For Americans, but wait a minute. Puerto Ricans are already Americans. The issue for all of us is that they are citizens without political rights, including a vote in Congress. This is the anomaly the proposed referendum system proposed to remedy. Whatever the Puerto Rican choice, we continental Americans have an obligation of equality to our fellow citizens on the island.

And that is the end of testimony from an editorial in the Washington Post.

H.R. 856 is the most comprehensive measure affecting self-determination of a U.S. territory since the Alaska and Hawaii Admission Acts of the late 1950's.

I cannot emphasize the importance of this bill not only for the 3.8 million U.S. citizens of Puerto Rico but for the Nation as a whole. The time has come to empower the people by giving them clear choices which they understand and which are truly decolonizing so we can reveal the people of Puerto Rico's true desire through a legitimate act of self-determination.

Let us comply with the call history is making upon us. Let us give our fellow citizens an opportunity in the name of freedom.

Mr. Speaker, I include for the RECORD the editorial from the Washington Post to which I referred.

[From the Washington Post, June 6, 1997]

AN OBLIGATION OF EQUALITY

Americans don't have long to get accustomed to the possibility that they may soon be considering admitting Puerto Rico as the 51st state. This outcome arises from the fact that, largely unattended, Congress is heading toward organizing a referendum next year giving the territory's nearly 4 million residents a ''once and for all'' choice of its relationship to the United States. The key moment came a few week ago, when the House Resources Committee approved 44 to 1 a bill from Chairman Don Young (R-Alaska) allowing Puerto Ricans to decide the future of their island. This old question is being brought to a new boil by the approach of the centennial of the Spanish-American War, in which the United States acquired bits of global empire. To many people, 100 years of American sovereignty over a territory denied full rights is enough.

The proposed referendum offers voters a choice among statehood, independence and the existing ''commonwealth.'' Commonwealth, however, enters the contest under a double burden. It has been tried over the decades and found wanting by many, and it is now widely seen as anachronistically ''colonial,'' even though it was a status voluntarily chosen and repeatedly affirmed. Chairman Young said in May, when his bill was passed in committee: ''It is time for Congress to permit democracy to fully develop in Puerto Rico, either as a separate sovereign republic or as a state if a majority of the people are no longer content to continue the existing commonwealth structure for local self-government.'' Its supporters tried hard in committee to sweeten the definition of commonwealth that would be put to referendum. They failed. For now, anyway, the island's statehood party is on a roll.

For Puerto Ricans, the status question bears deeply on identity as well as practical benefit. Closely related is the issue of language; the committee declared that English—a minority language in Puerto Rico—shall apply ''to the same extent as Federal law requires throughout the United States.'' Tough issues of taxes and benefits must also be calculated.

For Americans. . . . But wait a minute. Puerto Ricans are already Americans. The issue for all of us is that they are citizens without full political rights, including a vote in Congress. This is the anomaly the proposed referendum is meant to remedy. Whatever the Puerto Rican choice, we continental Americans have an obligation to equality to our fellow citizens on the island.

FLAG BURNING AMENDMENT

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 21, 1997, the gentleman from Texas [Mr. PAUL] is recognized during morning hour debates for 5 minutes.

Mr. PAUL. Mr. Speaker, the Congress will soon vote on a flag burning amendment to the Constitution. This issue arouses great emotions, even without any evidence flag burning is a problem. When was the last time we heard of a significant incident involving flag burning? It is a nonissue, but Congress has managed to make it one while avoiding the serious matters of life, liberty, and property.

As Congress makes plans to attack the flag enemies, it stubbornly refuses to consider seriously the Doctrine of Enumerated Powers, property rights, political propaganda from a government-run educational system, taxpayers' paid-for NEA sacrilege, licensing of all broadcast networks, or taxpayers' financing of monopolistic political parties, let alone the budget, the debt, the deficit, honest money, policing the world and the entire welfare state.

Will the country actually be improved with this amendment? Will true patriotism thus thrive as the malcontents are legislated into submission? Do we improve the character of angry people because we threaten them with a prison cell better occupied by a rapist?

This whole process fails to address the anger that prompts such misguided behavior as flag burning. We have a government growing by leaps and bounds, our citizens are fearful of the future and we respond by creating the underwear police. Surely flag underwear will be deemed a desecration.

Why is dealing with a symptom of anger and frustration by suppressing free expression a moral good?

The best I can tell is legislative proposals like this come from Congress' basic assumption that it can legislate economic equality and mold personal behavior. The reasoning goes; if Congress thinks it can achieve these goals, why not legislate respect and patriotism, even if it does undermine freedom of expression and property ownership.

Desecration is defined as: ''To divest of a sacred character or office, commit sacrilege or blasphemy or to deconsecrate.'' If consecrate is ''to make sacred; such as a church or bread or wine'', how can we deconsecrate something not first consecrated? Who then consecrated the flag? When was it done?

