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 just 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 desecration of their contribution to America. The American flag serves as the world’s most recognized symbol of freedom and democracy, and should be given the appropriate respect and protection.

FREEDOM FOR ALEIXS RODRIGUEZ FERNANDEZ
HON. LINCOLN DIAZ-BALART
OF FLORIDA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, June 23, 2005

Mr. 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 in a 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, who at times assumed the role of a lynch mob, in his home. 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.

2005 ELLIS ISLAND MEDALS OF HONOR AWARDS CEREMONY

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 heritages, cultures and religions—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, 12 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
newcomers spoke little English, hardly had any money, and arrived with only the clothes on their backs. Despite those challenges, all were willing to risk their lives in exchange for the opportunity to build a better life for themselves and their families.

The Ellis Island Medal of Honor was created in 1986 to honor those individuals who—through their own perseverance, sacrifice and success—continue to help keep America at the forefront of science, business, sports, entertainment, health care research, and myriad of other important issues. Representing a rainbow of ethnic backgrounds the 2005 recipients received their awards on May 14, 2005, in the shadow of the historic Great Hall, where the first footsteps towards a new life were taken by the millions of immigrants who entered the U.S. in the latter part of the nineteenth century.

NECO Co-chairman Lee Iacocca, paying tribute to NECO’s Founder and Chairman, William Denis Fugazy, said: “Bill’s most enduring legacy is the National Ethnic Coalition of Organizations and the Ellis Island Medals of Honor. He has been the driving force behind NECO since its inception. Under the NECO banner he has led the fight against intolerance and hate, and brought together disparate groups to work together and to celebrate the gifts that each ethnic group brings to keep America strong and free for all. His life is testament to what one person with a big heart and boundless energy can accomplish.”

Nasser J. Kazeminy, Chairman of NECO’s Executive Committee, said that the 2005 Ellis Island Medal of Honor recipients have enriched the fabric of our nation. He went on to say “Few Americans have enriched this country and have become role models for future generations. He noted that a posthumous Medal was given to Sergeant Christian Engelndrum, U.S. Army National Guard, who was killed in Iraq last November. Engelndrum, he said, was a heroic New York City firefighter, and also served in the Middle East during Operation Desert Storm. He was the first New York City employee to be killed in Iraq. His third child, a daughter, was born in June 2005.

Since 1986, approximately 1,700 American citizens have received Ellis Island Medals of Honor, which continue to pay tribute to the ancestry groups that comprise America’s unique cultural mosaic. In addition, NECO awards one International Ellis Island Medal of Honor each year. This year’s international honoree was Richard Plat, Chairman of Visy Industries, Australia.

Mr. Speaker, the 2005 Ellis Island recipients are without doubt a remarkable collection of individuals who have distinguished themselves as leaders in their fields, and who have, through their dedicated service, contributed to one of the most significant contributions of America—creating a better life for others. By their selflessness, the 2005 Ellis Island Medal of Honor recipients have paved the way for future generations to follow in their footsteps.

I once again commend NECO and its Chairman, my good friend William Denis Fugazy, for honoring the accomplishments of these outstanding individuals and their tireless efforts to foster dialogue, build bridges between different ethnic groups, and promote unity and a sense of common purpose in our Nation. I respectfully ask my colleagues to join me in recognizing the good works of NECO, and congratulating all the 2005 Ellis Island Medal of Honor recipients, and I would ask that the names of all of this year’s recipients be placed into the Congressional Record following my statement.
Representative J.J. Pickle

HONORING REPRESENTATIVE J.J. PICKLE

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, June 23, 2005

Mr. RANGEL. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to honor a great man whose presence in this chamber raised the level of civility and decency and lifted the hearts of each and every one of us. Yesterday, with a number of my colleagues, I attended the funeral services of Representative J.J. “Jake” Pickle of Texas.

This was a man whose gregarious spirit and good humor over 31 years was a welcomed addition to the proceedings of the chamber, and whose passion and determination to achieve a better life for all Americans were evident in his every day good will and efforts.

Jake was a natural politician because he loved to serve the people and realized that serving the people meant knowing them. He went out of his way to greet and meet individuals who were constituents, who were Americans, and who were simply human. In formal meetings or walks to this chamber or sitting around the office, Jake always had a welcoming and calming smile accompanied by a hearty greeting and oftentimes an affectionate bear hug. He was a lightening rod of energy and enthusiasm and infused that passion and concern into everyone he came in contact with.

That passion and dedication to the public carried over into his work in this chamber. I had the honor to work with Jake on the Ways and Means Committee and I know he was committed to helping the public in every way possible. He was not blinded by partisanship but believed in the right ideals and direction for this country.

In the 1980s, as chair of the Social Security Subcommittee, he worked across the aisle to achieve reforms in the system that would guarantee the program for future generations. He built alliances with members of different ideologies on issues of importance to him, Austin, Texas, and the American public.

