

HONORING SFC RONNIE
THOMPSON, JR.

HON. RON LEWIS

OF KENTUCKY

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, May 1, 2008

Mr. LEWIS of Kentucky. Madam Speaker, I rise today to pay tribute to Sergeant First Class Ronnie Thompson, Jr., a remarkable soldier and citizen from Rineyville, Kentucky. SFC Thompson's recovery from a grave injury sustained while serving in Iraq has made him a source of inspiration among his fellow soldiers and throughout the extended Fort Knox community.

SFC Thompson joined the United States Army in 1991 and was assigned to the First Infantry Division. During his early tenure, he completed a deployment to Bosnia and two additional deployments to Kosovo. He was subsequently deployed to Iraq where he served as a Scout Platoon Sergeant with the Air Assault Quick Reaction Force.

On December 11, 2004, SFC Thompson was severely wounded by an improvised explosive device while participating in Coalition efforts in Iraq. He was air evacuated back to the United States and placed in emergency care at the Walter Reed Medical Center in Washington, DC. In the months and years that have followed, SFC Thompson has defied doctor's expectations, emerging from a coma and enduring countless hours of grueling physical therapy.

In his long convalescence, SFC Thompson continues to demonstrate the unique courage and keen sense of duty that made him such an exemplary soldier. In addition to the daily rigors of rehabilitation therapy, he has found time to serve his fellow soldiers as a volunteer at the Fort Knox Veteran Service Office. On the battlefield and off, SFC Thompson has answered the call of his country in a profound way, making deep personal sacrifices to serve others and preserve our freedom and way of life.

It is my great privilege to recognize Sergeant First Class Ronnie Thompson, Jr. today on the floor of the U.S. House of Representatives for his service to our country, support of our soldiers, and lifelong example of leadership and service. His unique achievements make him an outstanding American worthy of our honor and respect.

INJECTING THE IMPROVEMENT OF
EDUCATION INTO THE POLITICAL
DIALOGUE

HON. CHARLES B. RANGEL

OF NEW YORK

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, May 1, 2008

Mr. RANGEL. Madam Speaker, in the interest of our national security, competitive standing in the world, and criminal justice system—I rise today to rouse dialogue on an issue that implicates all three: education. Recent numbers report that as few as 1 out of every 2 youngsters are not earning high school diplomas in our Nation's biggest cities. For those of us from districts where the need is great, these numbers are far from new, let alone startling. But even as they inspired alarm in

the wake of the report's release, they have failed to ignite a national conversation on an issue that demands action, not just today, but yesterday. That alarm has already, regrettably, been snuffed out. We remain, still, oddly hush-hush and complacent.

Many will make an argument of the heart, that to fail to equip these kids with the skills and knowledge they need to eschew poverty and criminality demonstrates an abominable lack of compassion. This is true. But allow me to also make an argument of the mind. These children cannot afford failure—and neither can we. As a nation, we drastically shrink our talent pool and our ability to compete on the global stage when we trade bodies in our college classrooms for bodies on the streets, in jails, even underground. We give way to the rise in influence of China and India and saddle the next generation with a workforce unfit for competition, perennially unemployed and underemployed. That is an explicit and direct threat to our national security.

A New York Times editorial—written by Bob Herbert, published on April 22, and titled “Clueless in America”—makes the case for an America that rises to this challenge, that takes note of our lack of progress, and moves with purpose and innovation towards correcting it.

CLUELESS IN AMERICA

We don't hear a great deal about education in the presidential campaign. It's much too serious a topic to compete with such fun stuff as Hillary tossing back a shot of whiskey, or Barack rolling a gutter ball.

The nation's future may depend on how well we educate the current and future generations, but (like the renovation of the nation's infrastructure, or a serious search for better sources of energy) that can wait. At the moment, no one seems to have the will to engage any of the most serious challenges facing the U.S.

An American kid drops out of high school every 26 seconds. That's more than a million every year, a sign of big trouble for these largely clueless youngsters in an era in which a college education is crucial to maintaining a middle-class quality of life—and for the country as a whole in a world that is becoming more hotly competitive every day. Ignorance in the United States is not just bliss, it's widespread. A recent survey of teenagers by the education advocacy group Common Core found that a quarter could not identify Adolf Hitler, a third did not know that the Bill of Rights guaranteed freedom of speech and religion, and fewer than half knew that the Civil War took place between 1850 and 1900.

“We have one of the highest dropout rates in the industrialized world,” said Allan Golston, the president of U.S. programs for the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. In a discussion over lunch recently he described the situation as “actually pretty scary, alarming.”

Roughly a third of all American high school students drop out. Another third graduate but are not prepared for the next stage of life—either productive work or some form of post-secondary education.

When two-thirds of all teenagers old enough to graduate from high school are incapable of mastering college-level work, the nation is doing something awfully wrong.

