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## House of Representatives

### *The Honorable Kevin Brady*

Madam Speaker, I rise today to honor the memory of Margaret Benjamin, who died on August 15, 2007 at the age of 93.

Living a life that spanned most of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Margaret Montgomery was born in Cincinnati, Ohio to Robert Montgomery, a veteran of the Spanish-American War, and his wife, Agnes Stern Montgomery. But her parents did not live to see her and her younger sister, Roberta, grow up, as they passed way when Margaret was only 13. Being orphans in the years leading up to the Stock Market Crash of 1929 was hard enough, but in the Depression that followed, it could have been ruinous were it not for the girls' father having supported the Junior OUAM National Orphans Home in Tiffin, Ohio where they were sent to live.

Growing up without parents and feeling responsible for her younger sister gave Margaret a mission in life based on community service and caring for others without ever feeling sorry for herself. Reaching her prime in an era when women did not generally work outside the home, Margaret took on numerous volunteer activities. Not the glamorous, fundraising kind, but the ones where she saw a need and stepped in to fill it. These included helping to organize a volunteer ambulance corps in the town where she lived but where the nearest hospital was far away. Later, she volunteered at a nearby state mental hospital, working one-on-one with patients struggling to overcome addiction to drugs and alcohol.

Her volunteer activities also included helping her husband, Roy, in his successful political career. She loved the heat of battle in campaigns, seething with passion underneath the veneer of cool professionalism. By the time he was ready to retire from politics, she had become so good at identifying issues, communicating with constituents, driving change, and embodying commitment to public service, that she was asked to run for office in her own right. And she won. Even in retirement, Margaret stayed active in politics.

At the age of 86, she managed her son-in-law's successful campaign for local office, showing up at the polls and chasing down voters with the assistance of her walker. Despite old age and failing health, she loved Election Day and treasured the freedom that the privilege to vote entailed.

Until the last year of her life, Margaret was active in volunteer activities related to her lifelong passion for music. She sang in the Woodlands Sweethearts chorus, making appearances at local events and nursing homes so that others could be touched by the music that was a constant source of inspiration and comfort in her life.

Indeed, she passed peacefully from this earth while listening to the music of J.S. Bach that she always found so calming and inspiring.

I had the privilege to know Margaret in her retirement years when she moved to Texas to be closer to her daughter. One of her last endeavors was helping my staff to organize a Social Security workshop at the senior citizens housing complex where she lived. To the end of her life, Margaret encouraged people to participate in government, to let officials like me know their thoughts, and to be accountable. We could do worse than to follow her motto formed in the crucible of politics, "just be gracious, no matter what."

Madam Speaker, it is the dedication, faith, and commitment of individuals such as Margaret Benjamin who make our country strong and who bring out the best in our communities. Thank you for the opportunity to recall her spirit and her service.