

CONGRESSIONAL RECORD

HONORING BIG SUR FIRE CHIEF MARTHA KARSTENS

HON. JIMMY PANETTA

OF CALIFORNIA IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, December 6, 2018

Mr. PANETTA. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize the extensive contributions made by Big Sur Fire Chief Martha Karstens to the well-being and prosperity of our community on the central coast of California. Chief Karstens has been an invaluable asset to the Big Sur community, a rural area of my District adjacent to historic Highway 1 on the California coast.

I know that every Big Sur resident can attest to Chief Karsten's character, integrity, and devotion to protecting and serving her community. Residents of Big Sur have historically experienced a lack of access to basic services due to the community's rural location. Chief Karstens sought to fix this, and in 1976, enrolled in the first Emergency Medical Technician (EMT) class ever offered in Big Sur, eventually becoming involved with the American Red Cross' Central Coast Chapter as a volunteer ambulance emergency responder. In 1979, Chief Karstens became president of the Red Cross Big Sur Ambulance, the only emergency first response service stationed in Big Sur at the time. Chief Karstens also served on the Board of the Red Cross, Carmel Chapter, as a representative of the Big Sur community. Chief Karstens continued as the Big Sur Ambulance President until 1991, when Monterey County funded a full-time, paid ambulance crew for the Big Sur community.

Following fourteen years of service with the Big Sur Ambulance, Chief Karstens joined the Big Sur Volunteer Fire Brigade, where she has served for the last twenty-eight years. She was named the Brigade's first Medical Battalion Chief in 1991 and was instrumental in developing the Brigade's medical first responder and EMT mission. In 1994, Chief Karstens transitioned into an administrative role for the Brigade and was asked to become a Duty Officer, requiring her to respond to and direct responses for a wide range of incidents. Following further trainings and certifications in fire safety and emergency response, Chief Karstens was voted in as the Administrative Assistant Chief of the Brigade and recognized as Volunteer Firefighter of the Year in 2003. In 2009, Chief Karstens became the Chief of the Big Sur Volunteer Fire Brigade. During her tenure as Chief, she has overseen the organization throughout several devastating fires on the Central Coast. These included the Pfeiffer Fire in 2013, where, despite losing her own home, Chief Karstens continued serving as Incident Commander. She also played a crucial operational role during the Soberanes Fire and the coordinated response to the subsequent storms that collapsed the Pfeiffer Canyon Bridge and stranded hundreds of Big Sur residents. Chief Karstens helped to ensure these residents had access to food, medicine, and other essential supplies until the bridge could be restored several months later.

Chief Karstens' dedication to her community is evident in her work to protect and serve her fellow Big Sur community members over the last forty-two years. Throughout this time, she has responded personally to thousands of calls and committed thousands of hours of her personal time to volunteer in Big Sur. Chief Karstens has proven herself as a dedicated first responder and has served her community with steadfast commitment at great personal sacrifice. Mr. Speaker, I ask my colleagues to join me in congratulating Big Sur Fire Chief Martha Karstens on her distinguished service and in wishing her a long and healthy retirement.