



United States  
of America

# Congressional Record

PROCEEDINGS AND DEBATES OF THE 119<sup>th</sup> CONGRESS, FIRST SESSION

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Washington, Monday, February 3, 2025

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## *House of Representatives*

Mr. Speaker, I rise today during Black History month with gratitude for the life of Commander Eunice Butts, her service to our country and Tampa Bay community. Commander Butts volunteered to serve America and shattered glass ceilings as an African American woman in the U.S. Air Force and National Guard during the Vietnam War. She served with courage, empathy and a love of country that continues to drive her work with service members to this day.

Born and raised in Tampa, Ms. Butts graduated from Middleton High School and was the first student to sing opera. Exploring her talent for singing and performing, she continued her education at Gibbs Junior College with a scholarship for music.

Following the first deployment of United States ground troops in Vietnam in 1965, Ms. Butts describes walking down the street and seeing the infamous “I want you” war poster that would effectively change the course of her life and begin her service epoch. Ms. Butts always dreamed of helping and opening doors for others, aware of the oppression that came before her and continued during her early life. Immediately walking in the recruitment center and enlisting in the U.S. Air Force, Ms. Butts knew she was ready to patriotically serve her country and uphold the legacy of Black women in the military. Her instinct to serve rang true and 16 years later, Ms. Butts left active duty and settled in Montgomery, Alabama.

Ms. Butts is the proud mother of two sons and a daughter, Edward, Robert and Franjenera. She is also the grandmother of three children, Benjamin, Zori and Latrice.

As a true public servant, Ms. Butts sought other ways to serve her country and found that the Air Force Reserves were looking for Black women. She continued her service in the Air Force Reserves, Alabama National Guard and in the American Legion for an additional 25 years.

Ms. Butts’ beliefs were rooted in the sentiment of giving and showing love to all, especially unsung heroes. In the 1970’s, Ms. Butts returned to Tampa where she served in the American Legion with World War II Veteran Willie Mae Williams, where they evangelized the pivotal role that women played in the military. When Ms. Williams passed, Ms. Butts answered the call of letting the world know the untold story of female veterans. Ms. Butts moved through the ranks of the American Legion and is the first African American female to serve as the American Legion Department State of Florida Commander.

Continuing to heal the wounds of Vietnam veterans, Ms. Butts believes that every day, Americans should pray and take under their wings, all the veterans who have served in our military. She often reminded her peers that many have been wounded, if not mentally, then physically, or both. Ms. Butts gave the gift of compassion to her partners in veteran service organizations and preached that service members need our shoulders to lean on for support and love.

Commander Butts bravely volunteered to fight and defend a country that did not always protect and defend Black women, yet she never wavered in her full devotion to America and liberty and justice for all. Mr. Speaker, on behalf of the patriotic Tampa Bay community, I thank Eunice Butts for her 39 and counting years of work to her fellow service members, veterans and their loved ones. Joining the legacy of women who inspired her, Ms. Butts life's work will be a foundation and benefaction for young, Black women everywhere, especially those who choose to defend and protect our nation. She has effectively nurtured and opened doors for her fellow service members all while passing on the valiant stories of female veterans who our nation will be forever grateful for.

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