Mr. Golston noted that the performance of American students, when compared with their peers in other countries, tends to grow increasingly dismal as they move through the higher grades:

“In math and science, for example, our fourth graders are among the top students globally. By roughly eighth grade, they're in

the middle of the pack. And by the 12th grade, U.S. students are scoring generally near the bottom of all industrialized countries.”

Many students get a first-rate education in the public schools, but they represent too small a fraction of the whole.

Bill Gates, the founder of Microsoft, offered a brutal critique of the nation's high schools a few years ago, describing them as “obsolete” and saying, “When I compare our high schools with what I see when I'm traveling abroad, I am terrified for our work force of tomorrow.”

Said Mr. Gates: “By obsolete, I don't just mean that they are broken, flawed or underfunded, though a case could be made for every one of those points. By obsolete, I mean our high schools—even when they're working as designed—cannot teach all our students what they need to know today.”

The Educational Testing Service, in a report titled “America's Perfect Storm,” cited three powerful forces that are affecting the quality of life for millions of Americans and already shaping the nation's future. They are:

1. The wide disparity in the literacy and math skills of both the school-age and adult populations. These skills, which play such a tremendous role in the lives of individuals and families, vary widely across racial, ethnic and socioeconomic groups.

2. The “seismic changes” in the U.S. economy that have resulted from globalization, technological advances, shifts in the relationship of labor and capital, and other developments.

3. Sweeping demographic changes. By 2030, the U.S. population is expected to reach 360 million. That population will be older and substantially more diverse, with immigration having a big impact on both the population as a whole and the work force.

These and so many other issues of crucial national importance require an educated populace if they are to be dealt with effectively. At the moment we are not even coming close to equipping the population with the intellectual tools that are needed.

While we're effectively standing in place, other nations are catching up and passing us when it comes to educational achievement. You have to be pretty dopey not to see the implications of that.

But, then, some of us are pretty dopey. In the Common Core survey, nearly 20 percent of respondents did not know who the U.S. fought in World War II. Eleven percent thought that Dwight Eisenhower was the president forced from office by the Watergate scandal. Another 11 percent thought it was Harry Truman.

We've got work to do.

TRIBUTE TO MRS. MINERVA
“MINNIE” RAMIREZ

HON. HENRY CUELLAR

OF TEXAS

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, May 1, 2008

Mr. CUELLAR. Madam Speaker, I rise today to honor Mrs. Minerva “Minnie” Ramirez for her induction as a laureate in the 2008 Laredo Business Hall of Fame, and for her incredible dedication to her friends and colleagues in the business community of Laredo, Texas.

Minerva Ramirez was born on September 20, 1931, to a hardworking ranch family. She started her first job at the age of 12 sweeping floors at the local schoolhouse, and she began

her knack for floral arrangements by making flower arrangements with tin cans and tissue paper in the shape of carnations which were sold for the cemetery. Minerva graduated from high school in 1948 in Hebbronville, Texas, and attended Texas A&I Kingsville. She worked her way through 2 years of college by teaching students at La Alejandrena Elementary School in Zapata County. Minerva was transferred to San Ygnacio, where she met her husband, Robert, and married in 1955. They moved to Laredo, and had three children: Carmen, Minita, and Robert Jr. Minerva taught and served as assistant principal at Ochoa Elementary for 17 years and became principal of Zachry Elementary School in 1981.

She started a flower shop, Carmin's, from the carport of her home in 1965, and the business grew so successful that Minerva retired from her teaching profession in 1986. One of her career highlights was being picked as the florist for the visitation of Pope John Paul II in San Antonio, Texas, in 1988 at the San Fernando Cathedral. Minerva has admirably served the community of Laredo, Texas, through her work as an educator to the youth of Laredo, and her contributions to the business community. For her dedication and hard work as a business entrepreneur, Minerva will be honored by the Junior Achievement League through her induction into the 2008 Business Hall of Fame.

Madam Speaker, I am honored to have had this time to recognize the dedication of Mrs. Minerva Ramirez, and I thank you for this time.

SUPPORTING THE MISSION AND GOALS OF WORKERS MEMORIAL DAY

SPEECH OF

HON. PHIL HARE

OF ILLINOIS

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, April 30, 2008

Mr. HARE. Mr. Speaker, I rise today in strong support of H. Res. 1154, supporting the mission and goals of Workers Memorial Day, and commend my colleague, Representative EDDIE BERNICE JOHNSON for introducing this important resolution.

Just 2 days ago on April 28th we honored the 20th Annual Workers Memorial Day, when people all over the world gathered to remember the workers who have been killed or injured on the job.

April 28th also commemorated the creation of the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA). Since 1970, OSHA has been a driving force in improving workplace safety and health conditions across the country. However, the Bush administration has sought to stifle that progress by downsizing OSHA, favoring employer voluntary programs over real enforcement.

A weakened OSHA has real life-or-death consequences for American workers. One such worker is Cintas washroom employee Eleazar Torres-Gomez—father of four—who was killed on March 6, 2007 when he was dragged by a conveyor belt into an industrial dryer.

