

Please join me in honoring the life of Dr. Hisham Ahmed. He will be sorely missed by his family, friends, colleagues, and students.

TRIBUTE TO REVEREND DR. W.
JEROME FISHER

HON. NANETTE DIAZ BARRAGÁN

OF CALIFORNIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Friday, August 9, 2019

Ms. BARRAGÁN. Madam Speaker, I rise today to commemorate the extraordinary life of the late Reverend Dr. W. Jerome Fisher, pastor of the first black church in Compton, California.

Reverend Dr. W. Jerome Fisher was born March 11, 1924 in the small town of Merryville, Louisiana in an era of sharecropping and Jim Crow. After accompanying his father to Chicago, Illinois as a child, Jerome Fisher honorably served his country as a medic in Normandy during World War II.

After serving in World War II, W. Jerome Fisher moved to Compton, California where he built the City's first black church, Little Zion Missionary Baptist Church.

Under the leadership of W. Jerome Fisher, Little Zion's congregation grew from 13 members to over 2,000, forming several community outreach programs to meet the needs of the greater community.

As pastor, Jerome Fisher, led Little Zion and the Compton community through times of pain and triumph for more than 50 years—including offering the opening invocation for the 100th Congress in 1988.

Sixty-five years after its founding, Little Zion Missionary Baptist Church now stands as Greater Zion Missionary Baptist Church—a beacon of Jerome Fisher's indelible legacy of distinguished service. That legacy lives on through its current pastor, Dr. Michael J. Fisher, his son, who took on the mantle of pastor in 2005.

I, along with the residents of California's 44th Congressional District mourn the passing of Reverend Dr. W. Jerome Fisher and celebrate his service and remarkable work.

IN CELEBRATION OF JERRY
FISCHER

HON. JOE COURTNEY

OF CONNECTICUT

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Friday, August 9, 2019

Mr. COURTNEY. Madam Speaker, I rise to honor the career of Jerry Fischer, a dedicated servant and defender of the Jewish community, who retired as executive director of the Jewish Federation of Eastern Connecticut on June 30, 2019, after leading the Federation since 1984. Jerry lives in the state of Connecticut, where he has acted as a strengthening and unifying force for the state's Jewish community for thirty-five years.

Jerry is, and always has been, a bastion for the preservation and prosperity of Connecticut's Jewish constituents. In his final year-end report, he told the Jewish Federation's board of directors that the goal his three-decade career was "to bring acts of loving kindness into the community and the world." Native to Washington Heights, at 17 years old Jerry made the journey from New York City to Israel, where he spent a year, eventually making the decision to join the Israeli army for the Six Day War of June 1967. He cited this decision as a response to the Holocaust, the genocide that brutally murdered 6 million of his own people. His childhood in Washington Heights places him in one of the epicenters of the civil rights movements; Jerry took this experience and his time in Israel to create a career of leadership based in compassion and justice.

Determined to push the Jewish community and the world forward, rather than back, Jerry stood up in the face of Holocaust skeptics and deniers and began the Encountering Survivors program, which brought Holocaust survivors and their family members face to face with high school students so that their stories of persecution and survival may live on through younger generations. In one such case, Jerry recruited 91-year-old Rae Gawendo, a Jewish refugee who arrived in Connecticut in the wake of the second World War, and, with the help of the Jewish Agricultural Society, started a chicken farm with her husband Jacob. Gawendo was sent from the Vilna ghetto to the Klooga work camp in 1942, where she was forced to work in a sawmill that processed the very logs used to bum Jewish bodies. She first spoke about her nightmare at a Holocaust commemoration arranged by Jerry Fischer, who later orchestrated meetings of

small groups of students in her home, who listened with rapt attention as she recounted the truth of her life—before, during, and after the war. Through interactions like these, Jerry created lasting, crucial bonds between generations that solidified his place among the country's leaders in indisputably preserving the memory of the Holocaust.

Madam Speaker, Jerry has also been a positive voice in Southeastern Connecticut moral and social life, promoting solidarity with other religious communities. Every Martin Luther King Day he has marched with Bishop Watts of the Shiloh Baptist Church and hundreds of other shivering members of the New London County community to an ecumenical observance of Martin Luther King's life and legacy. He has organized public forums to discuss the Middle East conflict, and has been a voice of moderation, supporting a two-state solution as a path to peace. He has led thousands of Eastern Connecticut residents on trips to the Middle East, and his fluency in Hebrew and encyclopedic knowledge of the Holy Land educated all of his guests on the wonder and deep spiritual history of that region. I personally experienced that a few years back when he took me through Jerusalem and was equally conversant on the Wailing Wall, Dome of the Rock, and the Stations of the Cross in a spellbinding tour that I will never forget. He also rescued me from an unscrupulous vendor in the marketplace who tried to overcharge me for some religious souvenirs I naively almost overpaid for. Thanks again Jerry.

Jerry has also been there to support the community in sad and tragic moments. After the sickening mass shooting at the Tree of Life Synagogue in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania in 2018, Jerry joined local rabbis, ministers, imams and priests to deliver a message of love and resolve to end senseless hate and gun violence in the media and at public events. He is a quintessential leader for all of us in Eastern Connecticut and we have been blessed by his grace and wisdom.

Madam Speaker, although Jerry is stepping down as Executive Director, he plans to continue to be an active member of the Jewish community. In an editorial detailing the highlights of his career, *The New London Day* wrote, "He and his wife Christine will remain in the area, and we suspect his mitzvahs—his acts of loving kindness—will continue, because that's who Jerry Fischer is." I would ask the House to please join me in extending our deepest gratitude to Jerry for his years of service and dedication to the Jewish community.