His bonds of connection to public service were rooted in principle and a desire to do what was right. He often stated to me his worry in 1964 over the Civil Rights Act. He knew that legislation to secure rights that had been long denied to African Americans was overdue and right; yet he also knew of the strong opposition to civil rights legislation in his congressional district and Texas. He took the unprecedented and dangerous (for a Texan) step of supporting that legislation, which has moved the country so far in terms of race relations. He knew the importance of addressing the issue of race in America and ensuring that all Americans were treated equally in this country.

While he received President Lyndon Johnson’s personal appreciation for that action, he was concerned that he would not be returned to office. Fortunately, the people of Austin saw the greatness of this man, and returned him fifteen times.

There was clearly something superb about the Gentleman from Texas. He was willing to work for and do the work of the people. His smiling face, his generous handshakes, and his willingness to put his neck on the line for the right cause were a welcomed part of his role in the House of Representatives. I miss working with Gentleman Jake as he would readily discuss and debate the issue of the day with anyone and with a hearty smile on his face.

There were several well-written obituaries earlier this week after Jake Pickle’s death which captured much of the spirit and essence of this fine public servant. The one I found most meaningful is the one I submit for the Record today to share with my colleagues. It is an editorial from Jake’s home town newspaper, the Austin American Statesman, paying him as high a compliment as any elected official can achieve, asserting that it was “A Privilege to be Served by Pickle.”

A PRIVILEGE TO BE SERVED BY PICKLE

June 19, 2005—Elected officeholders rightly talk about the privilege of serving the people. Occasionally, though, an officeholder comes along so complete in dedication, energy and humanity that the community is privileged to have his service. And having Jake Pickle for a congressman for 31 years proved just such a privilege for Central Texas.

Jake—anyone could call him Jake—was that fine by him—always enjoyed being the center of attention. He was a terrific storyteller, in part because he so obviously loved telling a story. Audiences, in turn, couldn’t help but enjoy and start laughing at his stories, and soon he was laughing at himself and their reaction.

Another reason people liked him was that he so obviously relished being with people. He was a born politician, someone who really did get a charge out of meeting, being with, and helping people. And he found in public office a perfect way to live out an honorable and useful life: Help others, and bask in the thanks.

But Pickle was far more than the glad-handing, back-slapping pal, as good as he was at that. He deeply believed that government could do things to help and protect ordinary people, and that’s how he used his office in Congress. As he rose in seniority in Congress and the influential House Ways and Means Committee, he became chairman of its Social Security subcommittee, which in the early 1980s faced the same kind of fiscal problems it deals today.

Here’s an excerpt from the 1992 edition of the American Almanac of American Politics describing Pickle:

“While other Democrats went out and demagogued the Social Security issue on the campaign trail, Pickle pointed out its problems and worked hard as the architect of the Social Security rescue of 1983, when benefits were in effect cut by raising the normal retirement age from 65 to 67 in the next century. He was a serious player on tax reform and on trade; he has come forward with enterprises like Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac, not because they seem to be in trouble now, but because he wants to avoid huge unanticipated obligations of the sort generated by federal deposit insurance of savings and loans.”

If only he were in Congress today! Pickle worked hard for Central Texas, not just in Congress and on the floor of the House of Representatives, but by coming home and asking us, repeatedly, what we wanted him to do. He kept doing it so well that we kept sending him back, until he decided it was time for someone younger to fight the good fights.

It was a privilege to have him represent us, and we’re sorry he won’t be telling us any more good stories.

PERSONAL EXPLANATION

HON. MICHAEL T. MCCAUL
OF TEXAS

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, June 23, 2005

Mr. MCCAUL of Florida. 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.

If I were able to vote on yesterday’s considered measures, I would have voted in favor of an amendment that I offered to the Legislative Branch Appropriations Bill. This fiscally conservative, commonsense amendment would have addressed the excess printing and paper that is generated by the GPO, and directed those funds to a far more worthy recipient—the Capitol Police. I thank Congressman PATRICK MCCHENRY for his support of my amendment, and for acting as my designee during the debate.

I would have voted “yes” on a Constitutional Amendment banning the desecration of the American Flag—legislation of which I am an original cosponsor.

For the Legislative Branch Appropriations bill, I would have voted: "no" on the Baird amendment, "no" on the Davis amendment, "no" on the Helmy amendment, "no" on the motion to recommit, and "yes" on passage.

PERSONAL EXPLANATION

HON. RON LEWIS
OF KENTUCKY

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, June 23, 2005

Mr. LEWIS of Kentucky. Mr. Speaker, I was absent from the House on Monday, June 20, 2005 so that I could testify before the BRAC Commission regional hearing in St. Louis, MO, on behalf of Ft. Knox, an Army installation in my district designated for significant realignment. Had I been present, I would have voted the following way:

House amendment 328, claiming religious proselytizing at the Air Force Academy, “no.”

House amendment 330, prohibiting funds for activities in Uzbekistan, “no.”

House amendment 331, prohibiting military action against Syria, Iran, N. Korea without Congress authority, “no.”

House amendment 333, prohibiting funds for carrying out sections of the Small Business Competitiveness Demonstration Program Act, “no.”