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HONORING MARIE GREENWOOD

Mr. President, I rise to honor the life and legacy of Marie Greenwood, who passed away late last year at the age of 106 years-old. Marie, a teacher by trade, spent her life dedicated to the idea that each child--regardless of their race, gender, or class--deserves a quality education. Her intellect, compassion, and vigor propelled countless children through the Denver Public School system and towards lives of purpose. Marie's work as Denver's first tenured black teacher and an integration pioneer increased educational equity in our schools and helped shape Denver into the great city that it is today.

An only child, Marie was born in Los Angeles in 1912 before she and her family relocated to Denver in 1925. As a black family in segregated Denver, they faced no shortage of obstacles. Despite being a star student who time and again overcame the bigotry leveled against her, Marie was told by her high school guidance counselor not to apply to college because it would be a waste of her parents' money. Thank goodness Marie did not heed this wrongheaded advice. She went on to graduate third in her class and earned a scholarship to Colorado Teachers College. Marie had set out on a path that would eventually lead to touching the lives of generations of Colorado's students.

Marie was a trailblazer in civil rights and the ideal teacher. In 1938, she earned tenure in the Denver Public Schools, the first black teacher to do so. Throughout the 1940s, Marie was involved in local activism that challenged discriminatory policies. In 1955, Marie made history again when she became the first African-American in Denver to teach at a segregated school. In the 1960s, she served on a Denver Public Schools committee tasked to study racial inequities in district funding and staffing. All the while, she was a kind and determined teacher who ensured that her students always tried their hardest.

In retirement, she authored two books, one outlining her philosophy on teaching children facing difficulties, and the other her autobiography. In 2001, her legacy was further solidified as the school district named a new elementary school in her honor. She will continue to be remembered by students who participate in the Greenwood Scholars program, which teaches the history of Denver through her life story.

As the former superintendent of Denver Public Schools, I can confidently say that our students would be well-served if Marie was the lodestar for our teachers. Her grace and passion for the profession made a tremendous difference in the lives of our young people, and we are all in her debt. Thank you, Marie. May she rest in peace.