

Commerce marked its 200th anniversary. I rise today to honor and recognize this momentous occasion.

On July 1, 1799, 43 community merchants and professionals gathered at the home of John Ripley on Main Street and signed their names to a document officially organizing the Hartford Chamber of Commerce. Since its organization, the MetroHartford Chamber of Commerce has tirelessly pursued the goals of civic support and economic promotion to make Hartford a bigger and better industrial and commercial city. For the last 200 years, the Chamber's traditions of business and principles of living have carried the greater Hartford region to the front list of municipalities in the country.

For example, during the First World War, the MetroHartford Chamber of Commerce played a critical community support role, financing an evaporation plant to preserve fruits and vegetables, improving housing conditions for African-Americans moving from southern States to work in Hartford's defense industries, and providing emergency funds for the families of soldiers killed in action in Europe. The Chamber became one of the first organizations to establish a registry and canvass local community businesses to help find work for returning soldiers and disabled veterans.

In the years following the Great Depression, the MetroHartford Chamber of Commerce built plants for companies, secured air mail and passenger service, supported the development of roads and highways, established a Better Business Bureau, advocated for the creation of trade schools, and promoted traffic safety and fire prevention programs. During the 1960's, the MetroHartford Chamber of Commerce organized antipoverty programs such as the Community Renewal Team, and again turned their efforts toward building and rehabilitating housing for community residents who otherwise could not afford it.

Today, we stand on the dawn of the 21st century, and on the heels of one of the worst recessions in history the MetroHartford Chamber of Commerce is once again playing a critical role in the revitalization and economic development of the greater Hartford area. Whether it is working with local communities and businesses on projects such as Riverfront Recapture aimed at reclaiming the history, beauty, and community embodied along the banks of the Connecticut River, or the Adriaen's Landing aimed at making Hartford the showcase city of the new millennium, the MetroHartford Chamber of Commerce stands as a testament to what can be achieved by those who have faith in their community.

INTRODUCTION OF THE RON BROWN TORT EQUALITY ACT OF 1999

HON. ELEANOR HOLMES NORTON

OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Monday, April 12, 1999

Ms. NORTON. Mr. Speaker, we are reintroducing the Ron Brown Tort Equality Act today because it is the first opportunity to commemorate the third anniversary of the trag-

ically needless crash of the plane carrying Commerce Secretary Ron Brown and 34 others in Croatia. Congress was out of session on the actual anniversary date, April 3rd of this year. This uniquely poignant accident will be remembered as a singular American tragedy. It is still hard to believe that 33 Americans and two Croatians were killed in a crash that our government could have prevented. The 33 Americans on board that plane were from California, Connecticut, the District of Columbia, Florida, Illinois, Louisiana, Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, Texas, Virginia, and West Virginia. Since the crash, my cosponsors and I have regarded it as a solemn obligation to accomplish two purposes: (1) help secure damages for a loss that can never be repaid, and (2) help see that no such accident occurs again.

We reintroduce the bill today spurred on by the vigilance of the families who lost their loved ones in the crash and who are intent on preventing other such tragedies. Since the last introduction of the bill on April 15, 1997, the families have been invaluable allies in helping us gain cosponsors and in keeping this bill alive. Just last week, members of the families met with congressional staff from the offices of cosponsors and me in a valuable strategy session. One result of that meeting and of further consultations with the families is the reintroduction of the Ron Brown tort Equality Act of 1999 today.

The families deserve more than the official funerals, the much deserved tributes, and our continuing grief. They deserve more than the insult to their injury that would remain if the law are not altered in light of the tragedy and families are not fully compensated. I believe that the Congress eventually will do the right thing and that the President will sign the right bill.

The Air Force Accident Investigation Board report was honest and forthcoming. It concluded that the accident resulted from the negligence of federal employees involving three independent causes, "any one of which had it not existed would have prevented the accident." The command gave authorization to flight procedures that had not been properly reviewed and approved; the aircrew made errors in planning and executing the flight; and the approach to the airport was improperly designated. In addition, inadequate training was a substantial contributing factor. When negligence is this pronounced, compensating the victims also has a deterrent effect on those responsible for assuring that such serious negligence is not repeated.

Thus far, however, there have been few indications that federal authorities are serious about assuring that no such tragedy occurs again. Two Article 15 disciplinary actions, two letters of reprimand, and 12 other actions were taken against particular officers. Is this all that our government can do? Following the shocking crash in Croatia, is this the extent of the federal obligation?

