CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENT AUTHORIZING CONGRESS TO PROHIBIT PHYSICAL DESECRATION OF THE FLAG OF THE UNITED STATES

SPEECH OF HON. MICHAEL T. McCaul OF TEXAS IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, June 22, 2005

Mr. McCaul of Texas. Mr. Speaker, yesterday, I attended the funeral of Congressman J.J. “Jake” Pickle—a former member of the House who represented the 10th District of Texas for 31 years. As the current representative of the 10th District of Texas, it was my duty to pay homage to Congressman Pickle who gave so much to Texas and his constituents.

In doing so, I was absent for legislative business on the floor, and missed the opportunity to vote in favor of an amendment to the Constitution to prevent the desecration of the flag. As an original cosponsor of this amendment, I would have voted “yes” to preserve the ultimate icon of American values.

Since 1994, there have been 119 instances of reported flag burning or desecration in the United States. But only one occurrence of this should be reason enough to outlaw this heinous act.

All 50 States have enacted resolutions asking Congress to pass a flag protection amendment, and an overwhelming majority of the American people have consistently supported the protection of our flag. Accordingly, the House has passed a flag protection amendment by more than the 2/3 majority needed in 5 separate Congresses.

Countless men and women, including my father, who are all heroes, have served under the glory of its stars and bars and died to ensure its spirit, and desecrating our flag is a gross and indefensible act.

Mr. Speaker, on June 30th, SFI will hold its annual dinner in which they pay tribute to individuals within the community who have complemented their efforts in the South Bronx. This year’s honorees include a wide array of influential leaders, including the late Yolanda Garcia, whose good works helped to provide adequate housing and a safe place to live for Bronx residents. It is my hope that SFI and all of this year’s honorees will continue to serve as a bridge between despair and hope for young people living in the South Bronx.

Mr. Speaker, as they celebrate their 16th Annual “Claude Buddy Young Dinner”, I ask that my colleagues join me in paying tribute to the Sports Foundation Inc. for more than thirty-six years of service to the youth of the South Bronx.

FREEDOM FOR ALEXIS RODRIGUEZ FERNANDEZ

HON. LINCOLN DIAZ-BALART OF FLORIDA IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, June 23, 2005

Mr. Lincoln Diaz-Balart. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to speak about Alexis Rodriguez Fernandez, a political prisoner in totalitarian Cuba.

Mr. Rodriguez Fernandez is a member of both the Christian Liberation Movement and the Movement of Cuban Young People for Democracy. Mr. Rodriguez Fernandez believes in bringing freedom to an island enslaved by the nightmare that is the Castro regime. Unfortunately, Mr. Rodriguez Fernandez has been a constant target of the dictatorship.

According to Amnesty International, in January 2002, Mr. Rodriguez Fernandez was attacked and threatened by plain clothes state security agents to an extent envisioned in a remote area. In March 2003, as part of Castro’s heinous crackdown on peaceful pro-democracy activists, Mr. Rodriguez Fernandez was arrested. Subsequently, in a sham trial, he was sentenced to 15 years in the totalitarian gulag.

Mr. Rodriguez Fernandez is currently languishing in an infernal cell in the totalitarian gulag. These deprived conditions are truly appalling. The State Department describes the conditions in the gulag as “harsh and life threatening.” The State Department also reports that police and prison officials beat, neglect, isolate, and deny medical treatment to detainees and prisoners. It is a crime of the highest order that people who work for freedom are imprisoned in these nightmarish conditions.

Let me be very clear. Mr. Rodriguez Fernandez is languishing in these deprived conditions because he believes in freedom. He believes in freedom of religion and human rights for every Cuban citizen. It is intolerable that freedom fighters like Mr. Rodriguez Fernandez are locked in gulags 90 miles from our shore because they believe in fundamental human rights.

Mr. Rodriguez Fernandez is one of the many heroes of the peaceful Cuban democratic movement who are locked in the dungeons of the dictatorship for their beliefs. They are symbols of freedom and democracy who will always be remembered when freedom reigns again in Cuba.

Mr. Speaker, it is condemnable and unconscionable that any person can be sentenced to 15 years in the grotesquely inhuman quarters of Castro’s gulag for a belief in democracy. My Colleagues, we must demand the immediate and unconditional release of Alexis Rodriguez Fernandez and every prisoner of conscience in totalitarian Cuba.

HON. DAN BURTON OF INDIANA IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, June 23, 2005

Mr. Burton of Indiana. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to congratulate and honor the 2005 Ellis Island Medal of Honor recipients. Presented annually by the National Ethnic Coalition of Organizations (NECO)—an umbrella group of more than 250 organizations that spans the spectrum of ethnic cultures, religions and traditions—the Ellis Island Medal of Honor commemorates and recognizes Americans of all ethnic backgrounds who have made significant contributions to our society. These medals have been aptly named for Ellis Island, as in so many ways Ellis Island is an enduring symbol of the immigrant roots and diversity that characterize our great Nation.

America has always been a haven for legal immigrants from all over the world who come to our shores with one simple dream; forging a new life in a land of opportunity, liberty, and freedom—freedom from religious, economic, political or ethnic persecution. When the immigrant station at Ellis Island, New York, opened on January 1, 1892, it admitted 700 immigrants into the United States on just its first day of operation. By the time the center closed in 1954, 11 million immigrants had passed through its doors. The Ellis Island administration and staff, on average, processed up to 5,009 people per day. Many of these