HONORING P. MICHAEL FREEMAN, FIRE CHIEF OF LOS ANGELES COUNTY

HON. GRACE F. NAPOLITANO

OF CALIFORNIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, February 17, 2011

Mrs. NAPOLITANO. Mr. Speaker, we rise today to honor P. Michael Freeman, our good friend and long time Fire Chief of Los Angeles County. Chief Freeman is retiring after 22 years of service as the Fire Chief and 47 years as a firefighter. His commitment to the Los Angeles community, dedication to his employees, and strong leadership of the department will be greatly missed.

Chief Freeman was born and raised in Los Angeles County. He moved to Dallas and had a 25-year career with the Dallas Fire Department eventually rising to the rank of Acting Fire Chief. During that time, he served our nation honorably in the Army Reserve. It was in 1989 that the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors made the wise decision to bring Chief Freeman home and make him the eighth Fire Chief of Los Angeles County.

Chief Freeman has been one of the most respected and longest serving public servants in the history of Los Angeles County. He has steadfastly faced the many challenges that come with running a fire department in a county of 10.5 million people, 4,000 square miles, 88 cities, 70 miles of coastline, dense urban areas, towering mountain ranges and deep forests. He has effectively led the fire department through the annual wildfire seasons, overseeing and containing some of the worst wildfires in the history of California in 2003 and 2009. He coordinated the response with other government agencies to the Northridge earthquake and the many other earthquakes that have rocked Los Angeles over the years. He has expertly overseen the daily operations of the department in responding to the multitude of emergencies that arise in an urban environment.

Chief Freeman has improved the department's emergency response capabilities and has been a strong advocate for the department with the federal government. He has worked with Members of Congress to ensure the first responder community has access to the federal resources they need for fire prevention programs, emergency response equipment, and natural disaster preparedness training. He has organized and led the effort to implement a new Los Angeles Regional Interoperable Communications System (LA–RICS). This system will allow first responders throughout the county to communicate effectively on solutions to emergencies ranging from major disasters to day-to-day events.

Chief Freeman has volunteered in numerous roles with the federal government to lend his expertise to improving emergency response services across the nation. He served as chairman of the board of FIRESCOPE and as a member of the Federal Emergency Management Agency's National Urban Search and Rescue (USAR) Advisory Committee. In 2003, he was selected by Secretary Tom Ridge to serve as a member of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security's emergency responder advisory committee. He also served as chairman of the International Association of Fire Chiefs Terrorism Task Force.

As the economy has weakened and the County has faced major budget challenges, Chief Freeman has done an outstanding job of maintaining the proper staffing, professional service and quick response times that our residents have come to expect. He has managed the many facets of the department well, from emergency medical services to hazardous materials response to the lifeguarding of our many beaches. He has strengthened the department's cooperation and coordination with regional, state and federal emergency response partners. Additionally, Chief Freeman has continuously worked to improve the diversity of the department by hiring more female and minority firefighters.

Chief Freeman implemented many important life safety response programs that are integral to the department's operations today. These include Urban Search and Rescue (USAR), the Canine Search Program, a 24-hour Health Hazardous Materials Division, and the Firehawk Helicopter Program.

Mr. Speaker, as Members of the Los Angeles County delegation, we would like to personally acknowledge and commend P. Michael Freeman for his dedication to the people of Los Angeles. He is a model of the brave, honorable and selfless public servant that is displayed every day by the men and women of the Los Angeles County Fire Department. We are privileged to have worked with Chief Freeman. We ask the House to join us in congratulating Chief Freeman on his many years of service and wish him much success in his future endeavors.

Members who signed: GRACE F. NAPOLITANO, KAREN BASS, HOWARD L. BERMAN, JANE HARMAN, HOWARD P. MCKEON, LAURA RICHARDSON, LUCILLE ROYBAL-ALLARD, ADAM B. SCHIFF, MAXINE WATERS, DAVID DREIER, XAVIER BECERRA, JUDY CHU, KEVIN MCCARTHY, GARY G. MILLER, DANA ROHRABACHER, LINDA T. SÁNCHEZ, BRAD SHERMAN, HENRY A. WAXMAN.

HONORING R.C. ALEXANDER

HON. MARSHA BLACKBURN

OF TENNESSEE

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, February 17, 2011

Mrs. BLACKBURN. Mr. Speaker, business leader Peter Drucker believes, "whenever you see a successful business, someone once made a courageous decision." Mr. Speaker, I rise today to tell you of one successful businessman who lived Drucker's mantra. Born on a working farm in Williamson County, Alexander built an automotive empire in Middle Tennessee. Through humble beginnings to a sprinting end, R.C. Alexander spent his life developing a strong sense of business, family, and community.

Starting with nine employees and single gas station in Murfreesboro, TN, R.C. Alexander grew Alexander Automotive into 22 locations throughout Franklin, Columbia, Murfreesboro, Dickson, and Cookeville. Built upon the tenants of hard work, dedication to community, and straightforward business models, Alexander Automotive maintained almost 1,000 employees at the time of R.C. Alexander's death. He led not only generations of his own family to excellence, but taught those in his influence of the straightforward business practices that brought him success.