First, for the families of civilian federal employees, there is the obligation to do more than grant a few thousand dollars through the Federal Employee Compensation program. Our obligation is to amend the law to reach the very few instances of gross negligence,

like this horrendous crash, that may occur. The bill would allow federal civilian employees or their families to sue the federal government but only for gross negligence by its officers or employees. Because there will be few instances where gross negligence can be shown, this is a small change in our law. This change will allow the families of federal employees to seek the compensation they have every right to expect while leaving the integrity of the federal government's worker compensation system intact.

There also were non-federal employees on that fated plane for whom no compensation is possible today. Astonishingly, federal law does not allow compensation when private citizens are killed or injured overseas. The failure of the Federal Tort Claims Act to allow for any compensation for civilians is either callous or an oversight in the law, and I believe that it is in need of correction. After all, private citizens can sue under the Act for the same injuries when they occur in this country. My bill would allow individuals who do not work for the federal government, or their families, to sue the United States for negligent or wrongful acts or omissions that occur in a foreign country.

We also introduce the bill because we know our government would want to deter such accidents in the future. We especially introduce this bill today for the families of those killed with Ron Brown on April 3, 1996, and I urge the Congress to pass this bill this session. The families who lost their loved ones deserve nothing less.

TRIBUTE TO VIRGIL G. LOVITT

HON. ROB PORTMAN

OF OHIO

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Monday, April 12, 1999

Mr. PORTMAN. Mr. Speaker, on March 24, 1999, the city of Sharonville, Ohio, lost one of its finest citizens. Virgil G. Lovitt, a leader in the business world as well as the community, passed away at the age of 63. A great friend to many people, myself included, he did more for Sharonville quietly from behind the scenes than most people will ever know.

A very successful businessman, Mr. Lovitt founded a State Farm insurance agency in 1957. In 1985, he represented Ohio for the annual agents field planning conference at the home office in Bloomington, Illinois. He was a State Farm Millionaire Life agent over 20 times. He was one of the first State Farm agents in Ohio to receive the series 6 security license. At the time of his death, he was national director and a member of Insurance Risk Management and a committee member of the Family Motor Coach Association.

However, when people think of Virgil Lovitt, most will remember his willingness to serve and his desire to improve the lives of those around him. As a result of his commitment to serve the public, he spent 1963-1975 as President of the Sharonville City Council. He was Sharonville's ward chairman for over 20 years. Mr. Lovitt was also a member of the Hamilton County Republican Central Committee and Executive Committee, chairman of the Hamilton County Tax Incentive Review

Board and member of the Sharonville Chamber of Commerce.

Remarkably, he made time to be involved in the civic world as well. He was a past President and Secretary of the Sharonville Kiwanis Club and started its annual Halloween party. He was honored as the Kiwanian of the year as well as Kiwanian of the year for Spiritual Aims. Mr. Lovitt was active in the Sharonville arts and crafts show for 22 years.

Even more important to Virgil was his family. He was married to his wife Marilyn for 44 years and they had two children. Their son Virgil is the mayor of Sharonville, and is married to Tracey; they have three children—Amanda, Glen and Amberly. Their daughter, Vickey Sasser, is married to Dennis and they have two children—Andrea and Andrew. Virgil was a devoted husband, father and grandfather and will be missed the most by his beloved family.

Mr. Speaker, Virgil Lovitt's drive to serve his fellow man can stand as an inspiration to us all. He was a true community leader and his life's work will stand as a constant reminder to me and all who knew him that service to others is a noble call to be answered.

GROUND TROOPS IN KOSOVO

HON. WILLIAM F. GOODLING

OF PENNSYLVANIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Monday, April 12, 1999

Mr. GOODLING. Mr. Speaker, today I am introducing a bill that will prohibit the use of Department of Defense funds for the deployment of U.S. ground troops into Kosovo unless authorized by law and approved by Congress. The intent is to require the Executive Branch to seek the advice and consent of Congress before sending our troops into harms way within the borders of Kosovo. It is vital that the will of the American people be heard on this important matter through a formal debate and vote in the United States Congress.

While the President continues to state his intent not to send ground troops to Kosovo saying air strikes are our best option, he is also indicating that troops would only be sent into a "permissive environment." Meanwhile, military experts are questioning whether NATO can realistically end this crisis in Kosovo without sending in ground troops. Others are saying it may be too late to send troops. This confusion and uncertainty is reason enough to have a well thought out, studied and deliberate debate and vote on a decision to deploy troops into a combat area.

The deployment of ground troops dramatically changes the dynamics of this crisis because it places our armed forces directly in the middle of a civil war. We should all be mindful of what our nation went through the last time we intervened in a civil war in the 1960's—a war that tore our nation apart both politically and socially, and resulted in the loss of over 58,000 American lives.

Congress must not be derelict in its duty to have a say in this matter. The President must seek the advice of Congress, and Congress must vote up or down on whether to send

U.S. ground troops to Kosovo. Our sons and daughters in the military deserve no less.

