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| Slotkin Honors Exemplary Hartland, Brighton Residents in Speeches on U.S. House Floor |
| **WASHINGTON, DC** -- Yesterday, U.S. Rep. Elissa Slotkin (MI-08) honored three exemplary 8th district residents on the floor of the U.S. House of Representatives: Hartland’s **Jessica Witkowski**, one of the first female Eagle Scouts in the country, and Brighton’s **Marcus Goller**, a local community leader and small business owner who passed away last month. Slotkin also honored the life of Michigan State University student **Alex Powell,** and the organization that carries on in his name, **Alex’s Great State Race.** The memory of these community leaders will now forever live on in the congressional record of the People’s House. Slotkin’s full remarks as prepared, for each honoree, are below:**Jessica Witkowski, Hartland (**[**Video of Slotkin’s Remarks can be viewed here**](https://iqconnect.house.gov/iqextranet/iqClickTrk.aspx?&cid=MI08ES&crop=15100.19824625.5454440.8032010&report_id=&redirect=https%3a%2f%2fwww.youtube.com%2fwatch%3fv%3dzpgMVN39Z1k%26feature%3dyoutu.be&redir_log=38188957079443)**):** I rise today to honor Jessica Witkowski, a young woman making a difference in her hometown of Hartland. For her efforts, she has earned the distinct honor of being one of the first female Eagle Scouts in the country. Drawn by the Scouts’ emphasis on environmental stewardship, service to community, and development of leadership skills, Jessica joined the Scouts two years ago as a sophomore in high school, shortly after they opened membership to girls. She set her sights on a lofty goal: being a part of the inaugural class of female Eagle Scouts. After building and installing bluebird houses in Settlers Park for her Life Scout rank, she started brainstorming Eagle Scout projects that would similarly align with her love of the outdoors. But soon after, the pandemic hit and stay-at-home orders forced a change. Like a good Scout, though, Jessica adapted. She soon realized that the greatest need in the community was for facemasks for seniors in retirement homes.  Through Zoom meetings and video tutorials, she gathered sixteen of her classmates and set out to teach them how to create facemasks. The fact that she had never sewn before did not hold her back. Nor did the fact that she’d have to sew with gloves on in order to follow the best practices for sanitation and avoiding potential spread. From start to finish, the project took two months. And by the time it was completed, Jessica and her determined group of volunteers had surpassed their initial goal and created 600 masks — which Jessica distributed to three local organizations taking care of seniors vulnerable to the pandemic. Last fall, on a tour of cider mills in my district, I actually ran into Jessica at Spicer Orchard. Even now, I can still remember her infectious personality and her 1000 watt smile even behind her facemask. She’s an impressive young woman and I’m proud to represent her here in Congress.  Although we haven’t been able to hold her official Court of Honor due to the pandemic, I know that it will come and Jessica will be able to celebrate her achievement surrounded by friends and family. In the meantime, it is my personal honor to speak these remarks into the Congressional Record so that folks back home can read about her hard work and dedicated service to our community. **Marcus Goller, Brighton (**[**Video of Slotkin’s Remarks can be viewed here**](https://iqconnect.house.gov/iqextranet/iqClickTrk.aspx?&cid=MI08ES&crop=15100.19824625.5454440.8032010&report_id=&redirect=https%3a%2f%2fwww.youtube.com%2fwatch%3fv%3duliQ8ic_0n4&redir_log=883875446866294)**):** I rise to pay tribute to Marcus Goller, a cornerstone of the Brighton community, who sadly passed away late last month. Marcus owned and operated the Brighton Coffeehouse and Theater alongside his wife, Amy, and their two kids, Spencer and Macy.  The spot is a mainstay of downtown Brighton — a place to pop in for a quick coffee and pastry or to take in a show in its 70-seat black box theater. But before it was a reality, it was just a dream between a couple and their kids. Marcus had had a long career in the coffee business, running a chain of coffee shops in college towns all across the midwest. Amy had acted professionally and directed productions at Brighton High School.  