Through service to his community, fidelity to his mission, and dedication to his family, Alexander leaves a behind a lasting tribute to his ideals. I ask my colleagues to join with me in celebrating the legacy of Mr. R.C. Alexander.

OUR UNCONSCIONABLE NATIONAL DEBT

HON. MIKE COFFMAN

OF COLORADO

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, February 17, 2011

Mr. COFFMAN of Colorado. Mr. Speaker, today our national debt is $14,129,889,690,377.50.

On January 6, 2009, the start of the 111th Congress, the national debt was $10,638,425,746,293.80.

This means the national debt has increased by $3,491,463,944,083.70 since then.

This debt and its interest payments we are passing to our children and all future Americans.

TRAGEDY IN KHOJALY, AZERBAIJAN

HON. BILL SHUSTER

OF PENNSYLVANIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, February 17, 2011

Mr. SHUSTER. Mr. Speaker, as the Co-Chairman of the House Azerbaijan Caucus, I rise today to bring attention to the tragedy that took place in Khojaly, Azerbaijan, a town and townspeople that were destroyed on February 26, 1992.

Sadly, today there is little attention or interest paid to the plight of Khojaly outside of Azerbaijan. However, one of our greatest strengths as elected officials is the opportunity to bring to light truths that are little known and command recognition. As a friend of Azerbaijan, I am proud to remind my colleagues that we must never forget the tragedy that took place at Khojaly.

At the time, the Khojaly tragedy was widely covered by the international media, including the Boston Globe, Washington Post, New York Times, Financial Times, and many other European and Russian news agencies.

Khojaly, a town in the Nagorno-Karabakh region of Azerbaijan, now under the control of Armenian forces, was the site of the largest killing of ethnic Azerbaijani civilians. With a population of approximately 7,000, Khojaly was one of the largest urban settlements of the Nagorno-Karabakh region of Azerbaijan.

According to Human Rights Watch and other international observers the massacre was committed by the ethnic Armenian armed forces, reportedly with the help of the Russian 366th Motor Rifle Regiment. Human Rights Watch described the Khojaly Massacre as "the largest massacre to date in the conflict" over Nagorna-Karabakh. In a 1993 report, the watchdog group stated "there are no exact figures for the number of Azeri civilians killed because Karabakh Armenian forces gained control of the area after the massacre" and "while it is widely accepted that 200 Azeris were murdered, as many as 500–1,000 may have died."

Newsweek Magazine reported: "Azerbaijan was a charnel house again last week: a place of mourning refugees and dozens of mangled corpses dragged to a makeshift morgue behind the mosque. They were ordinary Azerbaijani men, women and children of Khojaly, a small village in war-torn Nagorno-Karabakh overrun by Armenian forces on 25–26 February. Many were killed at close range while trying to flee; some had their faces mutilated, others were scalped."

Time Magazine stated "While the details are argued, this much is plain: something grim and unconscionable happened in the Azerbaijani town of Khojaly two weeks ago. So far, some 200 dead Azerbaijanis, many of them mutilated, have been transported out of the town tucked inside the Armenian-dominated enclave of Nagorno-Karabakh for burial in neighboring Azerbaijan. The total number of deaths—the Azerbaijanis claim 1,324 civilians have been slaughtered, most of them women and children—is unknown."

Azerbaijan has been a strong strategic partner and friend of the United States. The tragedy of Khojaly was a crime against humanity and I urge my colleagues to join me in standing with Azerbaijanis as they commemorate this tragedy.

HONORING SYD BYKOFSKY

HON. THEODORE E. DEUTCH

OF FLORIDA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, February 17, 2011

Mr. DEUTCH. Mr. Speaker, I am honored to rise today to congratulate Syd Bykofsky on his 95th birthday. Born in New York City, Syd has dedicated his life to helping others, and to being a loud and commanding voice for workers' rights.

Syd began his political activism at the age of 14. When he was just 18 years old, Syd solidified his activism by advocating for a 40 hour work week and picketing on behalf of Laundry Workers, Taxi Drivers, and Millinery Workers, to ensure a better work environment for future generations. In his 20s, Syd joined the Workmen's Circle and served locally and nationally in many leadership positions. Since 1993, Syd has been an active member of the Workmen's Circle Florida Regional Board.

Syd continued his political and social activism and in 1965 he marched on Washington with Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Syd continued his fight for equal opportunity when he participated in the Selma to Montgomery March for Civil Rights; and, by demonstrating for Memphis Garbage Workers and Nurses in Atlanta, Georgia, Syd's contributions to workers rights expanded over the years.

Even though Syd maintained a busy schedule as a community activist, he always made time to be involved in the life of his family. Having been the President of both the PTA and the Father's Club of his children's public school, he was a proud and dedicated father to his children. His commitment to his children and the community continued as he became the Vice President of the 61st Precinct Community Council Day Camp. Syd helped organize Marlboro Houses Day Camp, served on the local school board of District 21K in Brooklyn and assisted in opening John Dewey High School for Special Education.

