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Adams Honors Charlotte Leader with House Floor Speech

Alma Adams Press [sam.spencer@mail.house.gov]

Sent: Wednesday, September 16, 2020 9:04 AM

To: Steve Johnston



Adams Honors Charlotte Leader with House Floor Speech

Rep. Adams to honor Sarah Stevenson with a five minute speech during morning hour

WASHINGTON, DC – Today, **Congresswoman Alma Adams (NC-12)** will give a speech from the House floor honoring Charlotte leader Sarah Stevenson, the first Black woman to serve on the Charlotte Mecklenburg School Board as well as the founder of the Tuesday Morning Breakfast Forum.

“It goes without saying that Sarah Stevenson has earned numerous awards and commendations over the course of her life. I was honored to be with Miss Sarah in 2017 as the Charlotte Mecklenburg Housing Partnership opened the 130-unit Stevenson Apartments in her honor,” **said Adams**. “But perhaps the greatest honor she continues to bestow on us, the entire Charlotte community, is wisdom. Not only her wisdom but the wisdom of the [Tuesday Morning Breakfast] Forum and its 40 years of guest speakers and attendees. Thank you, Miss Sarah, for working for justice, freedom, and peace; and for blessing so many people with enough foolishness to believe that we can make the impossible, possible.”

The speech will be [broadcast on C-SPAN](#) between 9:00 AM and 9:30 AM.

Full remarks as prepared for delivery are below:

I rise this morning to speak in honor of the first Black woman to serve on the Charlotte Mecklenburg School Board,

One of the co-founders and conveners of the Tuesday Morning Breakfast Forum,

Not only a “queen” of the Queen City but one of our crown jewels,

Miss Sarah Stevenson.

Sarah Belle Mingo was born in Heath Springs, South Carolina in 1925, the first of 14 children.

Her life quickly led her to Charlotte where, like many African American women of her time, she worked as a housekeeper and did domestic work so that she and her family could achieve a brighter future.

In Charlotte, she met her husband, Robert Louis Stevenson, and as an activist

and mother of four, successfully integrated the school district's Parent-Teacher Associations. In no uncertain terms, Miss Sarah laid the foundation for one of the most integrated school districts in the nation.

You could have found her across the street from us on October 12, 1970, when she attended oral arguments at the Supreme Court for the Swann v. Charlotte-Mecklenburg Board of Education case.

In 1980, she won election to that Board of Education, where she served for 8 years.

Equity in education was always at the forefront of what she did, because even though the courts declared separate but equal was illegal, too many schools in Charlotte were still both separate and unequal.

What she did made a difference. In 1984, halfway through Miss Sarah's tenure on the school board, President Ronald Reagan made a campaign stop in Charlotte at the height of his popularity.

President Reagan had a line in his stump speech that won thunderous applause in cities across the country, and in Charlotte he repeated it, saying that school busing was a failed "social experiment that nobody wants."

The crowd went silent. There was, at best, scattered applause. That's because in Charlotte, activists like Sarah Stevenson worked hard so Black and white parents came together in support of Charlotte's "finest achievement" - school integration.

She lost reelection to the school board in 1988 because she continued to value equity and integration even as the political winds changed.

Her values were more important to her than winning votes, and that's an example we can all learn from.

While she was on the School Board, she co-founded the Tuesday Morning Breakfast Forum, a group she continues to convene to this day. The Forum can best be described as the pulse of the community in Charlotte. The Forum has met on most Tuesdays for the past 40 years, and it's a required stop for candidates for public office in Charlotte and those running statewide.

For these and many other achievements, it goes without saying that Sarah Stevenson has earned numerous awards and commendations over the course of her life. I was honored to be with Miss Sarah in 2017 as the Charlotte Mecklenburg Housing Partnership opened the 130-unit Stevenson Apartments in her honor.

But perhaps the greatest honor she continues to bestow on us, the entire Charlotte community, is wisdom. Not only her wisdom but the wisdom of the Forum and its 40 years of guest speakers and attendees.

As is said in a Four-Fold Franciscan Blessing that often starts the forum:

May God bless us with discomfort at easy answers, half truths, and superficial relationships, so that we may live deep within our hearts. Amen.

May God bless us with anger at injustice, oppression, and exploitation of people, so that we may work for justice, freedom and peace. Amen.

May God bless us with tears to shed for those who suffer from pain, rejection, starvation and war, so that we may reach out our hands to comfort them and to turn their pain into joy. Amen.

May God bless us with enough foolishness to believe that we can make a difference in this world, so that we can do what others claim cannot be done. Amen.

Thank you, Miss Sarah, for working for justice, freedom, and peace; and for blessing so many people with enough foolishness to believe that we can make the impossible, possible.

Congresswoman Alma Adams represents North Carolina's 12th Congressional District (Charlotte) and serves as Vice Chair of the House Committee on Agriculture. Additionally, she serves on the House Financial Services Committee and the House Education & Labor Committee, where she serves as Chair of the Workforce

Protections Subcommittee. In 2019, Rep. Adams co-founded the Black Maternal Health Caucus with Rep. Lauren Underwood.

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