One day, while sitting in the children’s reading room at a small bookstore on Main Street, they had the idea of opening their own coffeehouse. What started that day as a dream became a reality in 2018, when Brighton Coffeehouse and Theater opened its doors and quickly became a cornerstone of downtown. It’s the perfect place to gather. I still remember hosting a townhall conversation there in 2019 and the incredible sense of community that you felt as soon as you walk in the door. It’s the reason that student organizations and performers constantly use the space — because you immediately feel at home. And as anyone will tell you, that’s because of Marcus. He was the soul of Brighton Coffeehouse — a quiet, kind presence. He treated visitors like neighbors and neighbors like family — always making sure that they were well served and had everything they needed. It was his idea to start the “Brighton Yacht Club,” a fleet of dozens of little motorized remote-controlled sailboats that people could rent and sail on the Millpond just outside. He loved his business and the people loved his business back. He’d be the first to tell you that it wasn’t always easy. That the road from a conversation to construction was filled with twists and turns and setbacks. But Marcus never met an obstacle he couldn’t overcome. His passing is our loss. To Amy, Spencer, and Macy, to all those who knew Marcus and loved him, may they hold onto the dark roasts, the baked goods, and the theater productions that brought them closer together. I speak these words today so that his legacy is forever remembered in the permanent record of the People’s House — letting all who read it know: Marcus Goller made a difference.**Alex Powell and Alex’s Great State Race, East Lansing (**[**Video of Slotkin’s Remarks can be viewed here**](https://iqconnect.house.gov/iqextranet/iqClickTrk.aspx?&cid=MI08ES&crop=15100.19824625.5454440.8032010&report_id=&redirect=https%3a%2f%2fwww.youtube.com%2fwatch%3fv%3d3u37N6yBBl8&redir_log=759514274624285)**):** I rise to recognize an organization that brings together fierce rivals in the name of shared community. An organization that bridges the sometimes impossible differences between us. An organization helping to bring arch-rivals together for the betterment of the community. And most specifically, an organization that bridges the 64 miles between Michigan State University in East Lansing and the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor. Most days, any Spartan or Wolverine will tell you that those miles are still too close for comfort. But on the Friday before “The Game” between both schools, a new tradition has emerged in the name of charity, community spirit, and expanding access to education for all: Alex’s Great State Race. Named after Alex Powell, a young man accepted to Michigan State as he underwent treatment for a rare and aggressive cancer, Alex had always dreamed of attending MSU. But the surgeries, chemo, and radiation treatments left him unable to carry out his studies with the normal vigor of a freshman student. Thankfully, Alex turned to MSU’s Resource Center for Persons with Disabilities, or RCPD. Devoted to inclusivity on campus for students, employees, and visitors alike, the RCPD provided Alex with a dorm room near his classes, offered support to him and his family, and accommodated his needs as they became more complex. They made arrangements to provide Alex the same MSU experience as any other student, even when he was being treated at a cancer center at the University of Michigan — 64 miles away. Despite his valiant fight, Alex lost his battle with cancer in 2011. Those around him remember his vibrant spirit and easy sense of humor, even in the midst of a debilitating illness.  More than anything, Alex wanted to leave a legacy that would inspire others, which is how his mother, Juliana, got in touch with the folks at the Resource Center who had played such an important role in his life. Together, they created the Great State Race in Alex’s name, a charity organization dedicated to raising money for the RCPD, as well as its counterpart at University of Michigan, the Office of Services for Students with Disabilities.  Now celebrating its seventh year, Alex’s Great State Race is an example of what can unite us. Each year, no matter how intense the rivalry between the two schools, ROTC cadets from both Michigan and Michigan State come together to run the game ball the 64 miles separating the campuses.  Supported by police that line the route, gracious donations that make it possible, and a community united by a spirit of charity, Alex’s Great State Race proves that despite our split allegiances, we absolutely have a common humanity.   Today, I’m proud to honor the Powell family, the ROTC cadets, and all the folks involved at both schools who raise money for such a worthy cause. As the Jewish prayer of remembrance says, “so long as we live, they too shall live, for they are now a part of us, as we remember them.” We remember Alex as long as these words will exist in the Congressional Record, which is to say, we remember Alex forever. ###  |
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