

SENSE OF CONGRESS THAT THERE SHOULD BE ESTABLISHED A CARIBBEAN-AMERICAN HERITAGE MONTH

SPEECH OF

**HON. ALCEE L. HASTINGS**

OF FLORIDA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

*Monday, June 27, 2005*

Mr. HASTINGS of Florida. Mr. Speaker, I rise today in support of H. Con. Res. 71, a resolution supporting the establishment of a Caribbean-American Heritage month. This resolution is admirable and deeply appreciated in its recognition and celebration of the Caribbean-American community and of the contributions that community has made to every sphere of American life.

The American spirit is a tapestry that weaves cultures together, one in which people of all traditions and walks of life convene to better protect and educate one another. The Caribbean-American people are an invaluable part of his tapestry, and their influence has stretched to every field of American society, culture and politics.

The State of Florida is especially indebted to the Caribbean-American community, enjoying one of the largest and most flourishing Caribbean-American populations in the nation. The contributions of this community to Florida's economy, educational system, politics and culture, and indeed to all areas of our society, are of the greatest importance to our state and to our country.

I am so privileged to represent people of virtually every single Caribbean heritage. From Lauderdale to Miramar to West Palm Beach to Oakland Park, I am honored to work on behalf of all of these communities and many more.

As early as the 17th Century, Caribbean men and women journeyed to find new lives in America. Our regions have endured similarly difficult pasts. We shared a struggle against slavery, we shared a fight for independence, and now we share the strong ties built on social equality and democratic government.

Mr. Speaker, the United States has been profoundly shaped by the achievements of its Caribbean-American citizens. Whether in technology, science, the military, fashion, politics, government, business, education or journalism, the achievements of Caribbean-Americans have been immense and invaluable.

Some of the most revered figures in American art have come from the Caribbean-American community: actors, musicians, politicians, authors, educators and so many others. All of them have played central roles in the cultural development of this country.

This resolution enjoys strong bipartisan support including mine because it is critical for this body to acknowledge and appreciate those who contribute to America's unique and highly respected culture. I am proud to lend my support to this most excellent resolution, I urge my colleagues to do the same.

MILITARY PERSONNEL FINANCIAL SERVICES PROTECTION ACT

SPEECH OF

**HON. DAVID SCOTT**

OF GEORGIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

*Monday, June 27, 2005*

Mr. SCOTT of Georgia. Mr. Speaker, today, I rise in support of Title II of, H.R. 458 Military Personnel Financial Services Protection Act. Title II of this measure regulates lenders who target the military and safeguards our armed services personnel from unscrupulous consumer credit lending and collection practices.

Many lenders have developed sales campaigns to market directly to military personnel. A few unscrupulous agents have made misleading pitches to 'captive' audiences, by posing as counselors on veteran's benefits and soliciting soldiers while they were on duty. In some instances, lenders have garnished military personnel's wages or required them to agree to have their loan repaid through the allotment system. Title II of H.R. 458 would clarify that lenders cannot garnish a military salary or give the appearance that they are agents of the military.

Predatory lenders have contacted or threatened to contact the borrower's commanding officer in order to collect debt. In addition, some lenders have required borrowers to sign documents as a condition of obtaining the loan that purportedly waive their legal rights, including requiring the borrower to submit to mandatory arbitration of any dispute. H.R. 458 would prohibit a lender to contact a loan recipient's chain of command and the measure would ensure that the customer's rights are not waived.

Title II in H.R. 458 recognizes that many military personnel are not aware of their borrowing options or rights or how to manage their finances after taking out a loan. To remember this problem, under Title II, military lenders would be required to provide detailed disclosures prior to the consummation of a loan transaction.

Last year, as a member of the House Committee on Financial Services, I expressed concerns about unscrupulous military lenders in several hearings. Some of these reported scams occurred at Fort Benning in my state of Georgia and were made public through a series of articles in the New York Times.

Mr. Speaker, I believe that Title II of H.R. 458 takes strong steps to ensure that our military men and women are not treated as second-class citizens when it comes to financial transactions and loans.

THE NEED FOR CULTURAL SENSITIVITY

**HON. CHARLES B. RANGEL**

OF NEW YORK

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

*Tuesday, July 12, 2005*

Mr. RANGEL. Mr. Speaker, today I come before this chamber to be heard on an issue of deep importance to US and Mexican relations. It is a concern that to many seems trivial but which in reality represents an important aspect of the cultural relationship and respect that exists between our two nations.

I speak of the stamp intending to honor the comic strip Mémín Pinguin. The decision to

draw attention and promote this character that would be recognized by those in the international community as racist is an act of gross insensitivity on the part of the Mexican government. In this global day and age, the Mexican authorities should have been aware of the negative international impact of this characterization of the Negro race in grotesque imagery associated with the vilest forms of racism. They should have realized that the depiction of a childish apelike cartoon intended to draw attention to racial stereotypes would be seen as racist. They should have understood that the postage stamp would be seen as a reflection of the beliefs of Mexico and that to pay honor to a character that would signal tolerance with racism is disgraceful.

While President Fox has defended this insulting portrayal as simply cultural differences, he must also understand the cultural message his government is sending to the rest of the world. Clearly, African-Americans and other African and Afro-descendant populations would see the uplifting of a black cartoon character, with monkey-like lips and head and a childish demeanor, as an attempt to malign them. At a time when the world is becoming increasingly interdependent, President Fox's government has decided to insult an entire race of humans—a race that has long suffered discrimination, insult, and abuse. Rather than highlight for the international community and the Mexican people a rich heritage of understanding and harmony, the Mexican government has chosen a symbol of offense and smear.

Yes, we should be aware of the cultural differences that exist between the people of our two countries, but that awareness requires efforts from both sides. In this Congress and past congresses, I and members of the Congressional Black Caucus have worked to erase the elements of racism that exist towards Mexicans, Hispanics, African-Americans, and Blacks. We have reached out in the spirit of cooperation and harmony to our friends in the Congressional Hispanic Caucus to fight against discrimination and discord between our people. We have pursued policies and positions that call on our leaders to decry stereotypical comments that appeal to our most basic emotions. We have united to condemn characterizations and caricatures intended to offend, defame, or marginalize our people, our race, and our community.

In the last month alone, I have been joined by a number of my colleagues in supporting an resolution to draw attention to the challenges and struggles of Afro-descendant populations in Latin America and the Caribbean. We introduced this resolution because too often the international community and the governments of Latin America and the Caribbean ignore, marginalize, and dehumanize the descendants of the transatlantic slave trade. Throughout the region, Afro-descendant populations have the lowest standards of living, the highest rates of illiteracy, the poorest standards of health care, the smallest per capita incomes, and the least amount of access to the political, social, and economic levers of power and opportunity.

It was surprising to me that, the week after the House International Relations Committee favorably marked up this resolution to recognize and support Afro-Latino and Afro-Caribbean populations, the government of Mexico would issue a postal stamp honoring an