Mr. Torres-Gomez's fate is unfortunately too common—16 workers die every day in our country from work-related injuries. In 2005

alone, over 5,700 workers were killed at work, and the situation is only getting worse. The Bureau of Labor Statistics found that the number of workplace deaths jumped by more than two percent between 2005 and 2006.

Last year, Representative LYNN WOOLSEY and I, along with Senator TED KENNEDY introduced the "Protecting America's Workers Act," which amends OSHA to cover more workers, increases penalties and strengthens protections and accountability. The best way to honor Mr. Torres-Gomez and all the other workers who have been killed at their jobs is to quickly send this bill to the President's desk.

Again, I thank Representative EDDIE BERNICE JOHNSON for introducing this resolution to honor our workers.

COMMENDING THE EFFORTS OF THE VILLAGE OF BETHALTO, ILLINOIS FOR ENVIRONMENTAL CONSERVATION

HON. JERRY F. COSTELLO

OF ILLINOIS

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, May 1, 2008

Mr. COSTELLO. Madam Speaker, I rise today to ask my colleagues to join me in commending the efforts of the Village of Bethalto for their service to the community and the environment by developing green spaces and parks around its community.

Recently, the Village of Bethalto christened the Culp Lake Park on the northwest portion of the community. This newly opened public space is an inspiration to other cities hoping to brighten their communities and provide their citizens with opportunities to enjoy the outdoors.

In the early 1960's, the Village of Bethalto developed a 17-acre lagoon site that, after years of disregard, became connected with the Alton Sewer Treatment Plant in 1972. While village officials sought to transform the lagoon for many years, it was not until Mayor Steve Bryant began the final push that ultimately led to the gorgeous green space there today.

In 1997, Mayor Bryant and village officials established a park plan that envisioned not just a green space, but a versatile area with recreational facilities, picnic pavilions, and beautiful landscaping. With urban sprawl on the rise, Mayor Bryant and village officials decided it was time to turn this blighted area of the village into a family friendly environment.

In order to keep costs at a minimum, village officials acquired grant funding from Madison County and the State of Illinois that led to the clean-up and filling in of the lagoon, the formation of a 4 acre fishing lake, and the ultimate creation of the park.

Not only was this effort championed by the Village Board, residents of the village took it upon themselves to contribute. The Bethalto Boys and Girls club, for example, donated and planted trees at the park.

Thanks to this type of effort, the Metro-East, located across the Mississippi River from St. Louis, Missouri, boasts the largest percentage of green spaces among the top 10 metropolitan areas in the State of Illinois.

Madam Speaker, I ask my colleagues to join me in commending the efforts of Mayor Steve

Bryant and the village officials from Bethalto, Illinois for their dedication to environmental conservation.

RECOGNIZING ATTORNEY JOHN TUCKER

HON. TED POE

OF TEXAS

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, May 1, 2008

Mr. POE. Madam Speaker, today I come to recognize the many achievements of the man known as "the wizard of trial law," John G. Tucker, who passed away at the age of 100 in January 2008. With his signature bow tie and flat top hair cut, Tucker was a fixture of the legal profession in Southeast Texas for over 75 years.

Tucker's father was an Army officer serving in Cuba as part of a peacekeeping force where officers were allowed to have their families live with them. His wife was 8 months pregnant when they found out that if born on Cuban soil, their son could never run for President of the United States. Knowing her son was destined for greatness, Tucker's mother set sail for New York City and eventually landed in Kansas City, Kansas, where John was born.

Though he never ascended to the highest office in the United States, Tucker was rather successful in all of his endeavors. He attended college in Pennsylvania and went on to graduate from Harvard Law School. John moved to Southeast Texas in the middle of the Great Depression of the 1930s, determined to take advantage of the boom created by the oil refineries. He joined the law firm created by William Orgain in 1933. The name was changed to Orgain, Bell, and Tucker in 1945 and continues to set the bar for legal excellence to this very day.

John Tucker tried over 90 cases in state and federal court and has argued cases before the Texas Supreme Court. He was deemed a Southeast Texas Legend by the Beaumont Foundation of America scholarship board in February 2007, becoming only the second person at the time to earn such honor.

On behalf of the Second Congressional District of Texas, I want to honor John G. Tucker for his lifetime of accomplishments. Through his diligent efforts and dedication he has made Southeast Texas a better place to live for generations to come.

HONORING MR. MICHAEL J. QUINN

HON. ROBERT E. ANDREWS

OF NEW JERSEY

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, May 1, 2008

Mr. ANDREWS. Madam Speaker, I rise today to honor Michael J. Quinn, senior news writer for CBS News Philadelphia, who retired on April 24, 2008. Mr. Quinn began working in TV news in 1961 at Channel 10, a CBS affiliate. During his tenure with Channel 10, Mr. Quinn served as a news writer, newscast producer, reporter and news anchor. In 1984, Mr. Quinn began working at CBS 3 Eyewitness News, serving as a senior news writer and as a producer for the "Newsmakers" program.