, I rise today as my home State of Illinois approaches the grave milestone of 20,000 COVID–19 deaths.

I am thinking of the families of each of our neighbors we have lost, and I am also thinking of everyone in our community who is currently suffering from the physical, psychological, and financial consequences of the pandemic.

The past year has been so hard for so many of us, and it is not over. We still have a long way to go until our families' health and economic well-being is secure.

Now, thanks to the work of incredible scientists, we have authorized vaccines that are safe and effective, offering a level of protection that can save lives and crush this virus.

But until we actually get shots in arms, the virus will continue to spread. This process has been difficult, and the bottom line is that our current vaccine process is not sustainable. But we can change that. We must change that.

The good news is that we can. We have a new administration laser-focused on ramping up distribution, and there are investments to be made in order to help.

Local health departments are overwhelmed with phone calls from people wondering where to go for a vaccine. Web-based appointment signups are filling faster than people can register. Immunization providers lack the resources to carry out vaccination campaigns at this unprecedented scale.

To address these challenges and carry out an efficient COVID–19 vaccination campaign that prioritizes the people who need them most, Congress needs to act swiftly and boldly. The next relief bill must include significant funding to accelerate vaccine administration with a particular focus on providing vaccine doses and outreach to ensure that nobody is left behind.

We also need to fund the workforce that will carry out vaccination efforts, as well as testing, contact tracing, and other critical initiatives to stop the spread of the virus.

I have introduced two bills, the Community Immunity During COVID–19 Act and the Health Force, Resilience Force, and Jobs to Fight COVID–19 Act, to make the investments that will be needed to end the pandemic, prevent the next public health crisis, and ensure a strong economic recovery.

Finally, as we continue to confront a once-in-a-century health crisis, it is absolutely unacceptable that millions of Americans continue to lack access to affordable healthcare.

That is why I introduced H.R. 369, the Health Care Affordability Act, which would increase the dollar amount of premium tax credits across all income levels.

It would eliminate premiums for lower-income households; reduce premium costs by hundreds or thousands of dollars for middle-class families, including those who currently make too much money to qualify for the tax credit; and ensure that everyone would be able to buy a plan for no more than 8.5 percent of their income. For families in northern Illinois who currently pay 15, 18, or 20 percent of their income for healthcare, this is real savings that matters.

This was included in the President's American Rescue Plan, and I urge my colleagues to support its inclusion in the next relief package.

At this challenging moment in history, the decisions we make will be felt for generations. If our ideas are too small, the consequences not only mean a protracted pandemic but a stunted economic recovery.

But if we pursue solutions that meet this moment, we can not only get to the other side of the pandemic, we can emerge from it stronger than before, with evidence-based public health investments that prevent future crises; with career pathways that usher in a new era of economic growth; and with a healthcare system built on a foundation of equity, where access to quality care is not the privilege of a few but the right of all.

I believe that this future is possible, and I know that the decisions we make today will shape it. I hope my colleagues on both sides of the aisle are ready to do the work we were sent here to do.

CONGRATULATING ETHAN KNARR

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Pennsylvania (Mr. THOMPSON) for 5 minutes.

Mr. THOMPSON of Pennsylvania. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize and congratulate Ethan Knarr of DuBois, Pennsylvania. Ethan recently accepted a fully qualified appointment to the United States Naval Academy in Annapolis, Maryland.

Ethan is the son of Christopher and Danielle Knarr and the grandson of Daniel and Linda Schaffer of DuBois, Leona Knarr of Troutville, and Doug Grube and the late Elizabeth Ann Grube of DuBois.

As a student at DuBois Area High School, Ethan has been an active member of the National Honor Society and the cross-country team, and he served as captain of the tennis team.

Outside of school, Ethan has been heavily involved in the Boy Scouts of America, having served as historian, assistant senior patrol leader, and eventually senior patrol leader of his troop. Ethan became an Eagle Scout in March 2020.

I would like to thank Ethan for his commitment to service and wish him the very best as he embarks on this exciting new phase of life in Annapolis.

RECOGNIZING PETE RICKARD

Mr. THOMPSON of Pennsylvania. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize and congratulate Pete Rickard of Strattanville, Pennsylvania, for accepting a fully qualified appointment to the United States Air Force Academy in Colorado.

Pete is a student at Clarion-Limestone High School. During his time at Clarion-Limestone, Pete has been a member of the Academic Decathlon team, lettered in basketball, and active in FFA, or Future Farmers of America.

He is now a senior member of the Civil Air Patrol Clarion Composite Squadron 504 and is active in the Greater Pennsylvania American Red Cross.

Pete credits his success to the love and support he has received from family and friends, including Rod and Debbie Frampton, as well as his four sisters, Lucy, Ann, Katie, and Bonnie.

Undoubtedly, Pete's academic success and experience with the Civil Air Patrol will serve him well as he starts this exciting new chapter at the Air Force Academy.

Best wishes to Pete, and I look forward to seeing all that he achieves.

RECOGNIZING LISA WINGER

Mr. THOMPSON of Pennsylvania. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize Lisa Winger of Oil City. Lisa was recently recognized by the Venango Area Chamber of Commerce as the 2020 Citizen of the Year.

According to the chamber, nominees are those who, ''in the face of danger, combat adversity through feats of ingenuity, courage, or strength, and those who perform great deeds or selfless acts for the common good.''

Susan Williams, executive director of the chamber, noted nominations for Lisa mentioned her impeccable character and that she was highly respected, a leader, and selfless.

Lisa works at the AseraCare Hospice, where she counsels residents and their families by providing compassion, comfort, and advice.

She truly lives a life of service. Outside of her work with AseraCare, Lisa has also established an Alzheimer's support group at the Oil City YMCA, and she leads the county's Toys for Tots program.

A friend of Lisa's said in her nomination that Lisa ''works tirelessly for Venango County and dedicates herself to everything she does.''

I would like to congratulate Lisa on this much-deserved recognition and thank her for her commitment to serving her community.