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Mr. Speaker, I rise today to honor and celebrate the remarkable contributions and achievements of a life-long servant leader, Dr. Kanika Tomalin. Ms. Tomalin has devoted her life to ensure that the underserved are not undeserved of opportunity.

For more than a decade, Ms. Tomalin served in key leadership positions at Bayfront Health which fueled her passion for a healthier St. Petersburg. She is the first Black woman to serve as a health care executive and while there, she led the creation of the joint venture partnership that resulted in the formation of the Foundation for a Healthy St. Petersburg.

In 2014, she was appointed St. Petersburg deputy mayor by Mayor Rick Kriseman and is the first Black woman to serve in that role. Dr. Tomalin helped launch numerous initiatives that have made St. Petersburg more vital, inclusive and healthier, including founding the Innovation District and Healthy St. Pete, which both helped reduce the Black poverty rate to a new low. Ten years ago, Pinellas County ranked 38th of 67 counties in Florida for overall health and today, it ranks 17th. Also out of Healthy St. Pete came *St. Pete Eats: A Cookbook*, which Dr. Tomalin published during the pandemic. It emphasizes healthy ingredients and recipes are taken from her own as well as from the city's independent restaurants as a salute to "the special role our small businesses play in this paradise of a place we call home." Proceeds from the book helped support small businesses affected by the public health crisis.

Before returning to the Foundation for a Healthy St. Petersburg for her full circle moment, Dr. Tomalin was chief operating officer and vice president for strategy for Eckerd College in St. Petersburg. Now as president and chief executive officer of the Foundation, which has a mission to understand health disparities and support community-driven solutions to achieve health equity, Dr. Tomalin is passionate about helping to rewrite the story of St. Petersburg's underserved communities so they can attain their full potential.

As a fifth-generation St. Petersburg native, Kanika is the oldest of two daughters born to Yvonne and David Jelks. She grew up in West St. Petersburg, attending Bay Point Elementary School, Bay Point Middle School, Tyrone Middle School and graduated from Boca Ciega High School. She says she had an idyllic childhood, cradled by her extended family of about 250 relatives, who mostly live in St. Petersburg or within miles. During her formative years, Dr. Tomalin was an

Ebony Scholar, a program that provides institutional and financial support to high-achieving African-American students and was the vision of Vyrle Davis, an education giant who became Pinellas County's first Black area superintendent. Her interest in journalism began early— her childhood best friend's mother was an editor at the then-*St. Petersburg Times*. She received her bachelor's degree in journalism from Florida A&M University, her master's degree in business administration from the University of Miami and her doctorate in law and policy from Northeastern University.

Dr. Tomalin was a Poynter Institute scholar writing stories for the *St. Petersburg Times* when she met her future husband, sports and outdoors writer Terry Tomalin. They raised two children, Kai and Nia, and were married for 17 years until his passing in 2016.

Dr. Tomalin also worked at the *Palm Beach Post* and television stations in Tallahassee, Florida and Louisville, Kentucky, as well as radio in St. Petersburg.

Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to recognize Dr. Kanika Tomalin, who is honorably carrying forward the legacy of her deeply rooted St. Petersburg family while making an indelible mark on progress for St. Petersburg, the Sunshine City that is moving along the margin of excellence from great to iconic where opportunity shines on all.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Kathy Castor". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Kathy Castor
United States Representative
Florida – District 14