June 14, 2000

EXTENSIONS OF REMARKS

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Mrs. MEEK of Florida. Mr. Speaker, I rise to pay tribute to one of our nation's unsung heroes, the late Earl T. Shinhoster, one of the noblest among the NAACP's indefatigable leaders. His untimely demise in a car accident suffered some 25 miles away from historic Montgomery, AL on Sunday, June 11, 2000 leaves a gaping void in our nation's quest for simple justice and equality of opportunity.

My State of Florida and most specifically, Miami-Dade County, will surely miss him for the longevity of his genuine commitment to our well-being under the aegis of the NAACP. When I think of Mr. Shinhoster's work in Florida, it is clear that it parallels much of our State's history as it struggled through the countless challenges of racial equality.

I first came to know him during the beginning of the 1980's when Liberty City was the scene of an unprecedented police brutality as it went up in flames in the aftermath of the killing of an innocent insurance executive, Arthur McDuffie, at the hands of the police. In his role as Southeast Regional Director of the NAACP, Mr. Shinhoster helped to restore calm and sanity to what was then a thoroughly besieged community.

Prior to this heartrending episode that gripped my community, this young crusader came in our midst to give hope and courage to countless parents from the innercity, challenging them to be involved with their children's schools and urging them to keep the faith toward helping them achieve mastery of the basic skills and academic excellence. He managed to return again and again, espousing the same message upon which the success of minority schoolchildren could be forged.

Then in 1983, when Miami was yet again embroiled for 3 days in racial disturbance in the Overtown area, it was Mr. Shinhoster who brought calm by urging the immediate suspension and investigation of two Miami police officers accused of killing two Overtown residents.

When 34 Haitian bodies washed ashore in Miami, this young leader came back to commiserate with our Haitian community, helping to bury the dead and calling for the authorities to investigate the circumstances surrounding the tragedy. Given the magnitude of our community's trauma from multiple sources, it was Mr. Shinhoster's creative genius and utmost understanding that gave rise to the creation of the NAACP's Office of Urban Affairs to support the healing of a community torn asunder by severe urban turbulence.

And when in the mid 80's tensions came to rip apart relations between the Black and Jewish communities, it was again Earl Shinhoster who came to the rescue, urging and facilitating a dialogue between the two groups.

The decade of the 80's marked Mr. Shinhoster's defining moment as he unabashedly spoke out at meetings, radio talk shows, TV programs and countless forums and conferences, espousing the NAACP's stance on a myriad of issues verging on school board and fair housing. He was forthright in putting banks and insurance companies on notice for covertly and overtly resorting to redlining and mortgage discrimination practices, and questioning the use of deadly force by the police under the guise of maintaining law and order.

He was brutally frank in assessing the unfairness of the death penalty and decrying the rise of youth crime among Blacks on one hand, while applauding the merits of minority set-asides, affirmative action and a fair immigration policy for all on the other.

When in 1992 Hurricane Andrew unleashed its awesome destructive power upon our community, making it the nation's costliest natural disaster, once again Mr. Shinhoster came to our rescue by orchestrating the NAACP's response to those whose lives and spirits were drastically dislocated.

Under Earl Shinhoster's leadership, Florida's barriers to Black access to political representation and voter participation were removed. And for the first time in the 20th century, African-Americans were able to run and serve on elected boards, city councils, school boards, county commissions, the State Legislature, finally, in the 1990's as a result of his indefatigable leadership, I along with my colleagues ALCEE HASTINGS and CORRINE BROWN became the first African-Americans from Florida to be elected to the U.S. Congress since the Reconstruction Period almost a century ago.

Blessed with a lucid common sense and quick grasp of the issues at hand, Mr. Shinhoster was also imbued with the rare wisdom of recognizing both the strengths and limitations of those who have been empowered to govern. The acumen of his intelligence and the timeliness of his vision were felt at a time when my community and this nation needed someone to put in perspectives the simmering agony of disenfranchised African-Americans and other minorities yearning to belong.

I vividly recall that when government and community leaders met to douse the still-burning embers of the Liberty City and Overtown racial disturbances, his was the firm voice of