

SPECIAL ORDERS

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 7, 2003, and under a previous order of the House, the following Members will be recognized for 5 minutes each.

GREEK INDEPENDENCE DAY

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from New York (Mrs. MALONEY) is recognized for 5 minutes.

GENERAL LEAVE

Mrs. MALONEY. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members may have 5 legislative days within which to revise and extend their remarks and include extraneous material on the subject of my Special Order.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Is there objection to the request of the gentleman from New York?

There was no objection.

Mrs. MALONEY of New York. Mr. Speaker, I rise with my colleague and dear friend, the gentleman from Florida (Mr. BILIRAKIS), with whom I founded and cochair the Hellenic Caucus to celebrate the 183rd anniversary of Greece's declaration of independence from the Ottoman Empire. March 25 has the same resonance in Greece that July 4 has in the United States.

Democracy traces its earliest roots back to ancient Greece, but it developed new strength in modern times from American colonists who demanded independence from Great Britain. When the Greeks of 1821 fought for independence from Turkey, they truly drew inspiration from the ideals and institutions of the fledgling United States. After 400 years of Ottoman rule, the Greeks began an 8-year battle that ended with the defeat of the Turkish Army.

Just as our defeat of the British Army was remarkable, so too was the Greeks' ability to defeat the Ottomans, a tremendous achievement. Against impossible odds, the Greeks broke free of one of the most powerful empires in history and gained their independence.

□ 1845

Mirroring our patriotic displays on July 4, Greeks celebrate this day with parades, speeches and parties. As many of my colleagues know, New York City is the home of the largest Hellenic population outside of Greece and Cyprus.

Western Queens, which I have the honor of representing, is often called Little Athens because of the large influence from Greece and Cyprus in that neighborhood. Recognizing the many similarities between our nations, it is a pleasure to take time to pay tribute to the Hellenic American community for their many contributions to America. We also honor the Federation of Hellenic Societies, which will lead the Greek Independence Day Parade in Manhattan.

As the Olympics return to Greece this summer, they have wisely chosen

the Olympic spirit as the theme of this year's parade. I am pleased to recognize this year's Grand Marshals, my friends Demetrios and Georgia Kaloidis and John and Margo Katsimatidis and Honorary Marshals Yiannis Skoularikis and George Papageorgopoulos. They will be accompanied by the Federation President, Apostolos Tomopoulos, and I will place in the RECORD the many names of the leaders of the Hellenic community who will be participating this weekend.

In the year 2004, a vibrant Greek democracy once again serves as an inspiration to its neighbors and the free world. As discussions progress toward an end to the 30-year division of Cyprus, we hope that the serious concerns of the Hellenic Cypriot American community will be reflected in the final agreement.

Forty-six members of the Hellenic Caucus joined in a letter to Secretary Colin Powell and Secretary General Kofi Annan to express their hope that any agreement will recognize, among other provisions, property rights, the demilitarization of Cyprus, the establishment of the legal obligations of the guarantor powers, and the presence of United Nations troops throughout the transition.

I also led a delegation of members of the Hellenic Caucus who met with Secretary General Kofi Annan last Friday to discuss the negotiations regarding the reunification of Cyprus before it enters the European Union on May 1. We expressed our support for the Secretary General in bringing the parties to the bargaining table, but expressed concerns regarding some of the issues that remain open: property rights, governance, free movement between Greek and Turkish areas of the island, and the pace of demilitarization of the island.

In particular, we raised questions about the ability of Cypriots to regain property that was seized or to receive fair compensation, how compensation would be funded, the unfairness of asking Greek Cypriots to foot the bill for buying back their own property, the ability of Greek Cypriots to have at least the same rights to acquire property in Turkish neighborhoods as foreigners do.

We stressed the importance of having a central government that has the ability to make decisions, and we expressed concern about limitations on the ability of Cypriots to travel unimpeded to all areas of the island.

While we applauded the plan to reduce the number of troops occupying the island, we expressed the hope that the U.N. troops would remain available to monitor the situation in Cyprus for as long as possible. We are hopeful that as the next round of negotiations take place, Secretary General Annan will do everything possible to ensure that our concerns will be addressed so that the final settlement will be acceptable to all Cypriots and Turks when it goes to the vote on the island.

I congratulate the Federation for honoring the Olympics in a year in which the games will be returning to their birthplace, Greece. The world has truly benefited from the ancient Hellenic tradition of allowing athletic competition to triumph over political differences.

I hope this Greek Independence Day will be a symbol of independence for all enslaved people, and we hope for the reunification of Cyprus and its entrance into the European Union. And, finally, Zeto e eleftheria.

Mr. ROTHMAN. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to pay tribute to Greek Independence Day and to thank our colleagues, Mr. BILIRAKIS and Mrs. MALONEY, who have once again shown great leadership in their efforts to organize this special order for Greek Independence Day.

I would like to honor not only this important day in Greek history, but the strong and unique relationship that exists today between the United States and Greece. The evolution of modern democracy has its roots in ancient Athens, and as such, it is only fitting that we, as representatives of one of the world's great democracies, pay tribute to the Greeks and their historical contribution to democratic governance on this 183rd anniversary of their independence.

Since the people of Greece declared their independence on March 25, 1821, our two nations have enjoyed close relations, and generations of Greek immigrants have helped to strengthen and enrich the relations between our two countries. As the Congressional Representative for thousands of Greek Americans, I salute their motherland's eight-year struggle for independence from the Ottoman Empire. Our countries' shared histories of fighting for our freedom and sovereignty creates a common bond between the United States and Greece.

Today, the United States' relationship with Greece continues to grow stronger. Greece has been a devoted supporter of the U.S. in every major international conflict of this century and plays an important role in both the European Union (EU) and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). Greece has been one of our most loyal allies throughout our war against terrorism and has assisted the Coalition in both Iraq and Afghanistan by providing a military presence on land, sea and in the air. In turn, the United States has worked to attain a peaceful settlement to the conflict in Cyprus, the island nation that was brutally invaded by Turkey thirty years ago. I was saddened to see the UN-sponsored negotiations break down recently, so soon before Cyprus's impending accession to the EU on May 1st, but I will continue my efforts to see this important matter through to its successful resolution.

On this celebratory day of freedom and independence, I also want to heartily congratulate the Greek nation on the honor of hosting the Olympic Games in Athens this summer. I cannot think of a more meaningful place to celebrate the spirit of extraordinary achievement than in Athens, nearly 2,780 years after the first Olympics were held in ancient Greece. I look forward to sharing in the pride and celebration of the Olympic Games as they take place this summer and I look forward to continuing to work with leaders from the Greek community as we persist in our fight for a free and united Cyprus.