Today, Syd continues to be a part of his family's lives not only with his grandchildren, but also with his great-grandchildren. Syd's activism is sustained by serving on the Executive Board of the Florida Alliance for Retired Americans and as the Director of Brittany C. Kings Point in Florida. This is a wonderful opportunity to honor Syd for his lifetime of activism, and I join his family and friends in congratulating him on this joyous occasion.

Congratulations to Syd and his entire family on his 95th birthday.

HONORING THE LIFE OF CAPTAIN GEORGE MASON WALKER

HON. ANDER CRENSHAW

OF FLORIDA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, February 17, 2011

Mr. CRENSHAW. Mr. Speaker, Captain George Mason Walker, 82, of Fort McCoy, Florida died Saturday, January 22, 2011. A native of Jacksonville, he lived most of his life in Putnam and Marion Counties.

George M. Walker served his country in both the U.S. Navy during World War II and the U.S. Merchant Marines during peacetime and the Vietnam War. He also served for 15 years as a ship pilot in the Panama Canal.

Captain Walker was a member of First Baptist Church of Orange Springs, Florida. Before his health became frail, he twice weekly could be found walking the Right to Life Abortion Line in Ocala, Florida.

Captain Walker was a Mason, a Shriner and a member of the International Organization of Masters, Mates and Pilots Association.

I commend Captain George M. Walker for his patriotism to his country, devoted service to his church, impressive career history, and life of love and caring concern for his family and fellow man.

IN SUPPORT OF BASIC FREEDOMS AND HUMAN RIGHTS IN THAILAND

HON. TED POE

OF TEXAS

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, February 17, 2011

Mr. POE of Texas. Mr. Speaker, last November, the Helsinki Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe extended an invitation to the former Prime Minister of Thailand Thaksin Shinawatra and a representative from the current Thai government to present testimony at a briefing on the alleged human rights violations that took place in Thailand back in March 2010 at a legal demonstration resulting in the deaths of at least 80 Thai civilians and the imprisonment of at least 350 other civilians.

Unfortunately, this briefing was postponed until the new Congress convened and a new commission chairman was appointed. Now that the new Congress is here, I hope the Helsinki Commission will re-issue the invitations. I am personally traveling to Thailand next week with my colleague Congressman DANA ROHRABACHER from the House Committee on Foreign Affairs to look into the extent of the alleged human rights violations, including the detainment of over 350 demonstrators by the current Thai government.

It is our intention to meet with representatives from the Thai Government and with opposition leaders to study the current situation. But it is clear that in the wake of the worst violence in decades, the Thai Government needs to hold free and fair elections.

With the recent uprising in Egypt and other parts of the Middle East and Asia by individuals who demand their freedom, Congress needs to be clear that it stands for the basic freedoms and rights of people around the world.

RECOGNIZING U.S. IMMIGRATION AND CUSTOMS ENFORCEMENT SPECIAL AGENTS ZAPATA AND AVILA

HON. BENNIE G. THOMPSON

OF MISSISSIPPI

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, February 17, 2011

Mr. THOMPSON of Mississippi. Mr. Speaker, today, I rise to express my sincere condolences about a reprehensible attack on two U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement officers earlier this week in Mexico, while driving between Mexico City and Monterrey, Mexico.

I honor the sacrifice of Special Agent Jaime J. Zapata, who lost his life and Special Agent Victor Avila, who is continuing to recover from injuries sustained during the attack.

In 2006, Special Agent Zapata began his career with ICE in Laredo, Texas as part of the Human Smuggling and Trafficking Unit and as a member of the Border Enforcement Security Task Force. At the time of his death, he was detailed to ICE's Attaché office in Mexico City.

Special Agent Zapata began his tenure at the Department of Homeland Security as a U.S. Border Patrol Agent in Yuma, Arizona. Law enforcement and border security were early passions for this Brownsville, Texas native, as he graduated from the University of Texas at Brownsville in 2005 with a Bachelor of Science Degree in Criminal Justice.

I understand that his fellow agent, Special Agent Victor Avila, was injured in the attack and is now recovering in his home. My thoughts and prayers are with Special Agent Victor Avila, and I am hoping and praying for his healthy recovery.

These agents were two of the hundreds of ICE personnel around the globe. Every day, committed agents like Special Agents Zapata and Avila collaborate with their foreign counterparts to dismantle criminal organizations that pose a border security and law enforcement threat to the United States.

Our Nation is fortunate to have the men and women of the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement keeping us safe and secure. Their bravery and dedication serve as a fine example for all Americans.

I know the Department of Homeland Security and other law enforcement groups are working closely with the authorities in Mexico to ensure that the perpetrators of this attack are identified and brought to justice.

To the family of Special Agent Zapata as well as his ICE brothers and sisters, I offer my deepest sympathies. His sacrifice in service for our country and your family's enormous loss are not, and will not, be forgotten.