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Commending Local 2013 High School Graduates for their Decision to Enlist in the United States Marine Corps and Our Community Salutes of Northern Virginia for Hosting the Third Annual High School Enlistee Recognition Ceremony

Statement by Representative Gerald E. Connolly

MR. CONNOLLY: Mr. Speaker, I rise to recognize 51 graduating seniors in my community for their record of academic and athletic accomplishment and for their admirable decision to enlist in the United States Marine Corps. I also express my appreciation to Our Community Salutes of Northern Virginia for providing this opportunity to be among the first to say to each of these young men and women: "Thank you."

I have had the privilege of working with Our Community Salutes of Northern Virginia since its inception in 2011. That year my office was contacted by one of the founding parents who upon learning that her son and other students at his school who had decided to enlist would not receive any recognition during graduation, joined with other parents to organize the first enlistee recognition ceremony of its kind in the region. The first ceremony recognized 9 students. In two short years that number has grown to 101.

With graduation season upon us, thousands of young people in my community, and millions across the nation, are preparing for the next chapter in their lives. Some will pursue higher education or vocational training, others will seek to enter the workforce immediately, and many will answer the call to serve their community and their country.

The United States of America has distinguished itself from other nations through the entrepreneurship and spirit of our people, the knowledge that we can achieve any goal if we set our minds to it, our inherent compassion and generosity, our fierce patriotism, and the extraordinary sacrifices and dedication to country exhibited by the members of our Armed Forces. The young men and women from our community who will be enlisting possess an abundance of each of these qualities. I join with their families and friends in congratulating and commending the following graduates on their enlistment in the United Marine Corps:

Kamo Abdulrahman; Jonathan Aguilar; Kevin Amaya; Jackson Burgess; Benjamin Burruss; Daniel Chhieu; Emily Collins; Latrice Coram; Larry Davis; James Degrafft; Kevin Diaz; Ludvigsen Diaz; Aaron Elassal; Jacob Facas; Mario Fajardo; Azad Fattahi; Ismael Ferman; Christopher Foerter; Spencer Gonsalvez; Veronica Gonzalez; Matthew Gregory; Jeffrey Hong; Nicholas Hunter; Mateusz Laguna; Gwendetta Mabry; Isaac Martinez; Tyreek Minter; Robert Mondloch; Yenifer Montalvo; Matthew Moser; Jason Pabontancara; Omar Paniagua; Tae Park; Erik Ploompuu; Herson Reyes; Jorge Ribera-Pedraza; Carlos Rodriguez; Leonel Santos; Romeo Sarmiento, III; Bradley Sherman; Simranjit Singh; Joshua Skym; David Smith; Kyle Stears; Brittany Thompson; Christian Valencia; Leopoldo Valiente Marquez; Joseph Stephen Vanwijngaarden; Deyvis Vasquez Soto; William Vo; Jaime Zamora

Mr. Speaker, I ask my colleagues to join me in applauding the courage and dedication of these graduates and in assuring them and their families that the full support and resources of the U.S. Congress and the American people will be behind them on every step of their journey in defense our nation's freedom.