''Sacred'' beliefs are those reserved for a religious or Godly nature, ''To set apart for the worship of a deity. To make holy.'' Does this amendment mean we now concede the flag is a religious symbol? Will this amendment, if passed, essentially deify the State?

There are some, I am sure, who would like to equate the State with God. The State's assumption of parental rights is already a deep concern to many Americans. Will this encourage more people to accept the State as our God? We imply by this amendment that the State is elevated to a religion, a dangerous notion and one the founders feared. Calling flag burning blasphemous is something we should do with great caution.

Will it not be ironic if the flag is made sacred and we write laws against its desecration at the same time we continue to steal taxpayers' money to fund the National Endowment for the Arts, which truly desecrates Christ and all of Christianity in the name of free speech?

The flag, indeed, is a loved patriotic symbol of American pride and freedom. Many of us, I for 5 years, served our country in the military fighting for the principles of liberty, but not for the physical cloth of which the flag is woven.

There is confusion between the popular symbol and the real stuff, and in the process of protecting our symbols we are about to undermine the real stuff: liberty. The whole notion of legislating against desecration is vague and undefinable. Burning can be easily identified, but should it not matter who paid for the flag? And are there no owners of the particular flag involved? Are all flags to be communal property?

If we pretend flags are universally owned, that means we can use them randomly. If there is no individual ownership, how can one buy or sell a flag? Should it not be a concern as to where the flag is burned and on whose property? With this legislation, the flag will lose its identity as property and become a holy government symbol not to be desecrated. These are difficult questions but they must be answered.

Whatever happened to the notion that freedom to express unpopular, even obnoxious views, including Marxist views, was the purpose of guaranteeing freedom of expression? Of what value is protection of only popular and majority-approved opinions? That is a mockery of liberty. Soviet citizens had that much freedom. Remember, dissidents who burned the Soviet flag were shot.

A national flag police can only exist in a totalitarian state. We should have none of it. Why not police the burning of the Constitution, the Declaration of Independence, the Emancipation Proclamation? These acts, expressing a radical fringe view, would be as equally repugnant.

INTRODUCTION

The Congress will soon vote on a flag burning amendment to the Constitution. This issue arouses great emotions even without any evidence flag burning is a problem. When was the last time we heard of a significant incident involving flag burning? It's a nonissue but Congress has managed to make it one while avoiding the serious matters of life, liberty, and property.

There just is no flag desecration crisis. Where are the demonstrators, where are the letters? Will this only lead to more discredit on Congress? Only 6 percent of the American people trust anything they hear from the Federal Government so why should they believe there is a flag crisis requiring an adjustment to the Bill of Rights for the first time in our history. Since most of what Congress does, leads to unintended consequences, why do we feel compelled to solve imaginary problems?

The American people are way ahead of the U.S. Congress and their distrust is a healthy sign the Republic will survive in spite of all our good deeds and noble gestures. And that's good.

What sense of insecurity requires such a public display to reassure ourselves we are patriots of the highest caliber, confident enough to take on the flag burning movement—a movement yet to raise its ugly head. Our political saviors will have us believe that our loyalty to America hinges on this lone amendment to the Constitution.

As Congress makes plans to attack the flag enemies, it stubbornly refuses to consider seriously: the Doctrine of Enumerated Powers, property rights, political propaganda from a government run educational system, taxpayer's paid-for NEA sacrilege, licensing of all broadcast networks, or taxpayer's financing of monopolistic political parties, let alone the budget, the debt, the deficit, honest money, policing the world, and the entire welfare state.

Pervasive bureaucratic government is all around us and now we're spending time on developing the next addition to the Federal police force—the flag police. Diverting attention away from real problems toward a pseudoproblem is not a new technique of politicians.

MOTIVATION

Political grandstanding is probably the greatest motivation behind this movement to change the Constitution. It's thought to be easy to embarrass those who, on principle, believe and interpret the first amendment differently. Those who vote eagerly for this amendment do it with good intentions as they laugh at the difficult position in which opponents find themselves.

Will the country actually be improved with this amendment? Will true patriotism thus thrive as the malcontents are legislated into submission? Do we improve the character of angry people because we threaten them with a prison cell, better occupied by a rapist?

This whole process fails to address the anger that prompts such misguided behavior as flag burning. We have a government growing by leaps and bounds, our citizens are fearful of the future, and we respond by creating the underwear police—surely, flag underwear will be deemed a desecration.

Why is dealing with a symptom of anger and frustration by suppressing free expression a moral good?

The best I can tell is legislative proposals like this come from Congress' basic assumption that it can legislate economic equality and mold personal behavior. The reasoning goes; if Congress thinks it can achieve these goals, why not legislate respect and patriotism even if it does undermine freedom of expression and property ownership?

