

EXTENSIONS OF REMARKS

EXPUNGEMENT RESTORES MOST FUNDAMENTAL RIGHTS

HON. CHARLES B. RANGEL

OF NEW YORK

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, March 1, 2006

Mr. RANGEL. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to express my disappointment at comments made earlier this month by Maryland Gov. Robert Ehrlich that he would veto a bill that would restore voting rights to felons.

Disenfranchisement is a problem plaguing society. Nationally, more than four million Americans are not allowed to vote as a result of laws that prohibit voting by felons or ex-felons. In 48 states, with the exception of Maine and Vermont, and the District of Columbia prisoners cannot vote. In 36 states, felons on probation or parole are disenfranchised and in 11 states, a felony conviction can result in a lifetime sanction long after the completion of a sentence. Unfortunately disenfranchisement is not a color-blind problem. This fundamental obstacle to participation in our democracy is aggravated by racial disparities within the criminal justice system, resulting in an estimated 13 percent of black men unable to vote. In 10 states with the highest Hispanic populations, including California, Latinos are as much as three times more likely to lose their right to vote from felony disenfranchisement than the population at large.

The denial of black and Latino ex-felons from membership and participation in our electorate is a glaring disgrace to a country that prides itself on its equitable criminal justice system. It is said that once prisoners have "paid their debt to society," they are free to re-enter it. But are they truly free? The answer is no if some of their fundamental rights aren't restored at the conclusion of their sentence. Not only are some ex-felons not allowed to vote, but employers hesitate to contract workers with criminal records and participation in certain housing and training programs is elusive to them as well. It is shameful and unfair to punish ex-felons even after they have served their sentence. We must avail to these citizens every opportunity to regain their dignity so they do not return to a life of crime. The unfortunate alternative is for society to continue to be victimized by ex-offenders who, having given up all hope of employment, resort to careers in crime.

It is my belief that expungement allows for a fresh start for reformed ex-prisoners. That is why I have reintroduced H.R. 662, the Second Chance for Ex-Offenders Act of 2005, which would permit the expungement of federal records for certain nonviolent criminal offenses. Gov. Ehrlich's comments that fully restoring voting rights to felons is inappropriate are in and of themselves egregious. If we continue to deny all ex-felons the right to vote and continue to punish them even after they have served their time, then what debt have they paid to society during their incarceration? What message are we sending not only to ex-

offenders but the world as we continue to tout ourselves as the leader of the free, Democratic world, if we do not allow some of our citizens the right to vote?

Currently, some states have reformed their laws to allow ex-offenders to become active participants in their government. Several states, such as Kentucky and Illinois, permit the expungement of the records of certain ex-offenders who have violated state laws. Voting rights advocates and legislators are pushing for such initiatives in Virginia. In the governor's great state of Maryland, dozens of House Democrats have co-sponsored legislation that would allow about 150,000 ex-felons to vote this year and the state Democratic Party has endorsed the proposal. To unilaterally turn a deaf ear to constituents, advocacy groups and fellow lawmakers is an offense to democracy.

Mr. Speaker, it is my hope that Gov. Ehrlich comes to realize the type of damage his vow to forbid restoration of voting rights to ex-prisoners has done to disadvantaged communities in his state. It is his vow that I find inappropriate.

TRIBUTE TO ALICE GRAY

HON. LYNN C. WOOLSEY

OF CALIFORNIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, March 1, 2006

Ms. WOOLSEY. Mr. Speaker, I rise with sadness today to honor my friend Alice Gray who died on February 10, 2006, at the age of 88. Surrounded by family and friends, she passed away peacefully in her Santa Rosa home. Known throughout Sonoma County for her leadership in the civil rights movement, Alice's strength, motherly warmth, and common sense were a hallmark of her style.

Originally from Longview, Texas, Alice moved to California during World War II to join her husband Gilbert who was working in the shipyards in Marin City. In 1950 the family moved to Santa Rosa where there were few other black people, and Alice and Gilbert soon became community activists.

In 1954 they co-founded the Sonoma Chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and led pickets to integrate local businesses. Alice also helped establish the National Association of Negro Business and Professional Women's Club in Sonoma, the Marin Rod and Gun Club, and the Community Baptist Church which has been led by the Reverend James Coffee for 45 years.

In 1992 Alice and Gilbert launched the Gray Foundation, with an initial contribution of \$150,000, to provide funds to students with the desire to further their education and serve their community. The Grays declared, "The Gray Foundation is our effort to reverse unemployment, declining social values and violent self-fear. We seek to put our resources behind our words (put up or shut up) . . . As a people, we have to put our growing re-

sources to use in support of our heroes/heroines, our heritage, as well as persons and places of learning. We must listen and learn from each the traditions of self-help and self-reliance that once gave our people strength."

The Foundation's programs embody that philosophy, from its scholarships for high school graduates to In Partnership, a unique enrichment program at Brook Hill Elementary School which focuses on the development of tools that young children will need for school success. Its theme is "Students Taking an Active Role" (the children are known as "STARS") and includes the South Park Grandmothers' Club whose members, including Alice, went regularly to the school to be there for at-risk kids.

Alice's husband Gilbert passed away in 1997 after 62 years of marriage. She remained active, including a drive to Los Angeles with her grandson Curtis last fall to attend the 18th annual California NAACP Convention. Always a high-spirited driver (called "wheeling" by the family), she drove for 100 miles on the trip, her first time behind the wheel since her husband's death. At the Convention, she met with the new president, Bruce Gordon, and many old friends from all over the state such as Willie Brown and Mervyn Dymally. She and Curtis attended seminars, including one on same sex marriage. Both of them were overwhelmed at the concluding banquet where Curtis was given the honor of doing an invocation and all 450 attendees sang Happy Birthday to Alice.

Alice is survived by 7 great, great grandchildren, 28 great grandchildren, 32 grandchildren, 5 siblings, numerous nieces and nephews, eight of her nine children—Ann Gray Byrd, William Gray, Dorothy Woodward, Ida Johnson, James Gray, Charles Gray, Aubrey Gray, Robert Gray—and many close friends and admirers.

Mr. Speaker, it was the Alice's and Gilbert's desire that "the Gray Foundation serve as an example to others so that they, too, will put up, because we cannot afford to shut-up and still survive." Alice Gray herself was a shining example of someone who "put up", inspiring so many with her actions and her heart. I will miss my friend but know that her message of hope and compassion will continue to spread throughout the community and beyond.

TRIBUTE TO JOSEPHINE CATHRINE GAJDA

HON. DANIEL LIPINSKI

OF ILLINOIS

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, March 1, 2006

Mr. LIPINSKI. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to honor an outstanding resident of the Third Congressional District of Illinois, Josephine Cathrine Gajda, upon her retirement. Over the years, Josephine has been a distinguished contributor to the community, as well as an exemplary mother. Her love of nature, reading,

• This "bullet" symbol identifies statements or insertions which are not spoken by a Member of the Senate on the floor.

Matter set in this typeface indicates words inserted or appended, rather than spoken, by a Member of the House on the floor.