Many issues demand further discussion. What is Congress' role and authority on the issue of deploying ground troops? Do we have vital national security interests in Yugoslavia? Is this war worth risking American lives? If so, how many? Based on the President's stated goals, it is a winnable war? How many bombs and missiles does it take to significantly "degrade" the military capabilities of the Yugoslavian military forces.

How long will U.S. troops be stationed in this region? Do we have the resources to place our troops in this region for an extended period of time at the expense of more vital and real security threats—including East Asia? As a result of military downsizing, do we still have the manpower and weapons supply to fight a three front war should the event arise in the Middle East, Asia, and the Balkans? How will this mission affect the morale of our armed forces? Is the role of our military a peacekeeping and nation building force or a defense against attack on the United States, its interests, and its citizens?

Mr. Speaker, I strongly urge my colleagues to support this measure. We must consider the "powderkeg" we are getting ourselves into. Let us not enter the 21st Century in the same way we began the 20th Century by getting ourselves involved in a centuries old Balkan conflict for which we cannot and will not resolve now by the introduction of U.S. ground troops.

TRIBUTE TO BRITTON CONGREGATIONAL CHRISTIAN CHURCH IN RECOGNITION OF 150 YEARS OF SERVICE

HON. NICK SMITH

OF MICHIGAN

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Monday, April 12, 1999

Mr. SMITH of Michigan. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to honor the Britton Congregational Christian Church, of Britton, MI. It is my pleasure to pay tribute to the fine example its teaching of strong values and simple directness has provided to our District.

On March 28, 1999, Britton Congregational Church, the oldest Christian Union church in Michigan, celebrated its 150th anniversary. The church took its fundamental character from the efforts of its first pastor, Elder Samuel Bradshaw, who stressed the utmost importance of strong family values.

The church completed building its first chapel on January 28, 1850. The congregation moved to a new location in 1880 where it meets today, but the emphasis on family values remained the same. Rev. David Welcome, the current pastor, describes the family atmosphere: "every person is a part of our extended family, with each member helping another when family is needed."

The fact that Britton Congregational Church endures to this day after a century and a half of changing times and surroundings, testifies to the commitment the church has maintained to traditional family values and concern for its members.

I am inspired by this legacy of commitment to the values it was founded upon, and I hold up its long history as a model for other institutions within and outside the district. Congratulations Britton Congregational Christian Church on 150 years of service and dedication. I wish you the opportunity to continue pursuing these ideals for many more years to come.

TRIBUTE TO CHRISTOPH MEILI

HON. JAMES H. MALONEY

OF CONNECTICUT

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Monday, April 12, 1999

Mr. MALONEY of Connecticut. Mr. Speaker, one of the great privileges afforded Members of Congress is the opportunity to come to the floor of the House of Representatives to relay to not just our colleagues, but to the entire country, significant contributions made to our society by our fellow Americans. I have that privilege and want to pay tribute to Mr. Christoph Meili, currently of West Orange, New Jersey.

In 1997, Mr. Meili, then 29 years of age, was employed as a bank guard in the Union Bank of Switzerland. While performing his appointed duties, he discovered one day several boxes of bank documents that not only dated back to the Holocaust era, but directly related to financial holdings of individuals at that time. These documents were about to be shredded and lost forever. Mr. Meili had recently viewed the epic tale, *Schindler's List*. Drawing inspiration from that film, he removed as many of the documents from the bank as possible, and delivered them to a Jewish organization in Zurich that then gave them to local police.

Mr. Meili's discovery and subsequent removal of the documents created wide controversy—as well as significant embarrassment of Switzerland's largest bank, which had first denied even the relevance of the documents. Upon intense investigation and international scrutiny, the bank not only confirmed that the documents were, indeed, Holocaust related, but that other similar documents had been previously shredded. This investigation further indicated that many of the documents were central to the research of an international panel of historians investigating Switzerland's dealing with the Nazis.

As a result of the brave actions of Christoph Meili, a \$1.25 billion settlement was made to Holocaust survivors, their families and Jewish organizations.

Regretfully, Mr. Meili paid a high price for doing the right thing. He and his wife lost their jobs in Switzerland and received multiple death threats, forcing them and their children to flee to the United States where they were granted political asylum by President Clinton. Since coming to America, Mr. Meili has testified before the Senate Banking Committee detailing his important actions of conscience.

Mr. Speaker, today, April 12, 1999, Mr. Meili will be honored by the Jewish Federation of Greater Waterbury and Northwest Connecticut, Inc. during a community-wide Yom HaShoah Commemoration (Commemoration of the Holocaust). As a Member of the Presidential Advisory Commission on Holocaust Assets, I commend Mr. Christoph Meili for his