DESECRATION

Desecration is defined as: ''To divest of a sacred character or office, commit sacrilege or blasphemy or de-(con)secrate.'' If consecrate is ''to make sacred; such as a church or bread and wine,'' how can we ''de-consecrate'' something not first ''consecrated?'' Who then consecrated the flag? When was it done? ''Sacred beliefs are those reserved for a religious or Godly nature, i.e., to set apart for the worship of a deity. To make holy.'' Does this amendment mean we now concede the flag is a religious symbol? Will this amendment if passed essentially deify the state?

There are some, I'm sure, who would like to equate the state with God. The state's assumption of parental rights is already a deep concern to many Americans. Will this encourage more people to accept the state as our God? We imply by this amendment that the state is elevated to a religion—a dangerous notion and one the Founders feared. Calling flag burning blasphemous is something we should do with great caution.

Won't it be ironic if the flag is made sacred—consecrated—and we write laws against its desecration at the same time we continue to steal taxpayer's money to fund the National Endowment for the Arts which truly desecrates Christ and all of Christianity in the name of free speech? I must repeat this question: Won't it be ironic if the flag is made sacred and we write laws against its desecration at the same time we continue to steal taxpayer's money to fund the National Endowment for the Arts which desecrates Christ and all of Christianity in the name of free speech?

The flag indeed is a loved patriotic symbol of American pride and freedom. Many of us, I for 5 years, have served our country in the military fighting for the principles of liberty, but not for the physical cloth of which the flag is woven.

There is confusion between the popular symbol and the real stuff, and in the process of protecting our symbols we are about to undermine the real stuff—liberty. The whole notion of legislating against desecration is vague and undefinable. Burning can be easily identified but shouldn't it matter who paid for the flag? Are there no owners of the particular flag involved? Are all flags to be communal property? If we pretend flags are universally owned, that means we can use them randomly. If there is no individual ownership how can one sell or buy a flag? Should it not be a concern as to where the flag is burned and on whose property? With this legislation the flag will lose its identity as property and become a holy government symbol not to be desecrated? These are difficult questions but they must be answered.

Will using a flag as underwear or as a beach towel or a handkerchief or flying it upside down become a Federal crime?

The American Legion and the Veterans of Foreign Wars burn flags to dispose of them. This respectful ritual is distinguished from a hoodlum doing it only by the intent. Are we wise enough to define and legislate intent under all circumstances? Intent obviously implies an expression of a view. So Congress now feels compelled to police intentions, especially if seen as unpopular.

Whatever happened to the notion that freedom to express unpopular, even obnoxious views, including Marxist ideas was the purpose of guaranteeing freedom of expression. Of what value is protection of only popular and majority-approved opinions? that's a mockery of liberty. Soviet citizens had that much freedom. Remember, dissidents who burned the Soviet flag were shot. A national flag police can only exist in a totalitarian state. We should have none of it.

Why not police the burning of the Constitution, the Declaration of Independence, the Emancipation Proclamation? These acts, expressing a radical fringe view, would be as equally repugnant, and a case could be made they might be even more threatening because their attack would be precise and aimed at the heart of American liberty. The answer is the political mileage is with the flag and tough luck to those who have principled opposition.

But no one should ever squirm or weasel out of the right vote, even if threatened with possible negative political fallout.

FEDERAL AVIATION ADMINISTRATION IS AGENCY IN DISARRAY

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 21, 1997, the gentleman from Florida [Mr. MICA] is recognized during morning hour debates for 5 minutes.

Mr. MICA. Mr. Speaker, I am deeply concerned that the Federal Aviation Administration is an agency in disarray, at best. In fact, at worst, it is an unpiloted craft without any direction.

The primary mission of the Federal Aviation Administration is to ensure airplane and passenger safety and security. Last year, after the explosion of TWA flight 800, FAA tightened security at all U.S. airports.

Airports spent hundreds of millions of taxpayer dollars to change parking and cars were towed when vehicles were left unattended. Some of the harassment of the traveling public became, in fact, absurd. Finally, after assurances that no immediate terrorist attack was underway, FAA allowed our airports and the traveling public some more reasonable approaches to airport parking and passenger access.

Now, months after nearly all evidence points to a mechanical failure as the cause of TWA flight 800, FAA continues to harass the American traveling public with several dumb and totally unproductive procedures. Regulations still require that passengers are asked these questions: First, ''Have you packed your own luggage or bag?''; and second, ''Has your baggage or luggage been in your possession at all times?''

Now, I ask what flaky half-baked terrorist or terrorist accomplice would answer these questions legitimately? Should a passenger honestly confess to this interrogation, they should be cautioned because they will be searched, harassed, and subject to Gestapo-like interrogation.

Mr. Speaker, the loss of life as a result of domestic air terrorism does not